



CHAPTER VIII

AN ORIENTATION TO FROMM'S

RHETORIC OF ALIENATION

While earlier chapters have discussed the personal influences on Fromm's thinking and the broader rhetorical orientation of social prophecy, this chapter proposes to focus specifically on Fromm's rhetorical orientation as it relates to his polemic use of alienation. This chapter is then a final introduction to the actual analysis of Fromm's rhetoric of alienation.

In this chapter five elements have been discussed: (1) Fromm's ethos with specific attention to the prophetic quality of his writing, (2) the historical dimensions of his broad scheme of social salvation, (3) his hortatory definition of human nature, (4) the rhetorical implications of his evolutionary orientation, (5) the strategic value of his social psychological term, "social character."

Prophetic Ethos

Fromm, as both a man and a social prophet, projects into the rhetorical scene a truly maverick quality. He professes to be a Marxist, yet he does not advocate class struggle as a means of revolution. He considers himself a true heir of Freud, yet rejects the libido theory. He has trained as a psychoanalyst, yet possesses no medical degree and disdains the analytic couch. He preaches a doctrine of intense anti-authoritarianism, yet presents his message in a most apodictic tone.



As a professed agnostic, he uses the Bible as one of his more frequent sources.

The rhetorical value of such a maverick position is twofold: first, it allows him to appeal to a broad spectrum of audience values, and in doing so he can become "all things to all men," a very necessary perspective by incongruity for the prophet. Second, Fromm's maverick quality creates an aura of mystification. His paradoxical posture makes categorizing him difficult and prediction even more difficult. The mystery of the man fosters a distance between him and his audience which allows him to present apodictic assertions which may go unchallenged by his audience because, he, as the prophet, possesses the "secret" clothed in the mystery of his hidden knowledge. As a result of his maverick quality, Fromm can more easily lead his audience into an attitude of acceptance.

In an effort to reach a larger audience, Fromm must increase his credibility as a person and make his message more reasonable and less in conflict with audience beliefs. At the same time he faces certain problems of negative ethos suggesting rejection of himself and his message precisely because he presents himself as a prophet.

Faced with this twofold necessity of broadening audience appeal and of presenting a reasonable proposal consistent with audience beliefs, Fromm employs the strategy of pious linkages to create positive association and identification for himself and his proposals in the minds of his audience. For this purpose he asserts a linkage between his proposal and a tradition he labels "socialist humanism." To lay the initial foundation for this tradition, he begins by linking his message to that of the Hebrew prophets, a tradition readily acceptable by both



Jews and Christians. Fromm traces the continuation of this tradition through the words of Jesus, Buddha, Meister Eckhart, the Renaissance humanists, the eighteenth century Enlightenment, Spinoza, Goethe, Freud, Marx, Einstein, Schweitzer, and contemporary Marxist revisionists. In representing this tradition as a developing and consistent whole, Fromm offers the audience a choice of acceptance or rejection on an "all or nothing" basis. Thus, if the Catholic reader rejects Marx or Buddha, he must also reject Jesus. For the atheistic humanist, the dilemma is that of rejecting Marx if he rejects Jesus. Each of Fromm's readers, whatever his philosophical or theological predisposition, is prompted to indulge in casuistic stretching and embrace the whole as the expression of his personal persuasion and discount the negative value of otherwise alien authorities. By selective perception Fromm can ignore differences and stress similarities and thus knit an integral doctrine from an otherwise very unlikely and certainly not commonly accepted variety of sources.

To create a substantial basis for his credibility, Fromm cannot rely on pious linkages and identification alone. In his own person as a psychoanalyst, he possesses a strong ethical appeal for many. In Western society today the psychoanalyst projects a mystique based on a blend of admiration and fear. Some see the analyst as a demi-god, equipped with an insight and knowledge which enable him to penetrate an individual's mind to unlock the mystery of the secret self hidden behind the defense mechanisms which shield every man's weaknesses. This popular image can produce both admiration and fear in those who interact with psychoanalysts. It is a common occurrence for specialists in the



field of psychology to sense a definite discomfort or even anxiety in persons with whom they deal only on a social basis.

While some may fear the analyst, others approach him with a quasi-religious admiration, feeling that his "magic" can rid them of all their psychic problems. In many cases this admiration takes on the proportions of a cult in which the devotees perceive the analyst as omnipotent, omniscient, and the source of ultimate security--all godly qualities. Thus it might be generalized that the psychoanalytic ethos projects a strong attraction-rejection image, a product of the popularization of Freudian theory and psychological terminology in general.

Such a cult surrounding Fromm has sprung up in the past among many college students and faculty. In such groups Fromm's name was an unquestioned authority and many of his books, especially The Art of Loving, became vade mecums. Maurice Green in narrating the history of the American Institute of Psychoanalysis in New York City remarks about Fromm's ethos: "Fromm, who had been given the same status at the new institute as Karen Horney and Clara Thompson, was enormously popular with the students as a lecturer and analyst, and it seemed to Karen Horney and others that he was dominating the institute."¹ Fromm's popularity and dominance ultimately led to his ouster from the institute, as Karen Horney asserted her own position of leadership in a rival faction.

Fromm's identification with the humanistic tradition and his mystique as an analyst project a "Moses" image, one who has been to the mountain and who now comes with the saving word. Besides his professional credentials, Fromm offers his audience a detailed description of his own personal encounter with alienation and its concomitant



anguish in Beyond the Chains of Illusion (1962). Speaking as one who has known the "ordeal," and who has shared the "truths of salvation" with the gods, Fromm can present himself as a prophet prepared to judge the people, to assign god and devil terms, to practice his casuistry, and generally to play the role of moralist.

If Fromm is to be in fact a moralist, he faces problems of negative ethos in this role. In contemporary society the moralist as dictator of morals is frequently looked upon as meddling, pretentious, hypocritical, self-righteous, and self-serving. Often he is seen as rejecting progress and science in an age in which progress and science are gods. His message sounds to many like a return to the practice of virtues which have become vices in terms of popular experience, or when judged less severely he may seem to suggest that the impossible be put into practice. In general, he is simply out of date and irrelevant to modern man.

The audience who rejects the moralist tends to picture itself as free, skeptical, iconoclastic, and liberated from the institutions which it associates with moralizing. The older order of sanctions is, for many, obsolete. The sense of immediacy and pragmatism has snuffed out the fires of hell. This is not to say that sanctions do not exist in contemporary society, but that those sanctions which do function do so only to the degree to which they are congruent with the value system of the day.

In overcoming or compensating for this negative ethos the strategy of the moralist-prophet must take into consideration the following points:



1. The moralist must understand his times and effectively analyze and address himself to the values and orientation of his audience.
2. He must understand the radical motivation of the behavior he is criticizing and not address himself merely to the superficial and transient symptoms of social behavior.
3. He must not be caught up in a maze of legal formulae, which rob him of the wisdom to see beyond the letter of any law to its spirit.
4. He must stylistically speak in the language and value idiom appropriate to his audience.
5. He cannot expect to command his audience to do good, but he can hope that they will change their behavior by his pointing out the good. Commands, besides being intrusive, are also boring. Rather the good must be made as attractive in itself as possible.
6. His persuasion cannot appeal to extrinsic values, but must advocate a course of conduct that has intrinsic validity and efficacy for his audience.
7. His description of conditions must jibe with the experience of his audience.
8. He must focus on the "felt" problems of his audience and give to those problems order, clarity, and insight.



9. If he is to threaten any sanctions, they must be present and pragmatic, flowing as an intrinsic consequence of the "sin."
10. He must offer his audience insight rather than incrimination.

Fromm's Overall Pattern of Strategy

In order to appreciate Fromm's use of alienation as a rhetorical strategy, one must first recognize his general rhetorical pattern. For that reason the present consideration focuses upon three perspectives which are fundamental to Fromm as a prophet and social critic: (1) the rhetorical context, namely, Fromm's concept of society; (2) the rhetorical agency, his concept of history; (3) the rhetorical purpose, his soteriology.

Society: rhetorical context

Unlike Karl Popper² who maintains that society can be successfully reformed only in piecemeal fashion, Fromm calls for a social revolution which reaches out to economics, politics, education, religion-- to every agent of culture within the society. The dimensions of this call for reform follow logically his dialectical view of society as an organic whole, which dictates that to change one part of the system one must change the whole system. Any piecemeal reform according to Fromm, can never be effective, for the system at large carries the virus which will thwart or undo any healing that may have taken place. Of necessity then, all of Fromm's reform appeals must be radical, in the sense that they strike at the root of the entire social system.



He states his perspective on reform:

But any attempt to change only one section of life, the human or spiritual one, is doomed to failure. In fact, any progress which occurs only in one sphere is destructive of progress in all spheres. The gospel concerned only with spiritual salvation led to the establishment of the Roman Catholic Church; the French Revolution with its exclusive concern with political reform, led to Robespierre and Napoleon; socialism, insofar as it was only concerned with economic change, led to Stalinism.³

This synergistic orientation to social change opens the way for a strategy of "driving into a corner," for Fromm is able to limit the idea of progress to very specific goals which are part of his soteriology. The reader is forced either to align himself with Fromm's devil terms, the Catholic Church, the French Revolution, and Robespierre, if he rejects Fromm's redefinition of reform, or to recognize the historical evidence of piecemeal reform's effectiveness and to accept Fromm's position.

History: rhetorical agency

As Burke remarks: "A rationale of history is the first step whereby the dispossessed repossess the world."⁴ Fromm, whose ultimate goal as prophet is to offer to his audience the opportunity of "repossessing the world," remains true to his Hegelian tradition of historical consciousness and evolves a philosophy of history endowed with laws and purpose. The hortatory value of Fromm's philosophy of history is pre-eminent, for, if he can gain the reader's acceptance of his interpretation of history, he has effectively channeled his reader's thinking along the line of his entire rhetorical appeal.

History, according to Fromm, is dialectical, an evolutionary growth process built on the principles of struggle and conflict. While



history may seem in some of his writings to have the character of an impersonal impetus forward, in You Shall Be as Gods⁵ he goes to great lengths to emphasize that man is the maker of his own history. Fromm describes history as an essentially salvific evolution which is the agency for the transmission of saving truth. And in this regard, Fromm sees himself as one of the present day recipients of this salvific tradition.

Fromm's dialectical view of history stresses the process of conflict in which each resolution of conflict leads to new conflict. The oppositional forces at work in the historical process are ultimately life and death, and man's choice between the alternatives dictates the course of history. The choice of life means fulfillment, the choice of death destruction. In offering alternatives, Fromm reflects his sensitivity to the audience's rejection of direct commands, while at the same time because of the nature of the alternatives he gives his audience little room for casuistic stretching of their own which would allow them to avoid the choice.

All of Fromm's writings reflect a concern for the historical context of the events he analyzes. Because history is for him organic, no one moment can be accurately understood without first determining the historical linkages which have given birth to that moment. In establishing these linkages, Fromm "essentializes" his analysis by assigning "essences" to given historical periods, thus giving them a god or devil characteristic. Historical analysis of this kind creates a bureaucratization of the imagination and a coaching of attitudes, as select historical facts are chosen to direct the imagination and



perspective of his readers. This selective reading of history, essential to any philosophy of history, has led Henry D. Aiken to call the philosophy of history "that gaudiest of metaphysical disciplines."⁶

Soteriology: rhetorical purpose

Fromm, as prophet, preaches a doctrine of salvation which, as has been said, incorporates the salvific power of history with its tradition of truth and the witness of the prophets who testify to that truth. As in the case of most religious persuasion, Fromm presents to his audience a detailed plan of salvation. Offering any such plan gives the believer a view of the goal and the means to it, combined with the consequent security of knowing which bolsters acceptance. Fromm sketches his salvation scheme drawing on Judaeo-Christian traditions; however, Fromm as rhetor manipulates the received doctrines and through symbolic tinkering draws a picture of his own concept of the promised land. In choosing the Judaeo-Christian tradition as the medium for his tinkering, he is able to rely on the familiarity of the original symbols to broaden audience appeal and acceptance.

As the previous section noted, Fromm sees history as purposeful, progressively moving toward salvation for the individual by producing a sane society. He describes the specific plan for salvation as a dialectical spiral of transformation propelled by conflict and struggle. The plan offers an explanation for the entire history of mankind beginning with the biblical story of Adam and Eve. By beginning at the first moment of human history Fromm gains great freedom for symbolic tinkering and casuistic stretching, since any effort to explain the whole



history of man must necessarily generalize and therein lies his license to practice his latitudinarianism.

The entire history of man is divided into three periods:

(1) the pre-individualistic period, (2) the period of sojourn during which man makes his own history, (3) the messianic period of fulfillment. These three periods remain chronologically separate and yet form a psychological and ideological unity through tension induced by conflict and struggle. Initially, the audience experiences the period of sojourn in the existential "now." Tension is produced as the audience looks back to the pre-individualistic period and forward to the messianic period.

Fromm's primary objective is to induce a state of tension which will motivate his audience to the acceptance of changes which he proposes as tension-reducing measures. Fromm's ultimate goal is not, however, equilibrium as might be expected, rather he chooses to use tension as the motive for "proprieate striving,"⁷ which resists equilibrium and seeks to maintain tension over the long span of time rather than totally reduce it. The striving is a personal expression of a need for fulfillment. The conflict between not-having and desiring produces the tensions, which in turn accelerate the further striving. In the final view, salvation comes not in fulfillment as such, but through the satisfaction derived from the striving. A later consideration of Fromm's concept of human nature will treat in greater detail his idea of "proprieate striving."

In the style of the true prophet, Fromm endeavors to generate an awareness of crisis to heighten tension. His appeal is radical: ". . . the real crisis of today is one that is unique in human history; it is the crisis of life itself."⁸ Fromm finds a special quality in



this crisis: it is "unique in human history" and therefore accentuates rejection through fear and acceptance of change through hope. Second, the crisis is of "life itself," the most fundamental reality of all human existence. The question, as Fromm puts it, is one of basic survival. A crisis of life itself by its complete pervasiveness becomes "bigger than life" and thus more threatening.

Fromm describes the present condition of his audience by the metaphor "asleep," which projects the image of inculpable passivity. As such it is especially appropriate for the moralist who should avoid too directly impugning guilt. The key term for inducing the sense of crisis is "awareness." Fromm states: "First of all, psychoanalysis deals with the issue of critical awareness, the uncovering of the deadly illusions and rationalizations that paralyze the power to act."⁹ Fromm's accusation comes in the form of a very gentle metaphor: "The task of the analyst of society is precisely to awaken man so that he can become aware of the illusory, false needs and of the reality of his true needs."¹⁰ He describes this "awakening" or "awareness" therapy in Freudian terminology as "making the unconscious conscious."¹¹ In his symbolic tinkering, Fromm assigns essences in such a way as to minimize negative audience reaction: "The task of critique is not to denounce the ideals, but to show their transformation into ideologies, and to challenge the ideology in the name of the betrayed ideal."¹²

While the task of "awakening" belongs to the prophet, the power to change is within the power of the audience themselves: ". . . if [man] can wake up from the half-dream state, then he can come to his senses, become aware of his proper forces and powers, and change reality



in such a way that illusions are no longer necessary."¹³ Although the audience does possess the power to "change reality," the prophet's function does not cease once the audience is awakened. What Fromm says in the preface to The Revolution of Hope might be fairly be said as a preface to all his work: "This book is meant to clarify the issues for those who have not clearly recognized our dilemma, and it is the appeal to action."¹⁴ It is clear then that Fromm sees his own role as the expression of the fourfold prophetic function:

- 1) [The prophets] announce to man that there is God, the One who has revealed himself to them, and that man's goal is to become fully human; and that means to become like God.
- 2) They show man alternatives between which he can choose, and the consequences of these alternatives. They often express this alternative in terms of God's rewards and punishment, but it is always man who, by his own action, makes the choice.
- 3) They dissent and protest when man takes the wrong road. But they do not abandon the people: they are their conscience, speaking up when everyone else is silent.
- 4) They do not think in terms of individual salvation only, they believe that individual salvation is bound up with the salvation of society. Their concern is the establishment of a society governed by love, justice, and truth; they insist that politics must be judged by moral values, and that the function of political life is the realization of these values.¹⁵

Alienation forms the central concept in Fromm's creation of a crisis situation. The particular strategies he employs will be discussed in the following chapter, but for the moment the basic rhetorical idiom should be alluded to. Fromm's dialectic of progress through history, stressing as it does conflict, struggle, and suffering, presents a good example of Burke's dialectic of tragedy. One element of his explanation is the axiom of the medieval Scholastics, intelligere est pati, "The



suffered is the learned."¹⁶ Although Burke may be using casuistic stretching in stressing the dramatic potential of the verb pati, which can mean "to receive" or "to undergo change," it still remains true that all knowing demands that the knower in some way become subservient to the thing known. To know is to be inflicted with, to endure, the object of knowledge. To know the "other" is to become the "other." Knowing, as an action, is a reaction to the thing known and thus entails change, adjustment, and "suffering." Knowing can never be restricted to cerebration alone, for knowing is a function of the whole man with effects on his emotional and behavioral states. As man gains knowledge, he also gains responsibilities, his personal orientation is altered, and thus he behaves differently.

Fromm explains how suffering motivates:

Indeed, historical change and revolution seem like a logical paradox; the enslaved man has no concept of freedom--yet he cannot become free unless he has a concept of freedom. The biblical story gives an answer to this paradox. The beginning of liberation lies in man's capacity to suffer. And he suffers if he is oppressed, physically and spiritually. The suffering moves him to act against his oppressors, to seek the end of the oppression, although he cannot yet seek a freedom of which he knows nothing. If man has lost the capacity to suffer, he has also lost the capacity for change. In the first step of revolution, however, he develops new powers which he could not have had while he lived as a slave, and these new powers eventually make it possible for him to achieve freedom.¹⁷

Here again there is a linkage of key terms which begins with "awakening," which activates "awareness," which sensitizes the audience to the "crisis," which they are "suffering" at the present moment.

This crisis awareness can be seen from another perspective in terms of the communication model proposed in the previous chapter.



The crisis-dilemma accentuates the intolerableness of the reality dimension, thus encouraging the audience to reject the present system and to accept the value-imperative dimension of Fromm's sane society.

Chapter six discussed Fromm's three stages of historical salvation. Here a closer examination can be made of these stages, insofar as they explain Fromm's soteriology.

The first period, the pre-individualistic era, pictures man living without reason, imagination, or awareness of self in instinctual harmony with the rest of nature. Man in this state is a paradox; he is imperfect insofar as he lacks individuating human powers. But he is also perfect insofar as he experiences happiness and harmony with nature, an "at-onement." Fromm explains man's psychic regression to infantilism as the attraction which Edenic harmony still has for man in his present condition.

Man's emergence from the state of pre-individualism is explained in the biblical terms of the "fall" of original sin. By symbolic tinkering of redefinition and perspective by incongruity Fromm turns the biblical story to his own ends. The redesign of the cycle of salvation begins with the dialectical conversion of the first "sin" into a virtue.

Man's first act of freedom is an act of disobedience; by his act he transcends his original oneness with nature, he becomes aware of himself and of his neighbor and of their estrangement. In the historical process, man creates himself.¹⁸

"Sin" becomes a dialectical term bringing man to a state of estrangement, but also awakening his awareness of his human powers. With "Adam's 'fall,' human history began."¹⁹ Fromm redefines "the knowledge of good and evil,"²⁰ as the advent of reason and imagination, by which "man begins the process



of individuation and begins to cut the ties with nature This is not the story of the 'fall' of man but of his awakening, and thus, of the beginning of his rise."²¹

Fromm is able to introduce dialectic struggle and conflict into his concept of history, as the result of the "broken harmony with nature,"²² which pits man against man, against nature, and against himself. Conflict is further accentuated, as man experiences himself "alone and separated from his fellow man and from nature."²³ The void caused by this broken harmony creates a desire in which man's "most passionate striving is to return to the world of union which was his home before he 'disobeyed.' His desire is to give up reason, self-awareness, choice, responsibility, and to return to the womb, to Mother earth, to the darkness where the light of conscience and knowledge does not yet shine."²⁴

Man's new existence after the fall confronts him with an "existential dichotomy of being within nature and yet transcending it by the fact of having self-awareness and choice."²⁵ Fromm drives his audience into a corner, as he continues: "Man can solve this dichotomy only by going forward."²⁶ But in going forward "man has to experience himself as a stranger in the world, estranged from himself and from nature, in order to be able to become one again with himself, with his fellow man, and with nature, on a higher level He has to experience the split between himself as subject and the world as object as the conditions for overcoming this very split." (Italics added.)²⁷

The dialectical incongruities abound—"falling" becomes the means of "rising"; from "non-humanity" comes "humanity;" "harmony" creates the occasion for the "first step of severing the ties between man and nature,



history--and alienation--begins."²⁸ Here Fromm echoes Erich Kahler, in The Tower and the Abyss: "The history of man could very well be written as a history of the alienation of man."²⁹

By quoting from biblical sources and redefining "original sin" as the cause of man's present state of alienation, Fromm uses a bridging device to transform the Marxist doctrine of struggle and alienation into an idiom identifiable by both believer and non-believer. The believer will find a basis for identification in Fromm's broad accommodation of the biblical text. For the non-believer, the story of Adam and Eve has the familiarity of a classic literary myth. For all, there is a "pious" tone to the presentation. From this "pious" base Fromm can begin to forge new pious linkages, redefine new terms, and in general redesign the bible as the "revolutionary book"³⁰ which he perceives: "The interpretation of the Bible given in this book is that of radical humanism."³¹ By redesigning the "book of salvation," Fromm has the advantage of a pre-disposition to accept his own salvation scheme, using the old symbols to clothe the new "essences."

Fromm's rhetoric of transcendence becomes clear when one examines the third and final stage of his dialectical scheme, the messianic time. One pole of the dialectic relationship is established in the pre-individualistic stage. This is the stage of essence, potentiality. The contrasting pole is the messianic time, the stage of existence, actualization. The movement is upward, from non-being to being. Fromm states very clearly: "In the prophetic literature the messianic vision rested upon the tension between what existed and was still there and that which was becoming and was yet to be."³²



The analysis of this messianic time will be made from three perspectives: context, motives, and form.

Context.--Fromm establishes an overall context by defining the messianic time as "the historical answer to the existence of man."³³ Since Fromm defines man as rational and history as the product of man's own determination, he can logically define messianism as "not accidental to man's existence but the inherent, logical answer to it."³⁴ From the very outset Fromm establishes an absolutist, imperative quality for his salvific solution by appealing to the god values of "natural historical evolution," which is the "inherent, logical answer," to the prophetically mystified term, "human existence."

Besides the historical context, the messianic time is defined by psychological needs. As Fromm describes it:

Human personality constitutes a system with one minimal requirement: avoidance of madness. But once this requirement is fulfilled, man has choices: he can devote his life to hoarding or to producing, to loving or hating, to being or having, etc. Whatever he chooses, he builds a structure (his character) in which certain orientations are dominant and others necessarily follow. The laws of human existence by no means lead to the postulation of one set of values as the only possible one. They lead to alternatives and we have to decide which of the alternatives are superior to others."³⁵

Such system building requires the prophet to define essences, to exercise casuistic stretching, to define god and devil terms, and generally to continue his symbolic tinkering. Thus, the ultimate psychological context extends between madness and sanity. The former dictates rejection and the latter an open-ended acceptance.

Motives.--In turning to the perspective of motives, it is essential to



remember Burke's definition: "Motives are shorthand terms for situations,"³⁶ and further that situations are interpretations of one's orientation for the purpose of assessing the meaning of those situations. From the composite picture of Fromm's orientation, it may be said that his messianism is essentially a theodicy, which term Leszek Kolakowski, the socialist philosopher, describes thus:

Theodicy, therefore, is a method of trans-forming facts into values: a method thanks to which a fact is not only what it appears to be in an empirical imagination, but an element of special meaning in a teleologically arranged order. This trans-forming of facts into values is no doubt, a vestige of magical thinking, older than the speculative theologies, and presupposes the belief in the sanctifying or damning power of certain events, a belief which has no connection with the empirically given data, while relating to qualities. The assumption that our present suffering must find compensation in some good in the future presupposes faith in the secret good qualities of unpleasant events, qualities connected with the all-wise order of the universe. This belief is of the same nature as any trust in the efficacy of magical practices. Our purpose here is to point to those essential elements in which modern secular thought is also compelled, either in negative or positive terms, to answer questions inherited from theological and pretheological, that is, magical, tradition. Every belief or disbelief in a God-less history, or a God-less universe organizing its elements in a teleological unity while assigning them values independent of human notions-- is a belief or disbelief in theodicy Theodicy is thus part of contemporary philosophy; it may be called the metaphysics of values, or speculation on man's position in the cosmos, or even a discussion of historical progress.³⁷

Another Marxist philosopher, István Mészáros, adds the demension of historical necessity to the concept of theodicy or teleology: "Human actions are not intelligible outside their socio-historical framework. But human history in its turn is far from being intelligible without a teleology of some kind."³⁸



Both of the above statements emphasize that ends are immanent in nature and that human life processes are not the exclusive result of mechanic causes, but are directed by certain normative wholes or entelechies. Such an orientation forces Fromm to reject mechanical and relativistic solutions to the question of human existence and to posit "laws" based on his accepted norms.

Fromm's messianism rejects the mechanical causality of an "act of grace"³⁹ as well as any "innate drive within man toward perfection."⁴⁰ This last statement would seem to deny Fromm's belief in a hierarchical psychosis, but the key term of his rejection is "innate drive." This psychic mechanism of drive theory is foreign to Fromm. The fact remains, however, that Fromm accepts the function of the hierarchical psychosis in the interaction of man's essence and his existence. He follows the dialectical pattern of man's salvation through his existential dichotomy, "being animal and yet transcending animal nature."⁴¹ This dichotomy produces in man conflict and suffering, and thus "man is driven to find ever new solutions to this conflict,"⁴² man is driven to seek transcendence.

Theodicy, because it is an interpretation of reality based on the striving for goals, is couched in ultimate terms, and specifically in Fromm's theodicy the messianic time becomes the ultimate term among ultimates encompassing what Burke describes as "an 'entelechial' pattern of thought whereby a thing's nature would be classified according to the fruition, maturing, or ideal fulfillment, proper to its kind."⁴³ Messianism in its dialectical sense develops through motives of conversion which proceed through gradient steps regulated by Fromm's "laws of human



existence," and as such they exemplify the lex continui.⁴⁴

To gain credibility for his theodicy, Fromm employs the strategy of "substance" which unifies the three stages of man's conversion. Since man is central to the whole salvation scheme, the consubstantiality of human nature which binds Edenic man, contemporary man, and messianic man, is the basis for Fromm's covenant of hope. This hope springs from past traditions, sustains the present discontent, and envisions a future fulfillment. Hope, of its very nature, is predicated on transcendence, and, as such, is dialectical, since it exists in the present (a quo) and reaches toward the future (ad quod).

Transcendence, as a dialectical term, presupposes that there is an agent who enacts the transcendence and a material element which is transcended. In Fromm's plan man is the agent of his own transcendence as he is the maker of history, and man in his human existence is the material element which is transcended. Fromm witnesses to this covenant of hope in his credo in Beyond the Chains of Illusion: "I believe that reason cannot be effective unless man has hope and belief Either the Western world will be capable of creating a renaissance of humanism in which the fullest developments of man's humanity, and not production and work, are the central issues—or the West will perish as many other great civilizations have."⁴⁵ The traditional prophetic prediction of ruin if the prophet's words are not heeded is in evidence here. The covenant demands a this-or-nothing response from the audience, the final ultimatum.

Burke explains the rhetorical dimensions of conversion and the lex continui:



Conversions are generally managed by the search for a "graded series" whereby we move step by step from some kind of event, in which the presence of a certain factor is sanctioned in the language of common sense, to other events in which this factor had not previously been noted. The thinker attempts to establish a continuity for arriving at conclusions which might seem abrupt and paradoxical if the two ends of his series were juxtaposed abruptly, without the interpolation of a gradient.⁴⁶

A final point should be made regarding the motive pattern of the messianic time, which Fromm develops as social analyst. If he, as prophet, is to be society's doctor, the question arises as to how and what kind of cure his audience can expect from his medicinal imperatives. Fromm specifies the method and the rationale for his cure: "The cure of social pathology must follow the same principle (that is used in the cure of individual mental disease), since it is the pathology of so many human beings, and not of an entity beyond or apart from individuals."⁴⁷

Here again Fromm lays claim to competence as a social critic based on his psychoanalytic practice, relying on his ethos as a professional. In an effort, however, to meet charges against him of utopian arrogance in seeming to offer a social panacea, he indulges in more symbolic tinkering by specifying a definition of "cure" by a perspective by incongruity: "Let us remember here that 'cure' has not the single connotation of remedial treatment which modern usage commonly implies, but is used in its larger sense of 'caring for.'"⁴⁸ This perspective permits Fromm to maintain the logical consistency of his dialectical evolutionary orientation toward history and human progress, and still avoid the stigma of "visionary." As a result of this position, he can



validly claim the continuing need for prophets and their ministration; thus the constant need for re-birth, for the perduring office of the prophet.

The form of the messianic time.--In terms of ultimates, the messianic time offers the believer a sane society which will be conducive to a sane life for the individual. As has been stated earlier, Fromm stresses that society is the determining factor in the development of the individual. The individual within a society is judged sane or sick, according to his conformity with norms peculiar to that society. A society is judged sane or sick, according to norms extrinsic to the society itself. What is considered "sane" or "sick" will depend "on our concept of the nature of man."⁴⁹ This linkage between the definition of sanity and the definition of man provides Fromm with another occasion to assign essences and to use the strategy of substance. While a later section of this chapter will discuss Fromm's concept of man, let it suffice for the moment to recognize that Fromm employs the coaching of attitudes by this critical definition of man.

From his univocal concept of the nature of man, Fromm can postulate a universal oneness in the human race which creates a bridging device to overcome nationalism and racism and to legalize universal laws and sanctions applicable the world over.

I believe that every man represents humanity. We are different as to intelligence, health, talents. Yet we are all one I believe that man can visualize the experience of the whole universal man only by realizing his individuality and never by trying to reduce himself to an abstract, common denominator. Man's task in life is precisely the paradoxical one of realizing his individuality and



and at the same time transcending it and arriving at the experience of universality.⁵⁰

The messianic time will create one world, contingent on the acceptance of Fromm's humanism: "I believe that the One World which is emerging can come into existence only if a New Man comes into being."⁵¹ Fromm defines the emergence of the One World as a fact, and by incongruity postulates the contingency of the emergence of a "New Man."

The form of the messianic time is determined to a great extent by the consubstantiality based on familial lineage: "In the messianic time [man] will be at home again--in the world. . . ." "The messianic time is the return to innocence, and at the same time it is no return at all, because it is the goal toward which man strives after having lost his innocence."⁵² The concept of "returning" suggests consubstantiality, while the idea of "no return at all" points out the dialectical transcendence.

Fromm comments directly on this dialectic:

There is a dialectic relationship between paradise and the messianic time. Paradise is the golden age of the past, as many legends in other cultures also see it. The messianic time is the golden age of the future. The two ages are the same, inasmuch as they are a state of harmony. They are different inasmuch as the first state of harmony existed only by virtue of man's not yet having been born, while the new state of harmony exists as a result of man's having been fully born.⁵³

The specific psychological characteristics of the messianic time express the fulness of humanity and man's having achieved "at-onement."⁵⁴ Psychologically, the messianic time produces in man a sense of well-being, which is synonymous with sanity and full humanity. Fromm lists the characteristics of this state of well-being as follows:



1. Well-being is the state of having arrived at the full development of reason: reason not in the sense of a mere intellectual judgement, but in that of grasping truth by "letting things be" (to use Heidegger's term) as they are.
2. Well-being is possible only to the degree to which one has overcome one's narcissism: to the degree to which one is open, responsive, sensitive, awake, empty (in the Zen sense).
3. Well-being means to be fully related to man and nature affectively, to overcome separateness and alienation, to arrive at the experience of oneness with all that exists—and yet to experience myself at the same time as the separate entity I am, as the individual.
4. Well-being means to be fully born, to become what one potentially is; it means to have the full capacity for joy and for sadness or, to put it still differently, to awake from the half-slumber the average man lives in, and to be fully awake.
5. If it is all that, it means also to be creative, that is, to react and to respond to myself, to others, to everything that exists—to react and to respond as the real, total man I am to the reality of everybody and everything as he or it is. In this act of true response lies the area of creativity, of seeing the world as it is and experiencing it as my world, created and transformed by my creative grasp of it, so that the world ceases to be a strange world "over there," and becomes my world.
6. Well-being means, finally, to drop one's Ego, to give up greed, to cease chasing after the preservation and aggrandizement of the Ego, to be and to experience one's self in the act of being, not in having, preserving, coveting, using. (Numbers and italics added.)⁵⁵

Fromm adds two other characteristics to complete the concept of sanity:

7. The mentally healthy person . . . is not subject to irrational authority, and accepts willingly the rational authority of conscience and reason. (Number added.)⁵⁶
8. The mentally healthy person . . . considers the gift of life the most precious chance he has. (Number added.)⁵⁷

Fromm's whole scheme of goals takes on the nature of a conspiracy



of ultimates. The ideals are so reasonable, so noble, so attractive, that only a fool could deny Fromm's proposal. Such a conspiracy drives the audience into a corner: acceptance means reasonableness at its most real level; rejection means pure stupidity.

In the context of consubstantiality and conversion by the lex continui, Fromm argues the piety of his plan:

Let us also remember that these goals of mental health are not ideals which have to be forced upon the person, or which man can attain only if he overcomes his "nature," and sacrifices his "innate selfishness." On the contrary, the striving for mental health, for happiness, harmony, love, productiveness, is inherent in every human being who is not born as a mental or moral idiot. (Italics added.)⁵⁸

This argument from inherent "naturalness" further elaborates Fromm's strategy of "repossessing the world," coming to one's birthright. "Given a chance, these strivings assert themselves forcefully, as can be seen in countless situations."⁵⁹ From this perspective Fromm can very logically see his own prophetic role in terms of awakening the innate urges of man, his hierarchical psychosis.

The previous section has analyzed Fromm's soteriology from the viewpoint of its historical dialectic; however, further insight can be had by comparison of Fromm's plan with Christian salvation.

The need for conversion according to Christian theology stems from the sinner's inherited separation from God by virtue of the "First Parent's" disobedience to divine law in paradise. For Fromm, man's need for conversion also stems from an inherited separation, not from God but from himself, other men, and nature. The cause of this inherited deficiency is not sin, but the natural evolutionary processes of man's



development. Thus "original sin" which is a "falling from grace" is translated into the psycho-social phenomenon of alienation.

Christian conversion requires four stages of re-admittance before the sinner can return to God in grace. These parallel Fromm's pattern of the cure for alienation.

If the Christian sinner is to be converted, he must first acknowledge his sinfulness. In Fromm's plan this is paralleled by the individual's need to become aware of his alienation. Second, for the Christian there must be atonement and penance, which compares with Fromm's need for suffering as the dynamic force impelling the "striving to overcome the suffering, that is, for change in the direction of health."⁵⁹ Third, the Christian is reinstated in grace through reconciliation rites. Paralleling this, Fromm prescribes various social reform rituals which foster the growth of love, reason, justice, and consciousness. The fourth and final step of salvation, in the Christian scheme is the eventual union with God in heaven; for Fromm this is the messianic time of man's union with himself, his fellow men, and nature.

Soteriology of its nature employs rituals of re-birth which attempt to make changes of identity in the individual and reorient "his systems of values, norms and ideals, so that they further rather than block his striving for health and maturity."⁶⁰ In this regard Burke comments: "This is chiefly an effort to redirect the symbolic processes."⁶¹

Fromm's secular soteriology reflects results of the disintegration of the theocentric synthesis of Medieval Christianity brought about by the anthropocentrism of the Renaissance. The Christian



synthesis described salvation as the redemptive act of a savior who redeemed (bought back) the sinner. This concept of bartering with God for the souls of sinners necessitated the formulation of a doctrine of grace which created a divine coinage with which to make payment. The doctrine of grace as a means of gaining "divine life" functions ultimately as a doctrine of transcendence.

Fromm's anthropocentric salvation scheme postulates a divine immanence existing within each man and hovering over society as a whole. As such, it bears a likeness to Transcendentalism. This godlikeness of man strengthens and directs man's vision of fulfillment through striving. A system which so elevates man might well be termed an "anthropotheism," denying as it does the necessity of a mediator-redeemer between God and man, and instead placing the responsibility for salvation on each man as he becomes his own redeemer.

In his covenant of hope based on the tension between man's past pre-individualistic state and the future messianic time, Fromm appeals to man in his present condition to heed his prophetic warnings and to transcend the present suffering by becoming aware of his dialectical potential. In his alienated state man possesses within himself the capability for de-alienation. By suffering negation he can discover the means of negating the negation. Transcendence requires transformation to a new and higher state of harmony arising from the former harmony of pre-individualism. This dialectical metamorphosis is a type of Ollman's spiral form of transformation by which man proceeds from one stage through a period of transition to a new stage closely resembling the first but with significant modifications.⁶²



Fromm's Definition of Human Nature

As Fromm has pointed out, the prophet's understanding of human nature is the key to the direction of his social imperatives. For this reason the present discussion becomes necessary as a background for an understanding of his strategy of alienation. In Fromm's view, human nature and society so interact that one cannot understand the one fully without understanding the other. With Protagoras he agrees that man is the measure of all things.

In speaking of the socio-economic structure of society as molding one's character, we speak only of one pole in the interconnection between social organization and man. The other pole to be considered is man's nature, molding in turn the social conditions in which he lives.⁶³

He further elaborates:

The social process can be understood only if we start out with the knowledge of the reality of man, his psychic properties as well as his physiological ones, and if we examine the interaction between the nature of man and the nature of the external conditions under which he lives, and which he has to master if he is to survive.⁶⁴

In his social revolutionary rhetoric, Fromm sets out to establish himself as prophet through the strategy of mystification. He assigns essences and prescribes the dimensions of substance with its familial linkages, its contexts, and its hortatory directions. Mystification permits Fromm to reveal secrets knowable only to those, like himself, who have visited the Olympian Heights.

The basic plan for The Sane Society seeks to answer four questions: (1) What is the nature of man? (2) What are man's objective needs? (3) What is the role of society in the evolution of man? (4) What are the conflicts between the nature of man and society?⁶⁵ The



first and second questions involve Fromm's use of character building through symbolic tinkering. The third establishes pious linkages. The fourth defines the human condition as a validation of the Marxist theory of struggle, but in a transcendent sense.

The prophet is a "revealer of truth"⁶⁶ and one who "sees reality and speaks what he sees."⁶⁷ Asserting this prophetic authority, Fromm states: "I believe that man's essence is ascertainable."⁶⁸ But with astute casuistic stretching he avoids the censure of some writers who would deny the knowability of human nature⁶⁹ and adds: "However, this essence is not a substance which characterizes man at all times through history."⁷⁰

However, as Fromm develops the notion of human nature his perspective by incongruity becomes more and more evident. Departing from the traditional idea of nature as the static element of a being, which is the principle and subject of change, Fromm declares that dynamic, evolutionary change itself is the nature of man.

Expanding this idea, Fromm speaks of three characteristics of man's being: "Man is first a being with certain specifically human conditions of existence; second, he is a social being largely formed by the structure of his society, and the structure has to be explored; and third, he is a being who seeks an answer to the question of why he was born, why he is living."⁷¹ The first and third characteristic of Fromm's description will form the basis of inquiry in this section. Since an earlier section has already treated Fromm's notion of society, there is no need to consider that topic here.



Conditions for human existence

Herbert Marcuse has taken strong exception to Fromm's idea of specific human conditions and has labeled it "ideological."⁷² Fromm's reply emphasizes the superiority of Marx's historical materialism over Freud's libido-instinctual biological theory espoused by Marcuse. Fromm argues from the principle that the "activity of the total personality in his relation to nature and to other members of society is the Archimedean point from which history and social change are explained."⁷³ Denying that his position is ideological, Fromm continues: "Such a theory [Fromm's own] is based on the fact of the 'human situation,' on the specific conditions of human existence."⁷⁴ With this statement he claims to validate his assumption by recourse to a concrete experimental basis in the Marxist sense of "materialism."

Fromm specifies the dialectical qualities of human nature fixed in the realities of contradiction, alienation, and struggle:

Man, having awareness of himself, has transcended the natural world; he is life aware of itself. At the same time he remains a part of nature, and from this contradiction follows his basic passions and strivings, the need to relate himself to others, the need to transcend his own role as a creature by creating (or destroying), the need to have a sense of identity and a frame of orientation or devotion. These needs can be fulfilled in various ways--the difference between these ways is the difference between mental health and illness, between happiness and unhappiness. Yet they must be fulfilled unless man is to become insane.⁷⁵

Marcuse's theory of instinctual libidinal needs Fromm considers inadequate:

On the other hand, the fulfillment of all instinctual needs, including sex, is not a sufficient condition for happiness--not even for sanity. The concept of



human existence is not less real than that of the instincts, and it is not idealistic; it is broader and conceived in terms of activity and practice--rather than of a specific physiological substance.⁷⁶

This passage offers a concise picture of Fromm's use of transcendence to establish: scene by the concept of alienation, motive by the concept of contradiction, agency by the concept of striving, and purpose by the concept of needs. Transcendence progresses through a series of alternative choices which lead man to the most basic human values: sanity and happiness. If one follows Fromm's alternatives, he finds himself driven into a corner, "unless man is to become insane."

To emphasize the contradiction in human existence, Fromm employs a striking metaphor. He calls man, "a freak of nature," because man is part animal with his bodily needs, which are unsupported by instinctual faculties, and man also transcends the animal world by his reason, awareness and imagination. "Man, a 'freak of nature,' would feel unbearably alone unless he could solve his contradiction by finding a new form of unity."⁷⁷

The term, "freak of nature," offers a rich variety of rhetorical implications, as it focuses on both contradiction and transcendence. First, note should be taken of the highly pejorative tone of the word which suggests an attitude of rejection. Naming man a "freak" creates a context of negativity, guilt, and subsequent rejection. Further, it suggests division, apartness, and difference, and from each of these perspectives the reader again feels driven into a corner. The term "freak" is highly motivating, for the freak does not "belong" in a condition which makes him a freak. He cannot remain where he is, as



he is—he must move. Judging his present condition as intolerable and to be rejected, he is faced with the choice of either retreating into self-destruction or going forward to transcend and convert his freakishness into productive ends. Such a metaphor accents the tragic comedy of human existence.

Here again, Fromm's symbolic tinkering moves dialectically. The idea of "freak" presupposes a norm from which the "freak" deviates, so that one cannot understand the meaning of "freak" without knowing the norm measuring the deviation. This dialectical method permits Fromm to assign "essences" of the norm and thus move his audience toward the focus of his advocacy.

Fromm's remark that man's freakishness creates an unbearable loneliness introduces the motives of division as a result of difference and rejection as a result of guilt caused by the difference. Division and rejection thus induce a state within man whereby he must seek a "new form of unity"⁷⁸ in order to flee his alienation and to find transcendent normality through harmony.

This metaphor may be described with reference to the rhetorical model developed in chapter seven. The motives of division and rejection are generated by the interaction of the reality dimension, which symbolizes the present moment as intolerable, and the value-imperative dimension, which offers the hope of transcendence to a "new form of unity." The tension-inducing dimension contributes the value scheme of unity and harmony as human needs.

Human existence is, in Fromm's mind, a problem to be solved:
"The essential contradiction in man's existence forces him to seek a



solution of his contradiction, to find an answer to the question which life asks of him from the moment of his birth."⁷⁹ Here is the prophetic imperative: the contradiction is "essential" and thus inescapable. The quest for a solution is perennial "from the moment of his birth." This dilemma drives man into a corner from which the prophet promises to extricate him.

Striving

From what has already been said regarding Fromm's insistence on the dynamic evolution of the self toward actualization and the resolution of the tension between essence and existence, the importance of human striving becomes obvious. Fromm establishes a framework of ultimates: "All passions and strivings of man are attempts to find an answer to his existence or, as we may also say, they are an attempt to avoid insanity."⁸⁰ This urge for self-actualization is universal: ". . . the striving for mental health, for happiness, harmony, love, productiveness, is inherent in every human being who is not born as a mental or moral idiot."⁸¹

Striving can thus serve as a strategy of substance creating a familial bond among all men who share the consubstantiality of human potential. Because this striving has as its goal, sanity, and sanity is the substance of the messianic time, there is a consubstantiality uniting man as striver and the messianic time as the goal of his striving. This consubstantiality is another foundation for Fromm's covenant of hope which is a socio-anagogical strategy to meet the ills of interregnum.



The next question to be answered arises as to what form this human striving assumes. As might be expected, Fromm posits a dialectical pattern: ". . . all essentially human cravings are determined by this polarity (regression or progression)."⁸² This polarity is placed in a context of ultimates in order to promote transcendence: "I believe that man's basic alternative is the choice between life and death. Every act implies this choice."⁸³ The audience again finds itself driven into a corner with transcendence toward life the only escape.

In an effort to involve the audience in further transcendence, Fromm uses casuistic stretching: "Life and death, as spoken of here, are not the biological states, but states of being, of relating to the world."⁸⁴ From this stretching of the meaning of life and death, Fromm can assign an endless series of value judgments to each term, so that the god-value of life and the devil-value of death can reach to any facet of human existence Fromm chooses to designate.

The term "striving" suggests obstacles against which one must strive. The ultimate obstacle is, of course, death, which Fromm explains in his development of the three death-seeking orientations: necrophilia, narcissism, and the incestuous fixation. As was explained in chapter three, these are dialectical orientations which are the counterparts of: biophilia, true love of self and neighbor, and independence from blood and soil. Fromm has devoted two books to the discussion of these topics, Man for Himself (1947) and The Heart of Man (1964).

With characteristic prophetic omniscience, Fromm states:

I believe that there are a number of limited and ascertainable answers to this question of existence There are basically only two categories



of answers. In one, man attempts to find again harmony with nature by regression to a pre-human form of existence, eliminating his specially human qualities of reason and love. In the other, his goal is the full development of his human powers until he reaches a new harmony with his fellows and with nature.⁸⁵

He continues by again driving the audience into a corner:

I believe that the first answer [regression] is bound to failure. It leads to death, destruction, suffering, and never to the full growth of man, never to harmony and strength. The second answer requires the elimination of greed and egocentricity, it demands discipline, will, and respect for those who can show the way. Yet, although this answer is the more difficult one, it is the only answer which is not doomed to failure. (Italics added.)⁸⁶

In this "this-or-nothing" solution Fromm establishes his own prophetic position of authority. One condition for success in striving for life is "respect for those who can show the way," the audience must be docile to the prophet's message. This is a smooth injection of dogmatism.

Another characteristic of man's striving in the name of life is pain and constant re-birth: "The whole of life of the individual is nothing but the process of giving birth to himself; indeed, we should be fully born, when we die--although it is the tragic fate of most individuals to die before they are born."⁸⁷ Fromm does not promise that this re-birth will be easy:

The fact that man's birth is primarily a negative act, that of being thrown out of the original oneness with nature, that he cannot return to where he came from, implies that the process of birth is by no means an easy one. Each step into his new human existence is frightening. It always means to give up a secure state, which was relatively known, for one which is new, which one has not yet mastered.⁸⁸

Re-birth likewise means struggle:



In the history of the individual, and of the race, the progressive tendency has proven to be stronger, yet the phenomena of mental illness and the regression of the human race to positions apparently relinquished generations ago, show the intense struggle which accompanies each new act of birth.⁸⁹

Fromm here redefines the Marxist idea of class struggle in the transcendental terms of a "struggle for existence." The dynamics of the dialectic conflict remain, but the terms are changed and the scene vastly expanded.

The dialectic form of striving for re-birth presents the same pattern of spiral transformation discovered in the general soteriological scheme. As salvation is cyclic, so is the striving toward it:

. . . it is man's fate that his existence is beset by contradictions which he is impelled to solve without ever solving them. When he has overcome the primitive state of human sacrifice, be it in the ritualistic form of the Aztecs or in the secular form of war; when he has been able to regulate his relationship with nature reasonably instead of blindly; when things have truly become his servants rather than his idols-- he will be confronted with the truly human conflicts and problems. He will have to be adventuresome, courageous, imaginative, capable of suffering and of joy, but his powers will be in the service of life, and not in the service of death. The new phase of human history, if it comes to pass, will be a beginning, not an end.⁹⁰

Here Fromm answers those critics who have called him a utopian idealist. Clearly in this passage, he sees striving itself as the perfection of human nature and attempts to offer man the motives to sustain his striving, a strategy of perspective by incongruity.

Fromm restates this perspective by incongruity by "discounting" the availability of "absolutist answers" to the problems of existence:

I believe that neither life nor history has



an ultimate meaning which in turn imparts meaning to the life of the individual or justifies his suffering. Considering the contradictions and weaknesses which beset man's existence it is only too natural that he seeks for an "absolute" which gives him the illusion of certainty and relieves him from conflict, doubt and responsibility. Yet, no god, neither in theological, philosophical or historical garments saves, or condemns man. Only man can find a goal for life and the means for the realization of this goal. He cannot find a saving ultimate or absolute answer but he can strive for a degree of intensity, depth and clarity of experience which gives him the strength to live without illusions, and to be free.⁹¹

Fromm finds that human existence is "in a state of constant and unavoidable disequilibrium,"⁹² and this is the motive for man's striving: "Man cannot live statically because his inner contradictions drive him to seek an equilibrium, for a new harmony instead of the lost animal harmony with nature. After he has satisfied his animal needs he is driven by his human needs."⁹³ Here Fromm repeats the theory of a hierarchy of needs as developed by Goldstein, Maslow, and others who espouse the self-actualizing personality.

This disequilibrium is such that "man is the only animal who finds his own existence a problem which he has to solve and from which he cannot escape."⁹⁴ Striving as a problem-solving effort becomes highly personal: "Man's life cannot 'be lived' by repeating the pattern of his species, he must live."⁹⁵

In designating human needs, Fromm presents himself as a "diviner of spirits," by distinguishing the true from the false. "As follows from the whole concept of man, his real needs are rooted in his nature; this distinction between real and false needs is possible only on the basis



of a picture of the nature of man and the true human needs rooted in his nature."⁹⁶ Fromm measures the true needs by the fact that their "fulfillment is necessary for the realization of [man's] essence as a human being."⁹⁷ In this matter of needs, Fromm rejects any subjectivism:

Only on the basis of a specific concept of man's nature can Marx make the difference between true and false needs of man. Purely subjectively, the false needs are experienced as being as urgent and real as the true needs, and from a purely subjective viewpoint, there could not be a criterion for the distinction.⁹⁸

This rejection of subjectivity reflects Fromm's prophetic sense of omniscience. Because "often man is conscious only of his false needs and unconscious of his real ones,"⁹⁹ Fromm feels he is justified in pronouncing prophetic dogmas of need to awaken man's slumbering unconscious. When man has been liberated from his sense of false needs, he will be able to give the right answers to his existence.¹⁰⁰

What has been discussed here regarding Fromm's formulation of the human need pattern is only the rationale underlying the specific needs he postulates. These specific needs have been described earlier in the discussion of the dimensions of mental health.

Human perfectibility

Fromm's critics have taken him to task for what they consider to be his naïve idealism regarding man's perfectibility. In making his case for human perfectibility, Fromm so manipulates his distinctions by casuistic stretching that he can offer a very absolute covenant of hope and still not foster complacency:



I believe in the perfectibility of man. This perfectibility means that man can reach his goal, but it does not mean that he must reach it. If the individual will not choose life and does not grow, he will by necessity become destructive, a living corpse. Evilness and self-loss are as real as are goodness and aliveness. They are the secondary potentialities of man if he chooses not to realize his primary potentialities.¹⁰¹

By placing the responsibility for perfection on man himself and by outlining the consequences of rejection of the means of salvation, Fromm presents a veiled threat.

Previous discussion of striving has stressed that it is the essential to human existence and that Fromm's conclusion is that man's ultimate form of striving is dialectical, i.e., continual striving is the goal and perfection of man.

The closing lines of Beyond the Chains of Illusion conclude Fromm's prophetic credo. They are positive in form, yet carry a melancholy note:

I believe in the perfectibility of man, but
I doubt whether he will achieve this goal, unless
he awakens soon.

"Watchman, what of the night?
The watchman says:
Morning comes and also the night
If you will inquire, inquire:
Return, come back again." (Isaiah, 21)¹⁰²

The prophet Isaiah well serves Fromm's paradoxical purposes. His hope is tempered by doubt: "Yorning comes and also the night." Will man choose the morning of life or the night of death? And the very last line in one short imperative states directly Fromm's plan of salvation: "Return" to harmony, to yourself, your neighbor, your world.



A Rhetoric of Evolution

The term evolution may be used in various contexts--that of the cosmos, organism, mental states, or society. But in whatever context, the term expresses the common characteristic of attempting to explain the presence of change in a given sphere. For Fromm the term evolution is also hortatory, for it attempts to coach attitudes toward change. Fromm is very precise in analyzing the past in order to "discover" patterns of previous history which explain the present human condition and which offer hope or foreboding for the future. The present condition of man is accepted as a product of the past and the basis of possibility for the future. The future thus is viewed as implicitly present in both the past and the present.

Man is the new synthesis of the evolutionary process--the organic, economic, political, and social worlds are all in their particular way the products of man's making, as he engages in the ceaseless struggle for existence. The Darwinian principle of natural selection is based on the fact that more organisms are born into the world than can successfully live in it. Fromm has translated this theory into the social principle that man has more choices than he can realize and consequently only a pious selection of alternatives will produce authentic human survival. "The survival of the fittest" becomes for Fromm the "survival of the most human." The task of designating what is "most human" Fromm appropriates to himself by assigning essences in the form of "laws of growth."

The strategic value of Fromm's evolutionary principles can be outlined as follows:



1. The evolutionary approach permits normative judgments of the past and present designed to determine a projected picture of the future. This creates a pattern of expectancies, which is the essence of Fromm's covenant of hope. Further, it allows him to coach attitudes of what-is and what-is-not, what-can-be and what-cannot.
2. Invoking the evolutionary process as an explanation of change allows for abstractification by the bureaucratization of the imagination of the audience, liberating them from observable facts. Such liberation makes simplification more acceptable and through the lex continui legislates for permissible lapses of logical and common sense judgments.
3. Because the evolutionary explanation is essentially a reflexive process, the audience is coached to an awareness of where it is at the present moment and in what direction it is tending.
4. Evolution, depending as it does on a doctrine of essences, exists as an open-ended system founded on the free choice of man. And as such it is an extension of Fromm's anthropotheism.
5. Evolutionary rhetoric makes possible a high degree of audience involvement with the topic, for the individual man is led to experience himself not as outside the process, but as the process itself.
6. Because of the interaction of past, present, and future in



Fromm's dialectic of history, the audience at the present moment is able to experience an immediate satisfaction psychologically which will be accomplished only in the future. This is part of the symbolic myth creation of the futuristic program which the prophet projects as a cure of the ills of the interregnum.

7. A final value of evolutionary rhetoric is that the ipse dixit imperatives of the prophet are channeled in such a way as to produce an acceptance or rejection alternative for the audience, and this pattern is the ultimate in the strategy of transcendence.

The Rhetorical Implications of "Social Character"

The final section of this chapter considers Fromm's notion of social character. Although this concept has been described in chapter three, the specifically rhetorical implications are noted here. Social character, as an analytic and suatory tool, permits Fromm to point out the "reality" of contemporary alienation. Because the term has grown in its significance in the field of social psychology during the past forty years,¹⁰³ Fromm can capitalize on the academic ethos of the term to implement his own purposes.

Fromm defines "social character" thus:

Each society creates its own type of personality by its way of bringing up children in the family, by its system of education, by its effective values (that is, those values that are rewarded rather than only preached).



Every society creates the type of "social character" which is needed for its proper functioning. It forms men who want to do what they have to do.¹⁰⁴

The analytic use of this concept allows Fromm to view the rhetorical scene from a vantage point very congenial to his position as prophet, integrating as it does the economic, political, and cultural elements of society. He states:

It is true, nations have a "social character," they share certain character traits because they share certain fundamental experiences to which all members of the group have been exposed. In order to analyze the social character of any nation, one must study their social, economic, political, and cultural situation in its minute details and then proceed to understand how this total situation molded the character structure of the majority of all members; one must study the intricate interaction of the socio-economic, ideological, and psychological factors which operate in the history of any nation. This can only be done if one is as thoroughly acquainted and concerned with the history of a nation as the psychiatrist is acquainted with the individual life history of his patient.¹⁰⁵

Fromm, as society's prophet, assigns the agents: the family, educational system, and effective value systems; the purpose: proper function of society; the agency: the formation of men who want to do what they have to do; the act: the social involvement of becoming a person in a given society.

Fromm's Marxist position is also validated by the notion of social character, stressing as it does the economic influences in society:

It is not only the "economic basis" which creates a certain social character which, in turn, creates certain ideas. The ideas, once created, also influence the social character and, indirectly, the social



economic structure. What I emphasize here is that the social character is the intermediary between the socio-economic structure and the ideas and ideals prevalent in a society. It is the intermediary in both directions, from the economic basis to the ideas and from the ideas to the economic basis.¹⁰⁶

This concept Fromm refers to as a "mechanism"¹⁰⁷ which lends a very objective quality to the "abstraction" and also creates the inference of its constant and inevitable function.

The rhetorical advantages of the concept flow essentially from its analytic function, which permits a selective perception and thus can direct the discovery and explanation of social phenomena. In applying the idea of social character, Fromm can explore history according to his own philosophy and assign an historical scene which begins with the advent of Protestantism and the rise of capitalism, as he does in Escape from Freedom, and the economic situation of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as he does in The Sane Society.

In explaining the insanity of contemporary social character in the capitalist world, he designates as agent devils--bureaucracy in business, government, and religion. The agency at work here is social conformity, which is the result of the passivity and inner vacuity of the individual and a result also of the manipulative forces within society. The driving purpose of the capitalist social character emerges as the profit motive and the entrenchment of capitalism. And finally, the acting out of the social character is the act of resignation to the status of an automaton, accepting the myth of the happy worker and the successful executive, and the idol worship of capitalism as the saving god.



According to Fromm, if one accepts and functions under the direction of the capitalistic social character, one inevitably becomes an alienated person. On the other hand, if one rejects this form of social character, one also becomes alienated, since he finds himself a "stranger" in his own country. Offering these alternatives, Fromm has neatly driven his audience into a corner—under the present system of capitalism there is no possibility to escape alienation. Because of the intense devil qualities of alienation, one is forced to reject it and with it to reject the capitalistic system as its cause.

While the sociological interpretation of social character is directed to society as a whole, Fromm has been able to shift the reader's focus from society at large to his own personal experience and thus more deeply to involve him in a very existential awareness of his plight. With the rejection of capitalism comes the acceptance, according to Fromm's dichotomy, of humanistic socialism. Here the emphasis is on the value of the person rather than of money, on being rather than having, on love and justice rather than manipulation and exploitation. The presumed result of the acceptance of humanistic socialism is the reinstatement of humanity for man and the end of alienation.

Having discussed Fromm's prophetic ethos, his soteriology, his hortatory definition of man, his rhetoric of evolution, and finally the strategic values of "social character," this chapter has sought to lay the final analytic groundwork for the investigation of Fromm's polemic of alienation, which follows in the next chapter.



Footnotes

Chapter VIII

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- ⁴Kenneth Burke, Attitudes toward History (Beacon ed., Boston, 1961), p. 315.
- ⁵See Erich Fromm, You Shall Be as Gods (New York, 1966), pp. 115-121.
- ⁶Henry D. Aiken, The Age of Ideology: The Nineteenth Century Philosophers (New York, 1956), p. 13.
- ⁷Gordon W. Allport, Becoming: Basic Considerations for a Psychology of Personality (New Haven, Conn., 1955), p. 49.
- ⁸Erich Fromm, "Epilogue," The Crisis in Psychoanalysis (Fawcett Premier ed., Greenwich, Conn., 1970), p. 190.
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- ¹¹Richard I. Evans, Dialogue with Erich Fromm (New York, 1966), p. 98.
- ¹²Erich Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion (New York, 1962), p. 134.
- ¹³Ibid., p. 15.
- ¹⁴Erich Fromm, The Revolution of Hope (New York, 1968), p. xvii.
- ¹⁵Fromm, You Shall Be as Gods, pp. 117-118.
- ¹⁶Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives (New York, 1954), p. 39.
- ¹⁷Fromm, You Shall Be as Gods, p. 92.
- ¹⁸Erich Fromm, "The Prophetic Concept of Peace," The Dogma of Christ, (Anchor ed., Garden City, N.Y., 1966), p. 213.



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- ²⁰Ibid., p. 70.
- ²¹Ibid., pp. 70-71.
- ²²Ibid., p. 70.
- ²³Ibid., p. 87.
- ²⁴Ibid.
- ²⁵Ibid., p. 88.
- ²⁶Ibid.
- ²⁷Ibid.
- ²⁸Ibid., p. 70.
- ²⁹(New York, 1957), p. 43.
- ³⁰Fromm, You Shall Be as Gods, p. 7.
- ³¹Ibid., p. 13.
- ³²Ibid., p. 105.
- ³³Ibid., p. 88.
- ³⁴Ibid., pp. 88-89.
- ³⁵Fromm, The Revolution of Hope, p. 90.
- ³⁶Kenneth Burke, Permanence and Change, rev. ed. (Los Altos, Cal., 1954), p. 29.
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- ³⁸István Mészáros, Marx's Theory of Alienation (Torchbook ed., New York, 1972), p. 118.
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- ⁴⁴See Burke, Permanence and Change, p. 142.
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- ⁴⁹Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 67.
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- ⁵⁵Erich Fromm, "Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism," D. T. Suzuki, Erich Fromm, and Richard DeMartino, Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis (Colophon ed., New York, 1970), pp. 91-92.
- ⁵⁶Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 275.
- ⁵⁷Ibid.
- ⁵⁸Ibid.
- ⁵⁹Ibid., p. 274.
- ⁶⁰Ibid.
- ⁶¹Burke, Attitudes toward History, p. 317.
- ⁶²See above, Chap. VII.
- ⁶³Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion, p. 81.
- ⁶⁴Ibid.
- ⁶⁵Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 20-21.
- ⁶⁶Fromm, You Shall Be as Gods, p. 118.



⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion, p. 174.

⁶⁹C. Wright Mill's position is typical of many opponents. He states: "The idea of some 'human nature' common to man as man is a violation of the social and historical specificity that careful work in the human studies requires; at the very least, it is an abstraction that social students have not earned the right to make. Surely we ought occasionally to remember that in truth we do not know much about man, and that all the knowledge we do have does not entirely remove the elements of mystery that surrounds this variety as it is revealed in history and biography." The Sociological Imagination (Oxford U. Pr. paperback ed., New York, 1967), p. 164.

⁷⁰Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion, p. 174.

⁷¹Evans, Dialogue with Erich Fromm, pp. 99-100.

⁷²Herbert Marcuse, "The Social Implications of Freudian 'Revisionism,'" Voices of Dissent (New York, 1958), p. 293ff.

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⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid., pp. 315-316.

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⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 29.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 275.

⁸²Ibid., p. 28.

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⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Ibid., pp. 174-175.



- ⁸⁶Ibid., p. 175.
- ⁸⁷Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 26.
- ⁸⁸Ibid., p. 27.
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- ⁹⁰Fromm, "The Present Human Condition," p. 35.
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- ⁹⁶Fromm, Marx's Concept of Man, p. 62.
- ⁹⁷Ibid.
- ⁹⁸Ibid., p. 62.
- ⁹⁹Ibid., pp. 62-63.
- ¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 62.
- ¹⁰¹Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion, p. 177.
- ¹⁰²Ibid., p. 182.

¹⁰³The use of "social character" as an instrument for social analysis began with the fusion of anthropology and psychology, which was initiated by men like W. H. R. Rivers, Edward Sapir, and Francis Boas. With a new awareness among anthropologists of the individual as both a "culture carrier" and a "culture innovator," the stirring of interest began, which Inkeles and Levinson have described as, "The study of deviant behavior leading to greater recognition that the fulfillment of cultural imperatives depends on the individual's internalization of cultural values and his learning of appropriate behavior." The Handbook of Social Psychology (Menlo Park, Cal., 1969), IV, p. 419. Ruth Benedict's Patterns of Culture (1934) represented an event of major significance, attempting as it did to characterize the psychological coherence of culture as a whole. Although her work was a subject of significant negative criticism, it still served as an example and a stimulus for others in the study of social psychology.



Probably the greatest impetus to the study of social character came as an aftermath of World War II, as social scientists of varying specialties sought to explore the psychological characteristics proper to given nations. Especially was this true of the wartime enemies of the United States. Among the leading anthropologists involved in this research were Bateson, Benedict, Dicks, Roundtable, Corer, LaBarre, Leighton, Mead, and Schaffner.

Inkeles and Levinson describe the period from 1934, the year of Benedict's Patterns of Culture, to 1945 when Kardiner published his Psychological Frontiers of Society, as the "seminal period of development" p. 419. Earlier research had proven that the concept of social character could be used effectively as an analytic tool, and as a result the period following the mid-1940's reflected a greater self-assurance among researchers, with the result that more and more field work was done.

While social anthropologists eagerly accepted the concept of national character, the prevailing attitude among academic psychologists ranged from cold reservation to open hostility. Social psychologists during the 1920's and 1930's reacted strongly against what they considered generalizations about national or group character which amounted to unscientific stereotyping. The strict experimental techniques of social psychology plus the rejection of personality theory, both strengthened the rejection of research on national character.

By the mid-1950's both academic psychology and social psychology had broadened their scope of interest and methodology to the extent that the study of national character was both relevant and fruitful, and thus researchers such as McClelland, Milgram, Triandis and Triandis, Rommetveit, Lindzey, French, and Campbell began to publish studies employing the concept of social character.

Psychoanalysis and clinical psychiatry offered an orientation which was vitally important during the early years of the development of the concept of social character. The collaboration of such anthropologists as Sapir, Mead, Kluckhohn, and Linton with psychoanalysts such as Alexander, Fromm, Reich, Reik, and Roheim made early and meaningful contributions to the understanding of social character.

An earlier chapter in the present study has noted Fromm's leadership in establishing the groundwork for the development of this concept. His first work, Zur Entstehung des Christusbogmas, appeared in 1931. Five years later, his article, "Studien über Autorität und Familie," brought him international recognition and set forth the fundamental orientation for his subsequent social criticism. His first English work, Escape from Freedom, (1941) with its detailed analysis of the psychology of Nazism remains a classic work today.

The field of sociology has been slow to investigate the study of personality as a factor in the organization and function of society; however, the work of men like Parson, Shils, Inkeles, Levinson, Janowitz,



Swanson, Riesman, Lerner, Pye, and others has established an acceptable basis for personality research in sociology.

This historical sketch has relied primarily on Inkeles and Levinson's article, "National Character: the Study of Modal Personality and Sociocultural Systems," in The Handbook of Social Psychology, ed. Gardiner Lindzey and Elliott Aronson, 2nd ed. (Menlo Park, Cal., 1969), IV, pp. 418-423.

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107 Ibid., p. 87.



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CHAPTER IX

FROMM'S STRATEGY OF ALIENATION

This final chapter of analysis has sought to place in rhetorical perspective Fromm's use of the term alienation. The chapter has been divided into six parts, the first of which deals with the polemic nature of the term alienation. The second section reviews Fromm's development of pious linkages in tracing the tradition of the term. The third section defines the nature of alienation as Fromm sees it and the function to which he puts it as an analytic tool. Section four describes the causes of alienation which form Fromm's catalogue of devil terms. The symptoms characterizing alienation are discussed in section five. And the sixth and last section analyzes Fromm's answer to overcoming alienation, which is a catalogue of god terms.

Alienation as a Polemic Term

Fromm, like every prophet before him, must deal in polemics, as he criticizes in an effort to create change. As has been observed earlier, Fromm's method is essentially dialectical, stressing conflict as the basis of change. He establishes the principle of his conflict resolution method as he states:

. . . whatever the reactions are, the statement that man can live under almost any condition is only half true; it must be supplemented by the other statement, that if he lives under conditions which are contrary to his nature and to the basic requirements for human growth and sanity he cannot help reacting;



he must either deteriorate and perish, or bring about conditions which are more in accordance with his needs.¹

With this dichotomy of growth or decline, Fromm sets the stage for driving his audience into a corner. As previously discussed, Fromm's orientation by definition of essences has provided his audience with a system of needs which the social sickness of alienation violates at its very core.

Fromm's lengthy excursions into philosophical issues may at first reading seem wasted verbiage, yet he makes clear his rationale for this style:

The interrelation between concern and knowledge has often been expressed--and rightly so--in terms of the interrelation between theory and practice. As Marx once wrote, one must not only interpret the world, but one must change it. Indeed, interpretation without intention of change is empty; change without interpretation is blind. Interpretation and change, theory and practice, are not two separate factors which can be combined; they are interrelated in such a way that knowledge becomes fertilized by practice and practice is guided by knowledge; theory and practice both change their nature once they cease to be separate.²

The question may be raised as to the appropriateness of alienation as a polemic term rather than that of an objective sociological category. Lewis Feuer, writing in New Politics, meets this objection of the sociologist, Seeman:

Seeman wishes to remove "the critical, polemic element in the idea of alienation," and to translate what it has to say into the language of the psychological theory of learning. But the will to criticize and polemize is precisely the essential intent behind the idea of alienation, and a multitude of alienated persons would be dissatisfied equally with conditions of power-possession, meaningfulness, norm-orientedness, involvement, and



self-acknowledgement.³

If one grants that alienation may be effectively used as a polemic term, the psychic phenomenon itself is motivating, according to Robert K. Merton: "The very society that produces this sense of alienation and estrangement generates in many a craving for reassurance, an acute need to believe, a flight into faith."⁴ This craving Fromm exploits through the vivid detailing of the reality of alienation, in order to persuade his audience to believe in the need for the sane society he proposes. Merton elsewhere has emphasized the motivating quality of alienation by describing the revolt experienced by the alienated individual which "leads men outside the environing social structure to envisage and seek to bring into being a new, that is to say, a greatly modified, social structure. It presupposes alienation from reigning goals and standards."⁵ Such a rebellion is precisely Fromm's goal.

Jerry Rubin, the practicing polemicist, emphasizes the polemic value of alienation:

Alienate.

Alienate.

Alienate.

The more people you alienate, the more people you reach. If you don't alienate people, you're not reaching them.⁶

And again Rubin states:

We must alienate middle-class Amerika. We must get middle-class Amerika all whipped up emotionally.

Amerika suffers from a great cancer; it's called APATHY.

Moral persuasion may work on the guilt feelings of the Amerikan middle class; it may even win his mind or vote; but how are you going to get



him off his ass?

Alienating people is a necessary process in getting them to move.⁷

In the previous chapters Fromm's use of guilt as a motive linked to alienation has been alluded to. He points out its positive value:

The reaction to the awareness of guilt is not self-hate but an active stimulation to do better. Some Christian and Jewish mystics have even considered sin a prerequisite for the achievement of virtue. They teach that only if we sin and react to the sin, not in fear but with concern for our salvation can we become fully human. In their thinking, which is centered around an affirmation of man's strength, of his likeness to God, of the experience of joy rather than that of sadness the awareness of sins means to recognize the totality of one's own powers and is not an experience of powerlessness.⁸

By presenting alienation as the sin of modern society, Fromm hopes to induce this "active stimulation to do better."

Lewis Feuer notes:

"Alienation" thus lends a distinctive emotive-dramatic metaphor to experiences of social frustration. . . .

From another standpoint, the emphasis of "alienation" is an indication of how the politics of the superstructure has in the last decade replaced the politics of the economic foundation. The advent of prosperity has meant the shelving of any mood for basic economic reconstruction. The concern shifts from the production and distribution of wealth to the question of the ends and goods to which wealth shall be devoted. Whether "alienation" however provides an adequate basis for the definition of human good seems to me doubtful. "Alienation" remains too much a concept of political theology which bewilders rather than clarifies the direction for political action.⁹

This criticism of vagueness of direction in Fromm's proposals has been leveled by other critics, but as Feuer states, this may be unavoidable



in the idiom of prophetic-theodicy employed by Fromm. This is not to apologize for Fromm's vagueness, but rather to acknowledge it.

Nathan Glazer, writing in Commentary, lists "alienation" as one of three key terms of the rhetoric of revolution:

If, as Sidney Hook wrote recently, the two great semantic beacons of our time are the terms "transition" and "crisis," then a third term is perhaps necessary to capture the special quality of this transition and this crisis. That term—the third semantic beacon—is "alienation." It expresses a unique facet of the crisis of our times; the widespread belief that there has been a revolutionary change in the psychological condition of man, reflected in the individual's feeling of isolation, homelessness, insecurity, restlessness, anxiety.¹⁰

Glazer's observation that "alienation" expresses a unique facet of the crisis of our times and that "alienation" has brought about a revolutionary change in the psychological condition of man today expresses precisely Fromm's polemic perspective.

Fromm himself sees the process of alienation in its polemic function giving rise to "new protest movements. The renaissance of socialist humanism is one symptom of this protest."¹¹

Tradition of the Term

Because of the historical evolutionary setting in which Fromm places the concept of alienation, he must establish very specifically the tradition of pious linkages which unites his mission with that of earlier prophets. He begins with Old Testament literature:

The concept of alienation has its roots in a still earlier phase of the Western tradition, in the thought of the Old Testament prophets, more specifically in their concept of idolatry. The prophets of monotheism did not denounce heathen religions



as idolatrous primarily because they worshipped several gods instead of one. The essential difference between monotheism and polytheism is not one of the number of gods, but lies in the fact of alienation. Man spends his energy, his artistic capacities on building an idol, and then he worships this idol, which is nothing but the result of his own human effort. His life forces have flowed into a "thing," and this thing, having become an idol, is not experienced as a result of his own productive effort, but as something apart from himself, over and against himself, which he worships and to which he submits. . . . Idolatrous man bows down to the work of his own hands. The idol represents his own life-forces in an alienated form.¹²

Fromm continues his catalogue of tradition stressing the familial function of substance which runs as a common vein throughout the history of revolutionary, humanist prophets:

What Owen and Proudhon, Tolstoy and Bakunin, Durkheim and Marx, Einstein and Schweitzer talk about is man, and what happens to him in our industrial system. Although they express it in different concepts, they all find that man has lost his central place, that he has been made an instrument for the purposes of economic aims, that he has been estranged from and has lost the concrete relatedness to, his fellow men and to nature, that he has ceased to have a meaningful life. I have tried to express the same idea by elaborating on the concept of alienation and by showing psychologically what the psychological results of alienation are; that man regresses to a receptive and marketing orientation and ceases to be productive; that he loses his sense of self, becomes dependent on approval, hence tends to conform and yet to feel insecure; he is dissatisfied, bored, and anxious, and spends most of his energy in the attempt to compensate for or just to cover up his anxiety. His intelligence is excellent, his reason deteriorates and in view of his technical powers he is seriously endangering the existence of civilization, and even of the human race.

. . . They [the Marxists] believed that the alienation of man resulted from his role as an object of exploitation and use. Thinkers like Tolstoy and Burckhardt on the other hand, stressed the spiritual and moral impoverishment as the cause of Western man's decay; Freud believed that modern man's trouble was



the over-repression of his instinctual drives and the resulting neurotic manifestations. But any explanation which analyzes one sector to the exclusion of others is unbalanced, and thus wrong. The socio-economic, spiritual, psychological explanations look at the same phenomenon from different aspects, and the very task of a theoretical analysis is to see how these different aspects are inter-related, and how they interact.¹³

Fromm attributes the psychological origin of the term to Hegel,¹⁴ a point disputed by Feuer, who traces it back to Calvin.¹⁵ In his reading of Marx, Fromm considers the concept of alienation to be the "key concept in the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, and which Marx retained until the end of his life."¹⁶ This interpretation is also challenged by Feuer: "With their abandonment of the concept of alienation, Marx and Engels made central in their political philosophy the concept of struggle. German ethical socialists, with their humanistic talk of love, seemed indeed to Marx and Engels akin to masochistic ascetics with their lack of aggressive vitality and energy."¹⁷

Feuer agrees with Fromm that alienation is not uniquely a modern problem:

It would be a major blunder to regard alienation as characteristically a phenomenon of modern society. For what stands out from an historical and comparative standpoint is the omnipresence of alienation; it takes different guises in all societies. There are modes of alienation in small egalitarian, cooperative, and agricultural societies.¹⁸

Feuer goes on to give examples of alienation among New Zealanders, Swedes, Jews in the kibbutzim, the farmers of Vermont, as well as the characters of Sinclair Lewis's Main Street.

Feuer also considers alienation to be a key concept around which



to cluster a myriad of social problems:

Every age has its key ethical concept around which it can best formulate the cluster of its basic problems. "Duty" summated for Kant the meaning of life in the Prussian bureaucratic and pietistic society; "peace" was the basic longing of Hobbes living in England's time of civil war; "happiness" defined for Bentham the aims of a middle-class England which was challenging the rule of a landed aristocracy. Twenty-five years ago, the concept of "exploitation" was the focus of most socialist and liberal political philosophy. Today many thinkers would replace it with the concept of "alienation," which has indeed become the central one for the neo-revisionist school of Marxism.¹⁹

Other authors have emphasized the past and contemporary importance of the term. Melvin Seeman in the American Sociological Review, has written:

In one form or another, the concept of alienation dominates both the contemporary literature and the history of sociological thought. It is a central theme in the classics of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim; and in contemporary works, the consequences that have been said to flow from the fact of alienation have been diverse, indeed.²⁰

C. Wright Mills has called it a major theme in contemporary sociological science:

The advent of the alienated man and all the themes which lie behind his advent now affect the whole of our serious intellectual life and cause our immediate intellectual malaise. It is a major theme of the human condition in the contemporary epoch and of all studies worthy of the name. I know of no idea, no theme, no problem, that is so deep in the classic tradition--and so much involved in the possible default of contemporary social science.²¹

Dwight G. Dean points out a resurgence of interest in the term and lists a series of synonyms and their sources:



The concept of Alienation, rooted deeply in sociological tradition, has recently enjoyed a new popularity. Theorists have suggested numerous possible correlates of Alienation, such as Apathy (Kenneth Keniston and Eric Kahler), Authoritarianism (Adorno), Conformity (Fromm), Cynicism (Robert Merton), Hoboism (Morton Grodzins), Political Apathy (Morris Rosenberg), Political Hyperactivity (Riesman and Glazer) or Personalization in Politics (Adorno), Prejudice (Adorno), Privatization (Ernst Kris and Nathan Leites), Psychosis (Jaco), Regression (DeBrazia) and Suicide (E. H. Powell).²²

Alienation: The Central Concept of Fromm's Rhetoric

The term "alienation" in Fromm's writing is polemic precisely because it is an analytic tool by which he is able to assign essences and coach attitudes in his audience concerning the qualities of the modern personality, the dialectical interaction between the socio-economic structure and character structure. Choosing this problem which is highly personal in its effects, yet highly social in its causes, Fromm can speak to the individual about problems which the individual experiences very concretely in his personal life, and he can then find the causes for these ills in the nature of society:

In the following analysis I have chosen the concept of alienation as the central point from which I am going to develop the analysis of the contemporary social character. For one reason, because this concept seems to me to touch upon the deepest level of the modern personality; for another, because it is the most appropriate if one is concerned with the interaction between the contemporary socio-economic structure and the character structure of the average individual.²³

This analysis leads naturally to polemic demand for social change. The areas of focus for change are three:



Just as Kierkegaard was concerned with the salvation of the individual, so Marx was, and his criticism of capitalist society is directed not at its method of distribution of income, but (1) its mode of production, (2) its destruction of individuality, (3) its enslavement of man, not by the capitalist, but the enslavement of man--worker and capitalist--by things and circumstances of their own making. (Numbers and italics added.)²⁴

Fromm's casuistic stretching, which demonstrates the effects of alienation on both worker and capitalist, is another attempt to broaden his appeal.

Fromm defines alienation as follows:

By alienation is meant a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an alien. He has become, one might say, estranged from himself. He does not experience himself as the center of his world, as the creator of his own acts--but his acts and their consequences have become his master, whom he obeys, or whom he may even worship. The alienated person is out of touch with himself as he is out of touch with any other person. He, like the others, are experienced as things are experienced; with the senses and with common sense, but at the same time without being related to oneself and to the world outside productivity.²⁵

Glazer characterizes alienation as "the psychological condition of man, reflected in the individual's feeling of isolation, homelessness, insecurity, restlessness, anxiety."²⁶ Feuer stresses a theme also present in Fromm's analysis: "'Alienation' is used to convey the emotional tone which accompanies any behavior in which the person is compelled to act self-destructively; that is the most general definition of alienation, and its dimensions will be as varied as human desire and needs."²⁷

Dialectical dimensions



Fromm describes the dialectical basis of the term:

For Marx, as for Hegel, the concept of alienation is based on the distinction between existence and essence, on the fact that man's existence is alienated from his essence, that in reality he is not what he potentially is, or, to put it differently, that he is not what he ought to be, and that he ought to be that which he could be.²⁸

Alienation arises as a direct result of individuality: "The other aspect of the process of individuation is growing aloneness."²⁹ Individuation in its turn is the product of the growing reflexive awareness of the "self," and thus Fromm can say: "Alienation as a sickness of the self can be considered to be the core of the psychopathology of modern man even in those forms which are less extreme than psychosis."³⁰

Fromm explains in more detail:

If every step in the direction of separation and individuation were matched by corresponding growth of the self, the development of the child would be harmonious. This does not occur, however. While the process of individuation takes place automatically, the growth of the self is hampered for a number of individual and social reasons. The lag between these two trends results in an unbearable feeling of isolation and powerlessness, and this in its turn leads to psychic mechanisms, which later on are described as mechanisms of escape.³¹

As part of the growth process of the self, alienation is not only inevitable, but a "necessary phenomenon, one which is inherent in human evolution."³² Emerson makes the same point in his essay, "Self-Reliance," "We must go alone. Isolation must precede true community."³³

Alienation described as the result of self-awareness becomes both the cause and effect of a transcendence of nature. Fromm points out the suffering involved:



The myth [Eden story] emphasizes the suffering resulting from this act. To transcend nature, to be alienated from nature and from another human being, finds man naked, ashamed. He is alone and free, yet powerless and afraid. The newly won freedom appears as a curse; he is free from the sweet bondage of paradise, but he is not free to govern himself, to realize his individuality.³⁴

The dialectical polemic of alienation evolves as the negation of negation. First of all, alienation is a negation insofar as man is a "freak," deprived of animal instincts, a social being who cannot relate to himself, his fellows, or to nature. Alienation symbolizes deprivation. Its contrary term, un-alienation, symbolizes fulfillment and actualization. In alienation man experiences his essence, his selfhood and individuality, as incomplete. This incompleteness, Fromm points out, rests in man's very core: "The alienated man is not only alienated from other men; he is alienated from the essence of humanity for his 'species-being' both in his natural and spiritual qualities."³⁵ By transcendence, however, man can learn to strive for a new level of existence which will complete his incompleteness, negate his negation--in the very same areas of self and individuality. Fromm lays out the broadest possible framework for this transcendence: "For Marx, as for Hegel and many other thinkers of the enlightenment, each individual represented the species, that is to say, humanity as a whole, the universality of man: the development of man leads to the unfolding of his whole humanity."³⁶ To achieve this new level of transcendence man must be coached into new attitudes, and herein lies Fromm's prophetic task.

As a sickness of the self, alienation obviously must erupt as



both a moral and psychological problem--a moral problem, insofar as "alienation corrupts and perverts all human values,"³⁷ and a psychological problem:

In the widest sense, every neurosis can be considered an outcome of alienation; this is so because neurosis is characterized by the fact that one passion (for instance, for money, power, women, etc.) becomes dominant and separated from the total personality, thus becoming the ruler of the person. This passion is his idol to which he submits even though he may rationalize the nature of his idol and give it many different and often well-sounding names. He is ruled by a partial desire, he transfers all he has left to this desire, he is weaker the stronger "it" becomes. He has become alienated from himself precisely because "he" has become the slave of a part of himself.³⁸

Fromm's final and obvious conclusion is that alienation "is a sickness from which everyone suffers."³⁹ And as Glazer observes, it is "less a description of a single symptom than an omnibus of psychological disturbances having a similar root cause--in this case, modern social organization."⁴⁰ Fromm's indictment of the social structure is clearly recognizable, as is the covenant of hope which is based on the coaching of attitudes toward reform and transcendence. The setting of the dramatic scene of struggle has been fixed. The next question is: who are the devil characters who perpetrate the killing?

Causes of Alienation: A Search for Devil Terms

As the process of alienation within the individual himself is dialectical, so too the essential cause of alienation functions dialectically. As Glazer has mentioned, the whole of modern social structure is under indictment. Fromm frames the indictment as a struggle between



life and death, a duel between ultimates, most fitting for his theodicy. Capitalism symbolizes the principle of death, while labor symbolizes the principle of life.

Capital, the dead past, employs labor, the living vitality of the present. In the capitalistic hierarchy of values, capital stands higher than labor, amassed things higher than the manifestations of life. Capital employs labor, not labor capital. The person who owns capital commands the person who "only" owns his life, human skill, vitality and creative productivity. "Things" are higher than man. The conflict between capital and labor is much more than the conflict between two classes, more than their fight for a greater share of the social product. It is the conflict between two principles of value: that between the world of things, and their amassment, and the world of life and its productivity.⁴¹

The traditional Marxist theory of class struggle is present here, but by transcendence Fromm has raised it to the level of an ultimate life-death struggle. Fromm descends from his Olympian view of the social scene and describes some of the concrete features of capitalism. The "process of quantification and abstractification"⁴² is one feature of capitalism which leads most directly to alienation. The first and most important measure of anything in a capitalist society is "how much" or "how many," with the result that the question of quality is effectively ignored. Abstractification is the natural result of the illusory quality of capitalist existence. Worker, customer, materials, and all the elements of production are reduced to abstract categories in the dehumanization which Fromm finds intrinsic to capitalism.

A second feature of capitalism is bureaucracy. A devil term which Betty Yorburg describes as perpetuating purposeless human existence:



The bureaucratization of our society has resulted in what Robert MacIver has characterized as a "great new world of means without ends." There is an increasing concentration of power, decision-making, and expertise at the top of the various institutional hierarchies, and an increasing concentration on means at the middle and lower levels.⁴³

Fromm comments on the irrationality of reason when it becomes reified through a lack of purpose.

Man has followed rationalism to the point where rationalism has transformed itself into utter irrationality. Since Descartes, man has increasingly split thought from affect; thought alone is considered rational--affect, by its very nature, irrational; the person, I, has been split off into an intellect, which constitutes my self, and which is to control me as it is to control nature. Control by the intellect over nature, and the production of more and more things, became the paramount aims of life. In this process man has transformed himself into a thing, life has become subordinated to property, "to be" is dominated by "to have." Where the roots of Western culture, both Greek and Hebrew, considered the aim of life the perfection of man, modern man is concerned with the perfection of things, and the knowledge of how to make them. Western man is in a state of schizoid inability to experience affect, hence he is anxious, depressed and desperate. He still pays lip service to the aims of happiness, individualism, initiative--but actually he has no aim. Ask him what he is living for, what is the aim of all his strivings--and he will be embarrassed. Some may say they live for the family, others, "to have fun," still others, to make money, but in reality nobody knows what he is living for; he has not goal, except the wish to escape insecurity and aloneness.⁴⁴

Fromm criticizes capitalism because of its bigness. Bigness fosters impersonalism, which fosters reification of the person, which creates the climate for manipulation of people as things.

The manager, like the worker, like everybody, deals with impersonal giants; with the giant competitive enterprises; with the giant national and world market; with the giant consumer, who has to be coaxed



and manipulated; with the giant unions, and giant government. All these giants have their own lives, as it were. They determine the activity of the manager and they direct the activity of the worker and clerk.⁴⁵

A fourth characteristic of capitalism is the social character typical of the twentieth century which Fromm calls the "receptive and marketing orientation." He compares this with the nineteenth century "exploitative and hoarding orientation."

Summing up then, we may say that the social character of the nineteenth century was essentially competitive, hoarding, exploitative, authoritarian, aggressive, individualistic. Anticipating our later discussion, we may already emphasize here the great difference between nineteenth- and twentieth-century Capitalism. Instead of exploitative and hoarding orientation we find the receptive and marketing orientation. Instead of competitiveness we find an increasing tendency toward "teamwork"; instead of a striving for ever-increasing profit, a wish for a steady and secure income; instead of exploitation, a tendency to share and spread wealth, and to manipulate others--and oneself; instead of rational and irrational but overt authority, we find anonymous authority--the authority of public opinion and the market; instead of the individual conscience, the need to adjust and be approved of; instead of the sense of pride and mastery, an ever-increasing though mainly unconscious sense of powerlessness.⁴⁶

A fifth characteristic of capitalism following as a result of bureaucracy is anonymous authority:

. . . it is not overt authority but anonymous, invisible, alienated authority. Nobody makes a demand, neither a person, nor an idea, nor a moral law. Yet we all conform as much or more than people in an intensely authoritarian society would. Indeed, nobody is an authority except "It." 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. Who can attack the invisible?⁴⁷

The actual power through which anonymous authority operates is



conformity:

I ought to do what everybody does, hence, I must conform, not be different, not "stick out"; I must be ready and willing to change according to the changes in the pattern; I must not ask whether I am right or wrong, but whether I am adjusted, whether I am not "peculiar," not different. The only thing which is permanent in men is just this readiness to change. No body has power over me, except the herd of which I am a part, yet to which I am subjected.⁴⁸

Capitalism is not Fromm's sole devil in explaining the cause of alienation. He sees the collapse of organized religion in terms of its effective force on society as also contributing to man's alienation. He pictures man in his abandonment of religion as taking a "big plunge into objectivity. The earth ceased to be the center of the universe; man lost his central role of the creature destined by God to dominate all other creatures."⁴⁹ With the dissolution of an omnipotent, omniscient, fatherly God, man "gave up also the true aims of all great humanistic religions: overcoming the limitations of an egotistical self, achieving love, objectivity, and humanity and respect in life so that the aim of life is living itself, and man becomes what he potentially is."⁵⁰

Here Fromm practices courtship, attempting to woo his reader from the void of his abandoned religion to Fromm's religion of socialist humanism.

A final cause of alienation, according to Fromm, is the simple lack of concern for the problem:

We have shoved away awareness of and concern with the fundamental problems of human existence. We are not concerned with the meaning of life, with the solution to it; we start out with the conviction



that there is no purpose except to invest life successfully and to get it over with without major mishaps.⁵¹

Fromm's strategy in assigning devil terms accomplishes precisely what it should for his purposes. His first indictment hits at the entire social structure. He then moves to incriminate the basic economic structure of the Western world, capitalism. The principal social institution traditionally responsible for establishing values, religion, next comes under attack for failing in its purpose. And finally, public apathy toward the problem is seen as a cause. Fromm's ultimate goal seeks to awaken public awareness, to institute his own religion of socialistic humanism which aims at the complete dismantling of the capitalistic economic system. Thus, if his audience accepts his devils as defined, they find themselves open candidates for Fromm's proposals, and this is precisely the function of devil terms.

Symptoms of Alienation

While there is a basic agreement among social critics as to essential definition of the term alienation, when the question arises as to the specific symptoms and areas affected by alienation, there is a division among critics. Authors, such as Ernest Schacht, have charged Fromm in particular with a "profusion of uses of the term"⁵² with the result that "Fromm seems to refer to almost everything of which he disapproves as an instance of alienation."⁵³ Irving Howe argues in the same vein that "the trouble with the current use of alienation as a mode of social analysis is that it explains almost everything, and thereby almost nothing."⁵⁴ Howe would, however, allege some validity for the term:

Somewhere amid the current talk about



"alienation" an important reality is being touched upon or pointed out. There is, in our society, a profound estrangement from the sources of selfhood, the possibilities of human growth and social cohesion. But simply to proclaim this estrangement can be a way of preserving it. Alienation is not some metaphysical equivalent of the bubonic plague which constitutes an irrevocable doom; it is the powerlessness deriving from failure to act. It is neither a substitute for thought, nor a dissolvent of human will, not even a roadblock in the way of useful work.⁵⁵

Critics who recognize the usefulness of the term, such as Lewis Feuer, grant its ambiguity but hasten to add, "Alienation has a way of eluding a fixed set of dimensions because it is as multi-potential as the varieties of human experience."⁵⁶ Irving Louis Horowitz, while admitting a degree of confusion about the term, is not ready to reject its use:

Despite the incredible degree of confusion which exists about the term "alienation"—a confusion that has caused many influentials in sociology and psychology to try to do without it—there is a danger in a premature scrapping of the term. There are few enough words in the vocabulary of social science having wide generic implications. In some sense the very confusions about the word "alienation" represent an acute, albeit, painful testimonial to a complication that exists in consequence of the autonomous development of social and behavioral sciences. The heavy freight placed on such words as "anomie," "aggression," "intuition," "instinct," and now "alienation" is a burden better met by clarifying the meaning of the term than by urging premature abandonment either on the grounds that any word admitting of multiple different definitions is meaningless, or because of the equally spurious aim of preserving formal symmetry.⁵⁷

Much of this dispute can be resolved, if the distinction is made of alienation as an objective category for analysis and as a polemic term. Solely as an analytic category, alienation does not serve the social sciences well if it presents a great degree of ambiguity. However,



in Fromm's usage as a polemic term, the very ambiguity itself serves his purpose effectively. Placing it in a cosmic setting, Fromm presents his readers with a devil term which is ideal. Following the rubrics of Eric Hoffer,⁵⁸ it is one, omnipotent, omnipresent, foreign, and it might be added, attacking the most fundamental human values. One can also recall Burke's recognition of the positive values of ambiguity which allow for a variety of perspectives and directional imperatives in social criticism.

In stating his own basic orientation to the symptomatology Fromm believes that

. . . one cannot speak meaningfully of alienation unless one has experienced it in oneself and in others. Furthermore, one has to examine the phenomenon of alienation in its relation to narcissism, depression, fanaticism, and idolatry to understand it fully and to be able to study the degree of alienation in various social classes and the social conditions which tend to increase or decrease it.⁵⁹

Clearly then, alienation is for Fromm a psychological phenomenon, and Fromm, as prophetic psychoanalyst, affirms his own credentials for handling the problem of understanding such a psychological problem, as he declares that "psychoanalysis has all the tools to accomplish this examination."⁶⁰

Karl Mannheim attests to the need to maintain varying perspectives on social phenomena:

We could, of course, ignore this crisis in our intellectual life as is generally done in everyday practical life, in the course of which we are content to encounter things and relationships as discrete events in no more than their immediate particular setting. As long as we see the objects in our experience from a particular standpoint only and as long as our conceptual devices suffice for



dealing with a highly restricted sphere of life, we might never become aware of the need for inquiring into the total interrelationship of phenomena.⁶¹

The following analysis will concentrate on three considerations: first, the psychological dimensions centering around the central idea of a loss of the sense of self; second, Fromm's designation of who are most affected in a capitalistic society; and third, those areas of social life which are most affected.

Loss of the sense of self

Fromm's description of the psychological dimensions of alienation may be viewed from two perspectives—one, the conditions which obtain as a result of the loss of a sense of self, and two, the behavioral patterns which flow as a consequence of these conditions. In describing the features of man's psychological alienation, Fromm has selected areas in which modern man takes the greatest pride thinking that he possesses. Fromm has shown that modern society in fact denies man his supposed virtues. By defining reality under the pervasive rubric of alienation, Fromm removes the underpinnings from the most basic modern values, and in doing so he intends to awaken man's awareness of his "real" situation. As he has said, man must be made to feel his alienation and to suffer thereby, if he is ever to experience salvation. Thus he begins his coaching of attitudes.

What are the conditions Fromm proposes as arising from self-alienation? In a society which prides itself in letting each man "do his own thing," Fromm sees man as deprived of experiencing "himself as the subject of his own acts, as a thinking, feeling, loving



person."⁶² Man rather "experiences himself only in the things he has created, as the object of the external manifestations of his powers. He is in touch with himself only by surrendering himself to the products of his creation."⁶³ In a society where the ability to sell is highly valued and the marketplace is where success and fame are to be found, Fromm finds that

. . . man experiences himself as a thing to be employed successfully on the market. He does not experience himself as an active agent, as the bearer of human powers. He is alienated from these powers. His aim is to sell himself successfully on the market. His sense of self does not stem from his activity as a loving and thinking individual, but from his socio-economic role.⁶⁴

This description of man threatens the value of "being in control of one's own destiny," of "developing one's own personality." If man has become a "thing" and thus cannot have a "personality," he has no personal power over himself or his fate.

Modern society cannot, according to Fromm's analysis, even measure up to what a technological age disdainfully calls a "primitive" culture: "The alienated personality who is for sale must lose a good deal of the sense of dignity which is so characteristic of man even in the most primitive cultures."⁶⁵ Were man to have this sense of self, he would feel himself "a unique and induplicable entity."⁶⁶ As Fromm explains:

The sense of self stems from the experience of myself as the subject of my experiences, my thoughts, my feelings, my decisions, my judgment, my action. It presupposes that my experience is my own, and not an alienated one. Things have no self and men who have become things can have no self.⁶⁷

Thus reification of the person becomes the direct result of the



capitalist marketing orientation.

Much of contemporary psychological literature discusses the prevalence of an "identity crisis" among adolescents and adults. This Fromm links with alienation:

This lack of a sense of identity has many consequences. The most fundamental and general one is that it prevents integration of the total personality, hence it leaves the person disunited within himself, lacking either capacity "to will one thing" or if he seems to will one thing his will lacks authenticity.⁶⁸

He adds:

The identity crisis of our time is based essentially on the increasing alienation and reification of man, and it can be solved only to the extent to which man comes to life again, becomes active again. There are no psychological shortcuts to the solution to the identity crisis except the fundamental transformation of alienated man into living man.⁶⁹

Here the value of "knowing who one is and where he is going," which is given such strong emphasis in society today, is seen as unattainable as long as man remains alienated.

Once modern man realizes that he has no "self" to relate to, the next question is:

What is modern man's relationship to his fellow man? It is one between two abstractions, two living machines, who use each other. The employer uses the ones whom he employs; the salesman uses his customers. Everybody is to everybody else a commodity, always to be treated with certain friendliness, because even if he is not of use now, he may be later.⁷⁰

This unmasking of manipulation strikes at the core value of Western democracy--freedom.

In a culture where the value of love is praised in every facet of the mass media, and where "being in love" is equated with "being alive,"



to question man's basic ability to love is very threatening. This Fromm does:

Love of man is a rare phenomenon too. Automats do not love; alienated men do not care. What is praised by love experts and marriage counselors is a team relationship between two people who manipulate each other with the right techniques, and whose love is essentially a haven from an otherwise unbearable aloneness, an egotism a deux.⁷¹

If man is impotent in his loving, what can be said of his ability to establish friendships, another highly valued social "asset"? Friendships are not formed on the basis of individual liking or attraction, but they are determined by the location of one's own house or apartment in relation to the others.⁷² And as if geographical manipulation of friendships were not degrading enough, Fromm further describes suburban friendships as dictated by a filiarchy. "It is the children who set the basic design; their friendships are translated into the mother's friendships, and these, in turn, to the family's. Fathers just tag along."⁷³

Fromm challenges the cult of happiness sold through all the commercial enterprises and affirms that alienation produces in man "a feeling of misery rather than well-being."⁷⁴

Fromm defines happiness by its opposite, which, he declares, is not sadness, but depression:

It [depression] is the inability to feel, it is the sense of being dead, while our body is alive. It is the inability to experience joy, as well as the inability to experience sadness. . . . A state of depression is so unbearable because one is incapable of feeling anything, either joy or sadness.⁷⁵

Man's depression leads him to a fear of boredom which "plays a paramount role among the fears of modern man."⁷⁶ Thus modern man lives in a world



dedicated to fun and amusement.

Where the marketing orientation gives much lip-service to the notion of the aggressive individual who can assert himself and thereby succeed, Fromm counters by declaring that "alienation is essentially experiencing the world and oneself passively, receptively, as the subject separated from the object."⁷⁷

As has been said, Fromm equates alienation with idolatry:

In idolatry man bows down and submits to the projection of one partial quality in himself. He does not experience himself as the center from which living acts of love and reason radiate. He becomes a thing, his neighbor becomes a thing, just as his gods are things.⁷⁸

Such idolatry is the most blatant sin in Fromm's system of values, for it denies that "man being created in the likeness of God is created as the bearer of infinite qualities."⁷⁹

Alienated man lives with a prevailing feeling of guilt which springs from two sources.

The one source is the same as that from which the feelings of inferiority spring. Not to be like the rest, not to be totally adjusted, makes one feel guilty toward the commands of the great It. The other source of guilt feeling is man's one [sic] conscience; he senses his gifts or talents, his ability to love, to think, to laugh, to cry, to wonder and to create, he senses that his life is the one chance he is given, and that if he loses this chance he has lost everything.⁸⁰

Fromm would like to impress his readers with the guilt feelings arising from the second source, for Fromm's appeal to a great extent rests on the motive of guilt--the sense of waste at not being what one could be, of being an automaton, of being a thing.

Alienation impresses him with the awareness of being without a



sense of self, without identity, power, dignity, the ability to love or think or feel, happiness, and for all of this--guilty. Alienated man is then severed from himself, from other men, and from nature.

Man is torn away from the primary union with nature, which characterizes animal existence. Having at the same time reason and imagination he is aware of his aloneness and separateness; of his powerlessness and ignorance of the accidentalness of his birth and of his death. He could not face this state of being for a second if he could not find new ties with his fellow man which replace the old ones, regulated by instincts.⁸¹

With the mention of reason and imagination and the possibilities of new ties, Fromm opens up the covenant of hope for the despair of the alienated man. This then is the condition of alienated man which flows from his loss of a sense of self. Consideration now turns to the behavioral patterns which result from this condition.

The Scholastic dictum agere sequitur esse ("Behavior follows existence") provides the rationale for this element of the analysis. Again it should be pointed out how Fromm has chosen to describe certain behavioral patterns which give the lie to the most treasured values of the Western ideology. In his behavior, alienated man prefers "having" to "being."⁸² If he lacks the sense of self, he must compensate for his lost identity by identifying with the things he possesses. All the members of a sick society "crave for things, new things, to have and to use. They are passive recipients, the consumers, chained and weakened by the very things which satisfy their synthetic needs."⁸³ Fromm calls alienated man's needs "synthetic" implying that alienation prevents man from having needs which are truly his own. And further, these needs, because they lack personal authenticity, make man a prisoner "chained and weakened."



Having abdicated his rightful human search for "being," alienated man, according to Fromm, seeks salvation by worshipping things,⁸⁴ and as a result "in this alienated world they feel as strangers and quite alone."⁸⁵ Man's aloneness reduces him to the condition of a robot whose actions and reactions are truly that of T. S. Eliot's hollow men:

Today we come across a person who acts and feels like an automaton; who never experiences anything which is really his; who experiences himself entirely as the person he thinks he is supposed to be; whose artificial smile has replaced genuine laughter; whose meaningless chatter has replaced communicative speech; whose dulled despair has taken the place of genuine pain.⁸⁶

He adds:

In the development of both capitalism and communism as we can visualize them in the next fifty or a hundred years, the process of automatization and alienation will proceed. Both these systems are developing managerial societies in which inhabitants are well fed and well clad, having their wishes satisfied, and not having wishes that cannot be satisfied; automatons, who follow without force, who are guided without leaders, who make machines that act like men and produce men who act like machines; men whose reason deteriorates while their intelligence rises, thus creating the dangerous situation of equipping man with the greatest material power without the wisdom to use it.⁸⁷

Besides this broad perspective on human behavior, Fromm also questions those two principal areas of behavior which consume almost all of the average man's day--work and play. The work pattern is becoming more and more "repetitive and thoughtless" stripping the worker of "his right to think and act freely."⁸⁸ In this world where much attention is seemingly given to self-expression and creativity, Fromm finds that in the practice just the opposite occurs: "Need to control, creativeness, curiosity, and independent thought are being balked, and the result,



the inevitable result, is flight or fight on the part of the worker, apathy or destructiveness, psychic regression."⁸⁹ The picture of the "happy worker" secure in his wages and fringe benefits thus becomes a myth.

The condition of work and the subsequent apathy or destructiveness creates in the society a complete abandonment of responsibility and laziness:

The meaninglessness and alienation of work result in a longing for complete laziness. Man hates his working life because it makes him feel a prisoner and a fraud. His ideal becomes absolute laziness, in which he will not have to make a move, where everything goes according to the Kodak slogan: "You press the button; we do the rest." This tendency is reinforced by the type of consumption necessary for the expansion of the inner market, leading to a principle which Huxley has very succinctly expressed in his Brave New World. One might epitomize the way many of us today have been conditioned from childhood with: "Never put off till tomorrow the fun you can have today."⁹⁰

The last phrase of the above quotation Fromm has elsewhere called the principle of non-frustration: "The principle that every desire must be satisfied immediately, no wish must be frustrated."⁹¹ Succumbing to modern advertising, alienated man presses his greed for things and the inability to postpone the satisfaction of his wishes. These characteristics Fromm places in threatening comparison with the qualities of Aldous Huxley's Brave New World, where man is completely out of control of his life.

If man's work is alienated, so is his play. As an automaton, man has no need to be aware of himself as a self, "because I am constantly absorbed in having pleasure. I am--a system of desires and satisfactions;



I have to work in order to fulfill my desires--and these very desires are constantly stimulated and directed by the economic machine."⁹²

Capitalism again becomes the culprit, denying man even his right to valid pleasure. Manipulated man can answer only in kind--by manipulating.

Another pattern of behavior is modern man's restlessness, which takes the form of love of exchange:

The marketing orientation is closely related to the fact that the need to exchange has become a paramount drive in modern man. . . . In capitalistic society exchange has become an end in itself

. . . the love of exchange has replaced the love of possession. One buys a car, or a house, intending to sell it at the first opportunity. But more important is the fact that the drive for exchange operates in the realm of interpersonal relations. Love is often but a favorable exchange between two people who get the most of what they can expect, considering their value on the personality market.⁹³

Alienated man becomes the perfect candidate for the totalitarian state: "Man's social feelings are projected into the state. Just because he has made the state the embodiment of his own social feelings, he worships it and its symbols. He projects his sense of power, wisdom, and courage into his leaders, and he worships them as his idols."⁹⁴

Fromm finds that alienation has torn at the very arteries which keep the social body alive:

. . . man is a social being with a deep need to share, to help, to feel as a member of a group. What has happened to these social strivings in man? They manifest themselves in the special sphere of the public realm, which is strictly separated from the private realm. Our private dealings with our fellow men are governed by the principle of egotism, "each for himself, God for us all," in flagrant contradiction of Christian teaching. The individual is motivated by egotistical interest, and not by solidarity with and love for his fellow man. The latter



feelings may assert themselves secondarily as private acts of philanthropy or kindness, but they are not part of the basic structure of our social relations.⁹⁵

Fromm here again unmask a highly valued Western norm which is the cornerstone of the Judaeo-Christian ethical system.

To summarize it may be said that Fromm presents his symptomatology of alienation in the most sweeping cosmic terms. As an ideal devil term, it is everywhere, overpowering, estranging, and invading the most vital parts of the person. It robs man of his manhood, strips him of control over his own human powers, leaving him without dignity, unhappy, guilty, and above all—alone. As a robot, neither his work nor his play can satisfy him, for his striving for pleasure only drives him more into his own egotism, and alienated man has no ego because he has no sense of self.

Those affected by alienation

In his diagnosis of the human problem Fromm finds that everyone inescapably suffers from alienation, and rhetorically this addresses his message to the broadest possible audience. This is strategically effective in getting audience attention and providing relevance to his audience's needs. But Fromm employs another rhetorical strategy which aims at unmasking the present socio-economic system and provoking change. To do this he chooses to indict specific key figures in the capitalistic system—managers, business owners, stockholders, bureaucrats, and workers.

While Marx stressed the alienation of the worker from his product with its consequent discontent and class struggle, Fromm diffuses Marx's rhetoric of struggle and applies it much more broadly:



The role of the manager is also one of alienation. It is true, he manages the whole and not a part, but he too is alienated from his product as something concrete and useful. His aim is to employ profitably the capital invested by others, although in comparison with the older type of owner-manager, modern management is much less interested in the amount of profit to be paid out as dividend to the stockholder than it is in the efficient operation and expansion of the enterprise. Characteristically, within management those in charge of labor relations and of sales--that is, of human manipulation--gain, relatively speaking, an increasing importance in comparison with those in charge of the technical aspects of production.⁹⁶

In his "Socialist Manifesto," Fromm indicts bureaucratic management for lacking the "qualities of the older owner--individual initiative, daring, risk-taking," and in their place are the "qualities of the bureaucrat; lack of individuality, impersonality, caution, lack of imagination; they administer things and persons, and relate to persons as to things."⁹⁷ Such a description of management hardly fits the self-image the modern executive would hope to project. As if the problem of alienation is not severe enough for the individual manager, Fromm uses casuistic stretching to touch a basic political value, the democratic system itself:

This managerial class, while it does not own the enterprise legally, controls it factually; it is responsible (in an effective way) neither to the stockholders nor to those who work in the enterprise. In fact, while the most important fields of production are in the hands of the large corporations, these corporations are practically ruled by their top employees. The giant corporations which control the economic--and to a large degree the political--destiny of the country, constitute the very opposite of the democratic process; they represent power without control by those submitted to it.⁹⁸



Fromm is saying in effect that capitalism creates a form of political dictatorship. Thus by a perspective by incongruity the "American way" of capitalism becomes "un-American."

The owners of business are likewise alienated:

What then is the attitude of the "owner" of the big corporation to "his" property? It is one of almost complete alienation. His ownership consists in a piece of paper, representing a certain fluctuating amount of money; he has no responsibility for the enterprise and no concrete relationship to it in any way.⁹⁹

Instead of owning a real thing, the modern owner actually possesses only the symbol of his ownership to which he cannot relate in any human way.

The alienation of the stockholder is based on his lack of actual control:

Another important aspect of the alienated position of the stockholder is his control over his enterprise. Legally, the stockholders control the enterprise, that is, they elect the management much as the people in a democracy elect their representatives. Factually, however, they exercise very little control, due to the fact that each individual's share is so exceedingly small, that he is not interested in coming to the meetings and participating actively.¹⁰⁰

Thus the Prudential Life Insurance Company's offer to its policy holders to "own part of the Rock," would be from Fromm's perspective another manipulative myth to control the consumer.

When he chooses managers, owners, stockholders and bureaucrats for special mention as those particularly alienated and especially powerless, Fromm is attempting to unmask the inner workings of the capitalistic system.

Areas of social life affected by alienation



A catalogue of the particular facets of social living, which Fromm sees as especially alienated, indicates the nature of his strategy for creating dissatisfaction and unrest within the present system. Generically, man is alienated in his relations to himself, to his fellow man, and to nature. In specific areas, man finds his work, his consumption of goods, his leisure time, his religion and his politics--all estranged from him. In his personal existence, he experiences as alien his own reason, thought, ethics, language, authority, and time itself.

Work.--The classic Marxist doctrine attributes the cause of alienation to the nature of capitalistic work. Fromm agrees, but finds that this is only the beginning. He describes the optimum working conditions as liberating man from nature and creating him as an independent social being:

In the process of work, that is, the molding and changing of nature outside of himself, man molds and changes himself. He emerges from nature by mastering her; he develops his powers of cooperation, of reason, his sense of beauty.¹⁰¹

This ideal was subverted by the Protestant work ethic which proposed the "meaning of work divided into that of duty among the middle class, and that of forced labor among those without property."¹⁰² But today this moral and religious obligation connected with work has disappeared, and "work has become alienated from the working person."¹⁰³ Man has become a machine, controlled by the machines of his own making:

The machine, instead of being in his service to do work for him, which once had to be performed by sheer physical energy, has become his master. Instead of the machine being the substitute for human energy, man has become a substitute for the machine. His work can be defined as the



performance of acts which cannot yet be performed by machines.¹⁰⁴

The profound dissatisfaction of modern day workers is reflected in the absenteeism, lack of interest, and hostility so prevalent in both management and labor. What was at an earlier date called "Blue-collar Blues," has now reached the "White-collar level." A recent survey reports:

The "blue-collar blues" has a new challenger on the hit parade of grievances: the "white-collar blues." Based on a survey of 2,821 executives, the American Management Association has found that an "alarming" 52 per cent of supervisory managers "found their work, at best, unsatisfying." Half believed a "dynamic personality" and ability to "sell yourself" are valued higher in business "than is a reputation for honesty or strong moral condition." In fact, less than 30 per cent of those surveyed said they've "never been expected to compromise personal principles to conform to organizational standards."¹⁰⁵

Consumption of goods.—The capitalist system causes an alienation of production, as well as of consumption. Fromm notes:

. . . the act of consumption should be a concrete human act, in which our senses, bodily needs, our aesthetic taste—that is to say, in which we as concrete, sensing, feeling, judging, human beings—are involved; the act of consumption should be a meaningful, human productive experience. In our culture, there is little of that. Consuming is essentially the satisfaction of artificially stimulated phantasies, a phantasy performance alienated from our concrete, real selves.¹⁰⁶

The impersonal quality of consumption results from the way money is used in society. Men acquire things with money which does not necessarily represent their personal effort. With money men can buy anything, regardless of their ability to use it. Thus, there are art collectors with no taste, book collectors who are illiterate. Consumption is determined "by advertising slogans, rather than by our palates, eyes or ears."¹⁰⁷



This other-directedness of consumption is a consequence of the individual loss of a sense of self:

I have no need to be aware of my self as myself because I am constantly absorbed with consuming. I am a system of desires and satisfactions; I have to work in order to fulfill my desires, and these very desires are constantly stimulated and directed by the economic machine.¹⁰⁸

Fromm's ultimate rationale for the alienation of consumption rests on the principle that "the way we acquire things is separated from the way in which we use them."¹⁰⁹ And because of this separation, consumption has become inhuman, meaningless, and non-productive.

Leisure time.—Fromm links the alienation of work and consumption to the alienated use of leisure time. Man "'consumes' ball games, moving pictures, newspapers, and magazines, books, lectures, natural scenery, social gatherings, in the same alienated and abstractified way in which he consumes the commodities he has bought."¹¹⁰ His leisure time is actually not "his," for it is determined by industry, as are the commodities he buys.

. . . his taste is manipulated, he wants to see and to hear what he is conditioned to want to see and to hear; entertainment is an industry like any other, the customer is made to buy fun as he is made to buy dresses and shoes. The value of fun is determined by its success on the market, not by anything which could be measured in human terms.¹¹¹

Man in his leisure becomes the fool, the puppet of capitalistic forces which use man. Man even at play is a slave to the system.

Religion.—Fromm observes that "our culture is perhaps the first completely secularized culture in human history."¹¹² While modern society still bears much of the trappings of traditional religion, the reality



of religion has been lost. " . . . God is taken for granted. . . .
God has been transformed into a remote General Director of Universe, Inc.;
you know that He is there, He runs the show, (although it probably would
run without Him, too), you never seek Him, but you acknowledge His leader-
ship while you are 'doing your part.'"¹¹³

Fromm calls Billy Graham and Fulton Sheen hucksters of the
modern religious "renaissance" which is "perhaps the worst blow mono-
theism has yet received. Is there any greater sacrilege than to speak
of 'the Man upstairs,' to teach to pray in order to make God our partner
in business, to 'sell' religion with the same methods and appeals used
to sell soap?"¹¹⁴

Fromm continues his prophetic unmasking and adds his prophetic
condemnation:

While it is true that from high Catholic quarters
and from a number of less highly placed ministers
and rabbis such criticism (of modern Capitalism) has
been voiced, all churches belong essentially to the
conservative forces in modern society and use religion
to keep man going and satisfied with a profoundly irre-
ligious system. The majority of them do not seem to
recognize that this type of religion will eventually
degenerate into overt idolatry, unless they begin to
define and then to fight against modern idolatry,
rather than to make pronouncements about God and
thus use His name in vain--in more than one sense.¹¹⁵

By using the principles of religion to condemn modern religion Fromm
allows religion to be its own accuser.

Politics.--Fromm appraises contemporary democracy:

. . . the problem of democracy today is not any more
the restriction of franchise but the manner in which
the franchise is exercised.

How can people express "their" will if they
do not have any will or conviction of their own, if



they are alienated automatons, whose tastes, opinions and preferences are manipulated by the big conditioning machines? Under these circumstances universal suffrage becomes a fetish.¹¹⁶

In addition to the prevalent manipulation of thought, the use of personality cults¹¹⁷ and the illusion of voter power¹¹⁸ perpetuate the estrangement of the citizen from the political process in which he is a supposed participant.

Fromm also criticizes politics in the broader sense of social forces, showing how the individual has succumbed to a passivity in cases where he would be expected to exert direction.

Man is not only alienated from the work he does, and the things and pleasures he consumes, but also from the social forces which determine our society and the life of everybody living in it.

Our actual helplessness before the forces which govern us appears more drastically in those social catastrophes which even though they are denounced as regrettable accidents each time, so far have never failed to happen: economic depressions and wars. These social phenomena appear as if they were natural catastrophes, rather than what they really are, occurrences made by man, but without intention and awareness.

This anonymity of the social force is inherent in the structure of the capitalist mode of production.¹¹⁹

Again, capitalism is the devil term, lurking beneath the surface of society, anonymous, but effective.

Reason.--Alienation, according to Fromm, has caused reason to atrophy.

While man amasses an encyclopedic store of facts, his critical, creative powers shrink.

In observing the quality of thinking in alienated man, it is striking to see how his intelligence has developed and how his reason has deteriorated. He takes his reality for granted; he wants to eat it, consume it, touch it, manipulate it. He does not even



ask what is behind it, why things are as they are, and where they are going. You cannot eat the meaning, you cannot consume the sense, and as far as the future is concerned--après nous le déluge!¹²⁰

This particular charge attacks a sensitive area in a people who pride themselves on their logic and education.

Thought.--Conformity has become an authoritarian means of thought control, which Fromm ties to the idolatry of social gods:

Alienation of thought is not different from alienation of the heart. Often one believes he has thought through something, that his idea is the result of his own thinking activity; the fact is that he has transferred his brain to the idols of public opinion, the newspapers, the government or a political leader. He believes that they express his thoughts while in reality he accepts their thoughts as his own, because he has chosen them as his idols, his gods of wisdom and knowledge. Precisely for this reason he is dependent on his idols and incapable of giving up his worship. He is their slave because he has deposited his brain with them.¹²¹

Fromm's judgment is severe here too. Alienated man has given his brain away and has become a slave to opinion makers. These words come hard to Americans who harbor the myth of thinking for themselves.

Ethics.--The alienation of ethics destroys the voice of personal conscience, since the self has been destroyed. "To the degree to which a person conforms he cannot hear the voice of conscience, much less act upon it. Conscience exists only when man experiences himself as man, not as a thing, as a commodity."¹²²

Alienation also does away with the principles of good and evil, and in their place substitutes a "fairness doctrine" peculiar to the marketing orientation.



Concerning things which are exchanged on the market there exists another quasi ethical code, that of fairness. The question is, whether they are exchanged at a fair price, no tricks, and no force interfering with the fairness of the bargain; this fairness, not good and evil, is the ethical principle of the market and it is the ethical principle governing the life of the marketing personality.¹²³

Where concepts of good and evil no longer exist and where fairness is the mode of value, where persons are reduced to things, an ethical code of "dog-eat-dog" and every other brutalization are the natural result.¹²⁴

Aesthetics.--Where reason is stifled, thought controlled, and ethics dehumanized, it becomes impossible for the individual to develop a personal system of aesthetics. If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, the beholder must have vision: "Another aspect of alienated conformity is the leveling-out process of taste and judgment which [William H. Whyte, Jr.] describes under the heading 'The Melting Pot.'¹²⁵

Language.--Language ability makes man different from the rest of nature. Because man is able to experience himself, to reflect upon his own awareness, and to symbolize his experience and awareness, he is able to rise above his animalistic surroundings. However, where the self has been lost, and awareness replaced by illusion, the power of language is also lost:

Among the many forms of alienation, the most frequent one is alienation in language. If I express a feeling with a word, let us say, if I say "I love you," the word is meant to be an indication of the reality which exists within myself, the power of my loving. The word "love" is meant to be a symbol of the fact love, but as soon as it is spoken it tends to assume a life of its own, it



becomes a reality. I am under the illusion that the saying of the word is the equivalent of the experience, and soon I say the word and feel nothing, except the thought of love which the word expresses. The alienation of language shows the whole complexity of alienation. Language is one of the most precious human achievements; to avoid alienation by not speaking would be foolish--yet one must be always aware of the danger of the spoken word, that it threatens to substitute itself for the living experience. The same holds true for all other achievements of man; ideas, art, any kind of man-made objects.¹²⁶

Verbal alienation translates itself into a boast of power to hide impotence: Man "uses the name of God, of freedom, of humanity, of socialism, in vain; he prides himself on his powers--the bombs and the machines--to cover up his human bankruptcy; he boasts of his power to destroy in order to hide his human impotence."¹²⁷

Time.--In an age of anxiety where despair seems the only solution to hopelessness, it becomes very easy for a people to practice an idolatry of futurism which gives to the a future a divine power to "make things right." Thus Fromm speaks of the "alienation of hope in which the future is transformed into an idol."¹²⁸ This worship of the future has been the Communist distortion of Marx's philosophy of history.¹²⁹

The logic of this argument is: whatever is in accord with the historical trend is necessary, hence good and vice versa. In this view, . . . it is not man who makes history but history that makes man. It is not man who hopes and has faith in the future but the future judges him and decides whether he had the right faith.¹³⁰

The alienation of hope is but another form of self-abdication and the resultant manipulation of man by things.

Authority.--In the alienated society authority becomes an anonymous and invisible power. "The mechanism then which the anonymous authority



operates is conformity."¹³¹ Aesthetic taste undergoes a collective leveling-out to the least common denominator,¹³² and the new morality is reduced to social adjustment.¹³³

Summary.--In each of these social areas contaminated by alienation, man relates to other men as one abstraction to another, machine to machine, thing to thing. The sense of communion in community has been lost. Man relating to himself can see himself not as a person, but as a package of goods--"human qualities like friendliness, courtesy, kindness, are transformed into commodities, into assets."¹³⁴ Man's sense of self "does not stem from his activity as a loving and thinking individual, but from his socio-economic role."¹³⁵

In final perspective, alienation becomes the term of ultimate dis-possession. In a culture where being oneself is a prime concern, where ownership is the key to success and happiness, where belonging is the symbol of social acceptance, and where having is the means to power, alienation is the worst dilemma, the cruelest fate, and the final blow.

Seen from this perspective, Fromm's polemic use of alienation has taken the most prized values of the capitalistic system and shown that capitalism itself does not award or reward the very values it professes.

The intended parallel between the message of the Hebrew prophets and Fromm's message is indicated by his adaptation of the Hebrew term idolatry. In the case of the ancient Jews, idolatry, the worship of "strange gods," was the ultimate form of apostasy for a society who prided itself as "The People of Yahweh." Alienation in modern society,



according to Fromm, becomes the ultimate apostasy, as the practical denial of all the values which the modern world professes to hold sacred.

Repossessing the World: Overcoming Alienation

Alienation, as a dialectical term, must be defined in terms of its opposite, as well as in terms of its direct meaning. For this reason an analysis of Fromm's proposal to overcome alienation can be useful in understanding alienation itself.

The alienated man as a victim of an alienating society has been dehumanized, reduced to a robot condition, without feeling or awareness. Since man has the seed of fulfillment within him, he has the power to repossess his world from which he has been estranged. The obstacle to man's return to his rightful inheritance is the sick society in which he lives. For this reason Fromm focuses his first concern on the reform of society as the means of reforming man.

In The Sane Society Fromm devotes some eighty-three pages to "Roads to Sanity," which discusses the social remedies for the sickness of alienation. As the term "roads" suggests, Fromm's solutions are several, and they operate on the premise that society is an evolutionary process. As has been mentioned earlier, Fromm's therapeutic approach to social reform is synergistic.¹³⁶ The agent that Fromm envisages as creating a social milieu conducive to sanity is socialism. But because the term socialism for many is a strongly devil term, Fromm's problem then is to create a god out of a devil. To this end he uses casuistic stretching, the designating of essences, and transcendence by abstractification.



Alienation is very definitely a human problem, and its root is in the problem of the twentieth century, "that man is dead."¹³⁷ In answer to this problem, Fromm states unequivocally, "Quite clearly the aim of socialism is man."¹³⁸ Fromm views socialism as the "abolition of human self-alienation, the return of man as a real human being. [Quoting Marx:] 'It is the definitive resolution of the antagonism between man and nature, and between man and man. It is the true solution of the conflict between existence and essence, between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between individual and species.'¹³⁹

Socialism, Fromm promises, in its humanistic form will bring man to union:

It is to create a form of production and an organization of society in which man can overcome alienation from his product, from his work, from his fellow man, and from himself and from nature; in which he can return to himself and grasp the world with his own powers, thus becoming one with the world. Socialism for Marx, was, as Paul Tillich put it, "a resistance movement against the destruction of love in social reality."¹⁴⁰

Socialism, as a protest against man's loveless condition in capitalist society, becomes the omnipotent god principle—ending alienation, returning man to his full humanity, reforming production and social organization, ending the exploitation of man and nature, and ultimately granting man true freedom to be himself. With these divine gifts, Fromm courts his capitalist readers.

Part of alienated man's problem is that he has become a machine, a robot, as a result of the economic structure of capitalism. But to make a frontal attack upon the system that feeds and clothes almost



every person in the Western world would be a brash undertaking, and certainly not in Fromm's style. He chooses rather to side-step a direct confrontation and by casuistic stretching attempts to court a hostile audience with a re-alignment of authority symbols.

He denies that his plan "hinges on the abolishment of private property"¹⁴¹ or even the use of industrial profit sharing. By a diversionary play on words, he establishes new symbols of authority. The primary problem is "that of sharing work, sharing experience."¹⁴²

Having set up this diversionary tactic, he does more symbolic tinkering. Changes in the form of ownership will be necessary only to the extent needed to create a "community of work,"¹⁴³ and to prevent the profit motive from directing production in socially harmful ways.

To quiet the fear that socialism arbitrarily will take from those who have and give to those who do not have, Fromm invokes the authority symbols of equality and dignity of life--incomes must be equalized to the extent of giving everyone the material basis for a dignified life and thus prevent gross inequities in the standard of living among the various social classes.

To maintain his credibility and not violate the beliefs of his audience too greatly, Fromm reassures his readers that the industrial method of production will be essentially retained; however, there will have to be a decentralization of work to give it more human proportions. To further de-alienate the work scene, Fromm calls for "co-management of all who work in an enterprise to permit active and responsible participation."¹⁴⁴ Here abstractification softens the harshness of the reality, with the introduction of new authority symbols.



War, that social ritual worshipping death and destruction, also comes under Fromm's prophetic indictment. In this age of atomic power, the threat of war hangs over all, paralyzing their faith and initiative. Fromm demands that this threat be abolished. Because wars are fought for political as well as economic reasons, Fromm calls for world government to induce international economic cooperation and planning to effect a relative sharing of wealth and a just division of economic resources. Here again abstraction and jargon veil the reality of Fromm's proposals, as he reaches for transcendence at a higher level of abstraction. Finally, he adds the demand for complete disarmament.

Individual psychological answers

While certain economic and political changes must take place in society if man is to repossess his world, there are equally necessary psychological responses which the individuals must make to the prophet's message. Man's primary response to Fromm's theodicy is to reach for a new level of concern through transcendence: "In the experience of love lies the only answer to being human, lies sanity."¹⁴⁵ Only love can create the productive orientation which relates man creatively to himself, his fellow man, and to nature.¹⁴⁶ Love means union, the solidarity of brotherhood, the end of the illusions of ego defenses. Ultimately, of course, love means birth and re-birth, which is the essential dialectic of life.

In proposing love as the only answer to alienation, Fromm attacks alienation dialectically by invoking its polar opposite. Love offers a new center for symbolic clusters from which the audience can form a new



life orientation. The cluster begins with the self--all love originates in the creative love of self; one cannot love another unless he first truly loves himself. Here Fromm offers the most intimate and deeply vital beginning of de-alienation.

If striving expresses the essence of human existence, much of this striving will obviously be expended in overcoming alienation. To accomplish this, Fromm stresses the need for faith in one's self to maintain the conviction of personal identity needed to face the human struggle. Faith in one's self also allows one to have faith in others, thus creating social solidarity and confidence in accepting the present and anticipating the future.¹⁴⁷ This is not to be a blind faith, for it must be strengthened by a return to reason and intelligence. Illusions and pampering myths are no longer necessary when creative reason guides man's activities.¹⁴⁸ Combining de-mythologizing and the essence of "self-reliance," Fromm continues to coach new attitudes.

Alienated society has developed an elaborate ritual of norms which must be replaced by a system of humanistic ethics with its totally man-centered values. This is the message of Fromm's Man for Himself and an extension of the same theme in The Heart of Man where he portrays the dialectical struggle of ultimates, life against death.

The sane society will offer man:

1. A society in which man relates to man lovingly,
2. In which he is rooted in bonds of brotherliness and solidarity rather than in the ties of blood and soil.
3. A society which gives him the possibility of transcending nature by creating rather than by destroying.



4. In which everyone gains a sense of self by experiencing himself as the subject of his own powers rather than by conformity,
5. In which a system of orientation and devotion exists without man's needing to distort reality and to worship idols.

A rationale for overcoming alienation

To secure this kind of sane society requires a constant vigilance, a respect for the prophet who shows the way by defining the "immutable laws inherent in human nature and human functioning which operate in any given culture,"¹⁴⁹ the courage to implement these laws into one's life and not to succumb to conformity by "social adjustment."

These dogmas Fromm makes more palatable to his audience through a sense of urgency and crisis: "This time, mankind is at one crossroad where the wrong step could be the last step."¹⁵⁰ And he adds:

The shadows are lengthening; the voices of insanity are becoming louder. We are in reach of achieving a state of humanity which corresponds to the visions of our great teachers; yet we are in danger of the destruction of all civilization, or of robotization.¹⁵¹

Although a crisis does exist, it still carries with it a sense of hope. If man takes the next step toward building the new, sane society

. . . it means the end of "humanoid" history, the phase in which man had not become fully human. It does not mean the "end of days," the "completion," the state of perfect harmony in which no conflicts or problems confront men. On the contrary, it is man's fate that his existence is beset by contradictions, which he has to solve without ever solving them.¹⁵²

The covenant of hope rises out of the paradox of dialectical progress through conflict and struggle, and thus Fromm saves himself from the



charge of pandering to infantile illusions of heaven-on-earth. When the moment of confrontation comes, man, if he is to survive, must choose to enlist his powers "in the service of life," and, in doing so, "the new phase of human history, if it comes to pass, will be a new beginning, not an end."¹⁵³ This is Fromm's eternal spring.

As a final summary of the goal of Fromm's de-alienation, his picture of the "good man" should be noted. "A good man is an alive man, a man in tune with life, in tune with other men, in tune with nature, in tune with the rhythm that pulses through all existence."¹⁵⁴ To every man Fromm offers the opportunity of becoming this "good man," if only he follows Fromm's prophetic admonitions.



Footnotes

Chapter IX

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- ²Erich Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion (New York, 1962), pp. 153-154.
- ³Lewis Feuer, "What is Alienation? The Career of a Concept," New Politics, I (Spring 1962), 128-129.
- ⁴Robert K. Merton, Mass Persuasion (New York, 1946), p. 143.
- ⁵Robert K. Merton, Social Theory and Social Structure, (Glencoe, Ill., 1949), pp. 144-145.
- ⁶Jerry Rubin, Do It: Scenarios of the Revolution (New York, 1970), p. 127.
- ⁷Ibid., p. 252.
- ⁸Erich Fromm, Psychoanalysis and Religion (New Haven, 1950), p. 89.
- ⁹Feuer, "What is Alienation?" p. 134.
- ¹⁰Nathan Glazer, "The Alienation of Modern Man," Commentary, III (April 3, 1947), 378.
- ¹¹Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion, p. 59.
- ¹²Ibid., pp. 57-58.
- ¹³Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 270-271.
- ¹⁴Erich Fromm, Marx's Concept of Man (New York, 1961), p. 47.
- ¹⁵Feuer notes that "Erich Fromm in his stimulating Marx's Concept of Man, New York, 1961, mistakenly says that 'the thinker who coined the concept of alienation was Hegel.' Cf. p. 47." "What is Alienation? The Career of a Concept," New Politics, I (Spring 1962), 117.
- ¹⁶Erich Fromm, "Foreword," Karl Marx: Early Writings, ed. and trans. T. B. Bottomore (New York, 1964), p. i.
- ¹⁷Feuer, "What is Alienation?" p. 124.
- ¹⁸Ibid., pp. 127-128.
- ¹⁹Ibid., p. 116.



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26. Glazer, "The Alienation of Modern Man," p. 378.
27. Feuer, "What is Alienation?" p. 132.
28. Fromm, Marx's Concept of Man, p. 47.
29. Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom, (New York, 1941), p. 29.
30. Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion, p. 53.
31. Fromm, Escape from Freedom, p. 31.
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34. Fromm, Escape from Freedom, pp. 34-35.
35. Fromm, Marx's Concept of Man, p. 53.
36. Ibid., p. 49.
37. Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion, p. 49.
38. Ibid., pp. 56-57.
39. Ibid., p. 48.
40. Glazer, "The Alienation of Modern Man," p. 380.
41. Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 94-95.
42. Ibid., p. 111.
43. Betty Yorburg, Utopia and Reality: A Collective Portrait of American Socialists (New York, 1969), p. 12.



- ⁴⁴Erich Fromm, "Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism," D. T. Suzuki, Erich Fromm, and Richard DeMartino, Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis (Colophon ed., New York, 1960), p. 79.
- ⁴⁵Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 126.
- ⁴⁶Ibid., p. 99.
- ⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 152-153.
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- ⁴⁹Fromm, "Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism," p. 79.
- ⁵⁰Ibid., p. 80.
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