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PONTIFICIA UNIVERSITAS GREGORIANA  
FACULTAS PHILOSOPHICA

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THE CONCEPT OF FREEDOM  
IN THE WRITINGS OF ERICH FROMM  
AN EXPOSITION AND EVALUATION

Auctore

Angelo M. Caligiuri

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✠ ALOYSIUS, *Card. Vicarius*

GRATEFULLY DEDICATED  
TO THOSE WHO HAVE MADE THIS POSSIBLE  
TO THOSE WHO HAVE CALLED ME  
SON BROTHER FRIEND FATHER

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## FOREWORD

The problem of freedom has perennially been of crucial importance to mankind. In the course of history freedom has appeared as the very real ideal for which men have shed their blood, as well as the mystery whose depths have challenged the greatest minds of the world. Freedom is at one and the same time, the goal of man's life and the means of attaining this goal. In our own day, freedom is a necessary ingredient of all other values, so that these other values are appreciated to the extent in which they can be enjoyed in freedom. Freedom is the most properly human of man's characteristics and the reflection in man of the Divine.

The inexhaustible richness of the mystery of freedom has, through the ages, given birth to the particular insights which philosophers have experienced and which, through their personal reflection and elaboration, they have made part of mankind's intellectual heritage. No one concept of freedom has completely exhausted the content of the mystery. Each new insight, often reflective of the progress civilization has made, provides a further glimpse of the reality. Man's understanding of freedom is progressing, it is deepening even as man is coming to a more profound understanding of himself and of his situation in the world.

During the past sixty years, the new directions taken in the study of man, and the increasing possibilities for the scientific study of man in the totality of his existence, have in large measure, resulted from the discovery and development of psychoanalysis. The methods and techniques of this therapeutic science have opened up avenues of research which had previously been inaccessible to students of human nature and human behavior. The wealth of knowledge and insights which have resulted from this breakthrough has found expression in the endless scholarly and popular works treating of, among other subjects, character



formation, personality structure, psychic equilibrium, human behavior and human freedom.

In its origins, psychoanalysis professed a strict biological determinism denying man's ability to choose freely. It saw man's experience of freedom as an illusion, and as not reflecting the reality of the unconscious drives in man. In the last thirty years, however, analysts have begun to discard the anatomical determinism of Freud, and, through a more concentrated effort at studying man in his relation to society, have once again acknowledged man's freedom.<sup>1</sup>

Whereas in the past, great emphasis was placed in the ability of man to determine himself, so that there was a danger of seeing this self-determination as absolute, the psychological and sociological sciences of today have brought us to the realization that, in reality, our freedom is immersed in determinism, that it is not absolute, but limited, that it is a real freedom, but also an impure one.

Within the last two decades, great strides have been made in analysing the limitations and determinants of human behavior that have their source in the socio-economic structure of society. The socialization and "complexification" of modern man's life has created a crisis of freedom, a crisis which has been most articulately and comprehensively analyzed by Dr. Erich Fromm, one of the most influential social psychologists of America. Since the appearance of his first book in 1942, Dr. Fromm's sphere of influence has been continually increasing. Today his major works are available in most modern languages, and in particular, they have found a great following in Latin America. Dr. Fromm is a psychoanalyst and sociologist whose intellectual reflections have provided us with invaluable insights into the complexities of man's relation to society. And, likewise, he has, in his many

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<sup>1</sup> Christian Bay writes: "There is no doubt, it seems to me, that the psychoanalytic approach offers the most promising over-all scheme for theorizing about the growth of human freedom, from the complete dependency and spontaneity of the infant up to the modest autonomy the fortunate adult may achieve and the confined spontaneity he may retain." Bay, *The Structure of Freedom* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958), p. 158.

writings, offered us an in-depth analysis of the meaning of freedom and its place in our modern culture.

It was the purpose of the original dissertation to present in an orderly fashion, an exposition of the concept and theory of freedom which Dr. Fromm develops in his writings. In an effort to be as intellectually honest as possible, we have chosen to present Fromm's thought on freedom in as objective a way as possible. We have sought to allow the reader to meet Fromm directly, to hear Fromm speak for himself. To this end we have included in this abstract, the entire second part of the original dissertation, in which Fromm's thoughts are presented without any comments or criticisms.

The writings of men like Fromm have taught us that pure and absolute freedom is an illusion here on earth. For many of us this lesson hurts. It upsets our old and lazy notion of a consciousness totally lucid and free from illusion, of a freedom born adult, of a personality which goes on its own powers. Such an illusion, that freedom is given rather than achieved, is dangerous. For, it is precisely illusion that breeds disillusion, and the illusion of disincarnate freedom, in our day, is all too likely to lead to the breakdown of moral belief.

The sciences of the twentieth century, particularly psychoanalysis, have afforded us a further glimpse into the mystery of freedom, a notion grounded in the empirical sciences, a notion which teaches man that he cannot be himself, he cannot be free, except through a constant effort to become and remain himself and free. It is a notion of freedom based upon man's more perfect knowledge of himself, knowledge wherein he understands that he is free and possesses a personal conscience only if he works on it courageously through self-domination and self-abandonment. And it is only such a notion of freedom, based on man's courage to be himself through self-mastery, that will rescue man from the might and weight of a civilization of necessity and conformity.

The present study was made possible through the kindness and generosity of the many individuals who directly or indirectly, knowingly or unknowingly, have contributed to its successful



completion. To all, the author acknowledges his debt of deep and sincere gratitude.

Certain persons, because of their more immediate involvement with the author and his work, merit specific expressions of thanks. The author is first of all, grateful to the Most Reverend James A. McNulty, D.D., Bishop of Buffalo, who has so generously afforded him the opportunity for further study. A special word of gratitude is also due to the Rector and to the Dean and members of the philosophy faculty of the Pontifical Gregorian University, for their personal interest and kindness, and for their scholarly stimulation.

The author is above all, most grateful to Father Joseph de Finance, S.J., for his most competent direction, his most generous availability, and his genuine personal interest in this undertaking. Sincere thanks are also especially due to my family, friends, and fellow priests, all of whose help and encouragement, so selflessly and generously offered, have contributed to the realization of this work.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL INTRODUCTION

Erich Fromm was born in Frankfurt, Germany, on March 23, 1900. He grew up in a religious Jewish home, where, among other things, he came to a familiarity with the writings of the Old Testament. His childhood and adolescence were witness to many social upheavals throughout the world. In his intellectual autobiography, he describes one of these, the First World War, as "the event that determined more than anything else" his development.<sup>1</sup>

Fromm first studied at the University of Heidelberg where, in 1925, upon the successful presentation of his doctoral dissertation, "Das Jüdische Gesetz: Ein Beitrag zur Soziologie des Diasporajudentums", he was awarded his Ph. D. by the University's faculty of philosophy. He also spent some of his student days at the University of Munich.

In the late 1920's he enrolled at the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute where he underwent specialized training and became a practitioner of psychoanalysis. In 1929, he studied and taught at the Frankfurt Psychoanalytic Institute and in the Institute for Social Research of the University of Frankfurt. The early 1930's witnessed the rise to power of Adolph Hitler, and with the advent of Nazism began the exodus which saw Fromm and many other German intellectuals leave their native land. In 1932 Erich Fromm emigrated to the United States, where he has remained up to this present day.

In the United States, he became affiliated with the International Institute of Social Research at Columbia University and also began collaborating with Karen Horney and Harry Stack Sullivan. He had already met Horney and her psychoanalytic

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<sup>1</sup> Erich Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, (New York: Pocket Books, Inc., 1962), p. 6.



1934

approach in her native Germany. By 1936, they, together with anthropologists like Ruth Benedict and Edward Sapir, were engaged in a joint effort to study the interaction of man and his culture.

Within a short period of time, Fromm became one of the foremost lecturers in social psychology. His writings and his reputation soon brought him to the faculties of several outstanding American colleges and universities. Among these are numbered Bennington College, Michigan State University, and the National University of Mexico. He presently divides his time between the latter institution where he is professor of psychoanalysis, and New York University where he is professor of psychology.

Fromm's intellectual biography centers around his great interest in the insights of both Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx. In his autobiography Fromm attempts to isolate several of the experiences of his adolescent years which he feels conditioned him and formed in him the intellectual attitude that led him to a passionate interest in the teachings of both Freud and Marx. He points out that as a young man, he was greatly puzzled by the phenomena of individual and social behavior and that he found answers to his questions in this area in the systems of Freud and Marx.

The contrasts between these two theories was a source of intellectual stimulation to Fromm, who desired to solve these contradictions. A proper appreciation of this fact enables us to see that in truth, the underlying goal in all of Fromm's writings has been to come to an understanding of the laws that govern individual men in their social existence, by effecting a reconciliation and synthesis between Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxian sociology. We find in this fact also, an insight into the methodological approach that Fromm uses in his considerations. He found in both Freud and Marx the common element of humanism, and today, through his efforts at evolving a humanistic psychoanalysis and a humanistic ethics, Fromm is one of humanism's leading prophets.

Catemario seems to indicate that Fromm came under the influence of this Freudian-Marxist thinking for the first time as a student in Berlin. According to him, this would have come

through contact with Wilhelm Reich's group which, however, in its attempt at integrating Freud and Marx, seemed to be stressing dialectical materialism, as well as seeming to have interests that were more political than sociological.<sup>2</sup>

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Fromm was certainly greatly influenced in his social-psychanalytic thinking by his years at the Institute for Social Research at Frankfurt. Here, under the direction of Max Horkheimer, discussion and research centered around Marxian sociology and Freudian psychology, and an attempt to integrate these two disciplines. The Institute's intellectual atmosphere also reflected to a great extent the influence of Max Weber.

Fromm's arrival in the United States brought him into contact with the American approach to psychoanalysis an approach which tended to regard individual psychology, to a greater or less extent, as an offshoot of social psychology. Under the encouragement of this new spirit, he was able to pursue fully his efforts to achieve a sociological-psychoanalytical understanding of man's situation in the world.

That Freud and Marx were the primary influences on Fromm's thought as it has evolved to this day, is obvious. Of the two, however, Fromm holds the insights and theories of Marx to be of greater importance to the development of a science of man. In *Beyond the Chains of Illusion* he writes:

By putting their names together the impression might easily arise that I consider them as two men of equal stature and equal historical significance. I want to make it clear at the outset that this is not so. That Marx is a figure of world historical significance with whom Freud cannot even be compared in this respect hardly needs to be said. Even if one, as I do, deeply regrets the fact that a distorted and degraded "Marxism" is preached in almost one-third of the world, this fact does not diminish the unique historical significance of Marx. But quite aside from this historical fact, I consider Marx the thinker, as being of much greater depth and scope than Freud. Marx was capable of connecting a spiritual heritage of

<sup>2</sup> Armando Catemario, *La Società Malata, Saggio sulla Filosofia di Fromm*, (Napoli: Giannini, 1962), pp. 476-477.



the enlightenment humanism and German idealism with the reality of economic and social facts, and thus to lay the foundations for a new science of man and society which is empirical and at the same time filled with the spirit of the Western humanist tradition.<sup>3</sup>

According to one of Fromm's commentators, Fromm's humanistic psychoanalysis is radically different from the prevailing psychological and psychiatric approaches of our day in that it has a different philosophical foundation. Discarding the philosophical materialism of the last century, humanistic psychoanalysis has its roots in the fundamental intuitions of contemporary philosophy, namely, the view of human reality as "situational," as characterized by tension and contrasts, and by the communication and interaction of man with the world and with other men.<sup>4</sup>

This observation introduces us to another source of influence on Fromm's thought, contemporary existential philosophy. Although Catemario seems to indicate that the echoes of existentialism were audible during Fromm's stay at the Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt,<sup>5</sup> Fromm himself disavows any connection between his terminology and that found in the existentialist literature. However, in spite of the fact that Fromm himself admits a philosophical debt by name, only to Aristotle, Spinoza and Dewey, it seems unlikely that the striking similarity between some of his basic concepts concerning man and his situation in the world and the insights of modern existentialism are entirely coincidental.<sup>6</sup>

Hammond notes that although Fromm in his latest book takes specific issue with the views of Sartre and Heidegger, cal-

<sup>3</sup> Erich Fromm, *op. cit.*, p. 12-13.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Armando Catemario, *op. cit.*, p. 483.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Catemario remarks on this point: "Eppure, a parte le evidenti analogie, quanto hanno potuto influire autori, cui egli solo accenna qua e là, e cioè filosofi come Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Sartre, Heidegger, Bergson, Buber, Tillich?". *Ibid.*, p. 35. See also Walker Percy, "Coming Crisis in Psychiatry," *America*, 96 (January 5, 1957), 391-393; 96 (January 12, 1957), 415-418, where the author suggests several similarities between Fromm's basic outlook and ideas and those of existentialist philosophers.

ling their existentialism "superficial and without clinical basis,"<sup>7</sup> he does, in *Marx's Concept of Man*, use the word "existentialist" to identify the tradition within which Marx stands, a tradition of existentialist protest against the alienation of man.<sup>8</sup> Hammond goes on to suggest from this, that Fromm would have no quarrel with being considered an existentialist in the broad sense in which Tillich employs the term, i.e. as one who analyses estranged or alienated existence. In fact, Hammond thinks it likely that Fromm's own views on this "existentialist tradition" were influenced by those of Tillich.<sup>9</sup>

To complete this brief consideration of Fromm's intellectual genealogy we must make mention of his indebtedness to literature, especially that of an existentialist bent,<sup>10</sup> and of his constant reference to the history of the Great Religions of the world.<sup>11</sup>

In this introduction, we have sought to acquaint the reader not only with the essential facts of Fromm's historical biography, but also with the general lines of his intellectual biography. It is hoped that further clarification of points here necessarily referred to in a cursory manner, will be the fruit of an attentive reading of this abstract, and particularly of the entire dissertation.

It should, finally, be noted that Fromm's humanistic psychoanalysis involves an inter-disciplinary approach to the human

<sup>7</sup> Erich Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 15, footnote 1.

<sup>8</sup> Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1961), p. 46.

<sup>9</sup> Guyton B. Hammond, *Man in Estrangement*, (Nashville, Tennessee: Vanderbilt University Press, 1965), p. 43.

<sup>10</sup> For example, in *Fear of Freedom*, p. 115, Fromm cites Franz Kafka's *Castle* as containing a precise expression of the powerlessness of man; and in *Man for Himself*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1949), pp. 167-172, he devotes several pages to an analysis of Kafka's *The Trial*, where Fromm finds a beautiful illustration of the complex interrelation of authoritarian and humanitarian conscience.

Among others to whom Fromm refers are included Balzac, in *Fear of Freedom*, pp. 15-16, and *Man for Himself*, p. 109; Flaubert, in *The Heart of Man*, p. 34; and Goethe and Ibsen in *Man for Himself*, pp. 92-96.

<sup>11</sup> Besides his continuous reference to the humanism of all the great religious teachers of mankind, Fromm has more recently expressed a definite interest in the insights and teachings of Zen Buddhism.





problem. In his writings, Fromm brings the insights of philosophy, religion, historical-cultural traditions and the findings of empirical science to bear upon his examination of the unique problem of human existence as it shows itself under the name of ethics, politics, therapy, education, eschatology and other specifications of the human situation.

## PART TWO

### AN EXPOSITION OF FROMM'S CONCEPT OF FREEDOM

#### INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

In the first part of the original dissertation an attempt was made to provide the necessary background for a complete understanding of Erich Fromm's concept of freedom.

We sought to do this by presenting, first of all, a short conspectus of the history of the problem of freedom as it appears in the more significant literature on the subject. We accepted and made our own the findings of Dr. Mortimer Adler and the researchers of the Institute for Philosophical Research, who, using the "dialectical" method made a thorough study of the freedom literature. In the course of their study, they found that all of man's reflections on the meaning of freedom could be identified through the use of three basic and distinct concepts of freedom. Each of these concepts is characterized by the manner in which the freedom is possessed, and by the mode of self in which the freedom is thought to consist.

These three basic classifications are: the circumstantial freedom of self-realization; the acquired freedom of self-perfection; and the natural freedom of self-determination. Although two other concepts appear as separate concepts in the freedom literature, they can, upon consideration, be classified as special variants of one of the other main subjects already identified. Thus, political liberty is a special variant of the circumstantial freedom of self-realization, and collective freedom, a special variant of the acquired freedom of self-perfection. It was also emphasized that these three basic categories were at the same time, necessary and sufficient to identify all that authors discuss under the name of freedom.

It was also pointed out that although some authors affirm only one conception of freedom, many others evolve theories which include a synthesis of two or three conceptions.



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In the second section of chapter one we presented an historical survey of the origin and evolution of psychoanalysis. Since Erich Fromm is a practicing analyst whose theories and reflections are based heavily upon his clinical observations, this section was necessary background for an intelligent appreciation of Fromm's freedom theory.

In broad lines, this survey traced psychoanalysis from its Freudian origins, through the first revolt of Adler and Jung, up to the development of the "Neo-Freudian" and "cultural" schools of our day.

Finally, we sought to locate the position of Fromm's analytic theory in this historical framework. Our conclusion was that, in spite of his own dislike for the term, Fromm is definitely a revisionist with regard to fundamental Freudian doctrines. The area in which his break with Freud is most pronounced concerns his views of the relationship between the individual and society. With Thompson, we felt justified in classifying him as belonging to the "cultural" school of Neo-Freudians. A hurried look at Freud's freedom theory concluded the third section.

In the chapters that comprise the second part of the original dissertation and reprinted in full in this abstract, we present an exposition of the notion and idea of freedom that Dr. Erich Fromm proposes and develops in his many writings. We feel that the subject matter studied has led naturally to the threefold division we have made. In chapter two we shall consider some of the preliminary notions which are essential to an understanding of Fromm's doctrine of freedom. In chapter three we present our understanding of what Dr. Fromm means when he writes of freedom as an orientation of the character structure, and in chapter four we consider his notion of freedom as a capacity to choose. In the conclusion to part two we shall endeavor to identify Fromm's freedom theory in the light of the history of the problem of freedom as presented in chapter one.

The matter presented in this part is the result of an objective (at least to the extent to which this is possible) reading of Dr. Fromm's works. An effort has been made to preserve this objectivity in exposing his doctrine. Our complete comments and observations on his conception of freedom are presented in part three of the original dissertation.

The author would, finally, make it clear that the interpretation of Fromm that appears in the following pages is solely that of the author, and that consequently, he alone assumes responsibility for its faults and failings.



## CHAPTER II

### PRELIMINARY CONCEPTS

The problem of freedom is present in one way or another in all of Dr. Fromm's writings. His preoccupation with freedom finds expression in various ways. In some instances, as in *Fear of Freedom*,<sup>1</sup> it is in the main stream of his thought. Elsewhere it is the ever present undercurrent whose influence is felt and often openly acknowledged. In all of his considerations, Dr. Fromm approaches the problem of freedom with a background of vast psychoanalytic experience, which, together with his own reflections, he feels permits him to see some new aspects of the problem.<sup>2</sup>

However, in discussing Fromm's concept of freedom, we must always keep clearly in mind the sense in which he uses the term "freedom." In his latest work, *The Heart of Man*, Dr. Fromm distinguishes two different meanings for the notion "freedom." He writes:

... In one, freedom is an attitude, an orientation, part of the character structure of the mature, fully developed, productive person ... The second meaning of freedom

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<sup>1</sup> In a recently released new edition of *Escape from Freedom*, (*Fear of Freedom* is the title in England), Dr. Fromm reaffirms the validity of the observations and principles of the first edition for our own day and age. In a special foreword to this latest edition, he writes: "There can be no doubt that in this last quarter of a century the reasons for man's fear of freedom, for his anxiety and willingness to become an automaton, have not only continued but have greatly increased. The most important event in this respect is the discovery of atomic energy, and its possible use as a weapon of destruction..." Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, (New York: The Hearst Corporation, 1965), pp. xii-xiii.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. his latest work, *The Heart of Man*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 124.



is ... the capacity to make a choice between opposite alternatives which, however, always imply the choice between the rational and the irrational interest in life and its growth versus stagnation and death.<sup>3</sup>

It is with freedom in the first sense that Fromm has concerned himself in most of his writings. Only in his latest book does he attempt a profound analysis of freedom in the more traditional sense of the word, i.e. as freedom of choice.

But before we can consider these two aspects of the concept of freedom in Fromm's thought, it is essential that we understand some of his other teachings which form the foundation and backdrop for his consideration of the problem of freedom.

#### I. THE CONCEPT OF CHARACTER IN FROMM'S THOUGHT

The first of these doctrines which we must examine, is Dr. Fromm's notion of character, for, as he says in his introduction to *Fear of Freedom*, "My task in this book would be easier could I refer the reader to the completed study of the character structure of man in our culture, since the meaning of freedom can be fully understood only on the basis of an analysis of the whole character structure of man."<sup>4</sup> Following Freud on this point, Dr. Fromm affirms that not only are man's thinking and feeling determined by his character structure, but also his actions. That this holds true also for the actions of normal persons who appear to be determined only by rational considerations and the necessities of reality, has been established by the empirical data made available through psychoanalysis. To quote Fromm in this matter, "...with the new tools of observation that psychoanalysis offers, we can recognize that so-called rational behaviour is largely determined by the character structure."<sup>5</sup>

Since, then, Fromm sees a person's activity as being determined by the dominant trends of his character structure, it will

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>4</sup> Erich Fromm, *Fear of Freedom*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1960), p. ix.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242.

be most appropriate for our purpose to consider briefly his idea of character and its formation.<sup>6</sup>

For Fromm, character must be understood in the dynamic sense of Freudian characterology. In other words, character does not refer to the sum total of behavior patterns or traits characteristic of one person, as it does in behavioristic psychology. Rather, it refers to a system of strivings, of dominant drives which underlie and motivate behavior, but which are not identical with it.

In order to help us come to a clearer notion of this dynamic concept of character, Fromm compares behavior traits and character traits. "Behavior traits are described in terms of actions which are observable by a third person." Thus, for example, the behavior trait "being courageous" could easily be discerned from a person's mode of action. "However, if we inquire into the motivation and particularly into the unconscious motivation of such behavior traits, we find that the behavior traits cover numerous and entirely different character traits."<sup>7</sup> And so, for example, it is possible that a person's courageous behavior may be motivated by ambition. According to Fromm, then, character traits underlie behavior. And although these traits constitute powerful forces, it is possible a person may be entirely unconscious of them.

Fromm's characterology also follows Freud in the "assumption that the fundamental entity in character is not the single character trait but the total character organization from which a number of single character traits follow."<sup>8</sup> These character traits result from a particular organization or, as Fromm calls it, orientation of character.

In *Man for Himself* Dr. Fromm gives a detailed analysis of what he considers to be the basic character orientations. For our purposes it suffices to note that all orientations fall into one

<sup>6</sup> Most of our treatment of Fromm's characterology will be based on his *Man for Himself*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1949), where he evolves his notion of character at great length.

<sup>7</sup> Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1949), pp. 54-55; cf. also Erich Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, (New York: Pocket Books, Inc., 1963), p. 77.

<sup>8</sup> Fromm, *Man for Himself*, p. 57.



of two categories; they are either productive or non-productive orientations, depending on the way a person relates himself to the world. He does this first of all by acquiring and assimilating things — the process of assimilation —; and then by relating himself to people (and himself) — the process of socialization.<sup>9</sup> Of course the enumeration of orientations which he lists is theoretical, and as Fromm himself says:

In reality we always deal with blends, for a character never represents one of the non-productive orientations or the productive orientation exclusively ... If one wants to characterize a person, one will usually have to do so in terms of his dominant orientation.<sup>10</sup>

There is no person whose orientation is entirely productive, and no one who is completely lacking in productivity. But the respective weight of the productive and the non-productive orientation in each person's character structure varies and determines the quality of the non-productive orientation.<sup>11</sup>

The character structure of an individual, then, represents the particular form in which energy is canalized in the process of living. Unlike Freud, Dr. Fromm sees the fundamental basis of character not in various types of libido organizations, but rather in specific kinds of a person's relatedness to the world. As we have already mentioned, man relates himself to the world by the process of assimilation and by the process of socialization. And it is in these orientations, by which the individual relates himself to the world, that the core of an individual's character is formed. This leads us to Fromm's definition of Character, which he defines "as the (relatively permanent) form in which human energy is canalized in the process of assimilation and socialization."<sup>12</sup>

From what has been proposed so far, one can see that man's character, according to Fromm, is molded by the social process. And, the major role in determining a person's whole

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 58, 83-84; see esp. p. 111 where Fromm lists all the various forms of orientations.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 112-113.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

character structure is played by the mode of life which a particular economic system determines for an individual.<sup>13</sup> This is so because the individual, driven by the need for self-preservation, is forced to accept the conditions under which he has to live. Consequently, the peculiarity of the culture in which he has to live will, to a large extent, determine the dominance of any particular orientation in his character structure. From this it follows that a study of the correlation between character orientation and social structure will provide us with an understanding of some of the most significant causes in the formation of character.<sup>14</sup>

For Fromm, it is from an understanding of man and the social structure, that is to say, an understanding of the human situation, which is the source of human needs, that our understanding of human motivation must proceed. In one of his later works, *The Sane Society*, Dr. Fromm enumerates the specifically human needs which stem from the conditions of the human situation as, "the need for relatedness, transcendence, rootedness, the need for a sense of identity and the need for a frame of orientation and devotion."<sup>15</sup> Now, the solution which man works out in his effort to satisfy his human needs depends on a great number of factors, not the least of which is the way his society is organized and how this organization determines the human relations within it.

### Social Character

These considerations bring us in contact with Fromm's concept of "social character."<sup>16</sup> As we have already mentioned,

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Erich Fromm, *Fear of Freedom*, pp. 239-247. Cf. also Fromm's treatment of this subject in one of his earlier writings, "Die Psychoanalytische Charakterologie in ihrer Anwendung für die Soziologie," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, Jahrgang I (1932), 253-277.

<sup>14</sup> Fromm, *Man for Himself*, p. 78.

<sup>15</sup> Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1963), pp. viii; 67.

<sup>16</sup> Fromm first developed his concept of the social character in his articles "Die Entwicklung des Christusdogmas," *Imago*, XVI (1930), 305-373; reprinted in English translation in Fromm, *The Dogma of Christ*, (London:



character, for Fromm, in the dynamic sense of analytic psychology, "is the specific form in which human energy is shaped by the dynamic adaptation of human needs to the particular mode of existence of a given society."<sup>17</sup> In dealing with the character structure of members of a group, social class or society, Fromm observes that there is an essential nucleus of the character structure of most members of the group which has developed as a result of the basic experiences and mode of life common to that group. This nucleus, this part of their character structure comprising only a selection of traits that is common to most members of the group, Fromm calls the social character.

In contradistinction to the individual character, in which people belonging to the same culture differ from each other, social character refers to the nucleus of character structure which is shared by most members of the same culture.<sup>18</sup> The very fact that

... most members of a social class or culture share significant elements of character, and that we can speak of a "social character" as representing the core of a character structure common to most people of a given culture shows the degree to which character is formed by social and cultural patterns.<sup>19</sup>

For Dr. Fromm, the social character performs a most important role in society. Each society is structuralized and operates in certain ways which are necessitated by a number of objective conditions. Now although these social structures do change in the course of historical development, at any given historical period they are relatively fixed. Here is where the social character performs its work. For:

It is the function of the social character to shape the energies of the members of society in such a way that

Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1963), 1-69; and in his "Die Psychoanalytische Charakterologie und ihre Bedeutung für die Soziologie," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, I (1932), 253-277.

<sup>17</sup> Erich Fromm, *Fear of Freedom*, p. 239.

<sup>18</sup> Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself*, p. 60; cf. also *Fear of Freedom*, p. 239.

<sup>19</sup> Fromm, *Man for Himself*, p. 60.

their behavior is not a matter of conscious pattern but one of wanting to act as they have to act and at the same time finding gratification in acting according to the requirements of their culture.<sup>20</sup>

The emphasis which Fromm gives to the socio-economic process as determining character structure, does not exclude the vital role that is played by an individual's childhood environment. As Fromm says in *Sigmund Freud's Mission*, "the understanding of the factors (aside from constitutional ones) which determine the development of any man's character must begin with his relatedness to his mother."<sup>21</sup> By seeing the family as the "psychic agency" of society, Fromm overcomes any opposition that might appear between the socio-economic structure of a culture and the childhood experiences of an individual, considered as determining factors of a person's character structure.<sup>22</sup> For it is through the family that society transmits to the child that character structure which later makes him adjusted to the tasks he has to perform in social life.<sup>23</sup>

So far we have seen that Fromm's characterology affirms that man's character structure is determined by the socio-economic structure of his culture at any given point of its development. To complete Dr. Fromm's concept of character, we must now observe that such a character, determined by the social process, in its turn determines the thinking, feeling and acting of individuals. Especially does Dr. Fromm stress the point that the thoughts we have about the ethical, philosophical, political, psychological or social problems confronting us, are greatly determined by the personality structure of the person who thinks.

<sup>20</sup> Erich Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, p. 84; cf. also Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 78; Fromm, *Fear of Freedom*, p. 242; Erich Fromm, D.T. Suzuki and Richard De Martino, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, (New York: Grove Press, Inc. 1963), pp. 103-104.

<sup>21</sup> Erich Fromm, *Sigmund Freud's Mission*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1959), p. 10.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Fromm, *Man for Himself*, p. 60; Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 82..

<sup>23</sup> This role of the family in relation to character formation has been an essential part of Fromm's theory from his earliest writings. Cf., for example, his rather detailed treatment of the family's role in society in "Über Methode und Aufgabe Einer Analytischen Sozialpsychologie," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, Jahrgang I (1932), 28-54.



Each concept or idea, then, has an emotional matrix rooted in the character structure of the individual. This fact is the key to the understanding of the spirit of a culture, for within a given society, having a specific social character, only those ideas and doctrines will become effective which appeal to and answer the specific human needs prominent in that social character.<sup>24</sup> Character then, also has this selective function with regard to a person's ideas and values. However, and here Dr. Fromm goes a step further, although religious, philosophical and political ideas are rooted in the social character, they also, in their turn determine, systematize and stabilize the social character.<sup>25</sup>

To complete the cycle, the changed character structure, now intensified and stabilized by the new religious, philosophical and political ideologies, gives rise to new character traits which in their turn "become important factors in further economic development and influence the social process."<sup>26</sup> As Dr. Fromm states it in *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*:

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.<sup>27</sup>

### Character and temperament

One other feature of Fromm's thought should be mentioned in this necessarily brief introduction to his characterology. He is emphatic in insisting on a clear distinction between the no-

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Fromm, *Fear of Freedom*, pp. 54-55; 59; 241-242; and Fromm, *The Dogma of Christ and Other Essays on Religion, Psychology and Culture*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1963), p. 103.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Fromm, *Man for Himself*, p. 59; Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 80.

<sup>26</sup> Fromm, *Fear of Freedom*, p. 88.

<sup>27</sup> Erich Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, p. 93; cf. also, Fromm, *Fear of Freedom*, p. 253.

tion of character and that of temperament. The reason for this is that Dr. Fromm sees the confusion of the two concepts as one of the major hindrances to progress and development in characterology and in the study of temperament. Briefly, the distinction can be stated as follows, "Temperament refers to the mode of reaction and is constitutional and not changeable; character is essentially formed by a person's experiences, especially of those in early life, and changeable, to some extent, by insights and new kinds of experience."<sup>28</sup>

This short summary of Dr. Fromm's concept of character was essential to our ultimate purpose, since, as we have seen, for Fromm it is man's character that determines his thinking, feeling, and acting. However, thus far, we have been speaking of only one pole in the interconnection between social organization and man; namely of the socio-economic structure of society as molding man's character. But there is another pole which must be considered in the relationship between social organization and man, and that other pole is man's nature itself, which in its own turn molds the social conditions in which man lives.<sup>29</sup> It is in order then, to consider summarily, Dr. Fromm's concept of human nature as a necessary preparation for an understanding of his notion of freedom.

<sup>28</sup> Fromm, *Man for Himself*, p. 52. In a recent interview in a popular American Magazine, Dr. Fromm indicates that his present thinking on this question places much more stress on constitutional elements — temperaments — in character formation. When asked by the interviewer, "Have you always felt as firmly as you do now about the constitutional elements?" he replied: "No, I haven't. Actually, I must say about thirty years ago, if I had listened to myself talking now, I would have labeled myself as a real reactionary to put so much attention on constitution, because I would have thought, 'Well, that means he doesn't really believe in the possibility of improvement of the human race.' But I have changed my view in various aspects.

"In my analytical work, I have convinced myself that people are different not only because of their experiences in life or their environment. I believe that environment, especially the experiences in the early years, makes a great deal of difference; but, nevertheless, I think it is dishonest if I claim that two people, one of whom is very aick and one of whom is relatively normal, are the way they are because of their environment only." "An Interview With Erich Fromm", *McCall's* (October, 1965), 213.

<sup>29</sup> Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 81.





## II. HUMAN NATURE IN FROMM

Although the character structure-orientation of man is determined primarily by the socio-economic structure of a given culture, Dr. Fromm specifically reminds us that this is but one of the elements in the social process. We cannot neglect the role of the human factor as another dynamic element in this process. And, according to Fromm, only a dynamic psychology can avoid paying mere lip service to the human factor, by not reducing the psychological factor to a shadow of cultural patterns. This brings us face to face with the problem of human nature. For as Dr. Fromm writes in *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*:

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 physiological ones, and if we examine the interaction between the nature of man and the external conditions under which he lives and which he has to master if he is to survive.<sup>30</sup>

For Fromm, the problem of whether or not we can speak of an essence of man, is no problem at all, since all dynamic psychology is based upon the premise that there is such a thing as the nature of man.<sup>31</sup> However, there is a problem in determining just what "human nature" means. In *The Sane Society*, Dr. Fromm asserts that we cannot yet have a satisfactory definition of man in a psychological sense, the reason being that our knowledge of man is still so incomplete. However, he does say that it is precisely the task of what he calls "the science of man," to come eventually to a satisfactory description of what deserves to be called human nature.<sup>32</sup>

The "science of man" has been discussed at some length in *Man for Himself*. Among the various observations Fromm makes about this science, he includes the following description

<sup>30</sup> Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, p. 87.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Fromm *The Heart of Man*, p. 115.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 13.

of the method which it is to use in arriving at a full and adequate picture of what human nature is:

Its method is to observe the reactions of man to various individual and social conditions, and from observation of these reactions to make inference about man's nature ... Human nature can never be observed as such, but only in its specific manifestations in specific situations. It is a theoretical construction which can be inferred from empirical study of the behavior of man. In this respect, the science of man in constructing a "model of human nature" is no different from other sciences which operate with concepts of entities based on, or controlled by, inferences from observed data and not directly observable in themselves.<sup>33</sup>

This same belief, that our concept of human nature must be the result of empirical observation, is also very clearly affirmed in *The Sane Society*.<sup>34</sup>

According to Fromm, following this empirical method will necessarily lead us away from a twofold error in evolving a notion of human nature. We will avoid first of all, the errors inherent in a biological and metaphysical concept of human nature, which assumes the existence of a human nature at once fixed and unchangeable. This assumption, as Fromm sees it, was made by authoritarian thinkers in order to establish the necessity and immutability of their ethical system and social institutions. What they considered to be man's nature, was in reality, a reflection of their own norms and interests. Their alleged nature of man was not the result of objective inquiry, but of the projection of subjective philosophical prejudices.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Fromm, *Man for Himself*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>34</sup> "The real problem is to infer the core common to the whole human race from the innumerable manifestations of human nature, the normal as well as the pathological ones, as we can observe them in different individuals and cultures. The task is furthermore to recognize the laws inherent in human nature and the inherent goals for its development and unfolding." *The Sane Society*, p. 13.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *Man for Himself*, p. 21.



In his latest work Fromm describes the error of such a concept in the following words:

If one assumes a certain substance as constituting the essence of man one is forced into a non-evolutionary, un-historical position which implies that there has been no basic change in man since the very beginning of his emergence. Such a view is difficult to square with the fact that there is a tremendous difference to be found between our most undeveloped ancestors, and civilized man as he appears in the last four to six thousand years of history.<sup>36</sup>

An objective-empirical observation of man's reactions to his individual and cultural surroundings will also help us avoid the erroneous concept of human nature which, since the eighteenth century, liberals and progressives have favored. In reaction to the idea of a fixed and unchangeable human nature, which explained and was the foundation for particular types of society, these thinkers stressed the decisive influence of environmental factors and the malleability of human nature. Although it was important and necessary to emphasize this aspect, many social scientists magnified it out of all proportion so that they developed an anthropological and sociological relativism which claims that man is nothing but a "puppet directed by the strings of social circumstances,"<sup>37</sup> the product of cultural patterns which mold him.

Such a position, which seemed to be corroborated by the findings of anthropology and psychology, tried to establish the infinite malleability of human nature. It assumed that "man's mental constitution is a blank sheet of paper on which society and culture write their text, and which has no intrinsic quality of its own."<sup>38</sup>

However, this concept of the infinite malleability of human nature leads to conclusions which are just as untenable as those

<sup>36</sup> Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, pp. 115-116.

<sup>37</sup> Fromm, *Fear of Freedom*, p. 247.

<sup>38</sup> Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 13.

that follow from the concept of a fixed and unchangeable human nature. For, as Fromm notes:

If man were infinitely malleable then, indeed, norms and institutions unfavorable to human welfare would have a chance to mold man forever into their patterns without the possibility that intrinsic forces in man's nature would be mobilized and tend to change these patterns. Man would be only the puppet of social arrangements and not — as he has proved to be in history — an agent whose intrinsic properties react strenuously against the powerful pressure of unfavorable and cultural patterns.<sup>39</sup>

The malleability theory then, has many important moral, political and theoretical implications which make it untenable.<sup>40</sup>

Having clarified these two extremes which, according to Fromm must be avoided, we can now proceed to his own doctrine on human nature. As we have already mentioned, for Fromm there is no doubt but that there is a common core of human qualities, for the very existence of human history demands such a common core. In *Man for Himself* he makes his position very clear:

Man is not a blank sheet of paper on which culture can write its text; he is an entity charged with energy and structured in certain ways, which, while adapting itself reacts in specific and ascertainable ways to external conditions. If man had adapted himself autoplastically to external conditions, by changing his own nature, like an animal, and were fit to live under only one set of conditions to which he developed a special adaptation, he would have reached the blind alley of specialization which is the fate of every animal species, thus precluding history. If, on the other hand, man could adapt himself to all conditions without fighting those which are against human nature, he would have had no history either. Human evolution is rooted in man's adaptability and in certain indestructable qualities of his nature which compel

<sup>39</sup> Fromm, *Man for Himself*, p. 21.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.



him never to cease his search for conditions better adjusted to his intrinsic needs."<sup>41</sup>

Dr. Fromm then, has always accepted the existence of human nature. However, his notion of just what the essence of man is, has undergone a gradual development, or rather clarification, in his writings. In his first published book, *Fear of Freedom*, he seems to be torn between the complete affirmation of social determinism and the necessity of admitting the existence of a human nature with a psychological dynamism of its own. "Man's nature," he writes, "his passions and anxieties, are a cultural product; as a matter of fact, man himself is the most important creation and achievement of the continuous human effort, the record of which we call history."<sup>42</sup> Then, after excluding the possibility of a human nature that is fixed or infinitely malleable, he concludes, "Human nature, though being the product of historical evolution, has certain inherent mechanisms and laws, to discover which is the task of psychology."<sup>43</sup>

Although he does not evolve a more detailed exposition of these two concepts until his later writings, Dr. Fromm does in his first work present his theory of what constitutes human nature. For him, the essence of man is a common core of basic needs, both physiological and psychological, which must be fulfilled and satisfied since they are inherent in man. He distinguishes those needs which are an indispensable part of human nature from those strivings and fears which develop in man as a reaction to certain life conditions. Examples of these latter would be:

Those strivings and character traits by which men differ from each other ... : love, destructiveness, sadism, the tending to submit, the lust for power, detachment, the desire for self-aggrandisement, the passion for thrift, the enjoyment of sensual pleasure and the fear of sensuality.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

And, for Fromm, "none of these needs is fixed and rigid as if it were an innate part of human nature which develops and has to be satisfied under all circumstances."<sup>45</sup>

In contrast to these needs, there are those that are rooted in the physiological organization of man. Such, for example, are thirst, hunger, the need for sleep etc. Each of these physiological needs imperatively calls for satisfaction, and beyond a certain point, lack of satisfaction becomes unbearable. In Fromm's words, "all these physiologically conditioned needs can be summarized in the notion of a need for self-preservation. This need for self-preservation is that part of human nature which needs satisfaction under all circumstances and therefore forms the primary motive of human behavior."<sup>46</sup>

Together with these physiological needs, there are certain psychological qualities, which, though not rooted in bodily processes, form just as compelling a part of human nature. These needs are rooted "in the very essence of the human mode and practice of life,"<sup>47</sup> are inherent in man and require satisfaction. Their frustration results in reactions. In *Fear of Freedom*, Dr. Fromm develops one of these basic psychological needs at great length:

The need to be related to the world outside oneself, the need to avoid aloneness. To feel completely alone and isolated leads to mental disintegration ... This lack of relatedness to values, symbols, patterns, we may call moral aloneness, and state that moral aloneness is as intolerable as the physical aloneness, or rather that physical aloneness becomes intolerable only if it implies also moral aloneness.<sup>48</sup>

While devoting most of his efforts in this work to how man must overcome this aloneness, toward the end of the book, Dr. Fromm also refers to some of the other psychological qualities

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*; cf. also *ibid.*, p. 14, where Fromm develops the relationship between need and character structure.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*



which he sees as inherent in man, and hence need to be satisfied:

The most important seems to be the tendency to grow, to develop and realize potentialities which man has developed in the course of history — as, for instance, the faculty of creative and critical thinking and of having differentiated emotional and sensuous experience ... It also seems that this general tendency to grow — which is the psychological equivalent of the identical biological tendency — results in such specific tendencies as the desire for freedom and the hatred against oppressors, since freedom is the fundamental condition for any growth ... We have also reason to assume that, as has been said before, the striving for greater truth is an inherent trend of human nature, although it can be repressed and perverted like the striving for freedom.<sup>49</sup>

To sum up Fromm's doctrine as presented in his first book, we can say that while refusing to accept the concept of either a biologically fixed or an infinitely malleable human nature, he does admit the existence of a human nature which "has a dynamism of its own" and that "constitutes an active factor in the evolution of the social process." While admitting that we cannot yet state in clear psychological terms what the exact nature of this human dynamism is, he does state that "man's inalienable rights of freedom and happiness are founded in inherent human qualities," namely, "his striving to live, to expand and to express the potentialities that have developed in him in the process of historical evolution."<sup>50</sup>

Before we proceed to consider the evolution of his concept of human nature in his later writings, it is necessary to make the following observation. In spite of explicit statements to the contrary,<sup>51</sup> it seems that the basic needs which Fromm posits as constituting human nature, have come, not from an objective and empirical observation of human nature — for nowhere does he refer to or evolve the science of man of which he speaks —

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. for example, Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, p. 10.

but rather from his own philosophical analysis of the human condition and situation; from his own interpretation of the conditions of human existence.

Although, as we have already seen, the notion that man's needs stem from his human condition is already present in *Fear of Freedom*,<sup>52</sup> it is not until his subsequent works that Fromm develops and elaborates this doctrine. The point we wish to make is that Fromm seems to be evolving at the same time, two different views as to what should be the basis of our knowledge of man's nature and of the laws which govern its growth. While stating that this knowledge should be the result of a "science of man," he proceeds in his own development according to the belief that this knowledge should be based upon a philosophical analysis of man's needs as they stem from the condition of his existence. This is clearly evidenced in the following quotation:

The Archimedic point of the specifically human dynamism lies in this uniqueness of the human situation; the understanding of man's psyche must be based on the analysis of man's needs stemming from the conditions of his existence.<sup>53</sup>

We turn now to *Man for Himself*, where as a matter of fact, Dr. Fromm undertakes an analysis of the human situation. Accepting without question the fact of man's evolution from a lower animal existence, he first of all sees in man a biological weakness which sets him apart from animal existence. This weakness consists in the "absence of instinctive regulation in the process of adaptation to the surrounding world."<sup>54</sup> In fact, Fromm sees the emergence of man as taking place at the precise moment in the process of evolution when instinctual adaptation was at its lowest. This weakness, which makes man the most helpless of all animals, is also the cause of man's strength. For, from this condition of biological weakness, man

... emerges with new qualities which differentiate him from the animal: his awareness of himself as a separate

<sup>52</sup> Cf. for example, *Fear of Freedom*, p. 14.

<sup>53</sup> Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 25.

<sup>54</sup> Fromm, *Man for Himself*, p. 39.



entity, his ability to remember the past, to visualize the future, and to denote objects and acts by symbols, his reason to conceive and understand the world, and his imagination through which he reaches far beyond the range of his senses.<sup>55</sup>

The emergence of reason, self-awareness and imagination have disrupted the harmony which characterized animal existence. And it is precisely this state of disharmony, of lack of unity with nature and with himself, that describes the human situation. Man's reason, self-awareness and imagination make him into a "freak of nature," for, while remaining a part of nature — and hence subject to her laws and unable to change them — he does also, by virtue of his new powers, transcend the rest of nature.

Because he is aware of the limitations of his existence, man must always strive to solve the insoluble dichotomy of his existence, which is in a state of unavoidable disequilibrium. Man cannot return to the prehuman state of harmony with nature; he must proceed to develop his new powers until he becomes the master of nature and of himself. Man's existence is characterized by a craving for another kind of harmony, for an "absolute-ness which will remedy the split in his nature which developed when he was separated from nature, his fellow man and himself."<sup>56</sup>

As he analyses this split in man's nature, Dr. Fromm observes that it necessarily leads to certain "existential dichotomies" or "contradictions which man cannot annul, but to which he can react in various ways relative to his character and his culture."<sup>57</sup> He calls these dichotomies "existential" because he sees them as rooted in the very existence of man.<sup>58</sup>

The three fundamental dichotomies which Fromm mentions in *Man for Himself* are: (1) that between life and death; (2) that between the individual's claim for the realization of all his potentialities and the short span of his life which prevents this full

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41 ff.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41, cf. especially footnote; also pp. 213-214, where Fromm speaks of the dichotomies in reference to ethics.

realization; and (3) that between man's being alone and related at the same time.

Man is aware of these dichotomies and this awareness profoundly influences his life. Although man can try to negate these contradictions by rationalizations and ideologies,<sup>59</sup> there is however, as Fromm observes:

...only one solution to his problem: to face the truth, to acknowledge his fundamental aloneness and solitude in a universe indifferent to his fate, to recognize that there is no power transcending him which can solve his problem for him. Man must accept the responsibility for himself and the fact that only by using his own powers can he give meaning to his life ... If he faces the truth without panic he will recognize that there is no meaning to life except the meaning man gives his life by the unfolding of his powers, by living productively.<sup>60</sup>

Fromm is careful to distinguish the existential dichotomies from what he calls "historical dichotomies," i.e. contradictions "which are not a necessary part of human existence, but are man-made and soluble."<sup>61</sup> All human progress is due to the fact that in the face of the existential dichotomies, the human mind cannot remain passive, but must strive to solve the contradiction.

The human situation then, as Fromm describes it in *Man for Himself*, finds man in a state of disharmony, with a nature split between a part that is human and a part that is animal. This disequilibrium in turn, is the basis for the existential dichotomies which man, endowed with reason, must strive to solve.

It is in this situation of human existence, then, that Dr. Fromm sees the origin of those basic needs which make up the "model of human nature," man's common core of qualities. While clearly affirming this teaching in *Man for Himself*, he does not expand on just what the needs are specifically. "The disharmony of man's existence," he writes, "generates needs which far

<sup>59</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 44 for what Fromm means by ideology.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.



transcend those of his animal origin. These needs result in an imperative drive to restore a unity and equilibrium between himself and the rest of nature.”<sup>62</sup>

In his reaction to the dichotomy of his existence, man must reflect the fact that he is an entity endowed with a body as well as a mind. In other words, his reaction must express itself not only in his thinking, but also in the process of living, in his feeling and actions. In order to find a new equilibrium, he has to strive for the experience of unity and oneness in all spheres of his being.<sup>63</sup>

However, it is not until *The Sane Society*, which appeared in 1955, that Dr. Fromm undertakes a complete analysis of and exposition of the basic psychic needs which stem from the human condition of existence. After repeating the argument already presented in *Man for Himself*, as to the origin of man in the process of evolution,<sup>64</sup> he again affirms the existence of a model of human nature and forcefully declares that the inescapable dichotomies which characterize man’s existence as man, give rise to his most intensive passions and needs. It is the condition of man’s existence, his human situation, which poses the problem that man’s reason cannot help but attempt to solve. Hence it is that “the most powerful forces motivating man’s behavior stem from the condition of his existence, the ‘human situation’.”<sup>65</sup>

The five basic psychic needs which Dr. Fromm then proceeds to discuss in *The Sane Society* are: (1) the need for relatedness; (2) the need for transcendence of his creatureliness; (3) the need for rootedness; (4) the need for identity; and (5) the need for a frame of orientation and object of devotion. It would be beyond the scope of our intent to give a full description of each of these needs. Such an exposition is easily accessible in Fromm’s works.<sup>66</sup>

However, it is to our purpose to point out how in this work Dr. Fromm has moved further and further away from the social

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 219-220.

<sup>64</sup> Fromm, *The Sane Society*, cf. pp. 23, 25-27.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. especially, *ibid.*, pp. 30-65.

determinism of *Fear of Freedom*, toward the position that there is a basic human nature with basic needs stemming from man’s existential condition.<sup>67</sup>

Once he has developed the concept of these psychic needs, Dr. Fromm proceeds to use them as the measuring rod with which he evaluates the worth of both individuals and society. He points out that each need can be satisfied in two ways, one of which is productive, and leads to mental health and happiness; the other of which is destructive and leads to insanity and unhappiness.

In his more recent works, Fromm refines his concept of human nature even more. In *The Art of Loving*, he devotes himself to describing at great length how man can fulfill his deepest need, “the need to overcome his separateness, to leave the prison of his aloneness.”<sup>68</sup> As in his previous works, here also he sees the question of how to overcome separateness, of how to achieve union, as coming from the human situation, from the conditions of human existence. Hence this question is the same for men of all times and of all cultures. And, the history of how man has answered this question can be seen in the history of religion and philosophy.

Fromm points out that man can seek this unity in three ways: (1) in all kinds of orgiastic states; (2) through conformity with the group, its customs and practices and beliefs; and (3) by attaining a union through creative activity. However, “the full answer lies in the achievement of interpersonal union, of fusion with another person in love.”<sup>69</sup> For Fromm, love is the ultimate and real need in every human being. A valid insight into the very nature of man necessitates our having faith in the possibility of love as a social and not only an exceptional, individual phenomenon.<sup>70</sup>

In *The Dogma of Christ*, Dr. Fromm discusses the method of coming to a knowledge of man in such a way that he seems

<sup>67</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 67 and John Schaar, *Escape From Authority*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1961), p. 45.

<sup>68</sup> Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, (London: Unwin Books, 1957), p. 14.

<sup>69</sup> A fuller discussion of these ways can be had in *The Art of Loving*, pp. 15-20.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 94-95.



to contradict the empirical method he proposed in *Man for Himself*. We cannot study man in the same way as we study a thing. He writes:

Of course I can try, and then I will write something about frequency of this — and — that behavior and about the percentage of this-or-that characteristic. A great deal of the science of psychology is concerned with that, but in this way it is treating man as a thing. The problem the psychiatrist and the psychoanalyst are concerned with, however, the problem we should all be concerned with — to understand our neighbor and ourselves — is to understand a human being who is not a thing. And the process of this understanding cannot be accomplished by the same method by which knowledge in the natural sciences can be accomplished. The knowledge of man is possible only in the process of relating ourselves to him.<sup>71</sup>

In this work, Dr. Fromm also repeats his belief that man creates himself in the historical process, which began with man's first act of disobedience which was also his first act of freedom. In this process man grows in self-awareness, love and justice, until, by the power of his own reason and love, he comes to a full grasp of the world and once again is "one."<sup>72</sup>

In *Beyond the Chains of Illusion* and *The Heart of Man*, his most recently published books, Dr. Fromm greatly clarifies his notion of the essence or nature of man. He sees man's essence, not now in a common group of qualities, but rather in the very contradiction of being a part of nature and yet transcending it, which contradiction is inherent in man's existence. As he himself puts it:

I believe that man's essence is ascertainable. However, this essence is not a substance which characterized man

<sup>71</sup> Erich Fromm, "Medicine and the Ethical Problem of Modern Man," in *The Dogma of Christ*, p. 128; cf. also, *The Art of Loving*, pp. 27-28; and Erich Fromm, "Man in Not a Thing," *Saturday Review of Literature*, 40 (March 16, 1957), 9-11.

<sup>72</sup> Fromm, "The Prophetic Concept of Peace," in *The Dogma of Christ*, pp. 142-144.

at all times through history. The essence of man consists in the above-mentioned contradiction inherent in his existence, and this contradiction forces him to react in order to find a solution.<sup>73</sup>

In *The Heart of Man* we find a greater development of this doctrine. He states, in this latest formulation of his thought, that the contradiction inherent in human existence, by which we can define the essence of man, consists in two sets of facts. The first is that man is an animal, but an animal whose instinctual equipment is incomplete. He is in nature and subject to its dictates and accidents. The second set of facts shows us that man has a mental quality which animals lack. "He is aware of himself, of his past, of his future, which is death; of his smallness and powerlessness; he is aware of others as others — as friends, enemies or as strangers. Man transcends all other life because he is for the first time, life aware of itself."<sup>74</sup>

After rather glibly affirming that this contradiction inherent in man's existence "is essentially the same as the classic view that man is both body and soul, angel and animal, that he belongs to two worlds in conflict with each other,"<sup>75</sup> Dr. Fromm goes further into his analysis of the essence of man.

That by which man is man, his essence, can, it is true, be described in terms of this basic conflict. However, this is not enough. We also have to recognize that this conflict in man demands a solution. And all the answers proposed must at least help man to overcome the sense of separateness and to gain a sense of union, of belonging. The proposed answers, however, do not themselves make up the essence of man. "What constitutes the essence," writes Fromm, "is the question and the need for an answer."<sup>76</sup> In other words, the conflict itself is the essence.

For Fromm, there are only two possible solutions to the question posed by man's existential dichotomy, to the need for unity. One he calls the regressive answer, in which man seeks

<sup>73</sup> Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, p. 189.

<sup>74</sup> Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, pp. 116-117.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*



to return to the state of animal existence, doing away with what is specifically human. The other he calls the progressive answer to the problem of human existence, because in it man finds a new harmony and unity by the full development of all human forces, the development of the humanity within oneself.<sup>77</sup>

We are now in a position to present a summation of Dr. Fromm's concept of Human nature. It appears that there has been a gradual, though clear switch in emphasis in Fromm's thought on this matter. From his earlier writings which saw man and his needs as the product of his culture almost exclusively, he came to the affirmation of the existence of a common core of human qualities which react to social conditions. For him, these qualities and basic psychic needs are rooted in the very condition of man's existence. Finally, in his latest work, Dr. Fromm stresses the doctrine that man's essence, his nature, does not consist in a group of qualities common to all men, but rather in the very conflict which arises from the inherent contradiction of his existence and the necessity for seeking a solution.<sup>78</sup>

### III. CONCLUSION

With this brief consideration of Dr. Fromm's concept of human nature, we conclude our presentation of those ideas in Fromm's writings which we consider essential to an understanding of what he means by freedom. For Fromm, as we have seen, human thinking, feeling and acting is determined by a person's character structure. His character structure in turn is the result both of the social process in which man lives, and of the human nature which man has as a result of his existential human situation. There are basic psychic needs, common to all men, which are rooted in the human situation. Man's nature however, is the very conflict which characterizes his existence, with the subsequent necessity to find a solution. Keeping these notions in mind, we can now in the following chapters, proceed to a presentation of Dr. Fromm's concept of freedom and determinism, which is the main purpose of this dissertation.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 120-121.

## CHAPTER III

### FREEDOM AS ORIENTATION OF CHARACTER STRUCTURE

#### I. STATE OF THE QUESTION — THE PROBLEM

As has been hinted at above, for Dr. Fromm freedom is necessarily involved in the entire process of human evolution. As a matter of fact, human existence is inseparable from the problem of freedom.

In Fromm's concept of evolution, man began to exist as man when his mode of action was no longer fixed by his instincts, by his hereditarily given mechanisms. His emergence from the pre-human stage is characterized precisely by his becoming more and more free from coercive instincts, so that he now begins to adapt himself to nature, not according to his instincts, but according to what he has learned.<sup>1</sup>

Man's first act of freedom was also the beginning of human history.<sup>2</sup> By it man began to sever his ties with, or rather transcend, the bonds that united him to nature. The process whereby man separates himself from his original ties, is called, by Fromm, the process of individuation. Before man evolves as an individual, according to this process, he is bound by "primary ties" which "connect the child with its mother, the member of a community with his clan and nature, or the medieval man with the church and his social caste."<sup>3</sup>

The primary ties to blood and soil can be considered organic in so far as they are a part of normal human development. But

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Fromm, *Fear of Freedom*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1960), p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28 where Fromm gives his interpretation of the account of man's first sin.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.



in so far as they fasten man to the outside world, they imply a lack of individuality and hence a lack of freedom. For Fromm, the process of individuation and the growth of freedom are intimately united. As a matter of fact, for him "the history of man can be characterized as a process of growing individuation and growing freedom."<sup>4</sup>

To the extent that the individual has severed his primary ties, to that extent is he free. "The more the child grows and to the extent to which primary ties are cut off, the more it develops a quest for freedom and independence."<sup>5</sup> For Dr. Fromm the concept of freedom characterizes human existence as such, and the quest for freedom is the necessary result of the process of individuation and of the growth of culture. Hence, it is not a metaphysical force and cannot be explained by natural law. Neither the conditions from which the quest for freedom springs, nor the quest itself can be done away with, not even by authoritarian systems.<sup>6</sup>

Because freedom characterizes human existence and because man's existence is characterized by his emergence from a state of oneness with the natural world to an awareness of himself as an entity separate from surrounding men and nature, it follows that the concept of freedom changes according to the degree of man's awareness and conception of himself as an independent and separate being.<sup>7</sup>

Now according to Fromm, the emergence of man from nature is a long drawn out process. As he states it:

To a large extent he (man) remains tied to the world from which he emerged; he remains part of nature — the soil he lives on, the sun and moon and stars, the trees and flowers, the animals, and the group of people with whom he is connected by the ties of blood.<sup>8</sup>

As long as man is still bound to these primary ties, his full human development is blocked. For, not only do these ties hinder

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

the development of man's reason and his critical capacities, but they also force him to see himself and others, not as human beings, but only through the medium of his or their participation in a clan or social or religious community. This is another way of stating that primary ties prohibit man's development as a free, self-determining, productive individual.

Once the stage of complete individuation is reached, the individual will be completely free from these primary ties. Freedom then, will have a different meaning for man when he has achieved complete individuation, than when he is in a state of pre-individualistic existence.<sup>9</sup> The desire for freedom differs according to the degree of individualism reached in a particular society. This is so, because, "every society is characterized by a certain level of individuation beyond which the normal individual cannot go."<sup>10</sup>

We must here point out that the freedom which Fromm sees as characteristic of human existence and as essentially connected with the process of individuation, the freedom which has been described thus far, is a negative freedom, or as Fromm describes it, "freedom from." It is freedom from instinctual determinations, freedom from the domination of nature, from the domination of Church and of the absolutist state, freedom from political authorities.<sup>11</sup> It is not identical with positive freedom, or "freedom to", of which we shall speak later on. It is a freedom which appeared at the very moment of man's emergence as man, i.e. when he was no longer a purely passive recipient of the instinctual action predetermined for him by nature, but assumed an active role towards nature. He started to think, and with the emergence of his reason, he started to produce, to invent tools, he began "to live" instead of "being lived."<sup>12</sup> As he continues to develop his reason, man continues to acquire an ever

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 25; and Fromm, "The Revolutionary Character," *The Dogma of Christ and Other Essays* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1963), p. 108.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Fromm, *The Sane Society*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1963), p. 22.



increasing mastery over nature and hence separates himself from it more and more.<sup>13</sup>

It is to acquire and preserve this "freedom from" that men throughout history have been willing to sacrifice their lives. From earliest times, through the middle ages, the reformation, and the victorious bourgeois revolutions in Europe and America, men have striven to free themselves from all external domination. And, the last two world wars, fought in the name of freedom and independence, have perhaps brought us to the greatest possession of "freedom from" that mankind has yet known. In our democratic society today, the individual has acquired the highest degree of political and religious freedom.

However, it is precisely this "freedom from," which Dr. Fromm says leads us to the real problem of freedom confronting man today. For, this negative freedom, like the process of individuation, is a two-edged sword. Although it is true that man's primary ties prevented him from becoming a free and self-determining individual, on the other hand these same ties to blood and soil gave him security and a basic unity with the world outside himself. They gave him a feeling of belonging and of being rooted somewhere. Even as man is severing those ties which bind him, he is at the same time losing his security and isolating himself.

For Fromm, then, this process of growing freedom is dialectical. As man becomes independent, self-reliant, and critical, he also becomes more isolated, alone and afraid. And for Fromm, the whole problem of freedom lies in understanding this dialectical character of freedom. "The understanding of the whole problem of freedom," he writes, "depends on the very ability to see both sides of the process and not to lose track of one side while following the other."<sup>14</sup> The freedom that brings man rationality and independence, also makes man isolated and hence, anxious and powerless. And because "this isolation is unbearable," man is confronted with the alternatives of either escap-

<sup>13</sup> For Fromm's definition of reason and the difference between reason and intelligence, cf. *The Sane Society*, pp. 64, 170; and *Man for himself*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1949), pp. 102-103.

<sup>14</sup> Fromm, *Fear of Freedom*, p. 90.

ing "from the burden of this freedom into new dependencies and submissions," or of advancing "to the full realization of positive freedom which is based upon the uniqueness and individuality of man."<sup>15</sup>

In *Fear of Freedom*, Fromm undertakes to show how this dialectical character of the process of growing freedom is the result of the structure of modern society. Our difficulty in seeing the problem of freedom as not only a quantitative one but also a qualitative one, stems from the fact that we who usually think in non-dialectical terms, "are prone to doubt whether two contradictory trends can result simultaneously from one cause."<sup>16</sup>

In the course of modern history, the fight for freedom has become synonymous with overthrowing old forms of authority and restraint. So much so, that we believe that we have gained more freedom, to the extent that we have eliminated more and more of these traditional restraints. But it is precisely this focusing of our attention on increasing our "freedom from" the old enemies of freedom, that prevents our becoming aware of the other aspect of the process of growing freedom. And herein lies the problem for Fromm. For, "new enemies of a different nature have arisen; enemies which are not essentially external restraints, but internal factors blocking the full realization of the freedom of personality."<sup>17</sup>

Man is so wrapped up in the growth of freedom from powers outside himself, that he is unaware of the existence of inner restraints, compulsions and fears which tend to undermine the meaning of the victories freedom has won against the traditional enemies. This explains why we, as Dr. Fromm says:

... are prone to think that the problem of freedom is exclusively that of gaining still more freedom of the kind we have gained in the course of modern history, and to believe that the defence of freedom against such powers that deny such freedom is all that is necessary. We forget that, although each of the liberties which have

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. x.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*



been won must be defended with utmost vigor, the problem of freedom is not only a quantitative one, but a qualitative one; that we not only have to preserve and increase the traditional freedom, but that we have to gain a new kind of freedom, one which enables us to realize our own individual self, to have faith in this self and in life.<sup>18</sup>

In one of the essays in *The Dogma of Christ*, Dr. Fromm formulates his view of the problem of freedom in a slightly different terminology. He affirms that the problem of freedom and independence goes much deeper than freedom in the sense of "freedom from." He writes:

The normal person acquires this degree of independence in the years after puberty. But it is an undeniable fact that this kind of independence, even though a person may earn his own living, marry and bring up children of his own, does not mean that he has become truly free and independent. He is still, as an adult, rather helpless and in many ways trying to find powers to protect him and give him certainty. The price he pays for this help is that he makes himself dependent on them, loses his freedom and slows down the process of his growth. He borrows his thought from them, his feeling, his goals, his values — although he lives under the illusion that it is he who thinks, feels, and makes his choices.<sup>19</sup>

It should be clear that the problem of freedom which we have been discussing thus far, involves freedom in the sense of "an attitude, an orientation, part of the character structure of the mature, fully developed, productive person."<sup>20</sup> As we have already noted, it is with freedom in this sense that Dr. Fromm is most concerned. And because, for Fromm, freedom can be understood only in relation to a person's character structure, which in turn is a result of the interaction of the psychological,

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>19</sup> Fromm, "The Revolutionary Character," *The Dogma of Christ*, p. 109.

<sup>20</sup> Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 132.

economic, and ideological factors in the social process, he asserts that we cannot appreciate or understand the problem of freedom for modern man, i.e. the dialectical character of freedom, unless we examine that period of the history of western society in which the foundations of our modern culture were laid.

Being specific, this means analysing the cultural scene in Europe during the late middle ages and the beginning of the modern era.<sup>21</sup> This period must be considered, because as Fromm writes:

In this period the economic basis of Western Society underwent radical changes which were accompanied by an equally radical change in the personality structure of man. A new concept of freedom developed then, which found its most significant ideological expression in new religious doctrines, those of the Reformation.<sup>22</sup>

In this formative period of modern man, we can, more clearly than in later periods, come

... to recognize the ambiguous meaning of freedom which was to operate throughout modern culture: on the one hand the growing independence of man from external authorities, on the other hand his growing isolation and the resulting feeling of individual insignificance and powerlessness.<sup>23</sup>

If we want to come to an understanding of these new elements in the personality structure of man, we have to study their origins, in the cultural situation of this period. Dr. Fromm does just this in *Fear of Freedom*, where he analyses the cultural situation of that period. In his analysis, he discovers that the concept of human freedom as it is found in our modern democracy, is rooted in the doctrine of the Reformation and in the rise of capitalism.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Fear of Freedom*, p. 35, where Fromm excludes the medieval era from consideration because at that time the problem of individual freedom had not arisen, since the individual had not yet emerged.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.



As the process of individuation began to make progress and the primary ties which bound man during the medieval ages were severed, a new feeling of freedom arose. And the doctrines proposed by the Protestant reformers, especially by Luther and Calvin, toward the end of the middle ages, were well suited to give concrete expression to this growing sense of freedom. When he developed his doctrine of faith and salvation as subjective, individual experiences, Luther deprived the Church of her authority and gave it to the individual. In his teaching, all responsibility was placed with the individual. In so doing, observes Fromm, Luther gave man independence in the realm of religious matters. And it is in this liberation of man from the authority of the Church, that Fromm sees one source of the development of political and spiritual freedom in modern society.<sup>24</sup>

But, according to Fromm, just as the new theology of the reformers enabled man to acquire more and more "freedom from" the traditional bonds that tied him down, so also did these doctrines give rise to the other side of the problem of freedom, i.e. the isolation and powerlessness of the individual. One of the fundamental assumptions of Luther's teaching, is that man's nature is intrinsically evil and vicious and hence incapable of performing any good deed of itself. Man's nature is not free to choose what is the right, but necessarily directs the will to evil.

The depravity of human nature, according to Luther, could be overcome only by "faith," which was the conviction of being loved by God, based upon the individual's complete surrender and submission to God. In other words, says Fromm:

While Luther freed people from the authority of the Church, he made them submit to a much more tyrannical authority, that of a God who insisted on complete submission of man and annihilation of the individual self as the essential condition of his salvation.<sup>25</sup>

Another source of the contradictory trends in the concept of freedom is found in the rise of capitalism. The social system in the middle ages offered the individual a fixed place in the

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

economic order, a place which he considered natural and unquestionable. The medieval system gave the individual stability and relative security. But towards the end of the middle ages, a spirit of restlessness began to make its presence known and felt. With the economic development of capitalism men became absorbed with the desire for wealth and success. Efficiency was esteemed as one of the highest moral virtues. In a word, already in the sixteenth century, all the decisive elements of the advanced capitalism of today had come into existence and they brought with them their psychological effect on the individual.

One of the most important results of this economic change was the disrupting of the existing social order. The advent of capitalism brought with it changes in all classes of society, changes that affected everyone. And the destruction of the old social system removed the stability and relative security of the old order. The result of this was that an individual no longer had a fixed place in the economic order, he was left more and more on his own, his traditional status no longer offered him security, everything now depended upon his own efforts, in a word, the individual was left alone. In Fromm's analysis, this isolation and loss of security was one of the chief mutations in the psychological atmosphere brought on by the growth of capitalism.<sup>26</sup>

But besides this negative effect, capitalism also brought with it a growth in freedom. For, although in medieval society individuals did not feel alone and isolated, on the other hand, neither were they free in our modern sense of the word. Society was so structuralized that each individual was chained to his role in the social order, it kept him in bondage. This bondage, however, must not be thought of as of the same type which authoritarianism and oppression were to impose on man in later centuries. Because man at this time was still related to the world by his primary bonds or ties, "he conceived of himself as an individual only through the medium of his social (which then was his natural) role."<sup>27</sup> In other words, in medieval so-

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 35; 42-49.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.



ciety, the individual as such did not yet exist. For this reason, since the process of individuation and growth of freedom are intimately correlated, we cannot say that the bondage of medieval society deprived the individual of freedom. Indeed, neither the individual nor freedom existed.

But capitalism broke through the regimentation of the corporate system and enabled the individual to stand on his own feet and try his luck. It made man the master of his fate, so that his was the risk as well as the gain. Through his own efforts, the individual could now achieve success and economic independence. In such a climate, birth and caste began to lose their power and money became the norm of importance. It became the great equalizer.<sup>28</sup>

By freeing the individual then, capitalism also furthered the growth of freedom. As Dr. Fromm describes it:

What Protestantism had started to do in freeing man spiritually, capitalism continued to do mentally, socially and politically. Economic freedom was the basis of this development and the middle class was its champion. In one word, capitalism not only freed man from traditional bonds, but it also contributed tremendously to the increase of positive freedom, to the growth of an active, critical, responsible self.<sup>29</sup>

For Fromm, then, capitalism, like protestantism, is an important source of the twofold trend which characterizes the problem of freedom. As it enabled man to become more and more of an individual, and hence to grow in freedom, it also made this same individual more alone and isolated, filling him with a feeling of insignificance and powerlessness.<sup>30</sup>

According to Fromm's analysis, then, it was the teaching of the Reformation and the rise and growth of capitalism that provided the psychological atmosphere which was conducive to the birth of modern man's concept of freedom, a concept which includes, we recall, contradictory or dialectical trends. As man

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 107-115, for effects of monopolistic capitalism on process of individuation and growth of freedom.

emerges fully as an individual, free from primary ties, he also finds himself completely isolated, alone, anxious and powerless. For Fromm, this aloneness is unbearable and hence individualized man must find a solution to the problem of how he is to be related to the world. Freed from his primary ties, the individual is faced with a new problem, that of orienting and rooting himself and of finding security in other ways than those which were characteristic of his pre-individualistic existence.

Such an individual, who faces the world outside himself as a completely separate entity, can solve this problem in one of two ways. He can proceed to a productive relationship and full realization of positive freedom based upon the uniqueness and individuality of man; or he can try to eliminate the gap that has arisen between his individual self and the world, and hence overcome his aloneness in an unproductive way, by giving up his freedom and escaping into new submissions and dependencies.<sup>31</sup> We shall now consider each of these solutions which Fromm considers open to man; to man, who, though fully an individual and enjoying "freedom from," at the same time is isolated, alone and powerless, and lacking "freedom to."

## II. THE PRODUCTIVE SOLUTION — POSITIVE FREEDOM

From what we have said of Fromm's doctrine so far, it is conceivable that someone might interpret his views on the relationship between the process of growing freedom and that of the isolation and alienation of man, as inevitably leading to a vicious circle, out of which man cannot extricate himself. However, to say this would be to have only a partial understanding of Dr. Fromm's ideas. For there is a way in which man can overcome the unbearable aloneness that seems to accompany growing freedom, without giving up his freedom; a way of becoming one again with man, nature and himself, without losing his individuality. This way is the way of positive freedom.

<sup>31</sup> Fromm gives a succinct and slightly different presentation of the two possible answers in *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1963), pp. 87-93.



whereby man relates himself spontaneously to the world in love and work in the genuine expression of his emotional, sensuous and intellectual capacities.<sup>32</sup> To put it in Dr. Fromm's own words:

We believe that there is a positive answer, that the process of growing freedom does not constitute a vicious circle, and that man can be free and yet not alone, critical and yet not filled with doubts, independent and yet an integral part of mankind.<sup>33</sup>

This answer is positive freedom.

Just what does "positive freedom" mean for Dr. Fromm? First of all we can say that it refers to the opposite of that freedom of which we have been speaking thus far, of "freedom from." It is a "freedom to," i.e. a freedom to develop and make use of all the potentialities and capacities which make man human. It is, in other words, the freedom that man can attain by being himself, by the full realization of his self. For Dr. Fromm, this realization of the self is accomplished by the realization of man's total personality, by the active expression of his emotional and intellectual potentialities. And, in so far as positive freedom implies the realization of the self, it also implies the full affirmation of the uniqueness of the individual.

The genuine growth of the self is an organic process, based upon a particular nucleus that is peculiar to this one person and to him alone. This is so, because men, though born equal, are also born different. This difference stems from the different physiological and mental equipment they inherit at birth, and is increased by the various sets of circumstances and experiences that they meet with in the process of living.<sup>34</sup> As each individual unfolds his emotional and intellectual potentialities, he gives birth to his self, he realizes himself. And for Fromm, "this respect for and cultivation of the uniqueness of the self is the most valuable achievement of human culture..."<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Fromm, *Fear of Freedom*, p. 120.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 227-228.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 227-228.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228; cf. also, *Man for Himself*, pp. 91-92.

The potentialities which man must express actively if he is to realize his self, are present in everybody. However, they do not become real unless they are actually expressed. "In other words," writes Fromm, "positive freedom consists in the spontaneous activity of the total, integrated personality."<sup>36</sup>

With this statement, we are led to a further insight into "positive freedom." For it, i.e. positive freedom, is the realization of the self through spontaneous activity. And, in speaking of spontaneity, says Fromm, we touch upon one of the most difficult problems of psychology.<sup>37</sup>

This spontaneous activity which Fromm sees as the answer to the problem of freedom, is not to be confused with compulsive activity "to which the individual is driven by his isolation and powerlessness;" nor is it the activity of an automaton that flows from the uncritical adoption of patterns suggested from the outside. In Fromm's words, it is, "free activity of the self and implies psychologically, what the Latin root of the word, sponte, means literally; of one's free will."<sup>38</sup> Activity here, also has a definite meaning. Fromm uses the word in the sense of "the quality of creative activity that can operate in one's emotional, intellectual and sensuous experiences and in one's will as well." This is to say that activity is not to be taken in the sense of "doing something." Before such spontaneous activity is possible, however, the different spheres of life must have reached a fundamental integration, so that this activity is the expression of the total personality.<sup>39</sup>

For Fromm, it is only through such spontaneous activity, through the spontaneous realization of the self, that man can unite himself anew with the world, with man and with himself. And only when he does this, can man overcome the terror of aloneness that comes from negative freedom alone, without sacrificing the integrity of his self.

A deeper analysis of this spontaneity makes us aware of its principal components. The foremost component is love. But not the type of love in which a person dissolves his self in

<sup>36</sup> Fromm, *Fear of Freedom*, p. 222.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*



another person, but rather, "love as a spontaneous affirmation of others, as the union of this individual self with others on the basis of the preservation of the individual self."<sup>40</sup> The other component is work. But again, work must be understood in its proper sense. It is neither a compulsive activity engaged in to escape from aloneness; nor is it the type of work which seeks to dominate nature and at the same time enslaves man to the product of his hands. It is rather, "work as creation in which man becomes one with nature in the act of creation." In this sense work is man's liberator from nature and also his creator as a social and individual being. By mastering nature, man emerges from nature, and the more his work develops, the more his individuality develops.<sup>41</sup>

What has been said of work and love, is true of all spontaneous activity, namely, that it affirms the individuality of the self and at the same time it unites the self with man and nature. And it is precisely because of this that spontaneous activity, or positive freedom, solves the problem of freedom. For, "the basic dichotomy that is inherent in freedom — the birth of individuality and the pain of aloneness — is dissolved on a higher plane by man's spontaneous action."<sup>42</sup>

Positive freedom, then, as we have seen, implies the full realization of the self through spontaneous activity. One other aspect of positive freedom must now also be noted, an aspect which follows from what has just been said. As the realization of the self through spontaneous activity, positive freedom also implies the principle that there is no higher power than this unique individual self. In other words, man is the center and sole purpose of his life, and "the growth and realization of man's individuality is an end that can never be subordinated to purposes which are supposed to have greater dignity."<sup>43</sup>

What we have presented thus far, has been based for the most part, on the ideas which Fromm proposed in *Fear of Freedom*, his first published book. In his later works, especially in

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225; cf. also p. 138; also *The Sane Society*, pp. 30-31; and *The Art of Loving*, pp. 13-33.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *The Sane Society*, pp. 177-182.

<sup>42</sup> Fromm, *Fear of Freedom*, p. 225.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228; cf. also *Man for Himself*, pp. 149-150.

*Man for Himself* and in *The Sane Society*, he evolves the same basic doctrine as he considers the various character orientations. For him, freedom is founded in the productive orientation of a person's personality. Following Spinoza, he asserts that "freedom and blessedness consist in man's understanding of himself and his effort to become that which he potentially is."<sup>44</sup> Productiveness, then, is man's ability to realize the potentialities inherent in him and to use his powers. Productiveness is an attitude which every human being is capable of, unless he is mentally and emotionally crippled. Indeed, man has a natural tendency to make productive use of his powers.

Distiguishing between "power-domination" and "power-capacity," Dr. Fromm calls man's ability to make productive use of his powers, his potency.<sup>45</sup> Man can lose his power-potency, by submitting to power-domination, i.e. submitting to another, for by so doing he loses his power to make use of all those capacities which make him truly human. By submitting to the combination of threat and promise aroused by power-domination, man's reason ceases to operate, he loses his power to love and his moral senses, so that he becomes prey to prejudice and superstition. It follows then that freedom is one of the necessary factors conducive to the productive use of man's powers.<sup>46</sup> "Freedom," however, "not in the sense of the ability to make arbitrary choices and not freedom from necessity, but freedom to realize that which one potentially is, to fulfill the true nature of man according to the laws of his existence."<sup>47</sup>

In *The Sane Society* Dr. Fromm describes the productive orientation which, as we have mentioned, is the source of freedom, strength and happiness, as:

... the active and creative relatedness of man to his fellow man, to himself and to nature. In the realm of thought, this productive orientation is expressed in the proper grasp of the world of reason. In the realm of action, the productive orientation is expressed in pro-

<sup>44</sup> Fromm, *Man for Himself*, p. 93.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88, 245-247; also *The Heart of Man*, p. 31.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *Man For Himself*, p. 84.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 247; cf. also p. 107.



ductive work, the prototype of which is art and craftsmanship. In the realms of feeling, the productive orientation is expressed in love, which is the experience of union with another person, with all men and with nature, under the condition of retaining one's sense of integrity and independence.<sup>48</sup>

In his essay, "The Revolutionary Character," in *The Dogma of Christ*, Fromm unites the two notions of freedom and productiveness. He writes:

Full freedom and independence exist only when the individual thinks, feels and decides for himself. He can do so authentically only when he has reached a productive relatedness to the world outside himself, which permits him to respond authentically.<sup>49</sup>

Then, after stating that this concept of freedom is to be found in the thought of the radical mystics as well as in that of Marx, Fromm observes that, "Independence and freedom are the realization of individuality, not only emancipation from coercion nor freedom in commercial matters." And continuing, he writes,

<sup>48</sup> Fromm, *The Sane Society*, p. 32. In *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1963), pp. 116-117, Fromm describes the productive orientation in the following terms: "The full awakening to reality means, again speaking in psychological terms, to have attained a fully 'productive orientation.' That means not to relate oneself to the world receptively, exploitatively, hoardingly, or in the marketing fashion, but creatively, actively (in Spinoza's sense). In the state of full productiveness there are no veils which separate me from the 'not me'. The object is not an object any more; it does not stand against me, but is with me. The rose I see is not an object for my thought, in the manner that when I say 'I see a rose' I only state that the object, a rose, falls under the category 'rose', but in the manner that 'a rose is a rose is a rose.' The state of productiveness is at the same time the state of highest objectivity; I see the object without distortions by my greed and fear. I see it as it or he is, not as I wish it or him to be or not to be. In this mode of perception there are no parataxic distortions. There is complete aliveness, and the synthesis is of subjectivity — objectivity. I experience intensely — yet the object is left to be what it is. I bring it to life — and it brings me to life."

<sup>49</sup> Fromm, "The Revolutionary Character," *The Dogma of Christ*, p. 110.

"the problem of each individual is precisely that of the level of freedom he has reached. The fully awakened, productive man is a free man because he can live authentically, his own self being the source of his life."<sup>50</sup>

In *The Heart of Man*, his latest work, Dr. Fromm proposes this same basic idea, but in a different setting. Observing that conflict with independence and integrity is a pathological symptom of incestuous fixations, he continues in the following fashion:

The person bound to mother and tribe is not free to be himself, to have a conviction of his own, to be committed. He cannot be open to the world, nor can he embrace it; he is always in the prison of the motherly racial-national-religious fixation. Man is only fully born, and thus free to move forward and to become himself to the degree to which he liberates himself from all forms of incestuous fixations.<sup>51</sup>

To sum up, one way in which man can attempt to solve the problem of the intolerable aloneness that accompanies his freedom from primary ties, is the productive way which leads to positive freedom. By achieving the realization of his self through spontaneous activity, man grows in positive freedom to become all that he is potentially. And, because in this process, man enters upon a new relatedness to himself, other men and the world — a relatedness based upon the individuality and integrity of his self — Fromm sees it as the only valid solution to man's problem of freedom.<sup>52</sup>

### III. THE NON-PRODUCTIVE SOLUTION — ESCAPE FROM FREEDOM

In his whole approach to the problem of freedom as he sees it, while stressing the psychological side freedom, Dr. Fromm at the same time in very clear in his affirmation that the psycho-

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 110-111.

<sup>51</sup> Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, p. 107.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Fromm, *Fear of Freedom*, p. 28.





logical problem cannot be separated from the material basis of human existence, namely from the economic, social and political structure of society. In other words, the realization of positive freedom and individualism is necessarily tied up with the economic and social conditions that permit the individual to become free in terms of the realization of his self.<sup>53</sup> It follows from this premise, that if the economic, social and political conditions on which the whole process of human individuation and freedom depends, do not offer a basis for the realization of individuality, there can be no progress to positive freedom, no growth of "freedom to." Where such a situation exists together with an advanced stage of "freedom from," i.e. severance from all the primary ties that gave man security, there arises a situation which forces men to seek an unproductive solution to the problem of freedom.

Indeed, where the economic, social and political conditions impede the growth of self-realization, of positive freedom, or "freedom to," (as e.g. in authoritarian states), those people who have already achieved "freedom from," or negative freedom, to a considerable degree, are faced with an overpowering problem which they must solve if they are to remain sane. Having lost the security and relatedness of their primary ties, they are not able to enter into new productive relationships with themselves, with others and the world. Having acquired "freedom from," they are not able to progress to "freedom to." And this lag between negative freedom and positive freedom makes the freedom they already have an unbearable burden.

Negative freedom, taken alone, without the possibility to progress to positive freedom, becomes identical with doubt. And this irrational doubt will not and cannot disappear until men progress to positive freedom.<sup>54</sup> Negative freedom alone be-

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 66-67, where Fromm explains that doubt remains one of the basic problems of modern man. "Doubt," he writes, "is the starting point of modern philosophy; the need to silence it had a most powerful stimulus on the development of modern philosophy and science. But although many rational doubts have been solved by rational answers, the irrational doubt has not disappeared and cannot disappear as long as man has not progressed from negative to positive freedom. The modern

comes identical with isolation, aloneness and uncertainty, with a kind of life which lacks meaning and direction. Powerful tendencies arise in man to overcome this state of isolation. But when the economic, social and political conditions prevent man from pursuing the productive solution discussed above, he has only one course left open to him, that of escaping from this kind of freedom by giving it up. Since man can never return to that relatedness to the world which he had before he emerged as an "individual," and since he can never reverse the fact of his separateness, he must escape from it; for a prolongation of this unerable situation would make life impossible.<sup>55</sup>

And so, he escapes from the burden of this freedom into new kinds of dependencies and submission. He escapes into relationships with man and the world which promise him relief from uncertainty, while at the same time depriving him of freedom.

According to Fromm, this course of escape is "like every escape from threatening panic." In other words, it is characterized by its compulsive character, whether this be a compulsive striving for success or a compulsive submission to a leader who assumes the responsibility, for "certainty," or compulsive conforming.

This inability to bear the isolation and weakness of one's individual self drives men into symbiotic relationships. In Fromm's writings, symbiosis is taken in the psychological sense

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attempts to silence it, whether they consist in a compulsive striving for success, in the belief that unlimited knowledge of facts can answer the quest for certainty, or in the submission to a leader who assumes the responsibility for 'certainty' — all these solutions can only eliminate the awareness of doubt. The doubt itself will not disappear as long as man does not overcome his isolation and as long as his place in the world has not become a meaningful one in terms of his human needs."

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 24. In an interesting observation, Christian Bay in *The Structure of Freedom*, p. 167, suggests that Fromm's thesis that the lack of belongingness of our age of individualism creates strains that make many men search for an escape from freedom, was perhaps anticipated in Kierkegaard's view of anxiety as being the "dizziness of freedom." Kierkegaard saw such terrible uncertainties facing the individual who ceased to take himself and his course of life for granted that he wrote, "To exist as an individual is the most terrible thing of all."



and “means the union of one individual self with another self (or any other power outside of the own self) in such a way as to make each lose the integrity of its own self and to make them completely dependent on each other.”<sup>56</sup> Among the prime examples of such symbiotic relationships are the masochistic and sadistic trends that are found in people.<sup>57</sup>

This running away from freedom, then is also characterized by the more or less complete surrender of individuality and the integrity of the self. For, by submitting himself to power and authorities who dominate him, he loses his “potency,” his ability to use those powers that make him human. His escape into new submissions solves an unbearable anxiety and makes life possible by avoiding panic; but it does this only at the price of happiness and positive freedom.

The authority of which Fromm here speaks is what he calls irrational authority. This type of authority is always power over people, be it physical or mental. It is always built upon this power on the one hand, and on fear on the other. By its very nature, this irrational authority is based upon inequality, an inequality that implies a difference in value between individuals, an inequality that places in the authority certain powers which make him fundamentally superior to his subjects since these powers are unattainable by them.

By running from freedom into submission to such an authority, man develops an authoritarian character, an authoritarian conscience which is the “voice of an internalized external authority, the parents, the state or whoever the authorities in a culture happen to be.”<sup>58</sup> As an individual becomes more and more entrenched in this authoritarian character, he feels more and more dependent on powers that transcend him so that his very productiveness and his efforts to assert his will give rise to feelings of guilt within him.

One of the implications of this crippling of his productiveness is that such an individual begins to develop a certain amount of sadism and destructiveness, energies which he

<sup>56</sup> Fromm, *Fear of Freedom*, p. 136; cf. also *The Heart of Man*, p. 104.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *Man for Himself*, pp. 107-108.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144.

discharges by taking over the role of authority and dominating himself. The results of this are vividly described by Fromm in *Man for Himself*:

What matters is the fact that the authoritarian conscience is fed by destructiveness against the person's own self so that destructive strivings are thus permitted to operate under the disguise of virtue. Psychoanalytic exploration, especially of the obsessional character, reveals the degree of cruelty and destructiveness conscience sometimes has, and how it enables one to act out the lingering hate by turning it against oneself. Freud has convincingly demonstrated the correctness of Nietzsche's thesis that the blockage of freedom turns man's instincts — backward against man himself. Enmity, cruelty, the delight in persecution, in surprise, change, destruction — the turning of all these instincts against their own possessors: this is the origin of the ‘bad conscience.’ ”<sup>59</sup>

In our own day and age, submission to authority is even more subtle, for authority has changed its character. Today authority is no longer overt, but anonymous, invisible, alienated authority. The authority to which the escapee from freedom submits is neither a person, an idea nor a moral law. As Fromm puts it:

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? Who can rebel against Nobody?<sup>60</sup>

It is through conformity to such an authority that man, as he escapes from freedom, tries to solve the problem of his alienation.

Such a solution, however, which Fromm says is, in principle, to be found in all neurotic phenomena,<sup>61</sup> does not get to the core

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>60</sup> Fromm, *The Sane Society*, pp. 152-153.

<sup>61</sup> For a full treatment of the role of irrational authority in society and of its basic relationship with the origin of neurosis, see Fromm, “Individual



of the problem of freedom, which still remains unsolved. Indeed, the type of life to which it leads is one of automatic and compulsive activities.<sup>62</sup>

It is the theme of most of Dr. Fromm's writings that the economic, social and political conditions of our modern society are such that man for the most part, is forced to take the non-productive way of solving the problem of freedom. Indeed, it was his great concern for the dangers which the political developments of the 1930's-1940's held for individuality and uniqueness, that made him undertake the writing of his first book, *Fear of Freedom*.<sup>63</sup>

But although this is true of our modern culture, says Fromm, it has not been true of every culture. In any detailed analysis of European and American history from the Reformation to our own day, we can see that the "two contradictory trends inherent in the evolution of 'freedom from to freedom to' run parallel, or rather are continuously interwoven."<sup>64</sup> Dr. Fromm means by this that in certain periods and in certain social groups, human freedom in the sense of strength and dignity of the self was the dominant factor. This was the case, for example, in the economic and political victories which the middle class in England, France, America and Germany won over the representatives of an older order.<sup>65</sup>

and Social Origins of Neurosis," Clyde Kluckhohn and Henry Murray, editors, *Personality in Nature, Society and Culture*, (second edition; London: Jonathan Cape, 1953), pp. 515-521.

Fromm has always considered the root or kernel of neurosis to be found in the individual's struggle for freedom and independence. He sees the essence of Freud's Oedipus Complex as consisting in the natural reaction or rebellion of a child to the pressure of parental authority. And it is in the child's unsatisfactory solution of this conflict between his spontaneity and independence, and the pressure of parental authority that lies at the roots of neurosis. Cf. *Fear of Freedom*, p. 153; and *Man for Himself*, p. 157.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Fromm, *Fear of Freedom*, pp. 28, 120-12; *Man for Himself*, p. 86; "The Revolutionary Character," *The Dogma of Christ*, p. 109.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. *Fear of Freedom*, p. IX.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105; Fromm also considers the presence of these two trends in philosophical thought, pp. 105-106.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

However, while the process of individuation, begun at the end of the middle ages, seems, in our own day to be approaching its goal of the full emergence of the individual, the rise of monopolistic capitalism during the last decades, reversed the trend so that those factors which tend to weaken the individual self have gained, and those which strengthen the individual have relatively lost in weight. In other words, while in many respects the individual has grown, has developed mentally and emotionally, while his freedom from all traditional bonds has become more pronounced, there has been no corresponding increase in the possibilities for the positive realization of his freedom and individuality. The possibilities for individual economic achievement have been so narrowed down that man "feels himself threatened by gigantic forces and the situation resembles in many ways that of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries."<sup>66</sup>

There has been a growing disproportion between "freedom from" and "freedom to." The lag between these two freedoms has increased man's aloneness, fear and bewilderment. Unable to bear the burden of this "freedom from" forever, man is forced to try to escape from freedom altogether, if he cannot progress from negative to positive freedom. In panic he flees from freedom into new ties or at least into complete indifference.

In our own era, the principal social avenues of escape from "freedom from," are the submission to a leader or authority and power, as has happened in Fascist countries, and the compulsive conforming that is prevalent in our democracy.<sup>67</sup>

In the course of Western history, man, in his struggle for freedom, has succeeded in overthrowing all external domination, be it of nature, of the Church or of the absolutist state. It would appear then, that in our Western democracy we have attained the ultimate victory for freedom. But this, according to Fromm, is a false picture, for new systems have arisen which effectively took command of man's entire social and personal life, so that all but a handful of men had to submit to an authority over which they had no control.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106; cf. also p. 52-53.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 28, 109-115.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 2-3.



As Dr. Fromm states so clearly in *Man for Himself*:

Indeed, the freedom attained in modern democracy implies a promise for the development of man which is absent in any kind of dictatorship, regardless of their proclamations that they act in man's interest. But it is a promise only, and not yet a fulfillment... we ignore the fact that we too bow down to power, not that of a dictator and a political bureaucracy allied with him, but to the anonymous power of the market, of success, of public opinion, of "common sense" — or rather, of common nonsense, and of the machine whose servants we have become.<sup>69</sup>

In conforming to these anonymous authorities, man adopts a pseudo self which is not his own. The more he does this, the less does he realize his real self, the more powerless he feels, and hence, the more is he forced to conform. Man's efforts to escape from this negative freedom do not restore his lost security, but only help him to forget his self as a separate entity. Since he cannot stand being alone, he chooses to lose his self and to enter into new bondage.<sup>70</sup>

To sum up what we have been saying in this section, it is Dr. Fromm's opinion, indeed one that he evolves in all his works, that the socio-economic and political situation of our Western culture, particularly since the rise of monopolistic capitalism, is such that the character structure and personality of modern man disposes him to seek a non-productive solution to the problem of freedom. Because the process of individuation proceeds automatically, whereas the growth of the self depends on various social and individual conditions, a great disproportion has developed between "freedom from" and "freedom to." This growing separation from the world and all that gave man security and reassurance, without the corresponding growth of the possibility to achieve self realization through spontaneous activity, has placed man in an unbearable condition of isolation, alienation,

<sup>69</sup> Fromm, *Man for Himself*, pp. 247-248.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Fromm, *Fear of Freedom*, pp. 3, 220, where Fromm speaks of the danger in such a situation for democracy.

aloneness. And since man cannot long remain in this state of uncertainty and doubt, he is forced to overcome it in the only way the socio-economic situation of his culture allows him, namely, by escaping from this "freedom from" into new dependencies and submissions. In so doing, man does overcome his aloneness and isolation, but only by sacrificing his freedom and the integrity of his self.

#### IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION OF CHAPTER

In this chapter, we have considered one aspect of Dr. Fromm's concept of freedom. We have tried to present his doctrine of freedom, understood as "an attitude, orientation, part of the character structure of the mature, fully developed, productive person..." A freedom which for Fromm, "has no reference to a special choice between two possible actions, but to the character structure of the person involved."<sup>71</sup>

The problem of freedom, understood in this sense, stems from the dialectical or contradictory trends that Fromm finds in the very notion of freedom. As man, in the course of his evolution, emerges as an individual, he at the same time, grows in freedom. But this freedom is a negative one, a freedom from those ties that limit the growth of his self. As man grows in this freedom, he realizes that in severing the ties that bound him to nature, to fatherland and to family, he also deprived himself of the security and certainty and sense of belonging which these bonds gave him. He found himself face to face with the problem of freedom, i.e. with the unbearable isolation and aloneness that is consequent upon the increase of "freedom from." And because this situation, if prolonged, would make life impossible he must seek a solution.

Two ways of solving this problem are open to man. One, which Fromm calls the productive solution, progresses from negative "freedom from," to positive "freedom to." Man achieves this solution through the realization of his self in

<sup>71</sup> Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, p. 132.



spontaneous activity. For Fromm, this is the only solution possible, which assures man his freedom and at the same time overcomes the isolation concomitant with the growth of freedom. And this is so, because by his spontaneous activity, man enters upon a new relationship with the world, other men and himself, a relationship that is based upon his individuality and the integrity of his self.

However, since positive freedom cannot be separated from the material basis of man's existence, it is possible that the economic, social and political structure of a given society will not be favorable to, and in fact, will impede the realization of the self, and hence make it impossible for man to solve his problem by progressing from negative to positive freedom.

Where this situation obtains, man has only one other way open to him for solving his problem of aloneness. And this is the non-productive solution, wherein man escapes from the burden of negative "freedom from," into new dependencies and submissions. He solves the immediate problem of his anxiety and doubt, by surrendering his freedom and losing the integrity of his self. In reality this second solution is no solution at all, for it has solved one aspect of the problem of freedom, but only at the expense of the other. By submitting himself to authority, whether it be external, such as the absolutist or totalitarian state; anonymous, such as public opinion, success, common sense; or internal (which is in reality internalized external authority) such as duty, conscience or super-ego, man enters into a state of bondage which deprives him of his self and of his freedom.<sup>72</sup>

For Dr. Fromm, then, there is only one possible solution to the problem of freedom, and that is the productive one. Since, however, progress to positive freedom does depend upon the proper conditions existing in the socio-economic and political structure of society, man will have to bring about "changes in this area, to enable him to proceed to positive freedom." And for Fromm, this is a pressing necessity of our modern society. For, monopolistic capitalism is producing men who are alienated from themselves, from others and from the world; it is produc-

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<sup>72</sup> Fromm, *Fear of Freedom*, pp. 84, 144.

ing men who are automatons and who are more than willing to give up their freedom.<sup>73</sup>

It might seem that in Fromm's doctrine man cannot effect such a change in the social process, since he himself is a product of it. However, Fromm explicitly states that although man's passions, desires and anxieties change and develop as a result of the social process, on the other hand, man's energies thus shaped into specific forms, in their turn become productive forces which mold the social process. It is, in fact, precisely this that makes man man, that although he is made by history, because of his reason, he in turn also makes history.<sup>74</sup>

As we mentioned earlier, it is with freedom in the sense of character structure that Dr. Fromm occupies himself in most of his works and writings. However, he also considers freedom in another sense, as signifying a capacity to make a choice between two alternatives. It is to his concept of freedom in this more traditional sense that we now turn our attention in the next chapter.

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, pp. 196-197.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, pp. 30-31.



CHAPTER IV  
FREEDOM AS CAPACITY TO CHOOSE

I. STATE OF THE QUESTION — THE PROBLEM

It is our intention in this chapter to examine Dr. Fromm's writings to discover his treatment of freedom understood now in the more traditional sense of freedom of choice. Although he does not attempt a complete treatment of the problem as such until his most recent work, *The Heart of Man*, this is not to say that in his previous works he has ignored the problem.

In *Fear of Freedom*, as we have seen, Fromm's primary concern was with the problem of socio-psychological freedom, with the socio-economic and political conditions which made man want to escape from freedom. However, he does occasionally refer to man's ability to will and to make decisions. Against the backdrop of his doctrine that man submits himself to authority in order to overcome his isolation, Dr. Fromm considers, in passing, decision making.

In order to call one's decision one's own, it is not enough that a person be not overtly forced by an outside power to do something. According to Fromm, most people are convinced that their decisions are their own simply because they are not subjected to any external force or pressure. However, he writes:

... this is one of the great illusions we have about ourselves. A great number of our decisions are not really our own but are suggested to us from the outside: we have succeeded in persuading ourselves that it is we who have made the decision, whereas we have actually conformed with expectations of others, driven by the fear of isola-



tion and by more direct threats to our life, freedom and comfort.<sup>1</sup>

Fromm's observations with regard to freedom of choice are limited in this work, to exposing the illusion that many have of making their own decisions. In observing the phenomenon of human decision in our society, Fromm "is struck by the extent to which people are mistaken in taking as 'their' decisions what in effect is submission to convention, duty or simple pressure."<sup>2</sup> He goes so far as to say that an "original decision" is a comparatively rare phenomenon in our society.

Seeing the problem of free choice as being intimately linked up with the problem of authority, Fromm points out that people today think they do what they want because they have thrown off the shackles of external, overt authority. However, they do not realize that although they have liberated themselves from the authority of Church and State, they have unknowingly become the prey of a new kind of authority, that of their conscience, of common sense and public opinion, which are instruments of conformity. While living under the illusion that they are self-willing individuals, in reality they have become automatons who think, feel and will what they believe they are supposed to think, feel and will.<sup>3</sup>

Whereas in his first work, Dr. Fromm merely noted that in our society most people live under the illusion of being free in making decisions, in *Man for Himself*, he considers free will as man's capacity to make decisions, at greater length. In this work, which is perhaps his most ambitious undertaking, he shows himself to be, basically, an ethicist, i.e. to be deeply concerned with the basic problem of all morality, the purpose of human existence. As he evolves his doctrine of the relationship between psychology and ethics he comes to the problem of the moral judgment of a person. And it is in this setting that he once again considers the problem of free will and determinism.

<sup>1</sup> Fromm, *Fear of Freedom*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1960), p. 172.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 218-219.

In discussing the problem of how a person is to be judged morally, of what criteria are to be used in a moral evaluation of a person's action, Dr. Fromm observes that this problem "is frequently associated with that of freedom of will vs. determinism."<sup>4</sup> If the freedom that man thinks he has in making a decision, is only an illusion, as the determinists hold, then man cannot be judged for his actions, since he is not free in making his decisions. On the other hand, if man has the faculty of free will which he can exercise regardless of psychological or external conditions and circumstances, then he is responsible for his actions and hence can be judged by them.

As he pursues his inquiry into the moral judgments of persons, Dr. Fromm necessarily also presents his own position with regard to the free will vs. determinism problem. "It would seem," writes Fromm, "that the psychologist is compelled to subscribe to determinism." By way of defending this statement, he explains that in studying character development the psychologist recognizes that the child starts his life in an indifferent moral state." He recognizes further that the external influences which shape the child's character are most powerful in the early years of his life, i.e. precisely "when he has neither the knowledge nor the power to change the circumstances which determine his character." Further, when the child reaches an age where "he might attempt to change the conditions under which he lives, his character is already formed and he lacks the incentive to investigate these conditions and to change them, if necessary."<sup>5</sup>

In order to avoid what appears to be the logical conclusion of the determinist position, namely that the more insight we have into the conditions responsible for the formation of a person's character and its dynamism, the more inevitable seems the opinion that no person can be morally judged, Fromm considers, and rejects, the position proposed by adherents of the free will theory.

Granting that there are circumstances in the lives of people which make the exercise of free will impossible, for example

<sup>4</sup> Fromm, *Man for Himself*, p. 231.

<sup>5</sup> All quotations in this paragraph are from *ibid.*, p. 231.



insanity (and for proponents of a modified theory of free will, even neurosis), and hence preclude any moral judgment, the proponents of free will nevertheless maintain that most people do have the freedom to act well if they want to and are consequently able to be judged morally.

What is of interest to our purpose is the reason which Dr. Fromm puts forward for saying that this view is also untenable. "We are prone to believe," he writes, "that we act freely because, as Spinoza has already suggested, we are aware of our wishes but unaware of their motivations."<sup>6</sup> We are, in other words, under the illusion of acting freely, whereas in reality the true motivations of our actions are determined.

Still concerned with the problem of moral judgment, Fromm next elaborates, to a limited extent, what he means by saying that our decisions are determined. As could have been surmised from what was presented in a previous chapter where Fromm's notion of character was discussed, he sees the motives of our decisions as being the result of a particular mixture of forces operating in our character. Every decision that is made, then, is determined by the particular forces that are dominant in a person's character structure, be they good or evil forces. Knowledge of a person's character and of the prevailing standards of value, are sufficient to predict the outcome of their decisions, when one particular force is overwhelmingly dominant. This is true even though the persons concerned have the "illusion" of having decided "freely."

However, according to Fromm, not all character structures have such an obvious predominance of one force over another, but rather the destructive and constructive forces are so balanced that the decisions of such persons are not empirically predictable. Only in such cases can we say that such a person could have acted differently. But even then, this "could have acted differently" for Dr. Fromm means only that the person's actions could not have been predicted, and nothing more. The actions of such a person are just as determined as those which are predictable, for, the person's "decisions," says Fromm show:

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 232.

... that one set of forces was stronger than the other and hence that even in this case his decision was determined by his character. Therefore, if his character had been different, he would have acted differently, but again strictly according to the structure of his character.<sup>7</sup>

It is obvious that in such a concept, the will becomes nothing more than the expression of a person's character. It is not an abstract power of man which he possesses apart from his character."<sup>8</sup> Dr. Fromm adheres to this view fully.

Lest the opinions which he presents in *Man for Himself* be considered "fatalistic," Dr. Fromm hastens to give another insight into his understanding of determinism. Although man, like other creatures, is subject to forces which determine him, unlike other creatures, he alone is endowed with reason and conscience, faculties which enable man to change and influence forces inside and outside himself, and to control, at least to some extent, the conditions which play upon him.

It is clear that in Fromm's thought, both reason and conscience have a very precise and technical meaning, which he takes great pains to develop and clarify. It is beyond our purpose to examine minutely these two notions. We shall content ourselves with a brief definition of each while referring the reader to Fromm's own works for a greater elaboration of these concepts.

Reason is the faculty whereby man penetrates beyond the unreality of most of the ideas that he holds, to discover their essence, their hidden relationships and deeper meanings.<sup>9</sup> It enables man to understand the very forces he is subjected to and because of this understanding, to take an active part in his own fate, and to strengthen those elements which strive for the good. Conscience for Fromm, must be taken not in its

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 233.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> For a fuller treatment of Fromm's concept of reason, cf. *Man for Himself*, pp. 45, 84, 102-103, 233; *The Sane Society*, pp. 22-24, 64, 170; *Sigmund Freud's Mission*, p. 8; *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, p. 194. Cf. also *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, pp. 91-92, where Fromm equates the full development of reason with the state of well-being.





authoritarian sense, i.e. as the internalization of external authority and social demands, but rather in its humanistic sense, as the voice which calls man back to himself and lets him know what he should do in order to become himself. It helps man keep aware of the aims of his life and of the norms necessary for the attainment of these aims.<sup>10</sup>

Reason and conscience, then, as understood in Fromm's view, enable man to take an active part in his life and hence not be a helpless victim of circumstances. But even reason and conscience are inseparably linked with a person's character, so that if destructive forces and irrational passions are the dominant forces in a person's character, then both reason and conscience are affected and can not function properly. In other words, according to Dr. Fromm:

... they (reason and conscience) are not free and undetermined and they do not exist apart from our empirical self; they are forces within the structure of our total personality and, like every part of a structure, determined by the structure as a whole and determining it.<sup>11</sup>

This is the extent to which Dr. Fromm develops his own notion of free will-determinism in *Man for Himself*. He asserts his acceptance of determinism and at the same time denies that his position is fatalistic. For the sake of completeness, we might mention that the problem of moral judgement, which occasioned Fromm's treatment of free will in this work, is resolved by him by saying that the position which holds that ethical judgement of a person must be based upon our knowledge that he could have acted differently, is founded on false premises and on confusion about the meaning of judgment.<sup>12</sup>

In one of his more recent publications, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, Fromm once more approaches the problem of freedom of choice. In a series of short paragraphs at the end of this

<sup>10</sup> For a fuller treatment of Fromm's concept of conscience cf. especially, *Fear of Freedom*, pp. 84, 144; *Man for Himself*, 142-172, 233; *The Sane Society*, pp. 28, 173; "Medicine and the Ethical Problems of Modern Man," *The Dogma of Christ*, p. 119.

<sup>11</sup> Fromm, *Man for Himself*, p. 234.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 234 ff.

work, Dr. Fromm sets out to put down in a clear and succinct manner, his "credo." In one of these statements, he treats of freedom of choice. Once again he places it in the context of man's moral life. "I believe," he writes, "that man's basic alternative is the choice between life and death. Every act implies this choice. Man is free to make it, but this freedom is a limited one."<sup>13</sup>

The life and death of which he speaks, are not biological states, but rather states of being, of relating to the world. "Life means constant change, constant birth. Death means cessation of growth, ossification, repetition." Man's basic choice is between these two states of being. Although man's freedom in the face of this choice is a limited one since:

There are many favorable and unfavorable conditions which incline him — his psychological constitution, the condition of the specific society into which he is born, his family, teacher, and the friends he meets and chooses — nevertheless it is his task to keep on increasing the margin of freedom, and to strengthen those conditions which are conducive to life as against those which are conducive to death.<sup>14</sup>

Fromm's observation is that too many people never make this basic choice, and hence live a life that becomes burdensome and aimless.

As we have seen thus far, in his earlier writings, Dr. Fromm has not come face to face with the problem of freedom of choice as such. Although he has, especially in *Man for Himself*, given us the broad outlines of his position, it is not until *The Heart of Man* that he turns his intellectual powers to this problem in se. In the final chapter of this book, entitled "Freedom, Determinism, Alternativism," Fromm gives us his appraisal of and his solution to the problem of freedom of choice.

As in most of his other writings, so also here, Fromm is primarily interested in finding the answer to the question of man's existence. And, as a convinced humanist, he sees that the

<sup>13</sup> Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, p. 190.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*



only possible answer to man's existence is man himself. In *Man for Himself* he developed at length an objective humanistic ethic whose norms are based not on revelation, nor on man-made laws and conventions, but on a knowledge of human nature. In an attempt to develop further the ideas already mentioned in his earlier works, in his latest work, Dr. Fromm considers man's nature, or essence, and whether or not man, of himself, is good or evil.

From what has been presented in the second chapter of this dissertation, we know that for Fromm, man's nature consists in a "contradiction inherent in human existence" and the need for an answer to this contradiction. Basically, there are only two possible answers available to man, a regressive one, which leads to death, and a progressive one which leads to life. Now all of these facts have an important bearing on the problem of freedom of choice, for:

... aside from the extreme cases, each individual and each group of individuals can at any given point regress to the most irrational and destructive orientations and also progress toward the enlightened and progressive orientation.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, for Fromm, "man is neither good nor evil."

Once he has arrived at this conclusion, Dr. Fromm necessarily has to consider the problem of freedom of choice, for the foregoing considerations lead him to ask whether "man is free to choose the good at any given moment, or has he no such freedom of choice because he is determined by forces inside and outside himself?"<sup>16</sup> Having set the problem in its overall context, Fromm now proceeds to consider it in detail. And, as he mentions in his foreword, his continuing clinical experience, together with his own theoretical speculations have brought him to a deeper understanding of freedom, an understanding we can assume he expresses in this most recent formulation of his thought.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, p. 123.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13, 124.

We believe that the brief background material we have just presented is essential to an understanding of Fromm's thought. Now that the stage has been set, we turn our attention to his own doctrine. In his treatment of the question of freedom of the will, Fromm first sets out to correct the main faults of the traditional way of considering the problem. For him the most significant fault is the lack of using empirical and psychological data, which lack leads to discussing the problem in general and abstract terms. By basing his considerations on psychoanalytic experience, Fromm hopes to avoid this error.

As he did in *Man for Himself*, Fromm introduces his own theory by presenting first, a short exposition of the traditional treatment of the problem. First he considers determinism, which holds that man's decisions at any given moment are caused by external and internal events which occurred before; and therefore that man is not free to choose.<sup>18</sup> Then he presents what he considers to be the most cogent arguments of the opponents of determinism. He summarizes the position of those who defend freedom of choice by presenting three arguments: (1) "it is argued on religious grounds that God gave man the freedom to choose between good and evil — hence that man has this freedom;" (2) "it is argued that man is free since otherwise he could not be made responsible for his acts;" and (3) "it is argued, man has the subjective experience of being free, hence this consciousness of freedom is a proof of the existence of freedom."<sup>19</sup>

After presenting his version of the main arguments for freedom of the will, Dr. Fromm rather nonchalantly, dismisses them all as unconvincing. He expresses surprise that even today proponents of the free will theory seem to overlook completely the writings of Spinoza and Leibniz who clearly showed that "the problem of freedom of choice cannot be solved unless one considers that unconscious forces determine us, though leaving us with the happy conviction that our choice is a free one."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *ibid.* p. 124 footnote 5.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.



Besides, says Fromm, the arguments for the freedom of the will seem to contradict every day experience. As a matter of fact, he goes so far as to say that freedom of the will "is at best a noble postulate, and yet perhaps not such a noble one, because it is deeply unfair to the individual."<sup>21</sup>

It seems clear, then, that Dr. Fromm adheres to determinism. The fact that Freudian and Marxist analysis have shown how weak man really is in his fight against the determining instinctive and social forces, seems to make determinism the more realistic and rational position. However, Fromm hastens to qualify his apparent adherence to determinism by making it clear that neither Freud nor Marx were determinists in the sense of believing in an irreversibility of causal determination. Both, according to Fromm, believed in the possibility that a course already initiated can be altered. This exclusion of "hard" determinism by Fromm, also stems from his psychoanalytic experience which abounds with examples of patients who, once they have been made aware of the trends that seemed to determine their lives, have been able to reverse these same trends and make a concentrated effort to regain their freedom.<sup>22</sup>

After giving this brief indication of the direction which his own thought will follow, Dr. Fromm resumes his analysis of the traditional treatment of the problem of freedom of the will. He enumerates five different reasons why the traditional discussion of this problem has suffered and indeed why the discussion itself seems at times to be futile. First, as he has already pointed out, the discussion has not taken proper notice of Spinoza's and Leibniz's discovery of unconscious motivation. Secondly, usually we speak of the freedom of choice of man rather than that of a specific individual and in so doing, we speak in an abstract way which makes the problem insoluble.<sup>23</sup>

Still another difficulty stems from the

... tendency, especially of the classic authors from Plato to Aquinas to deal with the problem of good and evil in a

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 127.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 127-128.

general way, as if man had the choice between good and evil "in general," and the freedom to choose the good.<sup>24</sup>

But such a formulation greatly confuses the discussion, for, in Fromm's opinion there is no such thing as the choice between "good" and "evil" in general. The moral conflict on the question of choice arises only when we have to make a specific and concrete decision.

Fromm finds a fourth fault of the traditional discussion in the very conception and formulation of the problem. Whereas it usually deals with freedom-versus-determinism of choice, Fromm believes that the problem of freedom-versus-determinism is rather one of various degrees of inclinations, one of conflict of inclinations and their respective intensities. Finally, in the traditional discussion, the concept of responsibility is used in a confused manner. Whereas it is mostly used to denote that a person is punishable or accusable, there is another concept of responsibility which is in no way connected with punishment or guilt. In this sense responsibility means only that "I am aware that I did it."<sup>25</sup>

By presenting his analysis of the traditional discussion of the freedom of choice, Fromm has been able to delimit the concept of freedom of choice to that which he himself accepts. For him it will refer to the "freedom of choice between two specific courses of action which one specific individual is confronted with."<sup>26</sup> In other words it is always and only the concrete act which requires a decision. In every concrete action man is faced with the problem of choice. Now it is possible that a person will not be conscious of this fact. But whether he is conscious or unconscious of the problem of choice, the nature of the choice itself remains the same. This is to say that for Fromm, choice is always "the choice between an action which is

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 128-129. In "An Interview with Erich Fromm," *McCall's*, (October, 1965), 216, Dr. Fromm says, "Responsibility is not false encouragement. Responsibility is to respond spontaneously to the situation, truthfully, realistically, to say what one thinks what one feels, and then to leave the other person free, free even to do what's bad for him."

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.



dictated by reason as against an action which is dictated by irrational passions.”<sup>27</sup>

In this Dr. Fromm explicitly follows Spinoza’s thinking, according to whom human action is causally determined either by passions or by reason. When man’s action is ruled by passion, he is in bondage; when by reason, he is free. For Spinoza, freedom is based on “adequate ideas” which in turn are based on the awareness and acceptance of reality (cf. what has been said about the role of reason). These adequate ideas so determine actions that they secure at the same time the fullest unfolding of the individual’s psychic and mental development.<sup>28</sup>

Fromm has now clarified enough of his basic notions so that he can at last present his own positive formulation of the problem of freedom of choice, as he sees it. For him, freedom of choice where determinism or indeterminism is involved, is always related to the basic moral question of life. It is the freedom to choose the better as against the worse, to choose between progressing or regressing, between love and hate, between independence and dependence. The problem of freedom of choice, then, is in no way concerned with choosing between two equally good possibilities, e.g. “between playing tennis or going on a hike.”<sup>29</sup> Understood in this sense, freedom is nothing else than the capacity to follow the voice of reason against the voices of irrational passions. And, since this is a psychological problem, it can be examined further.

To appreciate fully Fromm’s formulation of the problem of freedom of choice, we must bear in mind that for him “freedom of choice is not a formal abstract capacity which one either ‘has’ or ‘has not’; it is, rather, a function of a person’s character structure.”<sup>30</sup> This means that when the balance of forces in a person’s character is such that it compels and determines him to act in a certain way, then that person’s character structure makes it impossible for him to exercise freedom of choice. This happens in two extreme cases. In some people, their character

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, p. 130.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

structure can be so bound up with the irrational passions, that they can no longer follow their rational intentions; they have lost their capacity to act in accordance with the good. In such a case, a person, for all practical purposes, is not free to choose that which he might recognize to be the better.

By the same token, the character structure of other persons might be so productively orientated that they are not able to act in any way which would be contrary to reason and to their true interests. Such persons have lost their capacity for choosing evil and are determined to choose good.<sup>31</sup>

The problem of freedom of choice, does not apply for those individuals whose character structures place them in either of these two extreme orientations. However, in the majority of men, we do not find such an overwhelming predominance of either progressive or regressive forces. In most men, we find a combination of contradictory inclinations, so balanced that they can actually make a choice. The act decided upon, however, “is the result of the respective strength of conflicting inclinations within the person’s character.”<sup>32</sup> It is then, for the majority of men, — for the average man with contradictory inclinations — that, in Fromm’s opinion, the problem of freedom of choice exists; for, he alone, not the best man, nor the worst man, but the average man, is free to choose.

In a rather round-about way, Dr. Fromm has now isolated and clearly exposed just what he considers to be the problem of freedom of choice. Having done this, he proceeds to develop his own thoughts on the matter and in so doing to develop his own theory and present his own solution to the problem. We turn our attention, now to Fromm’s positive teaching.

## II. ALTERNATIVISM — FROMM’S THEORY

Taking freedom of choice in the sense of the capacity to choose between contradictory inclinations — “between the rational and the irrational interest in life and its growth, versus stagna-

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*; cf. also St. Augustine and the determination of the will in the beatific vision.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.



tion and death”<sup>33</sup> — Dr. Fromm first turns himself to a consideration of the factors upon which this freedom depends. As should be evident from what has been said so far, the most important factor, for Fromm, is the respective strength of the contradictory inclinations and particularly the strength of their unconscious aspects.

Before we can proceed further, it is necessary to present a summary of Fromm’s notion of the unconscious, since it is of major importance in his views on freedom. To begin with, we must note that his notion of the unconscious must not be confused with that of Freud. Although he does draw heavily on Freud’s doctrine, and is markedly influenced by Marxist thought, Fromm’s conception is truly his own.

In his contribution to *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, Dr. Fromm distinguishes three distinct notions associated with the terms conscious and unconscious. He rejects the notion that sees “conscious” and “unconscious” as referring to certain localities within a person and to certain contents connected with these localities. This concept is usually designated by the use of the definite article “the.” Like Harry Stack Sullivan, Fromm feels that this use of “the unconscious” in the sense of locality is unfortunate and a poor representation of the psychic facts involved.

He also regards as unfortunate and confusing the notion which identifies consciousness with reflecting intellect, and unconsciousness with unreflected experience. In explaining his view he writes:

... intellectual reflection is, of course, always conscious, but not all that is conscious is intellectual reflection. If I look at a person, I am aware of the person, I am aware of whatever happens to me in relation to the person, but only if I have separated myself from him in a subject-object distance is this consciousness identical with intellectual reflection.<sup>34</sup>

Fromm understands the terms “conscious” and “unconscious” as referring to a subjective state within the individual. In this

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Fromm, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, p. 97.

functional sense, these terms refer to the awareness or absence of awareness of our impulses, feelings, desires, fears and other experiences. “There is no such thing,” then, “as the unconscious; there are only experiences of which we are aware, and others of which we are not aware, that is, of which we are unconscious.”<sup>35</sup>

Freud was mostly concerned with the individual unconscious, that is, with the fact that men repress the awareness of the most significant experiences in their lives, and that the conflict between this unconscious reality within themselves and the denial of that reality in their consciousness, was a frequent cause of neurosis. One of his most important insights was to recognize that most of what is real in man is not conscious, and that most of what is conscious is not real. In other words, Freud saw that man is in a state of “false” consciousness because what he is aware of does not represent the underlying real experience within him, but rather a convincing rationalization which covers up the real desires and strivings, which have been repressed. Because of fear, man represses the forbidden impulses and, so to speak, drives them underground, from where, as unconscious forces they determine man’s actions. Accordingly, that which is allowed to reach consciousness is of little importance. In fact, most of what people have in their conscious minds is fiction and delusion, is unreal.

Fromm accepts these findings of Freud, and then, under the definite influence of Marx’s early philosophical writings, elaborates and completes them by adding an understanding of society’s role in the formation of ideas. He sees that each society determines which ideas, thoughts and feelings will be allowed to become conscious, and which must remain unconscious. In other words, just as for Fromm there is a social character, so also is there a social unconscious.

In using this phrase “social unconscious,” Fromm intends to describe those areas of repression which are common to most members of a society. It refers to those commonly repressed elements whose contents a given society cannot permit its members to be aware of if that society is to operate successfully.

<sup>35</sup> Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, p. 106.



In an effort to make his position clear, Dr. Fromm writes:

But the effect of society is not only to funnel fictions into our consciousness, but also to prevent the awareness of reality. The further elaboration of this point leads us straight into the central problem of how repression or unconsciousness occurs ... perhaps because of its enormous complexity human awareness is organized in various possible ways, and for any experience to come into awareness, it must be comprehensible in the categories in which conscious thought is organized. Some of these categories, such as time and space, may be universal ... Others, such as causality, may be a valid category for many, but not for all, forms of human perception ... Other categories are even less general and differ from culture to culture. However this may be, experience can enter into awareness only under the condition that it can be perceived, related and ordered in terms of a conceptual system and of its categories. This system is in itself a result of social evolution. Every society, by its own practice of living and by the mode of relatedness, of feeling, and perceiving, develops a system of categories which determines the forms of awareness. This system works, as it were, like a socially conditioned filter; experience cannot enter awareness unless it can penetrate this filter.<sup>36</sup>

For Fromm then, consciousness and unconsciousness are socially conditioned. Experiences cannot reach consciousness unless they can pass through the threefold filter of: (1) language, which by its words, its grammar, its syntax, by the whole spirit which is frozen in it, determines which experiences penetrate to our awareness; (2) logic, "which directs the thinking of people in a given culture;" (3) social taboos, "which declare certain ideas and feelings to be improper, forbidden, dangerous, and which prevent them from reaching the level of consciousness."<sup>37</sup> This last aspect of the social filter, corresponds to what

<sup>36</sup> Fromm, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, pp. 98-99.

<sup>37</sup> Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, pp. 129-131.

Fromm has elsewhere called the social character. With Marx, then, Fromm concludes that, "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, it is their social existence that determines their consciousness."<sup>38</sup>

In *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, Dr. Fromm discusses the content of the unconscious. After rejecting Freud's view that the unconscious is "that in us which is bad, the repressed, that which is incompatible with the demands of our culture and of our higher self," and also Jung's view that the "unconscious becomes a source of revelation, a symbol for that which in religious language is God himself," Fromm describes our unconscious as containing "both the lowest and the highest, the worst and the best." And, since "outside the confines of the particular organization of the ego are all human potentialities, in fact, the whole of humanity," he concludes that "in getting in touch with this disassociated world of the unconscious one replaces the principle of repression by that of permeation and integration."<sup>39</sup>

The unconscious, then, for Fromm:

... is neither the good nor the evil, the rational nor the irrational; it is both; it is all that is human. The unconscious is the whole man — minus that part of him which corresponds to his society. Consciousness represents social man, the accidental limitations set by the historical situation into which an individual is thrown. Unconsciousness represents universal man, the whole man, rooted in the cosmos; it represents the plant in him, the animal in him, the spirit in him; ... To become aware of one's unconscious means to get in touch with one's full humanity and to do away with barriers which society erects within each man, and consequently, between each man and his fellow man.<sup>40</sup>

Fromm has viewed Marx's materialism as a sociological theory explaining the development of man's culture and thought

<sup>38</sup> Cited in Fromm, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, p. 104, footnote 19.

<sup>39</sup> All quotations in this paragraph are from Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1950), pp. 96-97.

<sup>40</sup> Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*, p. 139.



in terms of his total life. He has seen in Marx the thinker who was able to reach a unified view of man which understands his consciousness as rooted in the conditions of his existence. However, Fromm's high estimation of Marx does not prevent him from criticising Marx's economic determinism because it does not take proper notice of the non-physical needs of man, including, self awareness, which also stem from the conditions of human existence.

In Fromm's opinion, man's consciousness can be freed from determination — be it the social and economic determination of Marx or the physiological and biological determination of Freud — only through increased awareness. By making the unconscious conscious, man can, in a way that echoes Spinoza, increase his awareness of reality both within and outside himself.

Awareness, then, is the key to understanding Fromm's theory of the unconscious. For him, "there is no such thing as 'the conscious' and no such things as 'the unconscious.' There are only degrees of consciousness — awareness and unconsciousness — unawareness ..."<sup>41</sup>

We have engaged in this digression in order to acquaint ourselves with Fromm's conception of the unconscious, knowledge of which is necessary if we are to understand his meaning when he refers to the unconscious aspects of the contradictory inclinations in the character structure of the individual. This exposition has also served to give us an initial acquaintance with the notion of awareness, one which becomes an integral part of his position regarding freedom of choice.

Indeed, as Dr. Fromm penetrates further, seeking those factors that support freedom of choice even when the irrational inclination is stronger, he discovers that, "the decisive factor in choosing the better rather than the worse, lies in awareness."<sup>42</sup> This awareness, as Dr. Fromm sees it, expresses itself in different

<sup>41</sup> Fromm, *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, p. 109. Fromm repeats this position with renewed conviction in his foreword to the latest edition of his *Escape from Freedom*, (New York: The Hearst Corp., 1965), pp. XIV-XVI.

<sup>42</sup> Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, p. 132.

ways. And, since these various types of awareness are such an essential part of his doctrine, we shall attempt a brief explanation of each.<sup>43</sup>

The first kind of awareness, is "awareness" of what constitutes good or evil. This awareness is not to be confused with "theoretical knowledge of what is called good and evil in most moral systems" Such knowledge of what is good or evil, is based on the authority of tradition and learned from authorities and conventional teaching. For Fromm, this is "alienated knowledge," and, according to him, "it is believed to be true only because it comes from these (authority, teaching etc.) sources." Awareness, on the other hand, implies that a "person makes that which he learns his own, by experiencing it, experimenting with himself, observing others and, eventually, gaining a conviction rather than having an irresponsible 'opinion'."<sup>44</sup>

But awareness of what good and evil is, of itself is not sufficient to explain freedom of choice. Freedom of choice depends also on awareness of which action in the concrete situation is an appropriate means to the desired end, and, what is of greatest importance, awareness of the balance of forces behind one's apparent wish. This entails becoming aware of our unconscious desires and of the rationalizations that hide the unconscious forces. Here as we have already seen, Fromm relies heavily upon Freud's discoveries about the unconscious, as well as on the teachings of Leibniz and Spinoza with regard to unconscious motivation. In order to clarify what he means here, Fromm proposes an example, in which a man, greatly attracted to a woman and experiencing a strong wish to have relations with her, develops all kinds of conscious rationalizations to explain his wish. Such a person is aware of his desires but not of the forces underlying them. To mention but two of the many possible forces at work in this example, Fromm cites the man's vanity and his narcissism. His true motives escape him and he is under the illusion of acting according to more reasonable ones.

Freedom of choice also depends upon the full awareness of

<sup>43</sup> Our exposition will be based on what Fromm has written in *The Heart of Man*, pp. 132-143.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.



the consequences of a person's act. If at the moment of decision a person could clearly see the consequences of the one choice as against the other, his decision might be different from one made without this awareness.

However, even though awareness of the underlying, real motivations and of the consequences are necessary factors in assuring freedom of choice, they are not sufficient to increase the inclination for making the *right* choice or decision. For this, it is necessary that man also be aware of that moment in a series of decisions, in a chain of events, *when* the *real* choice is made.

The real choice, when the agent still has freedom, is often erroneously thought to be the last decision in a chain of decisions. However, at the point of final decision, the freedom to choose has usually vanished, since the person has by then become too deeply caught up in his own passions. It is at an early point in the chain of decisions, at the first or second decision, that man is still free to choose. It is here that the real choice is made. Dr. Fromm sees the lack of this awareness of when the "real" choice is made, as an important explanation of why most people fail in their lives. He writes:

One might generalize by saying that one of the reasons why most people fail in their lives is precisely because they are not aware of the point when they are still free to act according to reason, and because they are aware of the choice only at the point when it is too late for them to make a decision.<sup>45</sup>

In Fromm's thought, the problem of being aware of when the real choice is made, is closely related to the fact that our capacity to choose changes constantly with our practice of life. In his words, "the longer we continue to make the wrong decisions, the more our heart hardens; the more often we make the right decisions, the more our heart softens — or better perhaps, becomes alive."<sup>46</sup> In order to clarify what he means by this statement, Fromm presents several examples.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135. This same idea was repeated recently by Fromm in "An Interview with Erich Fromm," *McCall's*, (October, 1965), 132.

<sup>46</sup> Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, p. 135.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 135-138.

We will consider but one of these examples. It is one which he uses to illustrate an important element of his doctrine. He considers two chess players, who have an equal amount of skill in the game. At the beginning of their game, each has the same chance, or better, freedom to win. As the first player continues to make correct moves which his opponent does not counter, he seems to be almost certain of winning. At this stage, the second player can still win. However, after a few more moves, the second player, because he is a skilled player, realizes that the game is already decided. Even though he has not yet been checkmated, he recognizes that he no longer has the freedom to win, he has already lost. Only a poorer player, one unable to analyse the meaning of his opponent's moves and what they are going to force him to do, will continue to play beyond this point, erroneously preserving the illusion that he can still win, after he has lost the freedom to do so.

With the help of this analogy, Dr. Fromm makes it clear that "freedom is not a constant attribute which we either 'have' or 'have not'." For him, in fact, "freedom" as such does not exist except as a word and as an abstract concept. The only reality there is, is "the act of freeing ourselves in the process of making choices." What this means is that our freedom, or our capacity to make choices changes with each of our actions, with what Fromm calls "our practice of life." A person's capacity to choose the desirable, the better alternative, increases everytime in his life he does something that increases his self-confidence, his integrity and his courage. By the same token, every time he surrenders himself to irrational passions, each time he expresses his cowardice and hence weakens his self, he prepares the way for more acts of surrender, and this eventually leads to loss of freedom.

The point that Fromm is making here, is that "there are innumerable degrees of freedom of choice." At any given moment in a person's practice of life, his degree of freedom of choice is different. This means that it will take less effort for a person to choose the good when the degree of freedom to choose the good is great, than when this degree is small.

And it is the failure to be aware of this truth, coupled with the lack of awareness of when the real choice is made, that Dr.





Fromm sees as the reason why so many people fail in the art of living. It is not that they are inherently evil, or that they do not have the will to live a better life, that explains their failure, but rather that they do not recognize when they stand at a fork in the road, still having alternative choices, and have to decide. And, of course, each step along the wrong road makes it that much more difficult for the individual to admit that he is on the wrong road and to make a choice for the right one.

Still considering the types of awareness which determine the capacity to choose, Dr. Fromm now describes one of the most influential kinds, namely, "awareness of those alternative choices which are real as against those alternatives which are impossible because they are not based on real possibilities."<sup>48</sup>

The notion of "real possibility" is pivotal to Fromm's theory. It is not that of determinism which says that in every situation of choice there is only one real possibility, namely to act out of necessity. This was the position of Hegel who said that the free man is precisely the one who is aware of this one possibility, of necessity, and hence knows that he is the executor of necessity, i.e. of reason. The man who is not free is the one who is forced to act in a certain way, without being aware of this necessity. Nor is this notion such that at the moment of choice there is an unlimited number of possibilities among which man can arbitrarily choose.

Rather, for Fromm, at the moment of choice, there is only a limited number of "real" possibilities. And this is so because he conceives the real possibility as "one which can materialize, considering the total structure of forces interacting in an individual or in a society."<sup>49</sup> Its opposite is the fictitious possibility, "which corresponds to the wishes and desires of man but which, given the existing circumstances, can never be realized."<sup>50</sup>

As should be evident, this notion of what a real possibility is, is necessarily connected with Fromm's concept of man's nature. For him, "man is a constellation of forces structured

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

in a certain and ascertainable way" as we saw in our second chapter. Although this particular structure pattern "man" is influenced by the environmental conditions and by hereditary and constitutional trends, we cannot say that his constitutionally given trends, e.g. shyness, are necessarily "causes" which determine certain "effects." However, a constitutional trend can and does limit the number of real possibilities open to a person. For example, a constitutionally shy person could not become an outgoing go-getter.

To exemplify what he means by "real possibilities," Fromm makes use of an example which he has already alluded to several times, that of the inveterate cigarette smoker who wants to give up smoking. For all practical purposes, such a person is confronted with only two real possibilities, either remaining a chain smoker, or giving up cigarettes altogether and not smoking a single cigarette more. Because of this person's circumstances and character, to believe that he has the possibility to continue smoking, but only a few cigarettes a day, is an illusion. It is not a real possibility.

Fromm gives further illustration of what he means by real possibilities, taken from the situation of modern society.<sup>51</sup> In fact, he sees the present time — 1964 — as probably the last time at which mankind will have the freedom to choose between peace, by ending the nuclear arms race, and war, by continuing present policies; between life and destruction. "If," writes Fromm, "mankind destroys itself, it will not be because of the intrinsic wickedness of man's heart; it will be because of his inability to wake up to the realistic alternatives and their consequences."<sup>52</sup>

The point we want to emphasize, and the point of all these examples, is that, according to Fromm:

... the possibility of freedom lies precisely in recognizing which are the real possibilities between which we can choose, and which are the "unreal possibilities" that constitute our wishful thoughts whereby we seek to spare

<sup>51</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 141-142.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.



ourselves the unpleasant task of making a decision between alternatives that are real but unpopular (individually or socially).<sup>53</sup>

To the extent that a person pursues "unreal possibilities," which are not possibilities at all, but pipe dreams which do not exist, to that extent does he deprive himself of the possibility of freedom of choice. While living under the illusion that these non-possibilities will one day materialize, man finds that his decisions are no longer his own, but are made for him by fate.

What all this amounts to is the realization that freedom of choice is most dependent upon the awareness that awareness of itself is not effective, unless it is accompanied by the will to act, by the readiness to suffer the pain of frustration that necessarily results from an action contrary to one's nature. Awareness must be joined with effort.

Awareness, then, in its varied applications is at the very heart of what Fromm means by freedom of choice.

Having presented Dr. Fromm's observations on the problem of freedom of choice, we can now tie together his various concepts and draw up some definite formulation of his theory of freedom of choice, even as he himself does in *The Heart of Man*.

Fromm's clinical experience and speculative reflections force him to conclude, in the first place, that man's actions are always caused by inclinations rooted in forces (usually unconscious) operating in his personality. When these forces become so intense that they not only incline man, but determine him, man has no freedom of choice. However, this intensity is reached only in extreme cases. In the majority of men the contradictory inclinations are balanced and operate effectively within the personality, so that there is freedom of choice.

However, this freedom is limited by the existing real possibilities which in their turn are determined by the total situation. And it is precisely in his ability to choose between these existing real possibilities, alternatives, that man's freedom lies. In this sense then, freedom can be defined "not as 'acting in the awareness of necessity'," like Hegel; "but as acting on the basis of

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

the awareness of alternatives and their consequences. There is never indeterminism; there is sometimes determinism, and sometimes alternativism based on the uniquely human phenomenon: awareness."<sup>54</sup>

Expressing this same thought in other words, Fromm writes:

... every event is caused. But in the constellation previous to the event there may be several motivations which can become the cause of the next event. Which of these, possible causes becomes an effective cause may depend on man's awareness of the very moment of decision. In other words, nothing is uncaused, but not everything is determined (in the "hard" meaning of the word).<sup>55</sup>

### III. CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have tried to expose Dr. Fromm's views on the problem of freedom of choice, or as it is often referred to, the problem of free will versus determinism. We saw that in his earlier writings, although he refers to this problem several times, he does not consider it fully. His treatment of it in these works, especially in *Man for Himself*, is however, sufficient to enable us to see the direction that his own more evolved thought on the problem will take. He always considers the problem in relation to his primary concern, the problem of man's existence.

He postulates two possible answers to the problem, one, regressive, leading to death; the other progressive, leading to life. Man's freedom lies in his ability to choose the good as against the evil alternative. In *The Heart of Man* Fromm undertakes an analysis of the problem of freedom of choice as such, and also presents his own theory.

In keeping with his characterology, Fromm sees all man's actions as being determined by forces or inclinations in his character structure, which are usually unconscious. Man is

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 143.



inclined both to regress and to move forward, which is the same as saying that he is inclined to good and evil. When both these inclinations are still in some balance, man is still free to choose, provided that he can make use of awareness in all its aspects and that he can make an effort. With awareness and effort, then, a person is free to choose between alternatives, real possibilities, which, however, are in their turn, determined by the total situation in which he finds himself.

The majority of men have this balance of inclinations, and hence, have freedom of choice. For them the problem of free will is to increase their inclination to choose the good. But it is possible for an individual to live his life in such a way that one inclination predominates and becomes so intense that he loses his freedom of choice. Depending on which tendency is dominant, a person is determined in such a way that he is not free to choose the good or not free to choose evil. For these extreme cases, the problem of freedom of choice does not exist.

Fromm then, subscribes neither to "hard" determinism, nor to "soft" determinism in the usual sense of these terms. Rather his theory is what he calls alternativism. Freedom of choice for him is "acting on the basis of awareness of the alternatives and their consequences." Such a freedom has varying degrees, and is not to be considered as a power one either has or has not.

It is a function of the character structure and hence varies according to the orientation of the character. For Dr. Fromm the problem of freedom of choice has meaning only in concrete cases of individual decisions. We cannot speak of this freedom in the abstract as belonging to mankind in general.

As Fromm sees it, the entire problem of freedom of choice is really one of the conflict of the various degrees of inclinations and their respective intensities, and not of freedom versus determinism. And so for him, although there is never indeterminism, there is sometimes determinism. But most of the time there is alternativism — freedom of choice — based on man's capacity to be aware.

## CONCLUSION OF PART TWO

In this second part of our dissertation we have endeavored to present an objective exposition of the doctrine of freedom which Dr. Erich Fromm develops in his writings. To this end we have intentionally avoided any statements which would betray our own appraisal of his thought.

It must be remembered that Dr. Fromm is not "ex professo" a philosopher, but a practicing psychoanalyst and a sociologist. It is not surprising then, that we did not expect, nor did we find a purely philosophical treatment of freedom in his writings. However, in the course of his clinical experiences and of his speculative reflections, he has developed a concept of freedom which takes him into the philosophical arena.

Although there has been no major evolution in his thought on this question of freedom, we have tried to indicate the evolution that does take place where it appeared. We have also made some effort to point out those aspects of Fromm's teaching which depend on the theories of other thinkers, particularly those of Freud and Marx. However, we remind our reader that a more complete look at these interdependencies was presented in the first part of this dissertation.

Now that our detailed study of Fromm's theory of freedom has been presented, we are, at last, in a position to consider the place of his doctrine in relation to the general schema of freedom theories presented in our historical summary of the problem of freedom in part one.

It was the conclusion of that section, that all major freedom theories in the history of recorded human thought could be classified and identified through the use of three basic conceptions of freedom. Each theory could be identified as proposing either one of these conceptions exclusively, or some combination of all three.



The first basic notion understands freedom as the ability, under favorable circumstances, to act as one wishes for one's own individual good as one sees it. This definition identifies the freedom of circumstantial self-realization. The second concept identifies the freedom of acquired self-perfection, which understands freedom as the ability, through acquired virtue or wisdom, to will or live as one ought in conformity to the moral law or an ideal befitting human nature. The final identification, the freedom of natural self-determination, sees freedom as the ability, by a power inherent in human nature, to change one's own character creatively by deciding for oneself what one shall do or shall become.

To complete the classification, we must also mention political liberty, which is a variant of the freedom of circumstantial self-realization, and collective freedom which is a variant of the freedom of acquired self-perfection.

As is true with most authors, Fromm, in evolving his theory of freedom, has at the same time developed his own vocabulary. While using terms and phrases which are common to the freedom literature, he gives them certain original nuances and understands them in such a way that they distinguish his theory from others and make it obviously his own. This means that as we consider his thought in the light of the three basic conceptions of freedom, we must overlook many of the personal developments in his theory so that we can bring it to a minimal common denominator acceptable to the various authors who affirm a particular freedom.

To begin with, it should be clear from that part of the original dissertation reprinted in this abstract, that Fromm's theory is not one that includes only one conception of freedom. Rather it involves several different conceptions of freedom.

Basically, Fromm's writings present a notion of freedom that can be identified as an acquired freedom of self-perfection. In the course of our considerations in chapter three, we made many references to Fromm's insistent teaching that positive "freedom to" is the freedom to develop and make use of all the potentialities in man that make him human. It is the freedom to fulfill his true nature according to the laws of his existence. Through his reason, man comes to an understanding of himself,

and, based on this understanding, he makes an effort to become what he potentially is. It is through the unfolding of his intellectual and emotional potentialities that man accomplishes the realization of his total personality.

For Fromm, this freedom of self-perfection is necessarily tied up with economic and social conditions. It evolves together with the evolution of society and culture, and its continuing increase depends upon social reform. In this feature of Fromm's theory we can see elements of the variant of self-perfection, collective freedom.

Fromm's writings also include an understanding of freedom as the circumstantial freedom of self-realization. Indeed, the above-mentioned potentialities which man must develop, although they are present in all men, do not become real unless they find expression through spontaneous activity. And this, for Fromm, cannot occur unless man is free from powers outside himself and from restraints within himself. In other words, man's realization of his self is dependent upon the circumstances in which he finds himself. Of particular importance in this regard, is the socio-economic-political organization of the society in which man lives.

In Fromm, however, this circumstantial freedom is not unrelated to the acquired freedom of self-perfection. It is, in fact, subordinated to it, in so far as freedom consists not in the ability to do whatever one wishes, but rather in the ability to make real those potentialities which make man human and fulfill his true nature.

Fromm also affirms a freedom of "self-determination." However, we must be extremely careful in describing it, since he does not affirm it in the sense described above. First of all, this freedom of choice, for him, is not a natural ability; i.e., an abstract power inherent in human nature. It is rather a capacity which is had only in concrete actions, and one which can increase or decrease according to one's practice of life. In so far as the character structures of most men include a balance of contradictory inclinations, most men actually can make a choice, and, to this extent, have a freedom of self-determination.

However, we must further make it clear that this act of choosing, for Fromm, is not completely self-determined. In itself, it is the result of the respective strength of the conflicting



inclinations in an individual's character structure. This is to say then, that the self-determination which Fromm asserts does not correspond to the notion of self-determination presented as one of the basic conceptions of freedom.

It seems, then, that we can classify Fromm as an author who holds to a theory of freedom which affirms first of all, an acquired freedom of self-perfection, and secondly, a circumstantial freedom of self-realization which is, however, subordinated to the freedom of self-perfection. We can say, further, that his theory also includes elements of collective freedom, and, if we understand the term in the limited sense described above, also a certain freedom of self-determination.

With this identification of Fromm's freedom theory completed, we have concluded the second part of our dissertation. Before presenting some concluding remarks to this abstract, we deem it useful, to emphasize once more, that the presentation and classification of Fromm's doctrine contained in these pages is based upon our own understanding of Fromm, and consequently, full responsibility for such an interpretation or misinterpretation rests solely with the author.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

It has been our intention in this study, to isolate and present in as objective a fashion as possible, the meaning of freedom as it appears in the many writings of Dr. Erich Fromm. Our motivation for this undertaking was a desire to investigate thoroughly — and in so doing profit from — the reflections of one of the most influential of contemporary American authors, on a subject which has to be declared among the most vital and critical of our age. It was then with a spirit of respect for the insights and intellectual abilities of Dr. Fromm that we pursued our labor. If then, in the observations and comments which we have presented in part three of the original dissertation we appear to have been completely negative, this must not be construed as reflecting our only, nor our complete judgement of Fromm's work. On the contrary, we are convinced that Fromm's efforts have done much towards leading man to a deeper understanding and awareness of his existential situation in the world. Making use of the sciences which have matured and come of age in the twentieth century, Fromm has been able to offer us many penetrating and provoking insights into modern man's relationship with the modern world.

In spite of the drawbacks attached to an interdisciplinary approach to the study of man, the courage and foresight which Fromm has shown in developing a coherent, systematic appraisal of the contemporary scene — going from the psychic level to the political and covering the whole range of inter-human problems from both their individual and social aspects — is certainly to be commended. Karen Horney has credited Fromm with being the first to attempt a synthesis between psychoanalysis and the social sciences. Granted this, it would not be difficult to attribute to Fromm much of the credit for the new direction which the study of man has taken in recent years. For, apart from those in the scholastic-Christian tradition, Fromm has been one of the



pioneers in proclaiming a normative humanism with its implications of norms affecting men's lives other than the biological and cultural ones, so long accepted as the standard of human existence. In proposing as the criterion for man's well-being a value scale of rightness and wrongness, authenticity, a concept of human nature and all that this implies, Fromm has made a notable advance from orthodox Freudian theory and has prepared the way for a more complete recognition on the part of psychoanalysis of the spiritual element in human psychic phenomena.

Fromm has also been one of the most articulate and profound commentators on the ills affecting modern Western society in general, and the American scene in particular. We cannot deny that his close and penetrating analysis of the pathology of Western man, and his insights into what he has coined the "marketing personality" have done much to bring to the fore the dehumanizing elements within our contemporary culture.

He was also among the first, if not the first, to make use of the psychological concept of authoritarianism in the sense in which it is generally understood today. It is his reflection which has suggested that the "authoritarian-masochistic character," that is, the authoritarian or generally submissive orientation in an individual could be a mechanism of escape from freedom. Although Fromm has a onesided view of authority, his insights into the reality of the authoritarian syndrome have certainly been influential in guiding us to a fuller appreciation of just what the relationship between authority and individual should and should not be.

The value of Fromm's emphasis on love as the answer to man's existence and of his study of human love must likewise be acknowledged. In spite of the presence of several flaws in his theory of love, the analysis on a human level, which Fromm offers us in *The Art of Loving*, can be of immense help not only in deepening our appreciation of human love, but also in purifying the notion of supernatural love.

In like manner, Fromm's study of religious experience also has much to offer. If we overlook his humanistic and "ontophobic" prejudices, we can find much of value in his descriptions of the subtle forms which idolatry takes today, culminating in what Fromm has shrewdly termed the tendency for God himself to "become an idol for many."

tion in an individual could be a mechanism of escape from freedom.

In our age of technological advances which can easily lead to the impersonal existence so alarmingly depicted in Orwell's *1984* and Huxley's *Brave New World*, Fromm's understanding of man reaffirms and extols man's personal dignity and enables him to break out of a fatalistic view of life that must of necessity lead to destructiveness. In professing his faith in man and his potentialities for good, Fromm has offered an antidote for the nihilistic philosophies which see nothing but absurdity in man's existence. Certainly, his efforts at integrating in one overall perspective scientific facts, human ideals and the ethico-religious tradition of mankind have resulted in an invaluable service to our contemporary society. In fact, the humanistic ethics, of which Fromm can be considered the most articulate spokesman, today appears as the most attractive alternative to the traditional Christian ethics.

We are convinced then, that Fromm has something to say to modern man, and that what he has to say is worth listening to. However, we must also caution that not all that he says is worthy of credence. Nevertheless, it is our conviction that the obvious limitations and weaknesses in Fromm's writings do not necessarily vitiate all of his insights. In our original dissertation, we have attempted to indicate how many of the limitations and inconsistencies in Fromm's thought stem not from the psychological data he observes, but rather from the arbitrarily assumed humanistic framework in which he chooses to observe them. Many of Fromm's observations and analyses of the human situation and of human psychic phenomena, when freed from the humanistic, anti-metaphysical and anti-supernatural limitations which he imposes on them, become valid insights which lead to a more profound appreciation of man and his situation in the world.

This is precisely the case with Fromm's concept of freedom. His description of man's primary potential to positive freedom, his analysis of freedom as a character orientation in which man is free to develop his potentialities, to become his self, correspond in general with what Maritain has described as being characteristic of the metaphysical mystery of personality. Fromm's positive freedom is certainly based upon a valid insight, the same one which Maritain refers to as the "freedom of expansion, of the



human person, of autonomy," the freedom of spontaneity of independence and of exaltation, "the freedom to make oneself actively the sufficient principle of one's own operation, by possessing, perfecting and expressing oneself as an indivisible whole in the act that one brings about."

In describing the growth of freedom as being concomitant with the process of individuation, Fromm has perceived that in each of us, "personality and freedom of independence increase together," and that the entire history of man's misery and his greatness "is the history of his effort to win, together with his own personality, freedom of independence." Fromm has forcefully described man's call to the "conquest of freedom."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, in his efforts at establishing the dignity of the human individual, Fromm has discovered and described very effectively the dynamism of freedom which is rooted in the nature of man's personality, and which leads him to struggle tenaciously for a terminal freedom, an autonomous freedom, a freedom that is the goal of the moral life and which must be acquired.

Zavalloni has observed that "the exaltation of the human person leads, through the conquest of freedom, either to the super-man or to the man of God."<sup>2</sup> Now because of Fromm's intellectual bias in favor of humanism and against Being, his great stress on the individual self and his quest for freedom, has led him to the divinization of man, to the super-man, to a God who is nothing more than the symbol of man's powers. And, the practical results of this divinization of the individual are evident in his entire understanding of man's relation to society. For nowhere does he consider the notion of the common good, nor the possibility of a responsible and rational authority perfectly compatible with an individual's autonomy and freedom. His anthropocentric approach leaves no room for legitimate authority,

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations in this and in the preceding paragraph are taken from Jacques Maritain, "The Conquest of Freedom", *The Social and Political Philosophy of Jacques Maritain; Selected Readings*, Joseph Evans and Leo Ward, editors (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1956), pp. 28-33.

<sup>2</sup> Roberto Zavalloni, *Self Determination, The Psychology of Personal Freedom*, trans. Virgilio Biasiol and Carrol Tageson (Chicago: Forum Books, 1962), p. 303.

obedience to whom would lead to greater freedom. His claiming for the human individual a divine freedom, forces Fromm to deny the possibility of any rule or objective measure which proceeds from a being other than the individual himself. Consequently, Fromm's man is ultimately engaged in "a false conquest of freedom which is illusory and homicidal."<sup>3</sup>

Fromm's understanding of freedom of choice also reflects his tendency to impose arbitrary limitations on valid and often incisive analyses of human behavior. And so, for example, his desire to escape from metaphysics has influenced his analysis of human behavior. It has led him to consider the empirical results of his observations within the framework of Spinoza's classical mechanism and hence to conclude that the mere existence of unconscious dynamisms in man's psychical activity is proof that these act in a necessarily determining fashion.

Fromm's acceptance of Marx's basic sociological theory has led him to concentrate on the socio-economic aspect of the determination in man's behavior to such an extent, that he does not give equal consideration to the role of the individual spiritual subject in the determining of his actions. Fromm has seen such an intimate connection between an individual's acquiring of positive freedom, i.e. his becoming productive, and the social structure of society, that he does not realize fully the extent to which this autonomous freedom, this freedom of independence presupposes an initial freedom of self-determination. Fromm seems afraid to allow himself to reflect upon the extent in which a personal freedom of choice is the source and fount of the world of freedom.

Fromm admits that man can chose. But then, since he lacks a metaphysics and will not hear of one, he bases this freedom of choice on the "unique human phenomenon of awareness." However, in making this statement, Fromm has not offered an ultimate foundation and explanation for man's freedom of choice, but has in reality, evaded the entire problem. For, the fact that a person is aware of the unconscious motives behind his action, or that, in certain

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<sup>3</sup> Maritain, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

circumstances he misunderstands the real character of the tendency which moves him, in no way prevents that act itself, performed consciously as a result of this mistaken tendency, from being free. What is of importance here, and the only element that matters, is that the individual "personally" accepts the tendency as it presents itself to him. As Nuttin remarks, "The only thing that would make freedom of behavior an impossibility would be if all motivation were essentially a disguised form of escape for the libido."<sup>4</sup> Although Fromm seems to indicate that he perceives this more fundamental aspect of the problem of choice when he writes, "that ... awareness as such is not effective unless it is accompanied by the *will* to act,"<sup>5</sup> he never pursues this insight further and hence does not confront the full reality of the spiritual subject of human behavior.

Fromm's alternativism is very close to what could be called a modified free will theory. Both agree that man's behavior is an expression of his entire personality, of his character structure. In other words, both see that man's behavior in general and his free decisions in particular, presuppose determinants that spring from his broad and complex dynamism of instincts, tendencies or inclinations, psychophysical dispositions, acquired habits and hereditary traits. This is to say that free choice is not an absolute self-determination, but rather a capability which can at times be absent, and at other times be present in varying degrees. Free choice very definitely has its roots in the pre-existing situation.

Fromm's insistence that the area of man's freedom of choice is very limited in no way opposes the free will theory that sees man's freedom to choose as an impure freedom, a freedom-in-situation. However, as he describes what appears to be in fact, a free will theory, he is very careful to avoid affirming such, and he writes in a framework which seems to deny in theory what he accepts in fact. Fromm's alternativism has certainly made a

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph Nuttin, *Psychoanalysis and Personality*, (New York: Omega Books, 1962), p. 152. See also, Jean Rimaud, "Psychologists versus Morality," *Cross Currents of Psychiatry and Catholic Morality*, William Birmingham and Joseph Cunneen, editors (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), pp. 126-127.

<sup>5</sup> Fromm, *The Heart of Man*, p. 133.

partial correction of the psychic determinism of orthodox psychoanalysis with its stress on the process of liberation, but by no means does it assure a true personal freedom.

It is our contention that Fromm's analysis of the psychic phenomenon of free choice, as well as his analysis of positive freedom, suffer from a lack of any profound and in-depth consideration of the spiritual subject of activity, and that this lack stems from his decision to ignore the possibility of a true metaphysics. Once again, then, we conclude that many of Dr. Fromm's observations and analyses of human behavior and free choice, are in themselves very helpful and valuable. It is only in the setting of Fromm's philosophical presuppositions that they appear inadequate.

With these reflections on Fromm's concept of freedom, we have accomplished the purpose of our study. Our efforts have attempted to bring us into a meaningful encounter with one of America's most influential writers, Dr. Erich Fromm, on one of mankind's most pressing problems, the problem of freedom. In the course of our work, we have come to experience the truth of Jacques Maritain's statement that "There is nothing so difficult as to have to speak about a philosophy that does not avow itself to be a philosophy."<sup>6</sup> However, the undertaking has been more than adequately rewarded. It is hoped that this study may be of the same assistance to others, as it has been to the author, in providing a deeper appreciation of the dimensions and complexities of human freedom.

We cannot minimize the new dimensions which the psychological sciences of our day have added to the philosophical appreciation of freedom in all its aspects. And the author feels that these are forcefully evident in the writings of Erich Fromm, where one can receive an insight into the existential reality of man, and wherein he can come to know that freedom is not that to which man is condemned, but rather that to which man is born.

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<sup>6</sup> Maritain, "Freudianism and Psychoanalysis," *Cross Currents of Psychiatry and Catholic Morality*, *op. cit.*, p. 353.







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