



. . . it is not the task of therapy merely to reduce mental and physical suffering. . . . health is not an objective condition that can be understood by the methods of natural science alone. It is, rather, a condition related to a mental attitude by which the individual has to value what is essential for his life.⁶⁶

Self-realization, then, is a tendency, a need, a propensity, and whether one chooses more self-realization at the price of enduring pain, or less self-realization in order to reduce pain, is a matter of attitude or decision. Such decision is not guided by any normative or ethical directives that are inherent in the factual data that are summarized under the term "self-realization." Now, to conclude Goldstein's report, what is true about his patients is true about people in general:

A comparison of the behavior of our patients with that of normal persons leaves us no doubt that the life of the normal organism is also governed by this rule. We may say, then, that an organism is governed by the tendency to actualize its individual capacities as fully as possible.⁶⁷

From the above alone it should be abundantly clear that for Goldstein the concept of self-actualization is a descriptive, factual concept, and that it is a gratuitous distortion and misinterpretation to ascribe to him such notions as that self-actualization is in itself a desideratum; that it can serve as an ethical norm or

⁶⁶Kurt Goldstein, "Health as Value," New Knowledge in Human Values, ed. A. H. Maslow, pp. 182-83.

⁶⁷Goldstein, Human Nature in the Light of Psychopathology, p. 141.



guideline; that self-realization is good and what blocks it is bad; that man should be exhorted to self-actualize; that self-actualization provides a single ultimate value or goal for mankind; that maturity and psychic health consist in self-actualization and that the denial of self-actualization constitutes psychic illness; that the society which facilitates and encourages self-actualization is the good society and the social order which frustrates or inhibits self-actualization is bad, etc. However, the distortion and misinterpretation become even more evident when we pay attention to Goldstein's use of the concept of self-actualization when he departs from his role as descriptive scientist to the extent of being concerned with the problem of the relationships of the individual to others, and with the problems of "norms," of "freedom," or of "the adequate social organization of mankind." In such normative contexts, where the purpose of Goldstein's discussion is to outline the conditions for a good and just society, he concludes that social life "implies the incomplete realization of every individual's nature,"⁶⁸ and that renunciation and self-restriction are imperatives that must counterbalance self-actualization.⁶⁹

First, let us note that, unlike Fromm, Maslow, and

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 203. (Emphasis mine)

⁶⁹Ibid., pp. 202-223 passim., and p. 238.



Rogers, who identify self-actualization with maturity, Goldstein, in his discussion of the development of the child, identifies self-actualization with the child's immature state.

[The child's] tendencies, feelings, attitudes, come into conflict with what is demanded of him; there is a clash between his tendency to self-realization, which corresponds to his immature state, and what is forbidden.⁷⁰

Secondly, unlike Maslow's uncritical and unqualified assertion that a person's self-actualization will be "good for him and good for others," Goldstein asserts only that self-actualization can take place without harm, and only under proper social organization.

It can not be said often enough that individuals, peoples, races, can actualize themselves without harming each other, that this can be accomplished only by an adequate organization of group life. . .⁷¹

Moreover, it is the concept of self-restriction, which Goldstein advances as necessary for sound social relationships and social justice, that for Goldstein "corresponds to what we call the ethical, to the norms," in man.⁷²

Goldstein outlines his social theory in a chapter entitled "The Individual and Others." This social theory may be summarized as follows:

1. The individual human being does not exist alone. "The existence of one man presupposes another man."

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 157. (Emphasis mine)

⁷¹Ibid., p. 197.

⁷²Ibid., p. 208.



Human life entails "connection with and dependence upon others . . ."

2. The self-actualization of the individual can take place "only by his encroaching on another's freedom, by claiming something from another, by imposing upon another to a certain degree."

3. Man's social existence and his drive for self-actualization thus "entail impact, antagonism, conflict, and competition with others."

4. This "necessarily implies the incomplete realization of every individual's nature." "Self-actualization on the part of one individual can be attained only by some renunciation on the part of another, and each must ask from others that renunciation."

5. "There is no pre-established harmony between human beings." Man has to "seek" harmony with others "in an active way."

6. Man is free to make his own decisions and choices. Man's being free "implies the necessity of encroaching upon the freedom of others. . . . Therefore, we may say that the activity of encroaching also belongs to the nature of man."

7. Social life therefore requires "self-restriction in the interest of another." "Self-restricting behavior . . . is [thus also] due to an underlying tendency which belongs to human nature."



8. Self-restriction and encroachment are thus two major and interrelated types of behavior. "Man is neither aggressive nor submissive by nature. .He is driven to actualize himself and to come to terms with his environment. . . . Whenever either form of behavior achieves dominance . . . then something has gone wrong . . ." "Normally behavior fluctuates in adequate proportions between self-restriction and encroachment upon the freedom of others."

9. "Self-restriction is experienced as inherent in human nature; it corresponds to what we call the ethical, the norms."

10. Freedom "does not mean the arbitrary right of each individual to do what he likes . . . it . . . presupposes the possibility of actualization on the part of all other individuals." Freedom therefore presupposes "freedom for all others--equality . . . equal rights and equal duties."

11. "Self-restriction and encroachment upon the freedom of others," when properly balanced, "are the avenues for the best possible self-actualization of all individuals forming . . . society, and by virtue of this they are the instruments for the creation of the best possible society."

12. A society based on this maximum of self-actualization possible within the necessary limits of the self-restriction required by social life, would be successful because it would be "in accordance with the essence of human nature."⁷³

Goldstein's views raise important problems, and are worthy of careful analysis. However, this is outside the scope of our inquiry. The purpose of the summary of this part of Goldstein's social theory is to show the fundamental differences between his use of the concept of self-actualization and its use by our social psychologists. Its purpose is also to point out that the errors made by Maslow, Fromm, Rogers, et al., in their use of the concept of self-actualization, are completely their own, and are in no way chargeable to Goldstein. For Goldstein never proposes to transform the fact of man's drive for self-actualization into an ethical norm or a guide for conduct. He identifies self-actualization with "encroachment upon the freedom of others," and with "antagonism, conflict, and competition with others." For him it is self-restriction that corresponds to the ethical, and the ethical norm or guide for conduct that he proposes is that of a proper balance between self-actualization (or encroachment) and self-restriction. To be sure, Goldstein argues that a

⁷³Ibid., Chapter VIII, pp. 201-223 passim.



social order based on this norm will be a successful social order, because it will be in accordance with the nature of man. In other words, he is making a judgment as to feasibility, or workability. He is saying that a society based on this norm is likely to work out, because it will make possible a certain amount of satisfaction of the drive for self-actualization, and at the same time will not impose upon men demands for self-restriction or renunciation of a magnitude greater than they are able to carry out. A society based on norms that would "oppose human nature" would not work out; it "would be bound to fail." The ethically desirable social order proposed by Goldstein thus turns out to be a feasible, practicable, workable social order as well.

Needless to say, there are value assumptions hidden in Goldstein's value-free notion of "success" or feasibility of a social order. The decisions as to which social order is a success, and as to what constitutes a failure in the organization of society, are themselves value decisions entailing prior value judgments. These value judgments can not be deduced from the facts concerning human nature, or from predictions about the consequences of establishing a social order based on one kind or other kinds of ethical norms. These value judgments have other foundations. These prior value judgments are brought to bear upon the facts concerning the nature of man, or upon the predicted consequences of this or that kind of social



order, and are used as ethical yardsticks by which to judge these facts or these predictions; they are not deduced from these facts or consequences.

But there is no confusion in Goldstein's writings on the subject of self-actualization. From the fact that man has a drive for self-actualization Goldstein does not infer the ethical proposition that self-actualization is good or that it is bad. Neither does he infer from the fact that social life entails self-restriction the proposition that self-restriction is good or that it is bad. His ethical judgment that a proper balance between self-actualization and self-restriction is good, has packed within it a large number of assumptions as to what is good or evil, right or wrong. But these assumptions, Goldstein recognizes, are not deducible from the facts of self-actualization and "encroachment." Thus, a reading of Goldstein, while it tends to show him to believe that there is some kind of relationship between ethical norms and the kind of being man is, also leads to two other conclusions: first, that Goldstein has not been any more successful than others in establishing the nature of this relationship; and second that, whatever this relationship may be, it is not possible to deduce ethical norms from factual, descriptive information about the nature of man.



CHAPTER VIII

THE INNER MORAL SENSE AS ETHICAL GUIDE

Another concept that plays an important role in the view that ethical norms and ethical guidance can be deduced from factual data about the psychological nature of man is the concept which I shall call "the inner moral sense." This is referred to by several other names in the writings of some of the social psychologists dealt with in the present inquiry. Wolfgang Köhler and Solomon E. Asch use the term "ethical requiredness." Allport uses the term "conscience." Maslow refers to it as "intrinsic conscience." Fromm speaks of "humanistic conscience." In effect, the use of this concept arises out of what Maurice Mandelbaum has called "the phenomenological approach to ethics," i. e., "a direct examination of the data of men's moral consciousness."¹ What this approach claims, with a greater or lesser degree of insistence, and with a variety of emphases, is that, if we examine man's awareness in connection with his moral experiences (our own

¹Maurice Mandelbaum, The Phenomenology of Moral Experience (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1955), p. 30. Note also Mandelbaum's further explanation: "I use 'phenomenological' to connote any examination of experience or of experienced objects which aims at describing their nature rather than seeking to give an 'explanation' of them. . . . What is included is every descriptive investigation of 'the phenomenal world,' that is, of whatever is directly experienced by me or by others." P. 313, note 18.



awareness, and the reports of others of their awareness, in connection with their moral experience), as well as the development of man's moral experience, we discover that man has an inner sense of "ought," of "obligation," of "right and wrong," of "good and evil," of "justice and injustice." It is thus a psychological fact that "ethical categories . . . are properties of individuals."² Action that fails to conform to these ethical categories, or to the requirements of this moral sense, is naturally judged by us to be wrong, whereas action that conforms to these inner moral requirements is experienced and judged as being right. We thus have a psychologically built-in ethical guide that is part of the nature of man.

The logical difficulties in the assumption that a phenomenological description of our sensing or experiencing an action as right or wrong, just or unjust, will in itself constitute or furnish the criteria for judging the rightness or wrongness, justice or injustice of the action, are quite obvious. However, some of our social psychologists fail to see these difficulties altogether. Others, though aware of some of the difficulties, fail to see in their ultimate implications a refutation of the very notion that from the existence of an inner moral sense one can deduce criteria for ethical judgment. Let us review briefly what

²Asch, Social Psychology, p. 357.



some of the social psychologists under discussion actually say on this subject.

Allport, taking a developmental approach, traces the development of conscience from the "must conscience" during childhood years, which "evolves out of parental restrictions and prohibitions," to the "ought conscience" that evolves with maturity and with the emergence of one's self-image. "Except for a few 'psychopathic personalities,'" says Allport, "conscience is a normal development within every human being," and mature conscience "becomes a kind of generic self-guidance."³ Allport goes on to make the sweeping, categorical assertion that, except for a few morally obtuse or psychopathic individuals, "conscience is a universal possession of all mankind."⁴

What is the content of this mature conscience according to Allport? This content is related to one's mature self-image. To be sure, some musts which are due to the internalization of parental rules and cultural norms are carried over from childhood into maturity. However, "the 'feel' of conscience in adulthood is seldom tied to the fear of punishment. . . . It is rather an experience of value-related obligation." In adult experience, . . . when conflicts and impulses come to be referred to the self-image . . . we find that the sense of obligation is no longer the same as a sense

³Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, pp. 134-136.

⁴Ibid., p. 303.



of compulsion; ought is not the same as must. I must be careful with matches; I mustn't give way to anger; I must obey traffic regulations; for disagreeable sanctions will follow if I do so. But I ought to write a letter, I ought to pick up picnic litter; I ought to pursue the good as I conceive it. Whenever I make a self-referred value judgment--as if to say, 'This is in keeping with my self-image, that is not'--then I feel a sense of obligation that has no trace of fear in it. . . . Conscience presupposes only a reflective ability to refer conflicts to the matrix of values that are felt to be one's own. I experience 'ought' whenever I pause to relate a choice that lies before me to my ideal self-image. . . . It is the generic self-guidance that keeps conscience alive and applicable to new experience. The generic conscience tells us in effect, 'if you do this, it will build your style of being; if that, it will tear down your style of being.'⁵

Mature conscience, or ought conscience, is thus related to self-realization. Problems of moral conflict or of moral choice are resolved by the ought conscience of mature adults, and this generic conscience guides the choice in the direction of consistency with our self-image, i. e., the self that we tend to and should actualize. Judgments or choices made in accordance with this sense of ought will be, by definition, veridical judgments, or right choices.

Maslow's notion of conscience follows lines similar to Allport's. While acknowledging that conscience as conceived in Freud's notion of the superego does in fact exist, Maslow claims that

⁵Allport, Becoming: Basic Considerations for a Psychology of Personality, pp. 72-74.



. . . there is another element in conscience, or, if you like, another kind of conscience, which we all have either weakly or strongly. And this is the 'intrinsic conscience.' This is based upon the unconscious and preconscious perception of our own nature, of our own destiny, of our own capacities, of our own 'call' in life. It insists that we be true to our inner nature.⁶

In accordance with Maslow's logic of self-actualization which was discussed earlier, it is natural that for him this "intrinsic conscience" is present chiefly in self-actualizing or "healthy" people. Among the "self-actualizers" he studied he found none

. . . to be chronically unsure about the differences between right and wrong in his actual living. . . . they rarely showed in their day-to-day living the chaos, the confusion, the inconsistency, or the conflict that are so common in the average person's ethical dealings. This may be phrased also in such terms as: these individuals are strongly ethical, they have definite moral standards, they do right and do not do wrong.⁷

In such people, according to Maslow, "the age-old dichotomy among the philosophers between 'is' and 'ought,' between fact and norm" does not exist:

My observation of healthier people, of people in peak experiences . . . is that in general there is no such unbridgeable chasm or hiatus; that in them, clear knowledge generally flows right over into spontaneous action or ethical commitment. That is, when they know what is the right thing to do, they do it.

⁶Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being, p. 6.

⁷Maslow, Motivation and Personality, pp. 220-221. (Emphasis mine) Cf. also p. 233 quoted supra, and Toward a Psychology of Being, pp. 150, 158, also quoted supra.



They spontaneously tend to do right because that is what they want to do . . .⁸

Allport's and Maslow's linking of conscience to self-actualization is, according to their own testimony,⁹ closely related to Fromm's distinction between "authoritarian conscience" and "humanistic conscience." This distinction made by Fromm must, however be understood in the context of his general assertion concerning man's conscience or moral sense, namely,

We have . . . reason to assume that. . . the striving for justice and truth is an inherent trend in human nature . . .¹⁰

Also:

There is no prouder statement man can make than to say: 'I shall act according to my conscience.' Throughout history men have upheld the principles of justice, love, and truth against every kind of pressure . . . Without the existence of conscience, the human race would have bogged down long ago in its hazardous course.¹¹

However, Fromm recognizes difficulties that are entailed in the attempt to infer ethical guidance from the psychological fact of the existence of conscience. For, while he cites the Hebrew prophets and Socrates as examples of human action guided by conscience, he is aware of other

⁸Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being, pp. 167 and 150.

⁹Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, p. 134; Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being, p. 6.

¹⁰Fromm, Escape from Freedom, p. 288.

¹¹Fromm, Man for Himself, pp. 141-42.



kinds of men who also claimed to be "motivated by their conscience." He refers to "the men of the Inquisition who burned men of conscience at the stake, claiming to do so in the name of their conscience"; warmakers who claim to act on behalf of their conscience, when they are really pursuing their lust for power, etc. In general, Fromm points out,

. . . there is hardly any act of cruelty or indifference against others or oneself that has not been rationalized as the dictate of conscience, thus showing the power of conscience in its need to be placated.¹²

Thus, when he takes a good look at the empirical manifestations of what is called conscience, Fromm finds himself caught in this discouraging antinomy: on the one hand, for man, with his "inherent trend" toward justice, to act according to one's conscience would seem to mean, ipso facto, to be performing ethical acts; on the other hand, many acts performed as dictates of conscience are clearly unethical acts of monstrous cruelty and injustice. This leads him to ask whether the various kinds of conscience are really the same, "with only their contents differing," or whether they are really different phenomena "with only the name 'conscience' in common," or finally whether

. . . the assumption of the existence of conscience turn[s] out to be untenable when we investigate the phenomenon empirically as a problem of human motivation?¹³

¹²Ibid., 142.

¹³Ibid.



In other words, what we are confronted with is the question whether the deliverances of conscience are at all reliable ethical guides, and what are the sources for criteria by which to judge the correctness of the deliverances of conscience.

Fromm tries to answer these questions and resolve the antinomy through the distinction between "authoritarian conscience" and "humanistic conscience." This distinction will require careful and extended examination. In Fromm's words, authoritarian conscience is "the voice of external authority, the parents, the state, or whoever the authorities in a culture happen to be."¹⁴ This is the authority of the Freudian superego. Such authority, which is regulated by fear of punishment and hope for reward, becomes internalized and assimilated into one's conscience, so that the feeling of responsibility to oneself develops in place of the sense of responsibility to external laws and sanctions. However, this authoritarian conscience continues to respond to commands pronounced by authorities, and its prescriptions are "not determined by one's own value system." As a result, when the guidance of the authoritarian conscience is in the direction of the good, the norms involved "have not become the norms of conscience because they are good, but because they are the norms given by authority." On the

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 143-44.



other hand, if the norms are bad they are just as much part of the authoritarian conscience. Thus, "a believer in Hitler . . . felt he was acting according to his conscience when he committed acts that were humanly revolting."¹⁵ This, says Fromm, is one reason why authoritarian conscience is not a reliable moral guide.

But there is another reason, according to Fromm. Authoritarian conscience frustrates man's desire for freedom, it makes a slave of him as he submits to authority. As the child grows up, his "will, spontaneity, and independence," refusing to be broken, rebel against parental and social authority, with varying degrees of success. According to Fromm, "only a few succeed entirely." The results of this struggle are "the guilty conscience," "the weakening or paralysis of the person's originality," "the weakening of the self," and "renewed submission," which is the only way the good conscience can be regained. "The scars left from the child's defeat in the fight against irrational authority are to be found at the bottom of every neurosis."¹⁶ However, some do not rebel, but submit to authority, and, indeed, take over the authority by treating themselves "with the same strictness and cruelty." This results in the development of what Fromm calls "the

¹⁵Ibid., p. 145.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 150-158 passim.



authoritarian character," with its "sadism and destructiveness," whose

. . . 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.¹⁷

In contradistinction to the authoritarian conscience, that which Fromm calls humanistic conscience does constitute an ethical guide according to Fromm. Humanistic conscience is not the internalized voice of an external authority whom we fear to disobey. Rather, humanistic conscience

. . . is our own voice, present in every human being and independent of external sanctions and rewards . . . [it] judges our functioning as human beings. . . . It has an affective quality, for it is the reaction of our total personality. . . . In fact, we need not be aware of what our conscience says in order to be influenced by it.

Actions, thoughts, and feelings which are conducive to the proper functioning and unfolding of our total personality produce a feeling of inner approval, of 'rightness,' characteristic of the humanistic 'good conscience' . . . acts, thoughts, and feelings injurious to our total personality produce a feeling of uneasiness and discomfort, characteristic of the 'guilty conscience.' Conscience is the voice of our true selves which summons us . . . to become what we potentially are.

Humanistic conscience represents not only the expressions of our true selves: it contains also the essence of our moral experiences in life.¹⁸

¹⁷Ibid., p. 151.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 158-59. (Emphasis mine)



Thus, with humanistic conscience we are back again at self-realization, and the complex of problems entailed by it. As in the case of self-actualization, Fromm finds it logically necessary to acknowledge that the claim by his "humanistic ethics" that "man is able to know what is good and to act accordingly on the strength of his natural potentialities," would be untenable if it could be shown that man is innately evil.¹⁹ Fromm therefore proceeds to develop the thesis that "destructiveness is a secondary potentiality in man," that man "is not necessarily evil but becomes evil only" when his growth and self-actualization are frustrated. The "proper conditions for the development of the good" do not require external rewards and punishment. The "normal individual" has the inherent tendency to grow, to be productive, to self-actualize, to achieve "psychic health."²⁰ If this tendency is fulfilled, then man's behavior will be guided by the humanistic conscience with its built-in moral gyroscope. The aim of humanistic ethics, according to Fromm, is therefore not the repression of "man's evilness (which is fostered by the crippling effect of the authoritarian spirit) but the productive use of man's inherent primary potentialities. Virtue is proportional to the degree of productiveness a person has achieved. If society is concerned with making people virtuous, it must be concerned

¹⁹Ibid., p. 210.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 218ff.



with making them productive. . . . The first and foremost . . . conditions [for developing productiveness] is that the unfolding and growth of every person is the aim of all social and political activities . . .²¹

I shall reserve for a little later the general critique of the doctrine that ethical guidance can be inferred from the descriptive claim that man possesses a conscience or an inner moral sense. At this point I shall limit myself to three observations on Fromm's position. First, the same basic logical difficulty that was discussed in connection with self-actualization, raises its head here again. Let us assume that it is factually true that man possesses a "humanistic conscience," that this conscience functions when man actualizes his potentialities and achieves productiveness, and that accordingly man's behavior and choices are "virtuous." What makes his acts or choices virtuous, or right, or just? What are the criteria by which the acts or choices are judged to be virtuous? Wherein lies the guarantee that these choices really are virtuous? Is the virtuousness, or rightness, or justice of the choices deduced from the fact that they are the choices of a humanistic conscience?

An affirmative answer would have to be based implicitly on a syllogism which would have as its major

²¹Ibid., p. 229. (Emphasis mine)



premise the proposition that "All acts or choices guided by a humanistic conscience are virtuous, or right, or just." Either this proposition is nothing more than an explicatory, stipulative definition, which says in effect only: "By 'acts and choices guided by a humanistic conscience' we shall mean 'virtuous, or right, or just acts or choices,'" in which case the proposition is tautologous and the syllogism circular and fruitless. Or, if the proposition, "All acts or choices guided by a humanistic conscience are virtuous," is meaningful, then it itself is an ethical judgment, not a descriptive statement, and as such must be based on some ethical criteria and justified by them. Such an ethical judgment is not self-validating, and its justification must be based on ethical norms or criteria extrinsic to the fact that the acts and choices in question are guided by the humanistic conscience. Ethical guidance thus can not be inferred from the factual psychological claim that man possesses a humanistic conscience. That acts or choices are virtuous, or good, or just, is never deducible, or in fact deduced by Fromm or by anyone else, from their real or claimed psychological source. These acts or choices are evaluated or judged by ethical criteria which are logically prior to and independent of the psychological facts of human nature.

The second difficulty in Fromm's position is a psychological one. One of the reasons Fromm gives for his



rejection of authoritarian conscience as ethical guide, is his contention that, if the norms internalized from the parental or cultural authority happen to be what Fromm would judge to be evil norms, they none the less become "just as much part of the authoritarian conscience." Fromm uses as an illustration a believer in Hitler who felt he was following his own conscience when he committed revolting acts.²² The clear implication here is that evil acts that are done in the name of conscience are always to be charged against man's authoritarian conscience. It would have to be so if Fromm is to be consistent. For, while Fromm sees humanistic conscience and authoritarian conscience overlapping with each other, both of them approving certain ethical principles (and to this I shall return in my third observation below), he dichotomizes the two consciences at least to the extent of appearing to claim that a person's feeling justified in committing evil acts could arise only out of authoritarian conscience. He appears to be saying as much when he discusses what happens "if the conscience is based upon rigid and unassailable irrational authority," and "man . . . becomes completely dependent on powers outside himself . . . which can be the state, a leader, or a no less powerful public opinion." In such a situation, says Fromm,

²²Supra, p.



Even the most unethical behavior--in the humanistic sense--can be experienced as 'duty' in the authoritarian sense. The feeling of 'oughtness,' common to both, is so deceptive a factor because it can refer to the worst as well as to the best in man.²³

Now, does an examination of the empirical manifestations of conscience tend to confirm this dichotomy? Does the feeling of "oughtness" or "duty" that often accompanies unethical and evil conduct come always and only out of the authoritarian conscience? If this were so, and if we are to take seriously Fromm's definition of the authoritarian conscience, and its differentiation from the humanistic conscience as an empirical differentiation (rather than a differentiation that results from stipulative, verbal definitions), then it would have to be possible, at least theoretically, to relate each case of such conscience-supported evil conduct to some fairly specific parental, cultural, political, social imperative that had been internalized and was being blindly obeyed by the actor out of a residual fear of punishment or hope for a reward. Fromm's illustration of Hitler's follower does pass this test. However, his other illustrations leave some doubt on this score, and suggest the likelihood that man's conscience is fallible, including those phases of conscience that do not fit Fromm's description of the authoritarian conscience.

What internalized parental or social imperatives

²³Fromm, Man for Himself, p. 167.



were being obeyed blindly by Torquemada and other leaders of the Inquisition as they tortured and burned people at the stake in the name of their Christian conscience? What parental or social norms are being blindly obeyed by "the predatory warmakers" who claim to be acting in the name of conscience? Isn't Fromm's own suggestion of a lust for power perhaps a better explanation of their conduct? What specific parental or social imperatives are being blindly obeyed in the acting out of this lust for power? Or, let us use as an illustration Hitler himself rather than one of his followers. What parental or social imperatives was he obeying blindly when he claimed to be acting out of his conscience in his destructive program of conquest, enslavement, and mass murder? Hitler's rationalizations are indelibly inscribed on the pages of Mein Kampf and on the bloody pages of the period of his rule. As Fromm points out, Hitler claimed to be acting "under the command of a higher power--God, Fate, History, Nature . . ." ²⁴ But it is difficult to see these rationalizations as pointing to some external parental or cultural norms that were internalized by Hitler and obeyed blindly by him.

On Fromm's own analysis, it seems clear that the men of the Inquisition, the "predatory warmakers," and

²⁴Fromm, Escape from Freedom, pp. 226, 235.



Hitler fit Fromm's category of the "authoritarian character structure." One of the ingredients of the authoritarian character is its masochistic wish and longing for "submission to an overwhelmingly strong outside power."²⁵ Hitler found in "God, Fate, Necessity, History, Nature" this great power to which to submit, and he found this power especially, according to Fromm, in Nature, in the laws of nature, "as expressed particularly in Hitler's crude popularization of Darwinism, in 'the instinct of preserving the species' . . ." According to Fromm, Hitler's rationalization included his espousal of the idea that Nature requires

. . . the fight of the stronger for the domination of the weaker . . . the survival of the fittest . . . and [Nature's] law of preservation is 'bound to the brazen law of necessity and of the right of the victory of the best and the strongest in this world.'²⁶

But it is difficult to see how Hitler's longing for submission to a great outside power, his looking upon Nature as such a power, and his claim to be acting under Nature's rule of the right of the strongest to victory over the weak, and under the command of God, Fate, History, etc., can be interpreted as rationalizations of blind obedience to some external parental or cultural commands that had been internalized by him. It seems more plausible

²⁵Ibid., pp. 232, 236.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 235-36 and 227. Fromm quotes from Hitler's Mein Kampf (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1941), p. 396.



to see them as the sometimes unconscious and often calculated rationalizations of sadistic-masochistic tendencies on the part of an authoritarian character. A person's authoritarian character structure with its sadistic-masochistic tendencies may be, as has been claimed by psychologists, a consequence of or reaction to his childhood experiences in a rigid, authoritarian home upbringing.²⁷ But this is quite different from saying that in his sadistic-masochistic acts and his rationalizations of them, the authoritarian character is acting out blindly parental or cultural norms which he had internalized. That Nature's alleged Darwinian rules are to be obeyed is hardly that kind of norm. It seems more likely that such sadistic-masochistic conduct involves the total self, rather than a part of the self that putatively is acting out its obedience to internalized commands of parents, religion, society, or public opinion.

However, Hitler and others do as a matter of fact claim to be performing their evil acts in the name of their consciences. But as we have seen, it is questionable, to say the least, that the conscience invoked by them to justify these evil acts is always or even often a response to internalized commands by external authorities. The question therefore arises as to what kind of conscience it

²⁷See Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, and Sanford, The Authoritarian Personality (New York: Harper & Bros., 1950).



is that justifies evil acts, and, more fundamentally, whether the notion of conscience as an ethical guide can survive even empirical psychological (phenomenological) description and analysis.

The third difficulty is, again, a logical one. According to Fromm, as pointed out above, the prescriptions of the humanistic conscience and of the authoritarian conscience often overlap, and certain ethical imperatives are prescribed by both. Fromm states this as follows:

Another form of the relation between an authoritarian and humanistic conscience is that in which, although the contents of norms are identical, the motivation for their acceptance differs. The commands, for instance, not to kill, not to hate, not to be envious, and to love one's neighbor are norms of authoritarian as well as humanistic ethics.²⁸

What appears to elude Fromm here is the fact that, whereas he dichotomizes sharply the two motivations, i. e., the two sources to which he ascribes these commands, he does not make correspondingly different evaluations of the ethical contents of these commands in accordance with the character of their particular source or motivation. In other words, the commands not to kill, not to hate, not to be envious, even when the motivation for their acceptance is (as it is for some people always and for many people some of the time) in an authoritarian conscience, continue to be ethically right. It should therefore be manifestly

²⁸Fromm, Man for Himself, pp. 166-67.



clear that, since the commands referred to are not rendered ethically wrong by the fact that their motivation may arise out of a person's authoritarian conscience, neither are these same commands rendered ethically right by the fact that their motivation may have come from a person's humanistic conscience.

The ethical character of the prescription, i. e., whether the prescription is good or bad, right or wrong, just or unjust, or whether we should follow the prescription, is completely independent of its psychological source. What the justification or vindication of such ethical prescriptions is, remains a problem for which, to the best of my knowledge, no logically satisfactory solution has yet been found. But one thing is again clear, namely, that such ethical prescriptions can not be logically deduced from or logically justified by the factual descriptive hypothesis that men have humanistic consciences, or that a given ethical command has a humanistic conscience as its motivational source.

We now turn to Solomon E. Asch, philosophically the most sophisticated of the group of social psychologists under consideration, and his theory of an inner moral sense. Asch uses as his starting point the empirical observation that "Many of our daily actions . . . possess for us the striking property of being just or unjust." While it is of course true that men differ in their



judgments of right and wrong,

the sense that certain things should be done, that others should not be done, is universally known. It is part of the human minimum, as much so as our capacity to see and hear.²⁹

Asch then proceeds to inquire as to the "properties of these inner commands," and as to their sources. Seemingly aware of the logical difficulties entailed in any attempt to identify the "should," or judgments of right and wrong, with factual data about the nature of man, or to deduce the former from the latter, Asch rejects those psychological theories that have attempted to "reduce [the facts of value] to presumably simpler facts of motivation and learning, or to terms that lack the specific qualities of value-judgments," or to identify "the experience of 'should' . . . with what we desire . . ." ³⁰ He also rejects the behavioristic and psychoanalytic explanations "which trace the genesis of obligation to dread of punishment." The "phenomenally right and wrong," Asch maintains, are not wholly identical with "the experience of desire or aversion, or with anticipation of reward or punishment," nor can the fact of social compulsion "transmute psychological functions into the experiences of right and wrong."³¹

²⁹Asch, Social Psychology, p. 354.

³⁰Ibid., pp. 354-55.

³¹Ibid., pp. 355-56.



Asch appears to think that, by rejecting these "reductionist interpretations" of our judgments of right and wrong, i. e., by rejecting their identification with psychological functions such as desire or aversion, or expectation of reward or punishment, he has successfully avoided the logical difficulties in deducing normative principles from psychological descriptions. This, I believe, and will attempt to show, is an illusion. For, Asch's position appears to me to be enmeshed in the same inescapable logical difficulties.

Asch approaches the phenomenon of ethical norms and judgments from the perspective of Gestalt theory, relying particularly on Köhler's concept of "requiredness." The following, in Köhler's own words, may serve as an adequate account of this concept:

The main issue, then, is clearly this: Is the human mind to be regarded as a domain of mere indifferent facts? Or do intrinsic demands, fittingness and its opposite, wrongness, occur among the genuine characteristics of its contents? . . . In all these fields we find the alternative: mere facts or, besides mere facts, right and wrong in a sense, that varies to some extent from one field to the others, but shows everywhere the same fundamental contrast to mere facts. Let us for the moment give the name value to this common trait of intrinsic requiredness or wrongness, and let us call insight all awareness of such intellectual, moral or esthetic value. We can then say that value and corresponding insight constitute the very essence of human mental life.³²

³²Wolfgang Köhler, The Place of Value in a World of Facts (New York: Meridian Books, 1959 (first published in 1938), p. 31, and passim.



Situations which involve ethical judgment and which eventuate in certain actions, according to Asch, "all contain a gap or disjunction." His illustrations include: the passerby who sees a child crying and stops to find out what the trouble is; a person sees an elderly man carrying a heavy load and helps him; a stranger is lost and someone tells him how to get to his destination; a physician has accepted a hospital post and immediately thereafter receives a more attractive offer, but, though tempted by the new offer, does not violate his original agreement, etc. In each of these cases, says Asch,

the situation was in some sense incomplete: our apprehension of the facts and their relations, or of the need of the situation, laid a claim upon us to improve or remedy it, to act in a manner fitting to it. Action that fits the requirements we judge to be appropriate or right; to fail to act appropriately we experience as violating a demand, or being unjust. This capacity reaches clearest expression in relation to persons; our grasp of their needs and requirements gives rise to the fullest fledged experience of claims and responsibilities. This conclusion is in accord with the high phenomenal objectivity of our ethical judgments. We feel that we value as we do for reasons connected with the situation, not merely because we are personally inclined to do so. . . . we regard the claims of certain situations to be binding on others as well as on ourselves.³³

Our experiences of such situations have a peremptory character, and "contain the important ingredient of 'should'; they are the basis of the phenomena of duty and

³³Asch, *Social Psychology*, pp. 357-58.



responsibility."³⁴ These "phenomena of value" are not produced by social compulsions. While social forces are "a condition for the most significant ethical judgments, . . . society cannot import these categories into the individual. These are properties of individuals whose capacity to grasp the structure of social relations permits them to sense requirements."³⁵ This sense of "should" is not exclusively cognitive in character, according to Asch. It is also directive. Our recognition of the situation of others and of their problems has the power to produce in us motivation, emotion, tensions and goals, that direct us to act "in a way relevant to the other's needs."

To become concerned for others, and to occupy ourselves with their fate, is a fundamental capacity of human beings.³⁶

In this way Asch does, after all, assert that there is a relationship between ethical judgments and motivational phenomena, but, he insists, his conception of motives here is different from the traditional one. Generally, he claims, motives have been defined as "neutral events free of normative components," and "solely in terms of the ego and its subjective wishes." As against this view Asch

³⁴Ibid., p. 355.

³⁵Ibid., pp. 356-57. (Emphasis mine)

³⁶Ibid., p. 357.



points out that motives are often "the most direct response to felt requirements," and that motives may arise "which refer to lacks and incongruities in the surroundings." Therefore, if one abandons the "presupposition that [motives] are indifferent to requirements and that they refer solely to oneself," objections to "the reduction of ethical judgments to terms of motivation" disappear.³⁷

Now, when we go beyond our phenomenal experiences of situations and our sense of what is the right or just action required by the situation, and ask the ethical question, namely, "Is this choice of action really right or just, and by what norms do we judge it to be right?", we discover that Asch really oscillates between two positions, neither of which escapes the logical difficulties. On the one hand Asch appears to argue that the locus of value, and the criteria as to what constitutes right or just action, are in the objective situation, "out there" so to speak. All we have to do is to perceive the situation, and the right actions as distinguished from the wrong actions will automatically reveal themselves to us. This, in turn, will produce in us an emotion or tension which will be removed only when we have pursued the right action. But this does not dispose of the problem; it only shifts its locus. For, even if we assume that the ethical criteria by which we are to be guided toward right instead of wrong

³⁷Ibid., p. 358.



action are intrinsic, built-in features of the objective situation, the question still remains whether our perception of the situation is infallible; and if it is not infallible, by what criteria do we distinguish between correct and incorrect perceptions of the ethical requirements of a situation.

On the other hand, Asch seems to be arguing that man has a fundamental "capacity" to be concerned with the needs of others; a "universally known" sense that certain things should be done and others should not be done; that ethical categories are "properties of individuals." If this is what Asch intends to say, then we are back again at the identification of ethical principles with alleged descriptive features of human nature, or with the attempt to deduce ethical norms from psychological propensities. For, as has been argued earlier in this chapter, from the claim that man has a certain capacity, or sense, or properties, one can not deduce the rightness or wrongness of the guidance received from this capacity or sense. If it is true that "concern for others is a fundamental capacity of human beings," then our judgment that such a capacity is "good" is not vindicated by the fact that it is a human capacity, unless one is prepared to defend another ethical judgment to the effect that "All human capacities are good." As has been pointed out earlier, such an ethical judgment with respect to any given human



capacity is not self-validating, and its vindication would have to be based on ethical norms that are not inherent in the alleged fact that man has certain capacities, or properties, or a moral sense. We base our judgment that a concern for the welfare of others is good or right not on the claim that it is a fundamental human capacity to be so concerned, but on other criteria, criteria that are logically independent of any information about properties or capacities of human beings.

The error that Asch makes, whichever of the two above interpretations we attribute to him, and the error that is made by the other social psychologists under discussion when they cross the frontier between descriptive psychology and ethics, resides in their belief or assumption that factual information can answer ethical questions as to what is right or what is wrong or as to what people ought to do. For, whether it is claimed either that man has a moral sense, or that he can perceive the moral features inherent in situations, let there be no mistake about it: the moral question is not "What did my moral sense approve?", or "What did my perception of the situation tell me to do?", or "What choice did I make?" The moral question is: "Should my moral sense have approved what it did?", or "Was my perception of the situation and my consequent action really right?", or "Was the choice I made a right or good or just choice?" There seems to be an assumption common to some of



our social psychologists that every accurate description by a person of his experience or sense of right and wrong, of good and evil, is correct and is sufficient to guarantee the rightness or wrongness of the action or choice involved.³⁸ But, as R. M. Hare points out,

. . . to say of someone that he has a feeling of obligation is not the same as to say that he has an obligation. To say the former is to make a statement of psychological fact; to say the latter is to make a value-judgment.³⁹

Whether the feeling of obligation, or the sense of what is the right thing to do, or the perception of a situation requiring a certain action, or the dictates of one's conscience, are ethically correct is a question that remains unanswered by these psychological reports. The difficulty can be made even more sharply clear if we again employ a simple logical formulation. The entymematic logical structure of the doctrine of conscience or of man's moral sense, in Asch's situationalist or Gestalt version, is as follows:

Premise: "A man perceives a situation the ethical features of which lead him to the judgment that he should do A."

³⁸Compare Abraham Edel, Ethical Judgment (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1955), p. 197, and Everett W. Hall, Modern Science and Human Values (Princeton, N.J.: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1956), p. 370.

³⁹R. M. Hare, The Language of Morals (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964; first published in 1952), p. 166.



Conclusion: "Therefore he should do A."

Obviously the missing Premise is:

"In all cases in which a man perceives a situation the ethical features of which lead him to the judgment that he should do X, he should in fact do X."

But, can we subscribe to this missing premise? Are all our should or ought judgments ethically correct judgments? Is our sense of requiredness ethically infallible? Surely Hitler, Eichmann, etc., acted out of their sense of ought. No doubt their perception of the ethical features of the situation led them to the judgment that they should exterminate the Jews of Europe. Does this psychological fact make their action ethically right? And, if I think that their actions were ethically monstrous, is it because I have not properly grasped the meaning of the situation as it confronted Hitler and Eichmann? Is it not rather the case that correct ethical judgment can not be deduced from descriptive psychological data about our perception of a situation, or about the disclosures of our moral sense, or about the intimations of our conscience?

In another place, and in another context, Asch says that "There is a range of constraints that persons accept because they seem just even if not pleasurable."⁴⁰

⁴⁰Asch, "A Perspective on Social Psychology," Psychology: A Study of a Science, ed. by Sigmund Koch, Vol. III, p. 381. (Emphasis mine)



But, does the acceptance of constraints because they appear just make these constraints just: How many generations of Negroes in Southern states so internalized and accepted their low caste position that they accepted it as just so long as they had some measure of economic stability, no matter at how low a level, and a sense of personal safety? But did this acceptance of their situation as just, make it just? It seems clear, therefore, that questions concerning the ethical correctness of the disclosures of our moral sense, and of the promptings of our conscience, are quite in order. We do pass moral judgment on what our sense of requiredness tells us to do, and, in any particular case, we may quite properly try to determine whether the course of action pointed to by our sense of requiredness is morally justified. There appears to be nothing self-contradictory in saying to a person: "Your conscience tells you to do thus and so, but doing thus and so would be wrong." Neither is it logically self-contradictory for a person to say: "My conscience tells me to do so and so, but perhaps my conscience is wrong," although one might question whether many people really ever say anything like this. The ethical criteria by which dictates of conscience would be thus judged are clearly extrinsic to the psychological facts about the functioning of our conscience, rather than based upon or derived from our conscience or moral sense.



Interestingly enough, Wolfgang Köhler, the author of the concept of "requiredness," sees clearly the distinction between psychological requiredness and ethical judgment, and the proper role of ethics in passing moral judgment on the psychological guidance of requiredness.

Köhler's statement of this is quite direct:

Our topic is requiredness in the generic sense, i. e., all facts . . . in which beyond mere existence and occurrence there is an 'ought' or an 'ought not.' Thus the urge toward revenge after an offense may become very strong in certain individuals. To hurt the offender cruelly may become for them a dominating 'ought.' We do not approve of this. Ethics subjects requiredness in general to some principles of selection according to which certain things must secondarily be rejected that were primarily objects of positive requiredness. Again, ethics may ask us to do certain things which have primarily and as such a negative 'valence.'⁴¹

For Köhler, therefore, requiredness is not an ethical norm and does not provide ethical guidance, and the differences between Asch and Köhler in this are quite clear and instructive.

In general the above discussion reawakens echoes of Bishop Butler's theory of conscience, and one of C. D. Broad's comments on it. It may be worth quoting them here briefly, simply as a piquant reminder that the question as to whether our social psychologists' researches and writings have brought us any nearer to an understanding of the

⁴¹Wolfgang Köhler, The Place of Value in a World of Facts, p. 339. (Emphasis mine)



foundations of ethics, some 230 years after Bishop Butler, is not an altogether idle question. Here are Bishop

Butler's words:

. . . allowing that mankind hath the rule of right within himself, yet it may be asked, 'What obligations are we under to attend and follow it?' I answer: it has been proved that man by his nature is a law to himself . . . Your obligation to obey this law, is its being the law of your nature. That your conscience approves of and attests to such a course of action, is itself alone an obligation. Conscience . . . carries its own authority with it, that it is our natural guide; the guide assigned us by the Author of our nature . . .⁴²

On this C. D. Broad comments as follows:

But the deliveries of conscience are by no means so certain and unambiguous in most cases as Butler makes out.

We should like to know whether there is any feature common and peculiar to right actions, which we could use as a criterion of rightness and wrongness. And we should like to know how, when the same conscience at different times, or different consciences at the same time, seem to issue conflicting orders, we are to tell which is genuine and which spurious. To such questions Butler does not attempt to give an answer . . .⁴³

It is interesting to note that when Asch discusses actual ethical problems, and criteria for ethical judgment, his illustrations of ethical principles do not impress one as being inferences from an inner moral conscience.

Moreover, his attempt to answer the question as to what

⁴²Joseph Butler (1692-1752), Sermons (first published in 1726; New York: Robert Carter & Bros., 1873), Sermon III, p. 49.

⁴³C. D. Broad, Five Types of Ethical Theory (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1930), pp. 81, 82-83.



makes an action right ends up in sterility because the nature of his answer is such that it admits of neither verification nor refutation. As concrete illustrations of ethical principles which "our experiences of right and obligation contain" Asch offers the following:

- 1) The principle of "first come, first served" in food queues in time of war, with its sub-rules about e. g., a person's leaving the queue temporarily and returning to his former place, old people and pregnant women, etc.
- 2) The principle of the equal administration of justice to all persons guilty of the same offense.
- 3) The principle that an effort must be made to get at the truth concerning a crime, and that the punishment meted out to the accused must be deserved.
- 4) The principle that infraction of rules must not be judged mechanically, but in the light of relevant circumstances, such as whether the harm was done accidentally or deliberately, etc.⁴⁴

To be sure, these are generally accepted as ethical principles

⁴⁴Asch, Social Psychology, pp. 360-362.



in our culture. But can it be said that they are accepted as ethical, right, or just principles either because my moral sense tells me so, or because my understanding of the features of the situation requires that these principles be followed? Take the person who approaches the queue and, seeing its length, realizes that if he waits his turn he will miss an appointment which may result in his getting a job, and if he goes to his appointment he will not be able to get the rationed groceries his wife needs for the preparation of supper. In such a dilemma this man's moral sense, or perception of the situation, may tell him to edge his way into the forward part of the queue. Or what about all the people referred to by Asch who, "under the pressure of need, passion, and social pressures evade and rationalize practices" that do not fit these principles? Whatever the psychological reasons may be, many of these people act out of what, to them, is tantamount to their moral sense, or to their perception of the situational features. This is particularly true of those who may be acting out of what Asch identifies as "fear, . . . ambition . . . lack of knowledge and restricted imagination . . . custom . . ." etc.⁴⁵ Certainly Asch judges these actions as ethically reprehensible, in spite of their having resulted from the dictates of what is phenomenally an inner moral sense or an understanding of a situation. Hence the

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 362.



gravamen of the case against Asch's position is that the ethical criteria by which he would have to judge the actions of these persons as ethically improper, are criteria extrinsic to and not derived from the psychological facts of these persons' moral sense of situational perceptions. As Köhler says in the passage just quoted, "Ethics subjects requiredness . . . to some principles of selection."

Nor is Asch's position helped any by his pointing out that "the most tyrannical regimes are under the necessity of disguising their aims by an appeal to justice," and his inference from this that "authority itself must appeal to a standard . . . the state and its authority are not the ultimate sources of right."⁴⁶ What he says is unexceptionable if what he means is, that the fact that actions come from constituted political authority does not make these actions in all cases ethically self-validating. The actions of constituted political authority are also subject to review as to their rightness or wrongness, justice or injustice, on the basis of ethical criteria. However, if Asch's meaning here is that the criterion, by which the actions of political authority are to be judged, is the psychological criterion of what people's inner moral sense tells them, and that, if these actions by political authority fit the dictates of the people's inner moral sense, then they are just or right, then Asch is again

⁴⁶Ibid.



caught in the logical trap from which the preceding discussion has attempted to extricate him.

For, I believe Asch would agree that the fact that the moral sense of many Germans approved the "standard" implicit in the Nazis' treatment of the Jews, did not transform the actions of the Nazi regime into moral and just actions. And similarly I believe that Asch would agree that the fact that for the moral sense of many white Southerners the Civil Rights Act violated their sense of a proper standard, did not transform the action of Congress in enacting this legislation into an unjust and immoral action. What is at issue is not the psychological question as to whether people in fact think in terms of moral standards. What is at issue is whether this psychological fact has any bearing on whether their standards are morally right or wrong.

Now, finally, in connection with the matter of social approval and disapproval, Asch inevitably gets involved in the problem of the vindication of ethical judgment, and here again makes an instructive, and I believe fruitless, attempt to keep the individual's moral sense enthroned in the position of ethical guide. Asch acknowledges that experiences of requiredness, and the facts of social approval and disapproval, are "intimately related."



We do feel guilt in terms of expectations of social disapproval. Even when there is no possibility of actual punishment, guilt is felt in terms of what others would think or do if they knew of our action.

However, Asch's explanation of this fact is "different from that which is often stated." Generally, he says,

praise and punishment from others coincides with the intrinsic appropriateness or harmfulness of behavior. It is consequently natural that we should conceive of requiredness in terms of people's evaluations. They, too, think in terms of social requiredness. Therefore, although no one is physically present or likely to know what we are doing, it is natural for us not to conceive of right and wrong in a lonely way.⁴⁷

But now Asch supplies a parenthetic answer to a question he does not directly ask, but a question that is implicitly present in what he has said. The question concerns the situation in which what a person's moral sense considers intrinsically right behavior, is met with social disapproval, or with punishments from others. In such a situation which of the two is morally right, the person's moral sense or the social disapproval, and by what ethical criteria? Asch's answer is contained in part in a parenthesis, in which he says that "Generally, praise and punishment from others coincide with the intrinsic appropriateness or harmfulness of behavior--(except where social processes have become maladaptive)." There is a great deal packed into this parenthesis. Who determines

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 359.



when the social processes in a given society have become maladaptive, and what are the criteria for such a judgment? Is a person's sense of requiredness ethically infallible, so that, if a society disapproves of or punishes the actions that his moral sense tells him to perform, this proves that society's social processes too have become by definition maladaptive? Let us test this by an illustration. During the Nazi regime some Germans befriended Jews and hid them from the Nazis, often at the peril of death to themselves. It is quite proper to say that so far as Asch is concerned, these Germans acted on the basis of what their moral sense told them is morally right. The Nazi regime and most of German society disapproved of these acts and punished them. We would all agree that in Nazi Germany social processes had "become maladaptive." But is our judgment that German society under Nazism was evil deduced from the fact that this society disapproved and punished the behavior of the Germans who tried to save Jews? Is this the criterion by which we pass moral judgment on Nazi Germany? Suppose the Nazis had not punished those Germans who were caught trying to hide Jews, and had only seized the Jews out of their hiding places and shipped them off to be exterminated, letting their would-be rescuers go free. In such circumstances we would still judge society under Nazism to have been evil, for a whole complex of ethical reasons which do not depend logically on the fact that Nazi society



disapproved of and punished those whose moral sense told them that it is right to save Jews. Indeed, this particular social disapproval and punishment is only one corollary of the morally monstrous complexus that made up Nazi Germany.

But the difficulty becomes more evident if we press the question further. What about social disapproval and punishment, of a person's conduct which is dictated by that person's moral sense, in a society that could not, on any ethical grounds apart from this particular social disapproval, be judged to be evil? Here Asch's reply is that "although we do what we consider right in the face of disapproval and punishment, we are thinking of some other people who would approve of our action."⁴⁸ Thus Asch tries to smuggle a social category into the individual's sense of moral requiredness that he proposes as ethical guide. Dr. Asch wants to eat his cake and have it too. But the presence of this hypothetical social norm in the individual's inner moral sense, under these circumstances, if Asch meant this seriously, would no longer be a case of the natural convergence toward each other of social norms, and of the individual's ethical norms as dictated by his moral sense; a convergence that presumably arises from the fact, as Asch said earlier, that others, too, "think in

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 359.



terms of requiredness." Under the circumstances stipulated above, the social norm would have to be the result of some internalized sense of social conformity, and would thus transform the inner moral sense into an altogether different concept.

But clearly Asch does not mean this seriously. He obviously adheres to his original idea of the individual's moral sense, of ethical categories being "properties of individuals," and his importation into it of social norms is purely speculative, and completely beyond verification or refutation. This is made clear by Asch's assertion that

. . . even if every human disapproved of an act we considered right, we would still be behaving in terms of approval--the approval that our fellow-humans would feel if they knew better.⁴⁹

How could one ever possibly verify or refute this contention, and of what ethical import is it? How could we ever possibly discover whether a person, thinking or making this claim about an act he considered right, in the face of universal disapproval, is really appealing to some universal social norm, or whether he is either rationalizing, or faking, or suffering from delusions? The patient in the mental institution who claims he is Napoleon may be said to behave in the same terms of social approval--he believes that his fellow-humans would recognize that he is Napoleon "if they knew better."

⁴⁹Ibid. (First emphasis mine; second emphasis Asch's)



Under analytic scrutiny, therefore, Asch's concept of an inner sense of moral requiredness as an ethical norm or guide either vanishes into thin air, or is forced into an impregnable fortress of ethical infallibility on the part of the individual, in confrontation with which, if any dictate of the individual's inner moral sense were to be tenaciously held by him against the opposition of "every human," the social processes of all human society would have to be declared to have become "maladaptive." Hardly an abundant harvest of light upon the problems of ethics is yielded here by contemporary social psychology, with its doctrine of moral conscience or of an inner moral sense



CHAPTER IX

MAN'S PSYCHOLOGICAL PROPENSITIES

ARE ETHICALLY NEUTRAL

We have tried to show in the preceding three chapters that the various manoeuvres of our social psychologists to deduce ethical guidance with respect to ends from descriptive findings or generalizations about the psychological nature of man and man's propensities, or ethical norms in such propensities do not stand up under scrutiny. They turn out to be self-refuting. We found that ethical norms, far from being logically entailed by a descriptive account of human nature and human propensities, are in fact logically independent of these psychological propensities. Such norms, or ethical evaluations, are espoused by our social psychologists, and in fact by every one else, prior to and apart from the alleged empirical discovery of man's psychological needs and propensities. Nevertheless, the fact is, as was pointed out above in Chapter V, that the social psychologists under discussion persist in classifying human needs, capacities, traits, or propensities, directly or indirectly as good or evil, right or wrong, beneficent or maleficent. It therefore becomes necessary to examine the one remaining basis on which the



attribution of the qualities of goodness, rightness, beneficence, or their opposites to the psychological propensities in human nature may be grounded, and to determine whether such attribution is justified.

As pointed out earlier in the present inquiry, the social psychologists under discussion, in their rebellion against the S-R psychology, and against Freudian psychology, propound a definition of human nature which includes among its ingredients such native propensities or need-dispositions as love, affiliativeness, altruism, sociability, rationality, inner moral conscience, creativity, desire for knowledge and understanding, esthetic interests, conscious (as opposed to unconscious) etc., etc. It was also pointed out earlier that, while there appears to be much empirical evidence to support the contention that these and similar need-disposition constructs point to constitutive, innate elements in human nature and in the dynamics of human behavior, they are overemphasized disproportionately by our social psychologists, with a resulting distortion of the image of man. Moreover, their exaggerated emphasis on this group of propensities in human nature is in itself a result not of empirical, descriptive investigations into the nature of man. It is rather, to a considerable extent, the product of a search, normatively guided, for those propensities in human nature that will exhibit the psychological conditions which they believe are necessary



for the realization of their vision of a just social order, in this instance a democratic, libertarian, and egalitarian social order.

Since they believe that the presence in human nature of such propensities is a necessary condition for the existence of a democratic society, which to them is the "good society," they characterize these propensities as good, right, beneficent, etc., and by implication they characterize as evil, wrong, or maleficent the "opposites" of these propensities. If our social psychologists were to back away from identifying ethical norms with or deducing ethical norms from psychological propensities, the least they would still be doing is attributing ethical qualities to them contingently. In other words, even if they were to acknowledge that the proposition "Affiliative behavior is good" is not deducible from "Man has a need and propensity for affiliativeness"; or even if they were to acknowledge that the proposition "Affiliative behavior is good" is not an analytic proposition inasmuch as the concept of goodness is not contained in the concept of affiliativeness; they would still maintain at least that it is a true proposition, synthetically true, and that so are, mutatis mutandis, a large number of similar statements about the goodness or badness, rightness or wrongness, beneficence or maleficence, of certain psychological propensities that are constitutive of human nature.



In the present chapter I wish to raise the question as to whether it is at all meaningful to say that the psychological need-dispositions or propensities that are constitutive of human nature are ethically good or bad, beneficent or maleficent, in the sense of ascribing to them these ethical qualities or attributes. My contention is that it is not meaningful to say this because man's propensities are in themselves, ethically neutral. In other words, it seems clear to me that the human propensities emphasized by our social psychologists as constitutive of human nature, and as a needed corrective to the S-R and Freudian psychologies, do not in themselves possess these ethical attributes. It seems conclusively clear to me that, given any such human propensity, some of the human actions that may be said to be among its consequences may be ethically right or beneficent, whereas other actions that are the expressions of the same propensity may be ethically wrong or maleficent.

This contention needs an additional word of preliminary clarification in advance of its fuller development. I am not saying that man is ethically neutral, and I agree with Asch that man is not a ". . . dynamically empty organism, lacking autonomous tendencies beyond primary needs and lacking directed forces toward nature or society . . ."1

¹Asch, Social Psychology, p. 373.



However, one must distinguish between a man, a man's acts, and his propensities. Certainly neither a man nor his acts are ethically neutral. What I am saying is that when man, or the nature of man, is analyzed in terms of such constructs as capacities, needs, motivations, traits, dispositions or propensities, useful and fruitful as these may turn out to be in the science of psychology for the purpose of describing or explaining human actions, they are not in themselves useful categories in the enterprise of normative ethics. What determines the moral rightness or wrongness of any human act is not any putative ethical attributes that may be ascribed to the propensity of which the act is an expression. What determines the rightness or wrongness of human action is the total situation in which the action occurs, including the intent or intention of the actor, and the consequences of the action's occurrence; and these are judged by ethical criteria that are independent of any alleged ethical attributes that may be ascribed to the particular propensity from which the action presumably stems.

That our social psychologists do as a matter of fact ascribe, directly or by implication, inherent ethical attributes to what we have called the psychological propensities constitutive of human nature, was made, I believe, amply clear above, in earlier chapters. The attack mounted by them against the S-R and Freudian



psychologies is centered in very large measure upon the allegedly exclusive or at least disproportionate emphasis by those psychologies on man's "lower" propensities, and upon their neglect of the "higher" or "superior" tendencies in human nature. To recapitulate briefly, the S-R psychology emphasizes such permanent primary needs as hunger, sex, avoidance of injury or punishment, desire for rewards, and holds that all forms of human action and interest, including the so-called "higher" ones, are merely ways, often disguised ways, of satisfying these "lower" primary needs; ways which developed through an "animal" process of reward-or-punishment conditioning, in which the organism learns which actions or interests will conduce to satisfying the primary needs, and which either will not lead to such satisfaction, or will result in punishment or injury. The Freudian psychology, according to our social psychologists, emphasizes such "lower" propensities as sexuality, aggressiveness, selfishness and self-centeredness, anti-social hostility, irrationality, unconscious drives or impulses, the pervasive dominance of the id, etc. There can be no doubt that the intent of the adjectives used in the literature to characterize these propensities stressed in the S-R and Freudian psychologies is often ethically normative. "Lower" and "animal" are often used not in any purely neutral, descriptive sense. They are normative words, and they convey the judgment that man's "lower" or "animal"



propensities are ethically inferior to the "higher" ones. Indeed, Freud himself, in spite of his protestations that the science of psychoanalysis has no "concern whatsoever with . . . judgments of value," often, as pointed out above in Chapter III, stepped out of his role as scientist, and in much of his writing was very much a moralist,² and often characterized the propensities listed above as anti-moral forces, and much of man's life as a struggle to control these anti-moral forces within him. Let us therefore now examine the ascriptions by our social psychologists of ethical attributes to man's propensities.

As has been pointed out earlier, Maslow's theory of motivation includes, as a salient part, a hierarchy of needs, from "lower" to "higher." While he occasionally acknowledges that "we don't really know" whether "aggression, hostility, hatred, and destructiveness" are instinctive, or are "an ever present reaction to frustration of instinctoid or basic needs,"³ one of his principal concerns is to show that the basic needs, which he calls instinctoid,

²In this connection I want to make reference to the brilliant concluding chapter, entitled "The Emergency of Psychological Man," in Philip Rieff's Freud: The Mind of the Moralist (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1961), pp. 360-392.

³Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being, p. 153; also pp. 182-183.



are "not bad, but either neutral or good";⁴ that "our intrinsic impulses are . . . not lions but lambs, loving rather than predatory, admirable rather than detestable . . ." ⁵ Maslow is equally eager to show that man's higher needs are "instinctoid and animal, precisely as animal as the need for food . . ." ⁶ that "man's best impulses are intrinsic," and that "our animal needs are seen to be of the same nature as our higher needs."⁷ It is important to understand that Maslow's insistence here that our animal needs are of the same nature as our higher needs, or that it was a bad mistake on the part of Western civilization to believe "that the animal in us was a bad animal, and that our most primitive impulses are evil, greedy, selfish, and hostile,"⁸ is not a result of any desire on his part to reject the ascription of ethical attributes to the propensities in human nature (he uses "need" and "impulse" interchangeably in this connection). His objective in blurring the distinction between "higher" and "lower" needs is only to ascribe the attribute "good" or "right" to some "lower" needs or impulses that have traditionally been

⁴Maslow, Motivation and Personality, pp. 135, 153, 340, and passim.

⁵Ibid., p. 153.

⁶Ibid., p. 151.

⁷Ibid., p. 152.

⁸Ibid., p. 129; also, Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being, p. 155.



considered to be evil. Moreover, it is clear that the higher needs in Maslow's hierarchy are not consigned to any ethically neutral limbo, but constitute for him an ethical paradise in which the only differences in the ethical labels worn by each need are the comparative differences between "good," "better," "best."

And so, for Maslow, when you go up in his hierarchy of needs and get above the physiological and the safety needs, the "higher" needs or impulses are good, or right, or beneficent: "The pursuit and gratification of higher needs have desirable civic and social consequences. . . . The higher the need the less selfish it must be. . . ."9 He refers to these higher needs as "our noblest impulses," "these noble and good impulses," "man's best impulses," etc.¹⁰ These include the need for "love," "belongingness," "esteem," "to know and understand" (cognitive needs), "esthetic needs," the need for "creativity," for "spontaneity," etc. The "opposites" of such "good" propensities, some of which Maslow lists under such rubrics as "aggression, hostility, hatred, and destructiveness,"¹¹ and again, "unwarranted hostility, cruelty, destructiveness, 'mean' aggressiveness," are of course "evil."¹² (though

⁹Maslow, Motivation and Personality, p. 149.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 152.

¹¹Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being, p. 153.

¹²Ibid., p. 182.



Maslow would object to my calling them propensities, since he holds the opinion that they are "reactive" rather than instinctive or instinctoid).

But it can be easily shown that there are many human actions which may be said to be expressions or manifestations of love, belongingness, need for esteem, need to know, esthetic need, creativeness, spontaneity, but which, when examined in their full context, including the intent of the actor and the consequences of the action, would have to be adjudged ethically wrong or maleficent. And contrariwise, there are many cases of human action which may be said to be manifestations of hostility, aggression, hatred, or destructiveness, which when seen in the light of the actor's intent and the action's consequences could not be adjudged ethically wrong, and might be adjudged right or beneficent. This appears to be vaguely perceived by Maslow, as may be seen in the second of the two quotations above. In this passage he finds it necessary to attach qualifying adjective to two of the "evil" propensities. He speaks here of "unwarranted hostility" and of "'mean' aggressiveness." These are significant adjectives. In these two phrases it is no longer the propensities "hostility" or "aggressiveness" that carry the load of ethical judgment, or the baggage of the inherent ethical attribute of evil or wrongness. The



evil, or wrongness, or maleficence are now inherent properties of the adjectives "mean" and "unwarranted" (if it is permissible to ascribe properties to adjectives).

This becomes additionally clear when we follow Maslow further along in his discussion at this point. He propounds the view that "indiscriminately destructive hostility is reactive" (i. e., not instinctoid). He also points out that

the ability to be aggressive and angry is found in all self-actualizing people, who are able to let it flow forth freely when the external situation 'calls for' it.¹³

Moreover,

. . . we know that the healthy child is also able to be justifiably angry . . . Presumably, then, a child should learn not only how to control his anger, but also how and when to express it. . .¹⁴

On the other hand, actions expressive of the need for love may turn out to be unloving or hostile actions, and, when seen in their full context, may thus be wrong. For example,

. . . sibling rivalry is traceable to the child's wish for the exclusive love of his parents . . . Thus out of a childish version of love, not in itself reprehensible, can come unloving behavior.¹⁵

Now, whether "indiscriminately destructive" hostility and aggressiveness or anger are reactive or instinctoid; and

¹³Ibid., p. 183.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.



whether sibling hostility is or is not a result of "ignorance and childish misinterpretations" of the instinctoid need for parental love as a need for exclusive love of parents; are questions that do not concern us here. What is significant is that from Maslow's discussion here one must clearly conclude that the ethically normative predicates "evil," "wrong," or "maleficent" can not be ascribed unqualifiedly to such human propensities as hostility, destructiveness, aggressiveness, in themselves. Neither can the ethically normative predicates "good," "right," or "beneficent" be unqualifiedly ascribed to the instinctoid "need for love" in itself. It is "indiscriminate destructiveness," "unwarranted hostility," and "mean aggressiveness" that are evil or wrong; and it is the desire for non-exclusive love that is good or right. But in making these distinctions and applying these adjectives, Maslow has actually changed the subject of the discussion. He is no longer speaking of man's psychological propensities. He is now discussing, to use his own word, "behavior," fairly specific human actions, the total situation of which determines the actions' moral character as indiscriminately destructive, unwarrantedly hostile, meanly aggressive, or exclusivist in their desire for love. Human actions certainly are subject to ethical evaluations. As to psychological propensities, such as aggressiveness, destructiveness, hostility, or love, the concrete human actions which may exemplify each of them, may be, depending



on each action's total context or situation, either good or bad, either right or wrong, either beneficent or maleficent. The propensities in themselves therefore can not have ethically normative predicates ascribed to them. The properties are ethically neutral.

If we look at Erich Fromm's work, even a cursory examination of his discussion of basic, inherent human needs, of "the most powerful forces motivating man's behavior,"¹⁶ leads to the same conclusions. These "needs which are specifically human,"¹⁷ "stem from the conditions of [man's] existence,"¹⁸ and must be fulfilled. The decision as to what is good and bad has to be made on the basis of our knowledge of man's nature . . . ,¹⁹ and its basic needs. Fromm's ascription of the ethical attribute "good" to these "specifically human" needs is thus clear. The fulfillment of these needs is good, and their frustration is bad and leads to mental illness. According to Fromm, the five fundamental needs that would still be experienced by man even if all his physiological needs were

¹⁶Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 28.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 29.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 28.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 30. See also Fromm's "Values, Psychology, and Human Existence," New Knowledge in Human Values, ed. A. H. Maslow, pp. 151-164.



satisfied, are the following:

1. The Need for Relatedness.--"The necessity to unite with other living beings, to be related to them, is an imperative need on the fulfillment of which man's sanity depends. . . . There is only one passion which satisfies man's need to unite himself with the world . . . and this is love. Love is union with somebody, or something, outside oneself . . .²⁰

2. The Need for Transcendence.--As a result of "man's situation as a creature," he has the "need to transcend this very state of the passive creature . . . He is driven by the urge to transcend the role of the creature, the accidentalness and passivity of his existence, by becoming a 'creator.'²¹

3. The Need for Rootedness.--Man "can dispense with [his] natural roots only insofar as he finds new human roots. . . . Every adult is in need of help, of warmth, of protection. . . . Is it surprising to find in the average adult a deep longing for the security and rootedness which the relationship to his mother once gave him?"²²

²⁰Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 30-31, and New Knowledge in Human Values, ed. A. H. Maslow, p. 152-53.

²¹Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 36, and New Knowledge in Human Values, ed. A. H. Maslow, p. 153.

²²Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 38-39, and New Knowledge in Human Values, ed. A. H. Maslow, p. 54-56.



4. Need for a Sense of Identity.--"Man, being torn away from nature, being endowed with reason and imagination, needs to form a concept of himself, needs to say and feel: 'I am I.'"²³

5. The Need for a Frame of Orientation.--"The fact that man has reason and imagination leads . . . to the necessity . . . for orienting himself in the world intellectually. Man finds himself surrounded by many puzzling phenomena and . . . has to make sense of them. . . . Reason is man's faculty for grasping the world by thought . . ."²⁴

However, though Fromm claims that these 'various needs of man . . . have to be satisfied in some way or other lest man should become insane,'²⁵ he points out in the next breath that "there are several ways in which each of these needs can be satisfied; the difference between these ways is the difference in their appropriateness for the development of man."²⁶ Fromm thus finds it necessary

²³Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 60, and New Knowledge in Human Values, ed. A. H. Maslow, p. 157.

²⁴Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 63-64, and New Knowledge in Human Values, ed. A. H. Maslow, pp. 159-160.

²⁵Fromm, "Values, Psychology, and Human Existence," New Knowledge in Human Values, ed. A. H. Maslow, p. 161.

²⁶Ibid. (Emphasis mine)



himself to strip man's basic needs, "the most powerful forces motivating man's behavior," of those ethical properties which he originally ascribed to them, and to leave them exposed in their pristine ethical nudity. The ethical property of "appropriateness for the development of man" is now ascribed not to the "needs," but rather to "the ways in which each of these needs can be satisfied." As in Maslow's case, Fromm has also changed the subject of the discussion here. Ways of satisfying needs are actions, and it is to these that one can ascribe, and that Fromm in fact turns out to be ascribing, ethical attributes, and not to needs.

According to Fromm, the need for Relatedness can be satisfied on the one hand by submission or domination, or on the other hand by love; and in his ethical theory the former kind of behavior is bad for the development of man, whereas the latter is good. The need for Transcendence can be satisfied either by creative behavior or by destructive behavior; the former way of satisfying this need is good, and the latter way of satisfying this same need is bad. The need for Rootedness can be satisfied either "regressively by fixation in nature and mother, or progressively by full birth in which new solidarity and oneness is achieved." Again, the former way of fulfilling the need is bad, the latter way of satisfying the same need is good. The need for a sense of Identity may be fulfilled through slavish,



conformist identifying of oneself with group, clan, religion, race, nation, etc., or through developing creatively an awareness of oneself as a distinct person. The former actions are bad, whereas the latter actions in fulfillment of the same need are good. And finally, the need for A Frame of Orientation may be satisfied through irrational orientation, or rationally; yet only the rational way is the good way for the "growth and development of the total personality."²⁷

Thus, it is the endless variety of human actions, each in its situational context, that may be judged ethically good or bad, right or wrong, beneficent or maleficent. The inherent human needs or dispositions that are being satisfied by these actions are themselves ethically neutral, inasmuch as the same need may be satisfied by right action at one time and by ethically wrong action at another. This is true of other "needs" of which Fromm speaks fairly loosely in his various writings. "Needs like the striving for happiness, harmony, love and freedom are inherent in his nature."²⁸ It is obvious that these, and other needs like spontaneity, to the extent to which they are "forces motivating man's behavior," may motivate behavior that is good or beneficent, or behavior that is evil and maleficent.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 161-62, and Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 30-66 passim.

²⁸Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 81.



As was pointed out above in Chapter V, Allport calls it "A persistent defect of modern psychology" that it has failed "to make a serious study of the affiliative desires and capacities of human beings."²⁹ His own sensitive and empirically documented studies lead him to the conclusion that "It is the nature of human life to crave affiliation and love . . ."³⁰ Contrasted with affiliativeness and love in Allport's studies are aggression and hate, the latter two being reactive rather than inherent, and emerging according to Allport "as a consequence of blocked self-esteem and blocked affiliation . . ."³¹ But the contrast, for Allport, is not only descriptive; it is also a normative contrast: affiliativeness and love are ethically good, whereas aggression and hate are ethically bad. However, by now it should be clear that this ascription of ethical properties to basic human propensities and their dichotomization into good and bad, is simply without justification. Affiliativeness in itself is neither good nor bad. On the other hand, actions which may be called affiliative are either good or bad, depending upon the situational context of the action. Certainly the group solidarity and affiliativeness in the predatory actions

²⁹Allport, "A Basic Psychology of Love and Hate," in his Personality and Social Encounter, p. 199.

³⁰Ibid., p. 214; also pp. 171-174, and p. 63.

³¹Ibid., p. 202.



of the members of a criminal gang or a gang of juvenile delinquents can not be called good. Nor is the affiliativeness that expresses itself in actions of blind social conformity or "slavish submission to group forces"³² to be assigned the ethical attribute of goodness. Love actions that are exclusivist in their possessiveness, or that are destructive of the recipient's personality by fostering within him a sense dependency (as in the case of the mother whose love smothers the child's initiative) can hardly be classified as ethically good. On the other hand, the aggressiveness expressed in the vigorous campaigning by an intelligent, dedicated candidate for public office, or in parliamentary debate against the opponents of civil rights legislation, is quite naturally seen as ethically good. Even hate, when the acts which are expressive of it are directed against the cruelties and injustices of a totalitarian regime, or against callow corruption in the political life of a country or a community, can hardly be labelled ethically bad or maleficent.

Solomon Asch charges modern psychology with having "systematically neglected" man's "need to understand, . . . desire to face the facts . . . a passion to explore and inquire . . . a thirst for knowledge."³³ Such basic human

³²Asch, Social Psychology, p. 451.

³³Ibid., pp. 22-23.



"needs" are considered good by Asch. However, it requires no extraordinary feat of the imagination to think of examples of human behavior that are exploratory, inquiring, and seeking after new knowledge, but by ethical standards would have to be judged evil and repugnant. Youngsters inflicting pain and torture on other youngsters out of the exploratory urge to discover the victims' reactions; the sexual pervert experimenting upon his victim out of an urge to gain new knowledge and experience in the sources of sexual gratification; the medical experiments conducted by Nazi physicians upon their victims in concentration camps; the psychological tortures practiced upon those accused of treason in Stalin's purge trials, and recreated imaginatively by Koestler in Darkness at Noon and by Orwell in 1984, were motivated in part by the torturers' desire to obtain knowledge about the limits of human endurance beyond which men's sense of fact and their elementary conception of truth are destroyed. These are examples of exploratory, knowledge-seeking human action. As concrete human actions they are evil and monstrous. Do these examples make man's propensities to explore, to understand, to gain new knowledge, evil rather than, as Asch would have it, good? Or is this another illustration of the principle that propensities in themselves are ethically neutral?

Let us now look briefly again at the dichotomy "rational" vs. "irrational," Asch criticises modern



psychology for its widespread assumption "that men are ruled by their emotions and that these are irrational," and deplores this assumption because it has been "responsible for a systematic depreciation of the possibilities of intelligence and thinking in human affairs."³⁴ Asch's assumption must therefore be that man's propensity to be rational, to exercise one's intelligence and thinking, is good. The other social psychologists discussed in the present study deplore, as has already been pointed out above in Chapter III, the dominant emphasis in recent psychology on the emotional and irrational elements in human motivation, and stress the rational elements in human nature. In the process they also directly or by implication ascribe the attribute of goodness to man's rational propensities.

Allport includes in his list of "Requirements for an Adequate Theory of Motivation" the requirement that such a theory "will ascribe dynamic force to cognitive processes . . ." Then he adds significantly,

We are emerging from an epoch of extreme irrationalism when human motivation has been equated with blind will, . . . with the struggle for survival . . . , with instincts . . . , with the steam boiler of the id . . .

When we say that we have 'scientific curiosity; or that all men make an 'effort after meaning,' or that everyone tries to resolve 'cognitive dissonance,' we are saying

³⁴Ibid., p. 21.



that the desire to know is itself a motive, and that there are cognitive, as well as drive, motives to reckon with.³⁵

What is of significance here is Allport's implied ethical judgment that what is cognitive, what is rational, in human motivation is good and desirable, and can serve as an ethical corrective when it is fused with the emotive in a person's "intention."³⁶

But here again, an examination of the concept of rationality as a human propensity in itself discloses no persuasive reason for ascribing ethical attributes to it. Of course, in an "intention" which is a resolve "to order our lives by some ethical code," the cognitive which becomes fused with the emotive "into an integral urge"³⁷ is, in this particular context or situation, by definition beneficent. However, in other contexts and other situations man's actions that may be characterized as rational or cognitive may be evil or maleficent, or even destructive of the very rationality which they are supposed to exemplify.

It is interesting but odd that Allport uses Festinger's theory of "cognitive dissonance" as one of the illustrations of the "advance of great importance" represented by psychology's ascription of "dynamic force to the

³⁵Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, pp. 222 and 259.

³⁶Ibid., p. 223.

³⁷Ibid.



intellectual functions, to the cognitive aspects of life."³⁸ The theory of cognitive dissonance has been stated by one psychologist as follows: "Human nature . . . is said to abhor inconsistency."³⁹ Or, to use Festinger's own words:

. . . dissonance, that is, the existence of non-fitting relations among cognitions, is a motivating factor in its own right.⁴⁰

In other words, man's propensity to know, to think, reason, is such that when he experiences inconsistency, non-fitting relations, or dissonance, he is impelled to resolve the inconsistency by making changes that will introduce fittingness or consistency into the situation, and thus satisfy man's need for rationality. This, for Allport, shows man as inherently rational, always weighing consistency as against inconsistency, craving the former and abhorring the latter, and thus desiring what is good and rejecting the irrational, which is ethically inferior.

But on the other hand research has amply demonstrated that man often uses his "reason" to justify impulsive behavior and emotional attitudes to which the ethical attribute of goodness can hardly be ascribed. Often reason

³⁸Ibid., p. 217.

³⁹Robert B. Zajonc, "The Concepts of Balance, Congruity, and Dissonance," Public Opinion Quarterly, Vol. XXIV, No. 2 (Summer 1960), p. 294.

⁴⁰Leon Festinger, A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance (Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson & Co., 1957), p. 3.



is used by men also to reinterpret reality so that the disclosures of cognition are ignored by them, and their emotional requirements, often far from ethical in character, are satisfied. This is, of course, recognized by our social psychologists when they discuss "rationalization"⁴¹ among the "mechanisms of defense," and identify it as "self-deception."⁴² Fromm states this succinctly:

[Man] has little difficulty in acting irrationally, but it is almost impossible for him not to give his action the appearance of reasonable motivation.⁴³

Asch's observation in this connection that "it would seem necessary to discriminate between rationalization and thinking" is hardly helpful here, and only begs the question. Asch goes on to explain this distinction by saying that

We need to know when we are dealing with a person who is fleeing from fact and truth and when we are dealing with the opposite attitude, that of trying to reach a true understanding.⁴⁴

The propensity to think, the desire to know and understand, are exemplified in various concrete human actions, some ethically good and others ethically bad. The propensity itself Asch, by implication, thinks of as good. But when the thinking or the cognitive act is of a certain specific kind, in a specific

⁴¹Asch, Social Psychology, p. 22; Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, pp. 158 ff.

⁴²Allport, ibid.

⁴³Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 65.

⁴⁴Asch, Social Psychology, p. 22.



context or situation, when it is directed toward fleeing from fact or truth in order not to disturb or dislodge tenaciously held emotions, and is thus judged to be bad in his ethical hierarchy, Asch indulges in a bit of semantic legerdemain and claims that this is something different from thinking because there is another name for it, namely rationalization.

Some years ago, in a field study which tested the understanding of a cartoon series ridiculing anti-Jewish prejudice, more than 76% of those respondents who, by another test, were classified as "most prejudiced," completely misunderstood the message.⁴⁵ This would seem to support Festinger's generalization that

Forced or accidental exposure to new information which tends to increase dissonance (within the personality) will frequently result in misinterpretation and misperception of the new information by the person thus exposed in an effort to avoid a dissonance increase.⁴⁶

Allport is thus correct in adducing the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance as evidence for man's propensity to be consistent, to reason and to know, but he is in error when he ascribes to this need the attribute of ethical superiority. How many morally repugnant acts, or unspeakably evil acts,

⁴⁵Bernard Berelson and Gary A. Steiner, Human Behavior: An Inventory of Scientific Findings (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964), p. 537.

⁴⁶Leon Festinger, A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance, p. 265, quoted by Berelson and Steiner, ibid.



are justified by their perpetrators through the most ingenious processes of reasoning!

The discovery of men's capacity to employ the intellect in the service of doing evil is neither surprising nor new. The Hebrew prophet, Jeremiah, some 2,550 years ago, denounced those who

are wise to do evil,
but to do good they have no knowledge (Jeremiah IV, 22)

Leo Strauss gives an interesting account of the way Hobbes showed reason to be employed in the service of man's appetites:

. . . the specific difference between man and all other animals is reason. . . . man . . . can envisage the future much better than can animals: for this very reason he is not like animals hungry only with the hunger of the moment, but also with future hunger, and thus he is the most precatory, the most cunning, the strongest, and the most dangerous animal. Human appetite is thus not in itself different from animal appetite, but only by the fact that in the case of man appetite has reason at its service.⁴⁷

One also recalls the lines of Mephistopheles on the subject of man's reason, in Goethe's Faust:

Der kleine Gott der Welt bleibt stets von gleichem Schlag
Und ist so wunderlich als wie am ersten Tag.
Ein wenig besser wurd'er leben,
Hätts't du ihm nicht den Schein des Himmels Licht gegeben;
Er nennt's Vernunft und braucht's allein,
Nur tierischer als jedes Tier zu sein.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Leo Strauss, The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis (Chicago: Phoenix Books: University of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 9. (Emphasis mine)

⁴⁸ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Goethe's Sämtliche Werke, Sechster Band (Leipzig: Der Tempel Verlag), Faust, p. 89.
The little God o'the world sticks to the same old way,
And is as whimsical as on Creation's day.
Life somewhat better might content him,
But for the gleam of heavenly light which Thou hast



In our own day we need only think of the dialectical skill brought to bear by Hitler and Goebbels upon the justification of their successive expansionist moves in Europe prior to World War II, or of their persecution and extermination of the Jews. Whether it be the deliberate and diabolical rationalizations of Hitler and Goebbels, or the often unconsciously motivated rationalizations engaged in by all of us, fictions are fabricated by our thinking apparatus and substituted for facts in order to remove the inconsistency between our justification of an unethical act and the external situation. As Berelson and Steiner summarize this,

When the real world and the motives of the subject are at odds, behavior is first designed to bring the real world into line with the motives. But when this is impossible, for external or internal reasons, the discrepancy (or dissonance, as it is now called) can be reduced by appropriate changes in the perception of reality.⁴⁹

Man's rationality, his propensity to think and to know, are thus in themselves neither good nor evil. They are ethically neutral. To be sure, when a person has made ethically right decisions or choices, and when this includes the decision to face facts and not try to

lent him:

He calls it Reason--thence his power's increased,
To be far beastlier than any beast.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, tr. Bayard Taylor
(New York: The Modern Library, 1930), p. 10.

⁴⁹Berelson and Steiner, Human Behavior: An Inventory of Scientific Findings, p. 266.



reconstruct them to fit one's wishes, then reason is indeed man's most effective instrument for self-control, for overcoming wishes and impulses, for getting good deeds done. But the propensity of rationality does not contain within itself a built-in guarantee that the acts which are an expression of it or an exemplification of it will always be ethically right and beneficent. Accordingly, specific human actions which exemplify man's rationality or his need for cognition may be ethically right or wrong, good or evil, depending upon the nature of the actions in their total situational context.

The same results follow when we examine the "conscious-unconscious" dichotomy from the point of view of the problem of the present chapter. Motives, drives, or needs are often dichotomized ethically on the basis of their being conscious or unconscious. Conscious motives, or needs, or propensities, are supposed to be good, unconscious ones are supposed to be bad. As Maslow puts it,

Many people still think of 'the unconscious,' of regression, and of primary process cognition as necessarily unhealthy, or dangerous, or bad.⁵⁰

Allport especially, relying upon his interpretation of Freud (See supra, Chapter III), emphasizes that Freud postulated "(in all people) an unconscious heavily laden

⁵⁰Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being, p. 184.



with antisocial impulses and repressions."⁵¹ And again,

. . . we must not deny that many of the passionate interests of adulthood may contain some admixture of unconscious aggressive or symbolic sexual force. Indeed, the more 'passionate' (obsessive) the interest the more we may suspect it to be infused with unconscious sexual or aggressive pressures.⁵²

However, when we stop talking about "the unconscious," and about impulses, or interests, or pressures, and begin talking about consciously motivated or unconsciously motivated actions, it may be sufficient to point out, on the one hand, that many, many consciously motivated human actions are ethically reprehensible or repugnant. And on the other hand, let us recall again Freud's important dictum that

Not only what is lowest but also what is highest in the Ego can be unconscious.⁵³

Thus, according to Freud, what is unconscious is not inherently evil, and, indeed, what is highest in the Ego can be unconscious. This is echoed by Maslow:

Our depths can also be good, or beautiful, or desirable. This is also becoming clear from the general findings from investigations of the sources of love, creativeness, play, humor, art, etc. Their roots are deep in the inner, deeper self, i. e., in the unconscious.⁵⁴

⁵¹Allport, Pattern and Growth in Personality, p. 155.

⁵²Ibid., p. 214. (Emphasis mine)

⁵³Freud, The Ego and the Id, pp. 32-33.

⁵⁴Maslow, Toward a Psychology of Being, p. 184.



In other words, unconsciously motivated actions may be ethically good, desirable, may even represent "what is highest in the Ego." Unconscious motivation, as well as conscious motivation, is in itself ethically neutral. The acts that express this motivation, seen in their situational context, may be judged to be either ethical or unethical.

It should be clear by this time that this point is perfectly general, and that it is true of any propensities in terms of which human nature is analyzed. However, I should like to use another two or three examples, and then say a concluding word by way of transition to the next chapter. Let us now look at the Altruism-Selfishness dichotomy. Certainly those who maintain that man is essentially selfish at the same time deplore this propensity in man, and ascribe negative ethical attributes to it. And per contra those who claim that man is essentially altruistic consider this a laudable propensity, and ascribe positive ethical attributes to it. Clustered closely around the concept of altruism are such propensities as self-sacrifice, idealism, etc., and these also are considered to be good or beneficent. However, once again this dichotomy and these ethical characterizations do not stand up under scrutiny. For there are many human actions that may be denominated selfish, which are not evil, and which indeed may be good or beneficent when seen in their full context. The action of the artist who, in producing a work of art, is motivated by



the selfish desire for self-expression; or the actions of a Churchill or a Roosevelt, who, in making momentous and far-reaching political or economic decisions, is moved by the selfish need to dominate masses of men or manipulate the forces of history, are two rather obvious examples.

More interesting is the ingredient of altruism, idealism, or readiness for self-sacrifice that is claimed to be inherent in human nature. Surely here is one human propensity that is altogether praiseworthy and of which we can not but say that it is ethically good or beneficent. Altruism and self-sacrifice are major and lofty ideals in one of the mainstreams (often contradicted by other mainstreams) of the Christian ethic in Western culture. But this must not veil the fact that many human acts, the total character of which is unmistakably evil or maleficent, are altruistic, idealistic, and even self-sacrificial acts. Who would dispute that patriotism is an altruistic and idealistic sentiment and attitude. While there are exceptions, no personal gain or selfish goal need motivate patriotic actions. On the contrary, patriotic actions are selfless: they are for the good of others, the good of the country: in one's patriotic actions self-effacing and self-sacrificing idealism is made manifest. But it is these same altruistic, idealistic acts of patriotism that so often harrass and persecute the political or intellectual non-conformist; that for decades restricted the entry to the



United States of immigrants from certain countries; that interned or relocated to inland area thousands of Americans of Japanese origin during World War II. How many clearly evil acts are performed by John Birch Society members out of altruistic, idealistic, and even self-sacrificial patriotic motives? As Anthony Kenny says, "it is notorious that bad actions may be done with good motives."⁵⁵

Even more instructive is a look at the social psychology of a mass movement such as National Socialism in Germany, and the mystique it developed both among its adult units and its youth groups. For all its monstrous evils, there has not been sufficient attention given to the ingredient of idealism in the Nazi movement. A few sentences from a study of the social sources of Nazism may be helpful:

We now come to that element in Nazism, the idealist character of which seems to be established almost beyond doubt . . .

. . . the seemingly strongest idealist component of Nazism, viz. its demand for heroic self-sacrifice, ultimately for the sacrifice of life itself for Führer and fatherland, demands our closest attention. Even severe critics of Nazism usually do not deny to it the credit of having been capable of inspiring courage and self-denial: that is to say, strong moral powers. (Emphasis mine. I shall comment on this below). . . . The Nazi literature is indeed full of appeals for self-denial and readiness for sacrifice . . .

It must be frankly admitted that a not inconsiderable group of young people responded to the call from genuine self-denying idealism.⁵⁶

⁵⁵Anthony Kenny, Action, Emotion, and Will, p. 88, n. 2.

⁵⁶Eva G. Reichmann, Hostages of Civilization: The Social Sources of National Socialist Anti-Semitism (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1951), pp. 214-215.



It was thus out of idealistic, self-sacrificial motives that Nazi groups smeared the word "Jude" on windows of shops owned by Jews; it was out of altruistic devotion to the mystique of "Blut und Rasse" and "Führer und Vaterland" that Nazi gangs in untold numbers burned Synagogues and smashed shop windows throughout Germany on the "Kristallnacht" of November 9, 1938; it was out of idealistic dedication to the need for purging Jews, "Communists," and other foreign elements that "polluted" the purity of German culture, that Jews and others were shipped to concentration camps and extermination centers. Echoes of Hitler's "idealism" can still be heard today. A news report from Hanover, Germany, dated October 13, 1964, reported that

. . . Gerd Heinecke, the defense attorney in the trial of the accused murderers of 7,000 Jews, . . . told the court that the defendants were not malicious because Hitler believed he was fulfilling a 'sacred mission' in killing Jews. . . . a newspaper, "Bild," . . . urged the revocation of his lawyer's license. [Heinecke] said he could not understand what he described as a 'misunderstanding,' since he did not mean 'to show hatred but love' in his remarks.⁵⁷

Nowhere have I seen the error that man's propensities for idealism, altruism, or self-sacrifice are ethically good, more egregiously exemplified than above, in Eva Reichman's clause in which she equates them with "moral powers." How one could characterize as "moral" those "powers" of which

⁵⁷Jewish Telegraphic Agency Daily News Bulletin, New York, October 14, 1964.



Nazi brutality was a product would defy one's moral understanding, were it not for the fact that the assumption concerning the moral quality of idealism, etc. is so universally accepted in ethical and psychological discourse, including the writings of the social psychologists under discussion. Human propensities, or "powers" in themselves are neither good nor bad, neither moral nor immoral; they are ethically neutral.

If we took Henry A. Murray's classification of 28 "secondary or psychogenic needs . . . [which] stand for common reaction systems and wishes,"⁵⁸ and tried to ascertain whether ethical attributes can be ascribed to them, our results would again be the same: as manifestations of each of these postulated human needs one can find human actions the total character of which is unmistakably good, as well as other actions which are unmistakably wrong or evil. It must therefore follow that of each of the needs themselves no ethical attributes can be predicated. Each need in itself is ethically neutral. The same point is made by John Dewey with reference to Hobbes' claim that

In the nature of man we find three principal sources of quarrel. First competition, secondly diffidence, thirdly glory. The first maketh men invade for gain; the second for safety; and the third for reputation.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Henry A. Murray, Explorations in Personality (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), pp. 80-83.

⁵⁹ Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, Everyman Edition, Chapter 13, p. 64. (Emphasis mine)



Dewey points out that by the time of 19th century British social philosophy, competition as love of gain came to be looked upon as 'the cause of beneficent social effects"; that in many communities honor or glory for oneself or ones family or class 'has been the chief conservator of all worthwhile social values"; and that diffidence as a motive may take any form, 'from craven cowardice to prudence, caution, and the circumspection without which no intelligent foresight is possible."⁶⁰ Dewey generalizes this point as follows:

In itself, the impulse (or whatever name be given to it) is neither socially maleficent nor beneficent. Its significance depends upon the consequences actually produced: and these depend upon the conditions under which it operates and with which it interacts.⁶¹

And finally, in this connection, it is also helpful to note Arthur O. Lovejoy's review of the treatment of three related propensities of human nature in European philosophical and political literature of the 17th and 18th centuries. The three propensities that, according to Lovejoy, repeatedly reappear in the literature of the period are:

a) 'approbateness,' the desire for approval or admiration of oneself, one's acts, and one's achievements on the part of one's fellows, and for the expression by them of this feeling--'the love of praise';

⁶⁰John Dewey, Freedom and Culture (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1939), pp. 109-113.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 111.



b) 'self-esteem,' the propensity or desire for a 'good opinion' of oneself and one's qualities, acts, and achievements;

c) 'emulation,' the craving for a belief in one's superiority to others in one or another of all of these respects, and a desire for the recognition of this superiority by those with whom one associates, and for the express admission of it by them.⁶²

Lovejoy further adds the terminological observation that

The noun 'pride,' which most naturally refers to self-esteem, was also frequently employed to designate approbateness, the desire for some form or degree of the approbation of others.⁶³

Now, it is Lovejoy's well-documented contention that, whatever their other disagreements may have been, and they were many, philosophers and theologians, pensée-writers and satirists, Catholics, Protestants, and free thinkers of that period, almost all agreed that these three propensities, especially pride and approbateness, are universal among mankind, irrepressible, and primary as the "most powerful of human motives." Lovejoy believes that the examples he uses, though not exhaustive, are sufficient

to indicate the wide--the almost, but not quite, universal--adoption by 17th and 18th century explorers of human nature, of this conception of approbateness as the most powerful and persistent motive of men's outwardly observable behavior.⁶⁴

⁶²Arthur O. Lovejoy, Reflections on Human Nature (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1961), p. 129. (Emphasis mine)

⁶³Ibid., pp. 130-131.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 131.



What is most arresting is Lovejoy's next contention, namely, that during these two centuries there was spirited debate as to whether "pride," this "universal and exceedingly potent passion in man, has chiefly benign or chiefly harmful consequences in individual and social life," and that opinion on this was sharply divided.⁶⁵ Lovejoy sums up this division of opinion as follows:

At one extreme was the opinion that it [i. e., "pride"] is the principal, or even the only, effective psychic source of all that is most needful and most desirable in human behavior whatever its intrinsic nature; at the other extreme was the opinion that it is the principal psychic source of most of the evils and miseries in man's existence.⁶⁶

After showing how the desire for self-esteem, and approbative-ness, and emulativeness manifest themselves in 'good' behavior as well as 'evil' behavior, Lovejoy understandably concludes that

The reason for recalling such familiar facts about human nature as these is that the diversity of . . . modes of behavior springing, under differing conditions, from a common root has not always been recognized.⁶⁷

And yet it would seem strange that the fact that a great diversity of human behavior, both good and evil, springs from the same human propensities, and the consequent fact that it is the behaviors that are moral or immoral,

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 217.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 116.



whereas the propensities are ethically neutral, has "not always been recognized." And strange also is the failure to recognize this on the part of our group of social psychologists. For insights into this truth have not been altogether absent from Western thought. It was recognized in the Rabbinic teachings of Judaism, as shown by George Foote Moore:

. . . the impulses natural to man are not in themselves evil. When God looked upon the finished creation and saw that it was all very good (Genesis I, 31), the whole nature of man is included in this judgment, as Rabbi Samuel ben Nahman observes: "And behold it was very good." This is the evil impulse. Is then the evil impulse good? Yes, for were it not for the evil impulse no man would build a house, nor marry a wife, nor beget children, nor engage in trade, as it says (Ecclesiastes IV, 4), "All labor and skillful work comes of a man's rivalry with his neighbor."⁶⁸

Aristotle seems to have made the same point in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. As one commentator puts it:

Aristotle neither praises nor condemns the tendencies inherent in man. They are indifferent in themselves; they become good or bad according as they are subjugated to or allowed to assert themselves against the 'right rule' which our reasonable nature grasps for itself and seeks to impose on them.⁶⁹

⁶⁸George Foote Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), Vol. I, p. 482. The quotation attributed to R. Nahman is from *Midrash Rabba* on Genesis, *Bereshit*, ix, 7. Cf. C. G. Montefiore and H. A. Loewe, *Rabbinic Anthology* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1967), p. 395.

⁶⁹D. W. Ross, *Aristotle, A Complete Exposition of His Works and Thought* (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), p. 189. The passage in the *Ethics* on which this is based is Book II, Chapter 3, 1104^b3-1105^a15, especially: "That virtue . . . by the acts from which it arises it is both



More recently, we find F. H. Bradley, in the course of his discussion of the two selves in man, the good self and the bad self (Cf. su^{ra}, Chapter VII on Self-actualization) making essentially the same observation about 'inborn propensities':

The bad self is not entirely composed of habits and desires all of which are 'egotistic'; the content of the good self is not all 'altruistic.' It is mere reckless theorizing to see in the bad self the assertion of propensities in themselves 'egotistic,' and nothing in the good self but what is naturally 'altruistic.' I do not know any one inborn propensity which can not be moralized into good or turned into bad. Take the virtues or vices of any man, and we can see that the natural basis of every virtue might under certain conditions have been developed into a vice, and the basis of every vice into a virtue; for vices and virtues have common roots. . . . Is the hereditary sexual propensity 'egoistic' or 'altruistic?' If egoistic, then all the virtues based on it . . . everything of which it is the root and the nourishment . . . is egoistic and bad; and this is in flat contradiction with facts. If altruistic, then the vices it gives origin to . . . are altruistic and good; and that again is against the facts.⁷⁰

In our own generation, drawing on the millennial mainstream of religious and philosophical thought in Judaism, Abraham Joshua Heschel develops the related theme of the inextricably intertwined relationship between good and evil in human nature:

increased and, if they are done differently, destroyed, and that the acts from which it arose are those in which it actualizes itself--let this be taken as said.' Ross' Translation: The Basic Works of Aristotle, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), p. 955.

⁷⁰F. H. Bradley, Ethical Studies, pp. 278-79.



Even more frustrating than the fact that evil is real, mighty and tempting is the fact that it thrives so well in the disguise of the good, that it can draw its nutriment from the life of the holy. In this world, it seeps, the holy and the unholy do not exist apart, but are mixed, interrelated and confounded. It is a world where idols are at home, and where even the worship of God may be alloyed with the worship of idols.

The dreadful confusion, the fact that there is nothing in this world that is not a mixture of good and evil, of holy and unholy, of silver and gross, is, according to Jewish mysticism, the central problem of history and the ultimate issue of redemption.⁷¹

'For there is not a righteous man upon this earth, that does good and sins not' (Ecclesiastes 7:20). The commentators take this verse to mean that even a righteous man sins on occasion. . . . The Baal Shem, however, reads the verse: 'For there is not a righteous man upon earth that does good and there is no sin in the good.'⁷²

To recapitulate, then. If human nature is analyzed in terms of such psychological units or concepts as Need, Drive, Motive, Trait, Instinct, (all essentially disposition concepts) for which we have been using the umbrella term "propensities" (see above, Chapter IV, Section F), we discover that no ethical attributes can be ascribed to any

⁷¹Abraham Joshua Heschel, God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1956), pp. 369 and 371. (Emphasis mine)

⁷²Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Concept of Man in Jewish Thought," The Concept of Man: A Study in Comparative Philosophy, ed. S. Radhakrishnan and P. T. Paju (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1960), pp. 151-52. The Baal Shem (Israel Ben Eliezer of Mezbizh, 1700-1760) was the founder of the Hassidic movement in Judaism. He became known as the Baal Shem Tov--the Master of the Good Name, and is referred to by this name in Hassidic literature and in writings on Jewish thought and history generally.



one of them by itself. If it were possible to assemble an exhaustive inventory of such psychological propensities inherent in human nature, and if the attempt were made to divide the propensities in this inventory into two classes (similar to the division attempted above in Chapter V), propensities that are claimed to be ethically good, and those which are claimed to be ethically bad, a disconcerting paradox would become evident. We would discover that for every human propensity which we would be inclined to classify as ethically good, many human actions could be found that are expressions of this propensity but are ethically evil. And conversely, for every human propensity that we would classify as ethically evil, many human actions would be found that are expressions of this need-disposition but are ethically good. Whereas human acts are good or evil, right or wrong, depending upon the act's total situational context and its consequences, man's psychological propensities, we must conclude, are neither good nor evil, neither right nor wrong. They are ethically neutral.

This conclusion seems to me to have some important implications for an aspect of political and social theory, in which some of our social psychologists become involved when they step out of their roles of descriptive psychologists and take on the role of moralists and social philosophers. These implications are discussed in the next chapter.



However, one final comment is required before we leave this subject. In Western jurisprudence, in a court of law, we punish only actions. We never punish a person for his traits, need-dispositions, or propensities, and this seems to me to constitute additional evidence in support of the proposition that man's psychological propensities are ethically neutral, and that only his actions are good or evil. None the less we find that in some court cases the motives of a person do become a subject of concern and deliberations, and we sometimes find in such court cases that distinctions are made between good motives and evil motives. This would seem to raise doubts about the view developed in this chapter. But it appears to me that in the context of a case in a court of law, the word "motive" is used in a sense synonymous with "intention." Now, intentions, to refer again to Anthony Kenny's distinction, are "forward-looking reasons for action."⁷³ An intention is already an action on the part of the person. To quote Kenny again,

. . . forming an intention (in the sense of taking a decision) is itself a human action . . .⁷⁴

Intentions are not general propensities. Each intention is a specific prelude to a specific action, and therefore

⁷³Anthony Kenny, Action, Emotion, and Will, pp. 91-92; Cf. supra, p. 56.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 94.



partakes of the ethical quality of the action--irrespective of whether the action is carried out or not. One never has an intention or makes a choice or decision to be aggressive or to be ambitious or to be affiliative or affectionate. Rather, the term "Intention" is relevant to such decision-making or choice-making situations as: decision to beat him up; intention to drive him out of business by under-selling him; intention to increase profits by collusion with others in a price-fixing scheme; intention to have him murdered; intention to wreck his reputation by spreading slanderous gossip about him, etc. Intentions, like actions, may therefore be judged to be ethically right or wrong. It is of course true that intentions sometimes do not work out in practice. The scheme to drive your competitor out of business may never get off the ground. The planned murder may not be carried out. The bank official may not carry out his intention to misappropriate funds because of his transfer to another branch of the bank. The question therefore arises as to whether, and in what sense, such intentions, since they have no consequences, may be judged to be ethically good or bad. The answer perhaps is that, once the bank official has formed the intention, has made the decision, to embezzle funds, this intention or decision does have consequences even though the embezzlement was not carried out; the consequence being that, though he failed this time, he will be more likely, more inclined, to do it



at another time. In other words, the formulation of the intention, the arrival at the decision, is itself an action which may become part of a habit-forming and character-molding chain of ethically reprehensible actions. As Aristotle said,

Such people have only themselves to blame for having acquired a character like that by their loose living, just as they have only themselves to blame for being unjust, if they make a practice of unjust behavior. . . . It is their persistent activities in certain directions that make them what they are. This is well illustrated by the behavior of men who are training for some competition or performance: they devote their whole time to the appropriate exercises. The man, then, must be a perfect fool who is unaware that people's characters take their bias from the steady direction of their activities.⁷⁵

⁷⁵Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1114a, 3-12, trans. by J. A. K. Thomson (London: Penguin Books, 1955), pp. 90-91.



CHAPTER X

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN NATURE

In any study of the relationships between the concept of human nature and theories of social and political organizations, three questions present themselves:

1. Given any theory of human nature, what can logically be deduced from it about political and social organization?

This question really contains two sub-questions:

- 1.1) Given any theory of human nature, what can be logically deduced from it about what political or social organization ought to be like; or what would be a good social order or political system?

Our answer to this question, given above in Chapter VI, was that no such logical deduction is possible: that from descriptive, factual statements about human nature it is not possible to deduce statements about what ought to be; and that whether a given social order or political system would be good, is a matter of ethical decision, of moral resolve, not logically deducible from descriptive information about human nature.



1.2) Given any theory of human nature, what can be logically deduced from it about the feasibility or practicability of any political or social theory?

Our answer to this question, given above in Chapter VI, was that, theoretically, it should be possible to make deductions or predictions of two kinds:

- a) If the nature of man is such and such, then it is unrealistic to expect that a given blueprint for "the good society" will work, because it assumes that men will do thus and so but men are unable to do this ("should" assumes "can"): or because it assumes that men will not do thus and so and this is an unwarranted assumption since under given conditions men will probably do thus and so.
- b) Given any realistic blueprint for the good society, and the ethical and social values and goals espoused in it, and given the nature of man to be such and such, it follows that certain methods of organization, social structures, social and psychological techniques, pedagogic methods, etc., will probably be effective instrumentalities for the achievement of the assumed or espoused values and goals.



2. Given any social or political theory or blueprint, what built-in assumptions does it make concerning the nature of man? Clearly this is not part of our present inquiry, and therefore no attempt is made here to formulate answers to this question.

3. Given a social or political theory or system, and the values or ethical goals espoused within it as desiderata--for example, the system of democracy--what kind of being must man be, what must human nature be like, what kinds of propensities does man have to have, in order to make possible the realization of this social system and its survival? In other words, given the moral resolve, the decision, that democracy is good, what are the necessary psychological conditions for the realization and survival of a democratic social and political order?

This third question is touched on more or less explicitly in the work of several of our social psychologists, and answers to the question are suggested, directly or indirectly, in their writings. It is this question and their answers to it that I wish to discuss now, in the light of the preceding chapters.



The contention was developed earlier that the social psychologists under discussion are often in effect disguised moralists, or social philosophers. As moralists, theirs is a quest for logical foundations for the ethical and social norms and goals they espouse. They erroneously think that ethical and social norms are deducible from, in some cases, identical with, some of man's basic psychological propensities. Accordingly, in their image of man and in their research, they emphasize those propensities in human nature which they assure, in one sense or another, to be good or beneficent. From these ostensibly good and beneficent human propensities, they mistakenly believe, the ethical principles and social goals espoused by them can be logically and validly derived.¹

However, there is another piece of reasoning that is present in the writings of the group under discussion, and which is part of their revolt against the S-P and Freudian psychologists. Among the values and social goals they espouse are those of a free, equalitarian, humane, political and social order. This kind of social order they deem to be good. For most of them the idea of this kind of social order is represented in the democratic idea, though for Fromm it is represented in his brand of "Humanistic Communitarian Socialism."² In this connection they make an

¹Supra, Chapters V and VI.

²Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 283-286, 327, 361, 363.



assumption which in effect constitutes an attempt to answer question #3 above. They assume that the image of man they see contained in the S-R and Freudian psychologies is inadequate for the creation or survival of the free and humane democratic social order. They assure that the psychological propensities ascribed by these two psychologies to man as constitutive of man's nature, do not provide the necessary psychological conditions for the existence of a free and humane democracy. They assume further that the psychological propensities which they consider good and beneficent, such as love, affiliativeness, altruism, rationality, creativity, etc., do constitute the necessary psychological conditions for a humane democratic social order. In rejecting the propensities stressed by the S-R and Freudian views, and, in emphasizing these "good" propensities of human nature, both in their research and in their writings, our social psychologists believe that they are contributing to the erection of a strong foundation for a desirable social order. I shall first try to document this, and then proceed to examine this theory.

Let us first look into Allport. The Epilogue to his little book, Becoming, is entitled "Psychology and Democracy," and opens with the significant explanation that he had written the book because he felt that



. . . modern psychology is in a dilemma. Broadly speaking, it has trimmed down the image of man that gave birth to the democratic dream.³

Allport expresses this complaint in several other ways:

Up to now the 'behavioral sciences,' including psychology, have not provided us with a picture of man capable of creating or living in a democracy. These sciences . . . have delivered into our hands a psychology of an 'empty organism,' pushed by drives and molded by environmental circumstance. What is small and partial, what is external and mechanical, what is peripheral and opportunistic--have received the chief attention of psychological system builders.

He refers with approval to Joseph Wood Krutch's book,

The Measure of Man in which Krutch

points out how logically the ideal of totalitarian dictatorships follow from the premises of 'today's thinking' in mental and social science,

and he concurs with Krutch's fears

that democracy is being silently sabotaged by the very scientists who have benefited most from its faith in freedom of inquiry.⁴

Allport thus makes two claims: (1) that the image of man in recent psychology does not provide the necessary conditions for a democratic social order; (2) that the image of man in recent social science and psychology logically entails the ideals of totalitarian dictatorship.

By way of contrast, Allport makes reference to "eighteenth-century conceptions of man, from which much of the early enthusiasm for democracy originated," though he

³Allport, Becoming, p. 99.

⁴Ibid., p. 100. (Emphasis mine)



at the same time grants that the 18th century conceptions of man "stood in need of correction," and that modern psychology has provided part of the needed correction.⁵

Among these needed corrections, according to Allport,

Modern psychology points to the marshland of unreason in human nature . . . Early fixations in character often leave infantile traces that bind the mind in such a way that democratic relationships in adult life are impossible. Infantile complexes of guilt may defeat the development of a generic conscience whose code is one of respect for all persons.⁶

However, Allport questions whether the "realism" of these corrections may not be one-sided, and he himself speaks dogmatically about "the rationalistic theory of human nature upon which democracy was founded."⁷ We shall ignore at this point the question of historical accuracy in the judgment that it was upon an 18th century rationalistic theory of human nature that democracy was founded, and return to it later. Here it is important to note that the adjective "rationalistic" is used by Allport in an ethically commendatory way, as contrasted with the ethically disparaging "marshland of unreason," "infantile traces that bind the mind," etc. What he believes to be true about the 18th century theory of human nature as a logical foundation for democracy, Allport affirms as his

⁵Ibid., p. 99.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.



own view today, as he tries to suggest what are the necessary psychological conditions for democracy. In contrast to the downgraded image of man in recent psychology which he finds inconsistent with democracy, Allport propounds his third claim:

The theory of democracy requires . . . that man possess a measure of rationality, a portion of freedom, a generic conscience, appropriate ideals, and unique value. We cannot defend the ballot box or liberal education, nor advocate free discussion and democratic institutions, unless man has the potential capacity to profit therefrom.⁸

Allport underscores this claim as to what is required by the theory of democracy in his observation that in the newer psychology being developed by a number of contemporary psychologists,

The emerging figure of man appears to be endowed with a sufficient margin of reason, autonomy, and choice to profit from living in a free society. . . . Soon, we venture to predict, psychology will offer an image of man more in accord with the democratic ideals . . .⁹

This triple claim, (1) that recent psychology does not give an image of human nature that provides the necessary conditions for a democratic society; (2) that the concept of human nature in recent psychology entails totalitarian political consequences; and (3) that human nature must be of a certain kind, containing such propensities as rationality, a generic conscience, autonomy, and

⁸Ibid., p. 100.

⁹Ibid., p. 101. (Emphasis mine)



other "good" propensities, in order to contain the necessary psychological conditions for a free, democratic society; -- this triple claim is also advanced, more or less explicitly, by Maslow, Asch, and Fromm.

Among the reasons he gives for his rejection of earlier instinct theory, Maslow includes the following:

From instinct theory, as understood in its heyday, flowed many social, economic, and political consequences of the most conservative and even anti-democratic nature . . .¹⁰

He amplifies this further by saying that

Any belief that makes men mistrust themselves and each other unnecessarily, and to be unrealistically pessimistic about human possibilities, must be held partly responsible for every war that has ever been waged, for every racial antagonism, and for every religious crusade. . . . Those who hope for a better future for the human species . . . all reject the instinct theory with horror because, . . . it seems to condemn all human beings to irrationality, to war, and to divisiveness and antagonism in a jungle world.¹¹

Maslow makes sharply clear the assumptions as to his political consequences that he believes to be entailed by the theory of human nature in recent psychology in general and by the earlier instinct theory in particular. He exhibits these assumptions in such bold statements as the following:

¹⁰Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, p. 132.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 134. Maslow's use of such locutions as "men mistrust[ing] themselves and each other unnecessarily," or being "unrealistically pessimistic," is of course question-begging. Whether the mistrust is necessary or unnecessary, and whether the pessimism is realistic or unrealistic, is the very issue in question between Maslow and those whom he criticizes.



[recent psychology] is Hamiltonian rather than Jeffersonian and democratic.¹²

This false theory of human nature . . . [whose adherents] have generally given up optimism with no more than a shrug of the shoulders . . . explains why Freud can be found in the same camp with Hitler on many issues.¹³

The truth or falsity of the theory of human nature rejected by Maslow is not at issue in this part of our discussion, neither is Maslow's rather shocking association of Freud and Hitler on "many issues" (after one has recovered his composure one is prompted to ask rhetorically "What could those issues possibly be?"). What is at issue here is Maslow's assumption that the "pessimistic" image of man he finds in Freud, in instinct theory, and in recent psychology in general, does not make democracy possible, and indeed entails an anti-democratic, totalitarian social order.

On the other hand, it is clear that for Maslow the psychological conditions necessary for a "better future for the human species" must include an optimistic theory of human nature. For a free democracy to be possible, a "democratic and Jeffersonian" psychology is necessary. One must "recognize instinctoid needs to be not bad, but

¹²Ibid., p. 355.

¹³Ibid., pp. 134-35.



neutral or good,' and it must be the case that 'individual and social interests . . . are synergic and not antagonistic," in order for a good society to be possible.

Now, when we turn to Asch's work, we again find the same triple claim. His critique of the biological, behaviorist, sociological, and Freudian "doctrines of man," on the ground that they disparage and downgrade man's capacities and propensities, may be summarized in his declaration that

Modern psychology has often drawn, I suspect, a caricature rather than a portrait of man.¹⁴

From this Asch concludes that

if the grim picture psychology draws were correct, there would be no hope for man or society.¹⁵

Asch thus makes the same assumption, namely, that the "grim," "ego-centered," "irrational," "rationalizing," "reward-seeking," and "infancy-controlled" image of man drawn by recent psychology, does not provide the necessary conditions for a good social order. He also appears to imply that this depiction of human nature entails consequences of hopelessness so far as a social order is concerned.

The third claim or assumption, namely that human nature must be constituted by "good" propensities in order for a free and democratic society to be possible, is also

¹⁴Asch, Social Psychology, p. 24.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 30.



clearly asserted by Asch:

Common sense realizes that men do not always or even most often act according to their best impulses, but it also acknowledges that these impulses are the necessary conditions for society the conceptual schemes with which psychology works today hardly leave room for them¹⁶

It is interesting that, like Maslow, Asch also states this clear in terms of the Hamiltonian-Jeffersonian contrast. Hamilton, according to Asch, opposed democracy because "The ordinary person, he held, is governed by passion, is changeable and unruly."¹⁷ In contrast to the Hamiltonian doctrine, Asch sketches his version of Jefferson's theory of human nature, and at the same time affirms that the good capacities and tendencies emphasized in the latter theory do constitute the necessary conditions for a democratic society. It will be helpful to quote this passage in its entirety.

There exists in modern times another view concerning the common man, of great historical importance and likewise founded on psychological propositions. Its most articulate exponent in this country was Thomas Jefferson, who proclaimed a belief in the capacities and tendencies of the common man on which he based the possibility of democracy. The starting point of Jefferson's thought was the assertion that men have 'common sense.' By this he meant that they have the capacity to face facts, to think and judge rightly, and to act upon their judgments if they are in possession of the facts. He also asserted that men have certain moral capacities, such as compassion for their fellow men, a sense of responsibility to one another, a desire to live in peace and to deal

¹⁶Ibid., p. 24. (Emphasis mine)

¹⁷Ibid., p. 27.



honestly with each other. . . . On these grounds he held to the proposition of the enlightenment period that government derives from the consent of the people and that it should be brought as closely as possible under their control.¹⁸

In another place, where he discusses the practices of a democracy as distinguished from democratic forms, Asch again asserts the same assumption:

. . . all the measures mentioned presuppose that the individual is more than an agent of his own interest, that he is acting also with reference to the community and its welfare.¹⁹

The same three ingredients are present prominently in Fromm's theory of the relationships between human nature and the good society. The first is exhibited in his attack on Freud's theory of human nature, and his conclusion that this theory makes civilization impossible. A few brief quotes will illustrate this. Freud's view

. . . assumes a basic and unalterable contradiction between human nature and society, a contradiction which follows from the alleged asocial nature of man.

Man's aggressiveness, Freud thinks, has two sources: one, the innate striving for destruction (death instinct) and the other the frustration of his instinctual desires, imposed upon him by civilization. While man may channel part of his aggression against himself . . . aggressiveness remains ineradicable.

For Freud, social life and civilization are essentially in contrast to the needs of human nature as he sees it . . .²⁰

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 27-28.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 446.

²⁰Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 74, 75, 76.



Fromm here, of course, misinterprets Freud when he implies that Freud's so-called pessimistic image of man with its aggressive, destructive, anti-social propensities entails the impossibility of a civilized social order. Ignoring this, however, and ignoring at this point also Fromm's view that society is often in conflict with man's "most valuable qualities," we can certainly see that, for Fromm, the "bad" propensities in Freud's image of man definitely do not constitute the necessary psychological conditions for the "Sane Society."

The second of the three ingredients is reflected in Fromm's claim as to what is entailed by, or what are the consequences of a lack of faith in man. Discussing Nazism, Fascism, and Stalinism, Fromm uses as one of his illustrations Lenin who, according to Fromm, was among those who "had no faith in man." He then advances his claim that the disparagement of man entails totalitarian consequences:

It is this lack of faith in man which antiliberal and clerical ideas have in common with Lenin's concept. . . . it leads to the very results which we see in the tragic history of the Inquisition, Robespierre's terror and Lenin's dictatorship. . . . It was this lack of faith in man that made it possible for the authoritarian systems to conquer man. . . .²¹

The third claim, namely, that an optimistic theory of human nature is a necessary psychological condition for the

²¹Ibid., p. 239.



possibility of a good society, is asserted by Fromm quite boldly and dogmatically:

. . . on the other hand faith in man is the basis for all genuinely progressive movements throughout history; it is the most essential condition of Democracy and of Socialism.²²

Fromm is even more specific in asserting this third claim.

He spells out some of the characteristics or propensities

its members must have if "man was to create a sane society":

More specifically, this meant a society whose members have developed their reason to that point of objectivity which permits them to see themselves, others, nature, in their true reality, and not distorted by infantile omniscience or paranoid hate. . . . a society, whose members have developed to . . . know the difference between good and evil . . . a society whose members have developed the capacity to love their children, their neighbors, all men, themselves, all of nature; who can feel one with all. . . . who transcend nature by creating not by destroying.²³

These then are the kind of utopian human beings that would be required in order to make possible the sane society. Fromm acknowledges that "So far, we have failed. We have not bridged the gap between a minority which realized these goals and tried to live according to them, and the majority whose mentality is far back . . ." ²⁴ The failure, according to Fromm, is of course the failure of society, not of man. Man has the potentialities to develop the characteristics

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., p. 357.

²⁴Ibid.



stipulated above, since, to recall once more Fromm's doctrine of man, ". . . the striving for mental health, for happiness, harmony, love, productiveness, is inherent in every human being who is not born as a mental or moral idiot."²⁵ It is only this kind of human nature that makes a sane society possible.

I now wish to examine this triad of assumptions shared by Allport, Maslow, Asch, and Fromm, and see how much of it stands up under analytic scrutiny.

In the first place, there is implicit in these assumptions, especially in the third of the group, a confusion between necessary conditions and sufficient conditions. The social psychologists under discussion write as if they were only trying to say that man's possession of such ethically desirable propensities as affiliativeness, altruism, rationality, etc., are the necessary psychological conditions for the establishment and survival of a democratic social order. In other words, what they appear to be saying is that these propensities of human nature are such that without them a free and humane social or political order would be impossible. This I shall examine below. At this point, however, it is important to note that they appear to mean more than that. They appear also to argue that man's possession of these ethically "good" propensities constitutes in some sense the sufficient

²⁵Ibid., p. 275.



conditions for democracy. In other words, their implied contention seems to be that man's possessing good propensities furnishes the conditions under which a democratic social order would somehow virtually have to come into being and endure.

This, I think is an error; basically because, as was argued in the last Chapter, psychological propensities are in themselves ethically neutral, neither good nor bad, neither right nor wrong. It is human actions in their situational context that are good or bad, right or wrong. And, given any propensity, human actions which exemplify it may be either good or evil, either right or wrong. It would therefore be most unrealistic and dangerous social and political planning to base a blueprint for a humane democracy upon the claim that man possesses "good" propensities, inasmuch as human actions that stem from these propensities will often turn out to be evil, wrong, destructive, etc., and may prevent or undermine the establishment of the functioning of the democracy. Such "good" propensities in human nature can not be said to constitute sufficient psychological conditions for the establishment and the survival of a free and humane social order. To put it somewhat differently, even if the psychological components of human nature were universally of the kind generally thought to be good, it would not mean that a good social order would have to come into being, and



it would still be possible to have a bad social order because the possibility would still be there of numerous evil or wrong human actions that may be the expressions of so-called "good" propensities in human nature.

However, the same analysis raises serious doubts about so-called good propensities in human nature constituting even only the necessary conditions for a free and democratic social order. If a free, humane democracy were the kind of social order that could not exist or endure in the absence of "good" propensities in human nature, then the possibility of democracy would indeed be seriously in question, again for the same reason as was given above. Man's psychological propensities are ethically neutral. That a propensity is commonly assumed to be good or beneficent is no guarantee that the human actions that are expressions of this propensity will be good actions. In fact, many actions that stem from such "good" propensities, when seen in their total context, are evil or maleficent, and destructive of democracy. How then, if such evil actions took place, could the propensities from which they stemmed still be called good? The goodness of these propensities thus vanishes, and with it the possibility of democracy, if democracy can not exist in the absence of such "good" propensities.

A second observation concerns a troublesome ambiguity in the notion of "good" human propensities in relation to the



good society. Does a democratic social order require, as its necessary psychological condition, a human nature all of whose propensities are good, many of which are good, or only some of which are good? Sometimes the assumption appears to be that in order to be able to have a humane, democratic society, men would have to be angelic creatures, completely free of any selfish, cruel, aggressive, domineering, acts. If this were a warranted assumption, then a democratic social order would be, ex hypothesi, either unnecessary or impossible. If men really were angelic creatures whose actions were always ethically good, it would seem that no political or social organization would be necessary, and all talk about laws, rules, authority, power, rulers, officials, etc., would be irrelevant. If, however, men are not angelic, not free of evil, cruel, or destructive actions, then, given the above assumption which we are examining, a democratic social order would be an impossibility.

If men are not completely angelic, i. e., if only some or even many of man's psychological propensities and of man's actions are ethically good, then it would seem that some political or social organization, some government, is necessary. In other words, if men are not completely angelic, it would follow that an absence of all order or government, a situation of complete freedom, spontaneity, and unfettered need-gratification, would not mean, or at least would not necessarily mean, that there would be no cruel, selfish, aggressive, domineering, destructive actions



on the part of humans. Some social order, some government, would therefore be necessary, and it would thus follow that certain social and political institutions would be necessary and certain social or political roles would have to be performed by persons in connection with such institutions. Automatically, therefore, laws and rules are entailed; and officials, administrators, persons invested with some authority, something of a bureaucracy, are needed. The inescapable relationships between those in authority and those who are subject to the exercise of authority, between those who are the rulers and those who are the ruled, then become part of interhuman relationships. To expect that such social and political relationships can be free of selfish, power-hungry, aggressive, or even cruel behavior would be most unrealistic. Therefore, even the assumption of a human nature many of whose psychological propensities are good, does not provide the conditions for a social order free from possible evils, injustices, or oppressions.

Thus, the assumption that an optimistic view of the psychological propensities of human nature furnish the logically necessary conditions for the ideal democratic social order, turns out to be a dubious assumption. John Dewey's insights are relevant here, and should have thrown doubt long ago on the assumption under discussion. Dewey pointed out that this kind of assumption is never descriptive in character, is not related to any empirical



data, but is rather a political claim, a consequence of the "purposes and policies" espoused by a group or person.

Those who wished to justify the exercise of authority over others took a pessimistic view of the constitution of human nature: those who wanted relief from something oppressive discovered qualities of great promise in its native makeup.²⁶

The fact is, according to Dewey, that human nature in itself does not furnish the conditions necessary for a democratic social order:

We cannot continue the idea that human nature when left to itself, when freed from external arbitrary restrictions, will tend to the production of democratic institutions that work successfully.²⁷

Democracy, says Dewey, must be a resolve, an act of choice, a moral decision:

We have to see that democracy means the belief that humanistic culture should prevail; we should be frank and open in our recognition that the proposition is a moral one--like any other idea that concerns what should be.²⁸

²⁶John Dewey, Freedom and Culture, p. 29.

²⁷Ibid., p. 124.

²⁸Ibid. This chapter of Dewey's entitled "Democracy and Human Nature," appears to present some difficulty. On the one hand he says that from human nature alone democracy does not necessarily follow, and that democracy requires a moral resolve. On the other hand he says that democracy requires "faith in human nature," "faith in the potentialities of human nature," and also that democracy must "release and fulfill the possibilities of human nature," without appearing to distinguish between the beneficent and the maleficent human actions that may be the consequence of the realization of some of these possibilities. I think that Dewey here speaks ambiguously as a result of a puzzling failure to maintain his own distinction between descriptive psychology and normative ethics. When Dewey says that "democracy needs a new psychology of human nature," and then claims that



If, then, democracy is essentially a matter of moral decision, of ethical resolve, then it needs no justification in terms of the factual propensities of man's psychological nature. Thus democracy may be judged to be a good social order, and may be a feasible or practicable social order, even if the propensities of human nature are evil, selfish, aggressive, irrational, etc. I suppose that one might maintain that in the limiting case, namely, if man's nature, all his propensities, and all his acts were at all times evil, selfish, destructive, aggressive, irrational, etc., democracy would be impossible. But short of this limiting, theoretical case, an "evil" human nature does not render

this proposition "but continues the American tradition," he is not calling for a new descriptive psychology, but rather for a renewed and strengthened resolve to choose democracy, to make it work, and to accomplish this by fostering the psychological attitude of faith in man's ability to make democracy work. Making reference to the fact that it used to be claimed that democracy emerged out of Christianity which teaches "the infinite worth of the individual human soul," Dewey proceeds to ask and answer as follows:

Is human nature intrinsically such a poor thing that the idea [of democracy] is absurd? I do not attempt to give any answer, but the word faith is intentionally used. For in the long run democracy will stand or fall with the possibility of maintaining the faith and justifying it by works. (Ibid., p. 126)

Accordingly, what Dewey seems to be saying is not that a human nature constituted by good psychological propensities is the necessary condition for democracy. Rather, he seems to be saying that the necessary conditions for democracy are a) the moral decision that this is the social order we shall consider to be good; b) the "faith" that man, having made this ethical resolve, is able to carry it out, and that democracy in turn will release those potentialities in man's conduct that we associate with democracy; and c) that this faith be justified by works, namely by the effort to attain and maintain a democratic society.



democracy an impossibility so long as enough men, aware of man's propensities for evil action, wanting to be free of anarchy, wishing freedom for themselves and knowing that they can have freedom for themselves only by establishing guarantees of freedom for others, choose a democratic social order which contains controls over unethical or antisocial acts, including controls over the acts of those invested with authority and power.

Indeed, as Arthur C. Lovejoy has persuasively shown,²⁹ it is an historical error to claim that democracy was based on the assumption of a good, ethical rational, angelic human nature either in those being ruled, or in those who rule and exercise authority and power. There is abundant evidence that the theoreticians of democracy, and the founders of, for example, American democracy, carefully took into account man's propensities for selfish, evil, corrupt acts, and for the abuse of power, among the rulers as well as among the ruled. They based their blueprints for a democratic social order on a resolve or decision to have a libertarian and egalitarian society. Being aware of man's propensities for evil, anti-social action, they resolved to transcend these propensities by providing in their blueprints controls over both the rulers and the ruled, that would reduce such anti-social acts to manageable

²⁹Arthur C. Lovejoy, Reflections on Human Nature, Lecture II, p. 37-65.



proportions. Thus Locke, in his Second Treatise on Civil Government, develops his attack on absolute monarchy by pointing out that absolute power does not exercise from its possessor the potentiality for evil acts:

For he that thinks absolute power purifies man's blood, and corrects the baseness of human nature, need read but the history of this, or any other age, to be convinced to the contrary. He that would have been insolent and injurious in the woods of America would not probably be much better on a throne, where perhaps learning and religion shall be found out to justify all that he shall do to his subjects, and the sword presently silence all those that dare question it.³⁰

The authors of the Federalist Papers showed a sensitive awareness of man's propensities for immoral and antisocial behavior, and much of their defense of the Constitution for the newly established democracy consisted in showing how the constitutional controls and its checks and balances would prevent such evil acts on the part of legislators and other governmental authorities. They did argue that man is not so utterly evil as to make democracy impossible, and that human nature possesses also praiseworthy qualities. But this very argument shows that the Founding Fathers of American democracy did not base democracy on an optimistic view of human nature as a necessary condition. This is reflected in the 55th Federalist Paper, which concludes a discussion of the way

³⁰ John Locke, *Of Civil Government, Two Treatises* (Everyman's Library, 1924), Book II, Chapter 7, p. 162.



in which the checks and balances provided by the Constitution will prevent corruption, with the following instructive passage:

As there is a degree of depravity in mankind which requires a certain degree of circumspection and distrust, so there are other qualities in human nature which justify a certain portion of esteem and confidence. Republican government presupposes the existence of these qualities in a higher degree than any other form. Were the pictures which have been drawn by political jealousy of some among us faithful likenesses of the human character, the inference would be, that there is not sufficient virtue among men for self-government; and that nothing less than the chains of despotism can restrain them from destroying and devouring one another.³¹

John Dewey was among the few recent writers who noted the awareness of the founders of American democracy that men, including governmental officers, had strong inclinations to antisocial behavior, and that controls over these tendencies was an essential ingredient in a democracy.

Dewey's observation centers on the love of power:

The Founding Fathers were aware that love of power is a trait of human nature, so strong a one that definite barriers had to be erected to keep persons who get into positions of official authority from encroachments that undermine free institutions.³²

But a most thoroughgoing analysis of the background in late 17th century and in 18th century thought, and of

³¹The Federalist: A Commentary on the Constitution of the United States (From the Original Text of Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison), Modern Library Edition, p. 365.

³²John Dewey, Freedom and Culture, p. 8.



the thought of America's Founding Fathers, that led to the fashioning of Democracy out of "bad human materials," is to be found in the second chapter of Arthur O. Lovejoy's "Reflections on Human Nature." Here Lovejoy shows

that the American Constitution was framed under the leadership of a group of extraordinarily able men who had few illusions about the rationality of the generality of mankind. . . . This fact . . . is in large part . . . explained by the wide currency in the late 17th and the 18th century of . . . conceptions . . . which implied that it is entirely possible to construct an ideal political society out of bad human materials--to frame a rational scheme of government, in which the general good will be realized, without presupposing that the individuals who exercise ultimate political power will be severally actuated in their use by rational motives, or primarily solicitous about the general good.³³

The method they employed, according to Lovejoy, was the method of counterpoise--"accomplishing desirable results by balancing harmful things against one another."³⁴ Lovejoy quotes from earlier sources, but especially important are the supporting quotations from the Federalist Papers. It is interesting to note Lovejoy's summary of what Alexander Pope had to say on this subject in his Essay on Man:

For Pope, too, 'statecraft' consisted in the recognition and application of the two perishes underlying the political method of counterpoise: that men never act from disinterested and rational motives, but that it is possible, none the less,

³³Lovejoy, Reflections on Human Nature, p. 38.

³⁴Ibid., p. 39.



to fashion a good 'whole,' a happy and harmonious State, by skillfully mixing and counterbalancing these refractory and separately antagonistic parts.³⁵

James Madison and the other Founding Fathers, Lovejoy reminds us, followed the method of counterpoise in shaping American democracy. This may be seen in various contemporary writings, and especially in the Federalist Papers.³⁶

According to Madison, "a factious spirit," and "the violence of faction,"³⁷ constitute the greatest menace to popular government. Madison explains what he means by a faction:

By a faction, I understand a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or minority of the whole, who are united or actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community.³⁸

The latent causes of faction are . . . sown in the nature of man.³⁹

There are two methods of curing the mischief of faction: the one, by removing the causes; the other by controlling its effects.⁴⁰

Since the causes of faction are inherent in human nature,

³⁵Ibid., p. 42.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 46-63. All quotations from The Federalist Papers, given below, are taken from Lovejoy's book.

³⁷The Federalist Papers, Paper #10, Modern Library Edition, p. 53.

³⁸Ibid., p. 54.

³⁹Ibid., p. 55.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 54-55.



The inference to which we are brought is, that the causes of faction cannot be removed, and that relief is only to be sought in the means of controlling its effects.⁴¹

And the method of controlling the effects of faction is to have each faction counterbalance and counteract other factions, so that no faction would be able to get majority support for its own self-interest, and as a result only the "general good" will be accomplished, or at least approximated.

The method of counterpoise, therefore, far from predicated a free and democratic social order on an optimistic view of human nature, actually utilizes the selfish and antisocial behavior of man as the building blocks out of which a good society is fashioned. This is again reinforced in a later Federalist Paper, in which government departments are discussed, and the need to give each administrator "the necessary constitutional means and personal motives to resist encroachments of the others"⁴² as a way of insuring against excessive concentration of power. Madison continues in this Paper as follows:

Ambition must be made to counteract ambition. The interest of the man must be connected with the constitutional rights of the place. It may be a reflection on human nature, that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government. But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels

⁴¹Ibid., p. 57.

⁴²Ibid., p. 337.



no government would be necessary. . . . [The] policy of supplying, by opposite and rival interests, the defect of better motives, might be traced through the whole system of human affairs, private as well as public. We see it particularly displayed in all the subordinate distributions of power, where the constant aim is to divide and arrange the several offices as that each may be a check on the other--that the private interest of every individual may be a sentinel over the public interest.⁴³

The possibility of a good society is thus not predicated upon a good, rational, affiliative, altruistic human nature. If man is such that his propensities for evil, irrational, selfish, antisocial behavior are dominant, a good society is still possible. The two necessary conditions for a good society are (a) men's awareness of the human propensities for evil, irrational, antisocial behavior, and (b) the ethical resolve to transcend these propensities to the greatest extent possible through the creation of mechanisms that will control them. The attack by our social psychologists on Freudian psychology on the ground that it does not furnish the necessary conditions for a free and democratic social order, and that it entails a totalitarian social order, are therefore completely misplaced. The attackers justify their attack by pointing to Freud's "pessimistic" view of human nature as antisocial and irrational, and they erroneously infer their accusations from this Freudian

⁴³Ibid.



image of man. In doing this they not only make the wrong inferences. They also show how fundamentally they misunderstand Freud who, while he stressed man's irrationality, never denied man's ability to know his own irrationality and to transcend it. This view of Freud is stated eloquently by Philip Rieff, in his chapter on "Politics and the Individual":

Depth psychology has demolished the optimistic faith of democrats in the rationality of a free citizenry, by discovering that the average citizen (in or out of a crowd) is not rational. But this is no reason for despair. There remains what is for Freud perhaps the highest rationality: knowledge of the irrational, a knowledge which may be used homeopathically, so to speak, to arrive at rational decisions essential to democracy.⁴⁴

Freud's "pessimistic" theory of man does not entail totalitarianism any more than it entails democracy. To be sure, Freudian psychology has made us more aware that man's nature is such that he is capable of the most monstrously evil deeds, of slavish dependency under a totalitarian regime, of being manipulated by demagogues and dictators to acquiesce in their tyranny. To ignore these truths would be scientific blindness wedded to moral irresponsibility. But knowing the evil potentialities in human behavior also makes it possible to know or to discover what must be done in order to build and safeguard a humane, democratic social order, as it also makes it

⁴⁴Philip Rieff, Freud: The Mind of the Moralist, p. 264.



possible to know better how to build and maintain a totalitarian regime;--which of these possibilities will be realized will always depend upon the acts of moral decision and moral resolve of enough individuals.

Man is capable of transcending these evil inclinations in himself by being aware of them and making the ethical choice to surmount them. Man and human society are always in a state of tension between these two possible choices. If men do not actively choose and effectuate and safeguard freedom through establishing the social mechanisms that will check, control, and prevent evil acts--our own as well as the acts of others, the acts of rulers as well as the acts of the ruled-- , then we will most likely end up in a period of slavery; and no person can be given a guarantee that in such a slave society he will be among the masters.

It becomes necessary here, and as a conclusion to this chapter to point out that Asch's criticism of Freud completely misses the mark when he says that

What is lacking in Freud's account is the sense that society is the condition of freedom as well as a source of oppression.⁴⁵

On the contrary this is precisely the "sense" to which the Freudian doctrine of man leads. To be sure, Freud emphasized the id, and the aggressive, anti-social, destructive, and brutal propensities in human behavior, and pointed out that

⁴⁵Asch, Social Psychology, p. 347.



in suppressing and frustrating these, a social order engenders neuroses. But Freud never implied that therefore the social order should not do this. Neuroses are the price man has to pay for the freedom that a good social order will assure for him if he chooses not to live in a condition of bellum omnium contra omnes. Civilization inescapably brings its discontents. Through excessive and unreasonable restraints upon the impulses of its members an excessively rigid and puritanical society may produce excessive and intolerable neuroses. However, barring such excesses, the position of Freud the moralist is that society, through its function as a source of restraints upon aggressive impulses, becomes precisely the condition of freedom; through a social order for controlling and frustrating his own anti-social desires, social man creates the freedom for men's co-existence with other men. It therefore appears strange indeed for Asch to level this critique against Freud, since, in another passage Asch himself eloquently and persuasively espouses most of the social and political implications of the Freudian doctrine of human nature:

. . . it is by no means certain that the character of a man is better revealed when he acts lawlessly than when he submits himself to discipline. Why not seize the horns of the dilemma and say that it is part of human nature itself to take measures to control and direct its own tendencies? Men are



willing to adopt procedures to curb their one-sided and temporary desires in the light of steadier aims that are also theirs. They are capable of creating barriers to their own impulses: the barriers are part of them as much as the impulses. Institutions too are human; they exist both to reinforce and to change human impulses; they are the means that men introduce to control their own nature.⁴⁶

⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 352-53.



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- 10/1946-10/1947 Executive Director, Brooklyn
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- 10/1947-3/1949 Executive Secretary, American-
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