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Erich Fromm's theory on alienation.

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ERICH FROMM'S THEORY ON ALIENATION

A Thesis Presented

by

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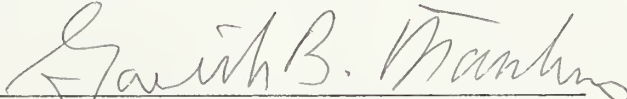
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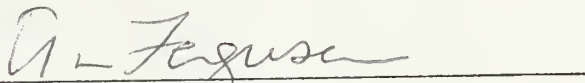

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PREFACE

I have originally intended to write a thesis on third world development, after having done research in Sudan during the summer of '86. However, due to the incomplete and insufficient amount of information and also to the lack of accessible philosophical studies done on the country, I decided to give up the idea. Thus, instead of dealing with the problems of the pre-industrialized societies, I chose to write about the problems that the industrialized societies are facing today.

I must appologize to the generous Sudanese people who gave so much assistance and support to my research in all respects, believing that I would write about the problems of their country. However, by studying the problems of the industrialized societies, I have come to realize that the pre-industrialized societies should not blindly follow the footsteps of the former. Hence, sometime in the future, when I actually do become engaged in the development of third world countries, I will know what they should avoid in order for them to become societies that do not have the problems that we carry. When I am able to return the help of the Sudanese people, I hope I can aid them and other third world countries in the right way.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Modern capitalism has made great advances in freeing
people from many external constraints of the Middle Ages.
However, everything has its costs, and thus in exchange for
the new freedom that people have gained, many problems have
also risen. Freedom is a concept deeply related to the
present day society for the social psychologist, Erich
Fromm. This issue will be discussed later, but as a brief
introduction to the concept, I should mention that there
are two categories of freedom: "freedom from", a human
being's capacity to free himself from external constraints,
and "freedom to", a human being's capacity to realize his
intellectual, emotional, and sensuous potentialities and to
express autonomy and integrity.[1] For example, nowadays, one
is "free from" the constraints of family, traditional
occupations and rigid family ethics, and a woman, who used
to be excluded from various activities, is "free to" have a
wider range of choices to choose from. However, sometimes
we are blinded by these positive aspects of freedom which
we now have, and tend to neglect the side effects that
prevail in many areas of society today. Thus, the purpose
of this thesis is to elicit these problems caused by modern

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industrialization and capitalism and to find a possible solution to them. I would like to use Fromm's theory of alienation, in order to discuss the whole issue. First I will explain the positive aspects of modernization and then explain the negative sides of them.

The development of capitalism liberated humans from the political, economic, and moral bonds of the pre-capitalist society.[2] Certainly not all countries, but most industrialized nations have a democratic election system, in which one vote weighs the same as another, regardless of sex, occupation, or wealth of the voter. In feudal times, if one was born as a son of a farmer, he was destined to be a farmer. Now, a woman can be the president of a large corporation or the head of a state. Concerning family relationships, the actual family was already in the process of dissolution in the eighteenth century, with the rapid development of civilization. The internal family bonds were dissolved, for example, obedience, piety, fidelity in marriage and so on.[3] In the postwar development, youngsters were able to act as they pleased and not to care about the approval of their parents.[4] In the Middle Ages, it was not considered good to be unfaithful to the family bond, but now it is not too difficult to be emancipated from the domination of one's own family. In other words, children are more liberated and the relationship between parents and children is somewhat more lateral than vertical. Children

do not necessarily have to look after the old parents and divorce is becoming easier for thoese who choose to do so.

Furthermore, in the materialistic sense, because of industrialization, as Fromm explains, "man has built his world; he has built factories and houses, he produces cars and clothes, he grows grain and fruit".[5] Humans are able to make whatever they want. Science and technology has made humankind's productive forces expand enormously, which has led to urbanization and industrialization.[6] However, one negative side to these is that by the use of technology, modern society has come to control and manipulate production, labor, history, and human beings. Therefore, people's living has become more and more conditioned to the transformation of society, which we now consider as the normal and natural environment of our lives.[7] In other words, if the social trend is to eat fast food hamburgers, more and more people will eat them for lunch and more and more will be produced. If the military industry makes money, many people will seek employment in the field and the students will tend to choose related fields as their major. The more a country has high tech weapons, generally, the more it will have power over other countries. With the use of chemical additives in food, the health of human beings have been affected in many ways, some of which are still unknown.

Another negative aspect is that, recently, the whole system of production and exchange, which has become a condition of living for each individual, appears to be controlled "almost entirely on the cerebral level". It has no deep attachment to the people themselves,[8] and "the link between the system and the individual seems alien and independent".[9] For example, an average office worker of, let us say, a record company, could be dealing with papers and numbers every day, but she is participating in a mere fraction of the total production and selling of records, and furthermore, that person would be receiving monetary reward which is also only a small part of the whole financial enterprise of the company. If the company does something unjust or becomes bankrupt, the worker cannot usually do anything about it, although, her livelihood would be in great jeopardy. In other words, the characteristic of social activities is opposed to individuals as something alien.[10] In this respect, a person is alienated from labour.

Concerning the workers, Fromm says that "their relations to themselves and others are so thin"[11] and that "their sense of identity is not developed through the formation of close relationships but, rather, through their progress within the 'megamachine' of corporate capitalism."[12] For example, a worker may sit next to another worker for years, and not know anything about nor

care for the personal life of his co-worker at all, but he can still function perfectly. The worker may become happy if he is promoted, even though he knows that his promotion will hinder the promotion of his co-worker. This shows alienation in the relationship between a person and another person.

Relating to this idea is competition, which also plays a very big role in today's society. Competition takes place within corporations, amongst businesses within the country and also with foreign enterprises. This has a negative quality as Karl Marx writes in his German Ideology: "Competition separates individuals from one another, in spite of the fact that it brings them together."[13] It brings people together in the physical sense that people work or study together in large corporations and educational institutions. However, on the other hand, there are no spiritual ties and everyone is an enemy to the other. Fromm also maintains that competition is the reason for the false smiles of the salespeople in department stores. In other words, the salespeople are only concerned about earning more profit than the other stores, so they strive in that direction, and hence, there is no true emotional tie between the sellers and the buyers.[14] Children and youngsters are also forced to take part in the competitive educational system, which is determined by the country's goal for economic development. How many of these

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students really know what they are studying and for what purpose? How many really have the conviction that what they are studying has any significance to their daily lives?

"The philosophical term for modern human evil is 'alienation'",[15] which is the trade-off or side effect of industrialization. There are different definitions, aspects, and subjects of alienation, and one aspect is "the strange phenomena of the lost self, the false self, and the fragmented self".[16] It originally meant separation, according to Ignace Feuerlicht, but it is also "connected with many things and persons".[17] The subjects that involve and the emphasis put on the different alienations depend on the interpreter's point of view. The word generally expresses "a vague, unhappy, and fashionable uneasiness, a wretched mood of helplessness, misery, and insecurity, sometimes associated with voluntary or involuntary isolation",[18] which represent some kind of mental anguish. Fromm's definition of alienation is this: "By alienation is meant a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an alien. He has become, one might say, estranged from himself. He does not experience himself as the center of the world, as the creator of his own acts."[19]

According to Fromm, this concept of alienation is the central point from which to analyze contemporary social character because it touches upon the deepest level of modern personality. He considers it as the "most

appropriate, if one is concerned with the interaction between the contemporary socioeconomic structure and the character structure of the average individual."[20] He writes: "human relations are essentially those of alienated automatons, each basing his security on staying close to the herd, and not being different in thought, feeling, or action."[21] Therefore, the person "identical with millions of other automatons around him, need not feel alone and anxious any more."[22] This means that, for example, one might superficially feel better if one sees the movie that is the talk of the nation, wears what is considered a fashion of the age, becomes concerned about the social and political issues that are being talked about, cheers the football team of his region, or belongs to some sort of organization or ideological group without really sitting down to reconsider the deep significance of its activities. However, this does not exactly imply that the person does not really experience loneliness or anxiety. He can have thoughts and feelings, which he subjectively feels to be his, but they have been put into him from the outside, and are basically alien and not actually what he thinks and feels.[23] Therefore, Fromm says that as a conformist of society, an alienated person, not experiencing loneliness or anxiety, is in fact having a pseudo-feeling and that everybody remains utterly alone, pervaded by the deep sense of insecurity and anxiety which results when human

separateness cannot be overcome.[24] Thus a person can be alienated from his own feelings. Of course, this is an objective statement involving a subjective issue which will be subjected to numerous objections, but that will be discussed later.

A Marxist, Ivan Stivak, also claims that there are different theories of alienation. Under Stivak's categorization, Fromm's theory belongs with those which assert that a human being is alienated from 1)his own personality. In the scientific view, alienation can be seen as the new historical phenomenon, as the result of technological development. Fromm's theory also relates to other theories which claim that a human being is alienated from 2)society. In a certain philosophical view, alienation is seen as a historical category and its transformations are determined by the given period, culture and socio-economic conditions. However, it can be overcome by a harmonious relation between human being and society. Other theories, according to Stivak, maintain that a human being is alienated from 3)God. In the theological view, alienation arises from original sin. A human being is alienated by the very fact that he is a human.[25]

Relating to the above, amongst the sources of alienation that Stivak lists, Fromm's theory includes: 1) the social structure of industrialized societies, 2) the fetishism of commodity production, 3) technology, and 4)

individual psychology. Other sources that Stivak lists are 5) essence of humanity, 6) the loss of God, and 7) the political regimes of totalitarian states.[26]

Fromm was not exactly a Marxist. Although he did formulate a theory of humanistic socialisism as a solution to alienation, one of the basic differences between Marx and Fromm is that while Marx advocated social revolution as a step towards socialism, Fromm does not make any claim on the political means towards achieving his ideal socialistic society. However, I think that Fromm's overall theory of alienation may be more appealing or easy to grasp compared to Marx's, since Fromm's theory deals deeply with the psychological aspects of human beings. To a great extent, Fromm revised and incorporated various theories and methodologies of human psychology that were established by Freud. Marx, on the other hand, focused more on complex economic relations, which may not be easily understood by many people.

Nevertheless, Fromm's theory of alienation owes a great deal to Marx, and furthermore, Marx's description of the capitalist society is useful in understanding the concept of alienation, so therefore, we should examine a little what Marx has to say. According to him, in the modern world, each individual's activity or his product becomes his own only in exchange value. Personal relationships occur as a result of relationships of

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production and exchange.[27] The production of each
individual depends on everyone else's production and the
transformation of the product into food for himself depends
on the other's consumption. This mutual dependence is
expressed in the constant need for exchange, but each
person has his private interests in mind and nothing else,
and hence, each person is indifferent to others. Each
individual exercises influence over others' activity as the
owner of the exchange values, and therefore, social
relations become transformed into the connections of
material things, and personal power into material power.[28]
Perhaps this is too much of a generalization or of a
pessimistic view point because there are still friendships
in today's society that are almost totally independent of
any sort of economic factors. However, one cannot deny that
most human relationships within a work organization,
between customer and seller, and to a certain extent
between teacher and student, whether good or bad, deep or
shallow, center on economic factors, and the relationships
are subject to termination any time due to economic
reasons.

Specifically, Marx claims that since the exchange is
a selfish one, and since selfishness leads each person to
seek the better of others, people necessarily try to
deceive each other.[29] This viewpoint may be too
pessimistic, but to some extent, when one opens up a new

box of cereals and discovers that the content constitutes only half of the box, that situation can be a representation of his description. Furthermore, he explains that every person tries to create a new need in another, so as to drive him to sacrifice, to place him in a new dependence and to seduce him into a new mode of enjoyment and economic ruin. On the side of some cereal boxes one can find discount coupons for other cereals, which are placed there so as to tempt the consumer to buy them next time in order to save a few extra pennies. Each person tries to establish over the other an alien power, so as to find satisfaction of his selfish need, and every new product represents a new potentiality of mutual swindling.[30] Mutual recognition of the respective powers of the objects is a struggle, and in struggle the victor is the one who has more energy, force, insight, or adroitness.[31]

Thus, Marx claims that money, as the exchange value, is a distorting power both against the individual and against the bonds of society. It transforms fidelity into infidelity, love into hate, virtue into vice, idiocy into intelligence, and vice versa.[32] Money can indeed change personalities and destroy human relationships. Extreme examples are represented in some of the television drama shows in which everyone is full of lust for money and power.

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Fromm believes that it is difficult to show care, responsibility, and respect for one's fellow people and still remain sane in an alienated society dominated by commodity relations of the market. However, there are solutions to the problem of alienation for Fromm, and I would like to develop his ideas on the ideal society and on brotherly love in this thesis.

In brief Fromm claims that to overcome the suffering created by the experience of separation and alienation means the emancipation of modern human beings. Here, love is the only sane and satisfactory answer to the problem.[34] Fromm believes that it is necessary to develop one's capacity to love, to such a point that one transcends one's own egocentric involvement and arrives at a new harmony, at a new oneness with the world.[35] Only by abolishing or letting go of this preoccupation can one experience the world without our egoistic attachments.[36] If a person's relationship to the world is to be a human one, then one can exchange love only for love, trust for trust. The relations to human beings and to nature must be a specific expression of the real individual life, and one must make himself a beloved one through a living expression as a loving person.[37] However, according to Fromm, this concept of love can be actualized only in his ideal communitarian society.

In this thesis, I would first like to discuss
Fromm's concept of "freedom" in Chapter II. I will compare
the positive and negative aspects of freedom of the Middle
Ages and the modern period. In Chapter III, I will
introduce Fromm's ideal socialistic society, which is
criticized by numerous people as too unrealistic. However,
I will defend his theory from criticisms that Fromm did not
design the methods toward his ideal society. In Chapter IV,
I will discuss Fromm's theory that "brotherly love" is the
only solution to alienation. Although Fromm claims that it
is very difficult to actualize this brotherly love in the
capitalist society, I will try to argue that it can be
actualized and that it should, on an individual basis, in
order to overcome the problems of alienation. Overall, I
basically agree with Fromm's account of alienation in
psychological perspective. Furthermore, although I consider
his ideal society too unrealistic, I give credit to his
belief in a peaceful and gradual social reform through
brotherly love, instead of a drastic revolution, in order
to attain a society free of alienation.

To conclude, the term "alienation" itself may not be
used in certain analyses, but the important things are to
realize human reality i.e. the human person's situation in
modern industrial society,[38] to reveal the problems of
everyday life, and then to identify the basic choices for
humankind, in order to respond to the contemporary crisis

of civilization.[39] Erich Fromm's theory is a good source to start from.

Footnotes

[1]Erich Fromm, <u>The Fear of Freedom</u> (New York: Keagan Paul, 1942), p. 23. Cited by Hugh Willmott and David Knights, "The Problem of Freedom: Fromm's Contribution to a Critical Theory of Work Organization" <u>Praxis International</u>, Vol. 2, No. 2, (July 1982), p. 206.

[2]Willmott and Knights, Op. cit.

[3]Karl Marx, ed. by C.J. Arthur, <u>The German Ideology</u>, (New York: International Publishers, 1970) p. 74.

[4]Erich Fromm, <u>Escape from Freedom</u>, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1941) p. 215.

[5]<u>The Fear of Freedom</u>, p. 101.

[6]Ivan Stivak, <u>Man and His World: A Marxian View</u>, Trans. by Jarmila Veltrusky, (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1970), p. 137.

[7]Ibid., pp. 140-141.

[8]Erich Fromm, <u>To Have Or To Be</u>, (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), pp. 148-149.

[9]Karl Marx, <u>Marx's Grundrisse</u>, trans. by David McLellan, (New York: Macmillan, 1971) p. 66.

[10]Ibid.

[11]<u>To Have Or To Be</u> pp. 148-149.

[12]Willmott and Knights, p. 207.

[13]The German Ideology p. 74.

[14]Erich Fromm, For the Love of Life, trans. by R.&
R. Kimber, (New York: The Free Press, 1983), p. 149.

[15]Man and His World: A Marxian View, p. 121.

[16]Feuerlicht, Ignace, Alienation:From the Past to
the Future, (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978) p. vii.

[17]Ibid., p. viii.

[18]Ibid., p. 5.

[19]Erich Fromm, ed. by Eric &Mary Josephson, Man
Alone, Alienation in Modern Society, (New York: Dell
Publishing Co., 1962), p. 56. Cited by A.S. Garbuzov, "The
Conception of Man in the Philosophy of Erich Fromm", Soviet
Studies in Philosophy, Vol. 24, (Fall 1985), p. 53.

[20]Erich Fromm, Sane Society, (New York: Holt,
Reinehart, and Winston, 1955), p. 110.

[21]Erich Fromm, The Art of Loving, (New York: Harper
& Row, 1956), p. 86.

[22]Escape From Freedom, p. 186.

[23]Ibid., p. 189.

[24]The Art of Loving, p. 86.

[25]Man and His World: A Marxian View, p. 126.

[26] Ibid., pp. 130-131.

[27] Marx's Grundrisse, p. 73.

[28] Ibid., pp. 65-66.

[29] Karl Marx, Karl Marx Fredrick Engels:Collected Works: Vol.3, "Comments on James Mill, Elemens d'Economie Politique" (New York: International Publishers, 1975), pp. 225-6.

[30] Ibid., "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844", p. 306.

[31] Ibid., "Comments on James Mill, Elemens d'Economie Politique", p. 226.

[32] Ibid., "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844", p. 326.

[33] Willmott and Knights, p. 210.

[34] The Art of loving, p.33, cited in Alienation:From the Past to the Future, p. 202.

[35] D.T. Suzuki, E. Fromm and R. De Martino (eds.), Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis, (New York: George Allen and Unwin, 1960) p. 87, cited by Willmott & Knights, p. 210.

[36] Willmott and Knights, p. 218.

[37] "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844", p. 326.

[38] Man and His World: A Marxian View, p. 131.

[39] Willmott & Knights, pp. 214-215.

CHAPTER II

FREEDOM AND ALIENATION

One of the main themes in Erich Fromm's theory of
alienation is the idea of freedom. As described in the
introduction, Fromm explains that capitalism freed humans
from the pre-individualistic, traditional bonds of medieval
society.[1] However, Fromm distinguishes two notions of
freedom, which Hugh Willmott and David Knights concisely
summarize as follows:

(a) man's capacity to free himself from external
    constraints. This form of freedom Fromm describes
    as "freedom from";
    and
(b) man's capacity to realize his intellectual,
    emotional, and sensuous potentialities. This form
    of freedom Fromm terms "freedom to".[2]

Willmott and Knights do not state whether Fromm
meant to distinguish these as positive and negative aspects
of freedom, but Fromm himself explains that "freedom from"
is used in the negative sense and that "freedom to" is used
in the positive sense.[3]

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To explain the negative character of (a), Fromm writes that after the development of capitalism, a person was <u>freed from</u> those ties of class, family, religion, and so on, which used to give him security and a feeling of belonging. Therefore, because of this freedom, the world has become limitless and at the same time threatening, and the person has come to have doubts about himself and about the aim of life. This is how freedom relates to alienation. His relationship to his fellow people, with everyone a potential competitor, has become hostile. Thus, having lost the sense of unity with other humans and the universe, he is overwhelmed with a sense of his individual nothingness and helplessness. In other words, because of this negative freedom, he has become a "stranger" with "a deep feeling of insecurity, powerlessness, doubt, aloneness, and anxiety".[4] Fromm calls this feeling caused by this negative freedom "an unbearable burden"[5] but which "is covered by the daily routine of his activities, social relations, by success in business", meaning that he is not <u>really</u> conscious of it, being distracted and preoccupied by the things he has to do in order to sustain his existence. Nevertheless, at the subconscious level, the feeling of "aloneness and bewilderment remain".[6]

As for the positive aspects of freedom, of "freedom to", Fromm writes that: "modern man... <u>has not</u> gained freedom in the positive sense of the realization of his

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self; that is, the expression of his intellectual, emotional, and sensuous potentialities".[7] In order to explain this, the following example can be used: although humans have won victories over the powers of religion, "the modern individual has lost to a great extent the inner capacity to have faith in anything which is not provable by the methods of the natural sciences". In the present day, beliefs are not accepted if they are not proved with evidence. Therefore, humans have become restricted in terms of expressing emotional potentialities that do not fit the paradigm of science. Another example is that although the modern person has gained freedom of speech, "much of what 'he' thinks and says are the things that everybody else thinks and says; that he has not acquired the ability to think originally".[8] To support this, James L. Marsh claims that:

> (There) is a one-dimensional, quantitative sameness in which everything is like everything else, and everyone spouts the current majority opinion. Talking to a person of the present age is to have the impression that his opinion and sentiments are not original, that we have heard it all before. No one risks anything, and consequently no one becomes anybody.[9]

According to Fromm, this is due to the "anonymous authorities of public opinion and 'common sense'.[10] Mass media have greatly contributed to this, in that they can spread and impose ideas, and hence brainwash the people and unify public opinions to a certain degree. This shows the restriction or manipulation of expressing the intellectual potentialities of people of the modern era.

Thus, modern humans <u>have not</u> achieved what Willmott and Knights exactly describe in (b). This implies that according to Fromm, modern humans have only gained the negative freedom of "freedom from" -security, reassurance, and so on- but have not gained any positive freedom of "freedom to" express various potentialities. Can we say, therefore, that modern humans have not gained <u>any</u> positive freedom compared to the Middle Ages? Fromm will not assent to this, since he states in another passage: "capitalism not only freed man from traditional bonds, but it also contributed tremendously to the <u>increasing of positive freedom</u>, to the growth of an active, critical, responsible self".[11]

Then how are we supposed to interpret Fromm's theory, i.e. whether he believes that modern people have gained positive freedom or negative freedom in the overall? One possibility is to interpret his theory of freedom in a complex, dialectic way. In other words, modern humans have achieved some positive <u>freedom from</u> medieval bonds, but

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have also gained negative freedom from security and the
sense of belonging, and, overall, they have achieved much
negative freedom. Simultaneously, modern humans have gained
the superficial positive freedom to be "an active,
critical, responsible self", in the sense that they are not
bound traditionally, religiously, economically, or
socially, but have not gained the "real" freedom to express
their various potentialities because of the new invisible
social forces and powers, and thus have gained more
negative freedom in this respect also.

To give an example in order to clarify this, the
abolishment of the feudal class system brought about
enormous changes. Although there are controversies
concerning to what extent this has happened, in modern
society, a person has gained positive "freedom from"
various bonds that restricted him from various political
and social activities. He now has the choice of working in
any field if he wants to and is not automatically required
to devote his life to the occupation that his father has.
However, on the other hand, he also gained the negative
"freedom from" security and comfort of home and community.
In other words, a person who used to be "born into a
certain economic position which guaranteed a livelihood
determined by tradition"[12] now has to worry about his
career and his academic standing, has to go through the
rough and stressful life of the world far from home, and

has to face all sorts of pressures and ordeals from everyday human interactions. He is now bound by the psychological chains of having have to deal with being independent, realizing that he has no authority to guide him, and nothing but his own ability to keep his existence in a vast world with so much competition and hostility. In this respect, Fromm considers that an individual has gained more negative freedom in the overall.

Another example is that the so called "freedom of education" in modern society provided the opportunity for everyone to go to school. One has gained the "freedom to" express himself intellectually, but then, in terms of Fromm's idea, one is required to follow the rigid school curriculums and fit into a certain pattern of thought. As he explains, "the aim of learning is to gather as much information as possiblible, mainly useful for the purposes of the market. Students are supposed to learn so many things that they have hardly time and energy left to think."[13] In this sense, a person has lost the "freedom to" express himself more naturally or spontaneously, and has gained more negative freedom in the overall.

Relating to this distinction between "freedom to" and "freedom from", Willmott and Knights make the following claim:

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.....a major difficulty with Fromm's thesis concerns
the viability of his distinctions between 'freedom
from' and 'freedom to'.....The distinction is not
unambiguous....Fromm's thesis on freedom is rooted in a
concern to focus our attention upon the our own mundane
experience of a difference between 'negative freedom'
...and 'positive freedom'.[14]

They are explaining here that the distinction of
"freedom _from_" and "freedom _to_" is not clear in Fromm's
theory, and that what is relevant is the difference between
positive and negative freedom. For example, if we say that
an individual gained "freedom _from_" oppressive family ties,
we can also say that she gained "freedom _to_" live more
individualistically. This only means that she gained
"positive freedom". Furthermore, as an individual gained
"freedom _from_" various bonds and "freedom _to_" receive
education, this can be explained as gaining "positive
freedom", and in reverse, as he gained "freedom from"
security and lost the "freedom to" express himself
naturally, this can be explained as gaining "negative
freedom". Therefore, to interpret Fromm, we can replace the
concepts of "freedom _from_" and "freedom _to_" with the
concepts of positive and negative freedom.

Furthermore, Willmott and Knights explain:

The difficulty can be resolved only if it is accepted
that Fromm's distinctions are rhetorical, not
empirical, and appeal ultimately to intuition and
experience, not purely to observable behaviour.[15]

Thus, as we examine the positive and negative
freedom of the Middle Ages and the modern period under
capitalism, we should consider them from the point of view
of "intuition and experience". To clarify this "intuition
and experience", Willmott and Knights rephrase it and
explain as follows: "the rootedness of Fromm's standpoint"
is "in intersubjective experience rather than objective
observation".[16] Therefore, the determination of positive
and negative freedom depends on the subjectivity of the
individual or individuals as a collective, rather than the
objective descriptions of the Middle Ages or the modern
era. To put it in simple terms, the question is whether
people were happy in the Middle Ages and whether people are
happy in modern times. The answer to this, Fromm believes,
is that people were happier due to more positive freedom in
the Middle Ages than the people in the present day society.

Relating to this idea, let us examine an example
that inadequately criticizes Fromm's view exactly on this
point. Nathaniel Branden, a believer in capitalism attacks
Fromm harshly on his theory of freedom. He claims that
Fromm "is a glamorizer of the Middle Ages" and finds that

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"shocking and offensive".[17] Branden himself characterizes the Middle Ages in the following way: "The complete lack of control over any aspect of one's existence, the ruthless suppression of intellectual freedom, the paralyzing restrictions on any form of individual initiative and independence" and "a world in which men did not have to invent and compete, they had only to submit and obey".[18]

This is Branden's way of interpreting the historical situation of the Middle Ages, but Fromm, although he will not describe it in this bitter fashion, does not disagree to these _objective_ descriptions of negative freedom. He does say that an individual in those days "was often not even free to dress as he pleased or to eat what he liked" and that "there was much suffering and pain". Society "kept him in bondage" in many ways: socially, geographically and economically. Furthermore, as Branden mentions, Fromm also agrees that "there was comparatively little competition".[19]

Thus, as we can see from the consistency between Fromm's and Branden's ideas on competition in the Middle Ages, they agree on some of the more _objective_ descriptions of negative freedom of those days. The question is not whether this "lack of control", "suppression", and these "restrictions" in the Middle Ages existed or not, but whether they were something that was _subjectively_ negative i.e. inappreciative, taken as a burden, or caused psychological uncomfort, to the people, or not. To this,

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the difference between Fromm and Branden is that in terms
of subjective experience, the former interprets the
situation as something that allowed people to have positive
freedom, since they kept the people free of insecurity,
loneliness, and so on, and allowed them to have the sense
of belonging and togetherness, whereas the latter does not
make any subjective value judgements on them.

Next, if we see what Branden has to say about the
development of capitalism, we find that he claims this:

> ....under capitalism, men are free to choose their
> 'social bonds' -meaning: to choose whom they will
> associate with. Men are not trapped within the prison
> of their family, tribe, caste, class, or neighborhood.
> They choose whom they will value, whom they will be
> friend, whom they will deal with, what kind of
> relationships they will enter.[20]

Here again, he is giving an account of the objective
positive freedom of the modern society, and Fromm will not
deny this. Fromm also says, "we are proud that in his
conduct of life man has become free from external
authorities, which tell him what to do and what not to
do".[21] However, Fromm does not end there but explains that
because of this new freedom, "he becomes more isolated,
alone, and afraid", as a psychological effect. Furthermore,
he claims that: "the understanding of the whole problem of

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freedom depends on the very ability to see both sides of the process and not to lose track of one side while following the other".[22] By "both sides", he means the positive and the negative sides of freedom, which implicitly includes the objective and subjective aspects of it.

Branden does admit that "it is true that every man is alone, separate, and unique. It is true that thinking requires independence."[23] But still, he stresses the positive _objective_ aspects and continues to say:

> To choose to think, to identify the facts of reality -
> to assume the responsibility of judging what is true or
> false, right or wrong -is man's basic form of self-
> assertiveness. It is his acceptance of his own nature
> as a rational being, his acceptance of the
> responsibility of intellectual independence, his
> commitment to the efficacy of his own mind.[24]

Furthermore, Branden concludes that "these are the facts that grant glory to man's existence."[25] He does not mention whether this is taken as enjoyment or a burden to the individuals. Fromm, in turn, interprets the same freedom negatively. Branden himself mentions that Fromm declares that a modern human

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<u>has to</u> think and judge-he has no authority to guide
him, and nothing but his own ability to keep him in
existence. No longer can he, by virtue of the class
into which he is born, inherit his sense of personal
identity: henceforward, he <u>had to</u> achieve it. This
posed a devastating psychological problem for man,
<u>intensifying his basic feeling of isolation and</u>
<u>separateness</u>.[26]

Therefore, here again, we see that Branden and Fromm

agree with the <u>objective</u> idea that modern capitalism

bestows on humans the freedom to think on their own.

However, the way each interprets the situation in terms of

how the individual psychologically lives through this new

freedom is different. Overall, Fromm takes it as

subjectively a negative freedom, whereas Branden does not

make any claim on subjectivity here.

However, afterall, Branden does admit that:

A great many men do recognize the painful emotional
state which writers on alienation describe. A great
many men do lack a sense of personal identity. A great
many men do feel themselves to be strangers and afraid
in a world they never made.[27]

But then again, Branden also asks: "To whose mentality, then, do these critics of capitalism demand that society be adjusted?"[28] and furthermore, charges Fromm with "choosing tramps, morons, and neurotics as his symbol of humanity".[29] In other words, he asks whom is Fromm referring to when he talks about alienation and the experience of modern day negative freedom. Branden is also implying that although a "great many men do feel themselves to be strangers", only these social outcasts gained negative freedom in the modern era, and the average person did not gain negative freedom, and hence, is not really alienated.

To this, Fromm would argue against Branden with his concepts of human nature. There are several aspects to this, and firstly, in human beings, there is "the desire for interpersonal fusion" which is "the most powerful striving in man".[30] In other words, there is a basic desire to love others in people that is essential to existence. However, Fromm believes that the principle of modern day capitalism is incompatible with the principle of love.[31] (This will be described in a later chapter.) Secondly, human "character" is "structured in the process of assimilation and socialization to satisfy certain needs for", for example, "emotional survival." In other words, there is a basic need in human beings "to be emotionally related to others for defense, work, material possessions,

sexual satisfaction, play, up-bringing of the young, and the transmission of knowledge."[32] However, according to Fromm, science and technology of the modern period destroyed these essences of human nature and the human links to nature and spirituality.[33] These are the concepts of human nature that underlie Fromm's assertion that modern people gained negative freedom and thus experience alienation.

However, Branden is right when he states that "Nowhere does he (Fromm) establish any logical connection between the facts he observes and the conclusions he announces".[34] However, by claiming this, the irony is that Branden is simultaneously inviting us to charge him with a similar shortcoming. Where does he present the proofs for all his claims? But then again, what and who decides whether the people of the Middle Ages had more positive freedom than the people of the modern day, in terms of subjective experience? Since this is a question concerning generalization, it could be determined by the opinions of the majority of the people in the particular period whether they experienced their freedom positively or negatively. But how are we to know what people thought and felt in the past? The answer is that we cannot.

However, one alternative is perhaps to do a sociological study on a society of the present day that is still in the form of pre-industrialization. Perhaps this

pre-industrialized society has characteristics that are common to what the currently industrialized, Western countries had back in the Medieval days. In that case, we can compare the positive and negative freedom of the industrialized society with this pre-industrialized society, as an alternative to a Medieval society.

As a personal matter, last summer, I did some research in Sudan, which is a very poor country in Africa maintaining various forms of tradition and Islamic culture. After interviewing numerous people of various classes and geographical location, I reached the conclusion that although the people were materialistically poor, the problems of alienation that one sees in industrialized societies were not present there. Most people claimed that they were happy because of strong family ties and a firm belief in religion. Many were aware of the objective freedom that the individuals of the industrialized society have, but they did not long for it.

However, this does not prove that the people that I interviewed were really happy, since according to Fromm, there is a difference between "genuine" feelings and "pseudo" feelings, and so what they were claiming may have been merely a "pseudo" feeling. Therefore, in order to claim that the people of Sudan are actually more happier than the people of the industrialized societies, we could base the judgement on something more objective like the low

rates of suicide, divorce, juvenile delinquency, crime and so on. Concerning these, although my empirical observation was that all these social phenomena were less frequent there compared to those in many industrialized societies, I have no concrete data to support my observations. Furthermore, even if I did have some national statistics, the validity of these would always be questionable.

Therefore, I do not intend to make a grand theory out of this rather loose study; and I believe that even if we resort to psychological surveys pertaining to freedom or alienation in any present day society, there will always be doubts and disputes over the methods and the validity of the surveys, if we try to pursue the answers philosophically. Hence, in the ultimate sense, it is a matter for the interpreter to decide whether the general public had more subjective positive freedom in the Middle Ages compared to the people in the present day, or vice versa. I believe that there will never be an absolute answer to this question.

Nevertheless, one thing that I can state is that it is wrong to believe unconditionally that people in the Medieval days had less subjective and positive freedom, and hence, were unhappier than people of the present day industrialized society. Fromm and many people in Sudan will agree to this.

Footnotes

[1] Erich Fromm, <u>Escape from Freedom</u>, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1941) p. 103.

[2] Hugh Willmott and David Knights, "The Problem of Freedom: Fromm's Contribution to a Critical Theory of Work Organization" <u>Praxis International</u>, Vol. 2, No. 2, (July 1982), p. 206.

[3] <u>Escape from Freedom</u>, p. 32.

[4] Ibid., pp. 61-62.

[5] Ibid., p. 36.

[6] Erich Fromm, <u>The Fear of Freedom</u> (New York: Keagan Paul, 1942), p. 115.

[7] <u>Escape from Freedom</u>, p. viii.

[8] Ibid., p. 105.

[9] James L. Marsh, "Marx and Kierkegaard on Alienation," <u>International Kierkegaard Commentary</u>. Robert L. Perkins ed., (Mercer University Press, 1984). p. 64.

[10] <u>Escape from Freedom</u>, p. 105.

[11] Ibid., pp. 107-8. My emphasis.

[12] Ibid., p. 42.

[13] Erich Fromm, <u>Man for Himself</u> (New York: Rinehart, 1947), p. 76.

[14]Willmott and Knights, pp. 207-8.

[15]Ibid.

[16]Ibid. My emphasis.

[17]Nathaniel Branden, "Alienation," Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal, ed. by Ayn Rand (New York: The New American Library, 1966), p268.

[18]Ibid., pp. 268-9.

[19]Escape from Freedom, pp. 41-43.

[20]Branden, p. 273.

[21]Escape from Freedom, p. 105.

[22]Ibid., p. 104.

[23]Branden, p. 264.

[24]Ibid., p. 269.

[25]Ibid., p. 264.

[26]Ibid., p. 269. My emphasis.

[27]Ibid., p. 278.

[28]Ibid., p. 272.

[29]Ibid., p. 265.

[30]Erich Fromm, The Art of Loving (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), p. 18.

[31]Ibid., p. 132.

[32]Michael Maccoby, "Social Character vs. The
Productive Ideal: The Contradiction in Fromm's View of
Man", <u>Praxis International</u> Vol. 2 No. 2, (July 1982),
p. 74.

[33]A.S. Garbuzov, "The Conception of Man in the
Philosophy of Erich Fromm", <u>Soviet Studies in Philsophy</u>,
Vol. 24, (Fall 1985), p. 47.

[33] Branden, p. 265.

CHAPTER III

FROMM'S IDEAL SOCIETY

Although a psychologist, Fromm believes that the
solution for alienation in the highly industrialized
capitalist society is not to treat each individual with
psychoanalytic therapy. For him, "the matter is much too
urgent " and "something more drastic is required".[1] Social
pathology must be cured from the root, and in order to do
so, Fromm holds that the total reconstruction of the
capitalist society is necessary. The ideal society that he
advocates, we build in place of the present one, which is
devoid of the problems of alienation, is called humanistic
communitarian socialism.

Fromm believes that in productive work, humans can
feel fulfilled and can gain a sense of security in the
world. Furthermore, a person needs to devote his talents to
something significant and labour purposefully, not merely
as the bearer of a skill utilized as a commodity of the
market. However, he believes that this productive and
purposeful labour is not to be found in the capitalist
society, where humans are not the dominant element in the
productive process, but are alienated from it. Therefore,
as an alternative, he designs an ideal socialisitic society

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where the true motives of doing creative work for its own sake and of establishing economic independence can be realized.[2]

There are numerous criticisms of his theory, but before we examine them, let us see what sort of idealistic society Fromm actually contrived. Firstly, the following are requirements for constructing the ideal new society.

* It would have to solve the problem of how to continue the industrial mode of production without total centralization...
* It would have to combine overall planning with a high degree of decentralization, giving up the "free-market economy," that has become largely a fiction.
* It would have to give up the goal of unlimited growth for selective growth, without running the risk of economic disaster.
* It would have to create work conditions and a general spirit in which not material gain but other, psychic satisfaction are effective motivations.[3]

To summarize, Fromm believes that "private ownership of the means of production must be abolished. The profit motive must be forbidden. Industry must be decentralized."[4] I will not analyze each item, but will introduce a sketch of the society Fromm was envisioning based on these images, by using Martin Birnbach's summary.

They employ modern industry and do not rely on handicraft production. They provide for the active participation of all members, economically and socially, and, by a complicated hierarchy presided over by a figure who in many respects resembles a politically responsible philosopher king, assure the centralization of leadership necessary to economic success.... The nuclear unit is the Neighbor Group, consisting of half a dozen families who meet regularly under a Chief of Neighbor Groups to discuss contentious issues and forward the results of their deliberations to the head of the community. ... In politics, too, a form of town meeting, having a maximum of about five hundred people, secures the complete discussion, concrete personal relations, knowledge of facts, and control over decisions that make for meaningful political activity.[5]

Pertaining to this, Birnbach has several criticisms. Firstly, that "Fromm simply ignores the problems of a transitional period."[6] In other words, according to Birnbach, Fromm outlines his ideal society, but does not tell us how we should achieve that sort of society, as, for example, Marx did with the abolishment of the classes and private property through social revolution. A more neutral critique of one of Fromm's books says "Even though Fromm outlines the work a socialist party should undertake, he is not offering a political program, but a set of ideals which might guide a truly human-centered politics."[7] Hugh

Willmotts and David Knights also ask "How, then, in Fromm's view, is this radical change to be accomplished? ". To this, they answer that Fromm does not "provide a plausible account of how the political will is to be mobilized to introduce it" and that "he does not indicate from what quarter the power necessary to bring about this change is to come." They conclude that his analysis "is rightly criticized for its structural and political naive."[8]

One possible reason for Fromm to be considered neglectful in designing the political measures for achieving the ideal society is, as Birnbach claims, after "the complexities of a gradualist approach once out of mind, Fromm is at liberty to leap over intervening obstacles and carve the aspect of utopia with an inspired chisel."[9] In other words, it is always easy to write or talk about ideals and hopes for the future. Anyone can do it. To design the necessary and convincing steps is the difficult part, and most people fail at this stage. Some people may regard Fromm as one of them.

On the other hand, we can have an argument in favour of Fromm, that he did not forget or totally neglect to consider the steps toward achieving his ideal society. A socialist, A.S. Gabuzov, explains:

In Fromm's view, the people who have overcome the feeling of "destructive separation" and who are torn

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away from loneliness, can begin to build in conformity
with their needs the cells of a commune -
"communitarian" socialism..... Gradually these cells
supposedly cover the whole of society, which means that
without a class struggle, without a socialist
revolution, "humanistic socialism" replaces
capitalism.[10]

To put it into simple words, those people who
somehow overcame alienation would be the core element to
gradually form a socialistic society. Three points can be
raised here. Firstly, who are these "special people"?
Gabuzov explains that each is a "new man" who "has attained
inner freedom and happiness".[11] Fromm himself lists
features of these peoples and here are some examples:

* Joy that comes from giving and sharing, not from
  hoarding and exploiting.
* Trying to reduce greed, hate, and illusions as much
  as one is capable.
* Making the full growth of oneself and of one's fellow
  beings the supreme goal of living.
* Sensing one's oneness with all life, hence giving up
  the aim of conquering nature, subduing it, exploiting
  it, raping, destroying it, but trying, rather, to
  understand and cooperate with nature.[12]

These codes seem to lack sufficient profundity to be
qualified as philosophy. They sound like the adult version
of the codes that are written above blackboards of
elementary schools in Japan. It is easy for one to list
such ideals for human character reforms, and many people of
all cultures of all ages have been claiming similar goals
for personal development, so what Fromm elaborates here is
nothing really innovative, for that matter. However, in
fact, these are merely summaries of what Fromm has been
expounding in many volumes, based on his socio-
psychological analyses, and therefore, although none will
be discussed here, they all actually have a firm
foundation.

Secondly, we were originally making the assumption
that, for Fromm, alienation of humans would be solved with
the establishment of the communitarian society, but now it
seems that Fromm is claiming that those who are not
alienated anymore can form the ideal society. This seems
like a catch 22 situation, but it can be understood if we
favourably interpret his claim to mean that some people are
able to overcome alienation in this capitalist society by
attaining the features as a "new Man", and they would, or
should, make the first step in creating the whole world as
an alienation-free ideal society.

Relating to this, thirdly, we can now state that although Fromm does not believe in a drastic, dramatic revolution like what Marx believed in, this does not necessarily imply that he __totally__ neglected to design the methods to achieve his ideal society. As Garbuzov Writes:

Fromm is a supporter of peaceful social transformations,....He fights for an abstract-utopian socialism, for the 'revolution' __in the psyche__, which must replace the socialist revolution.[13]

Therefore, it is not that Fromm "ignored" the steps needed to achieve his communitarian society. Just because his methods are __not political or social__, and his conception is not an elaborate idea of class abolishment, like Marx's, it does not follow that he neglected to consider or avoided to examine __any sort__ of step needed to achieve his humanistic communitarian society. He mentions that it starts from the __reformation of individual characters, psychology, or way of thinking__. More specifically, in order to bring about a society in which no one is alienated, the method is through attaining the features of the "new Man" that he proposes. However, this idea is subjected to criticisms that it is too laissez-faire and __too optimistic__ for attaining the ideal society, by the fact that it

depends too much on the individual and not by political methods.

But then again, this still does not explain what Fromm said about how to develop these ideal individual characters in oneself in order to qualify for this "new Man". Birnbach also states,

> Fromm could not very well argue that piecemeal therapy of alienated individuals would sooner or later add up to a healthy social order.....Something more drastic is required, more drastic than the Marxian system on which he could not, when all was said and done, pattern his most considered proposals.[14]

In fact, Fromm did not particularly emphasize the slow process of transformation of society through the development of characteristics in his wrtings. In other words, we can only interpret it favourably, and Fromm himself is not clear on this point.

Nevertheless, logically speaking, none of the above criticisms of Fromm's lack of structural, political methodology in attaining his ideal communitarian society has any bearing on the contents of his idea. Nevertheless, Birnbach criticizes this kind of society as "inevitably a myth, or, less charitably, a fantasy."[15] He claims:

We need not belabor the absence of economic realism
which presumes that the far-flung industrial complex of
twentieth-century capitalism can be fragmented into
miniature communities while retaining some semblance of
coordination and efficiency. The incredibly complicated
activities of production, marketing, and research that
large-scale interlocking enterprise makes possible
could not conceivably be carried on in the communities
of work Fromm describes. Fromm is surprisingly naive.[16]

Birnbach is trying to say that Fromm's idea is
unrealistic for twentieth-century society with all of its
firmly established, complex international enterprises and
networks. In other words, it is not easy to replace this
world with Fromm's world, which is based on a minor scale,
personal, and time consuming system. Especially in this day
and age when there is so much war going on all over the
world and hostility between nations, this criticism might
be plausible, if one is opting for an overnight change.

Another aspect that Birnbach mentions is that "it is
the desirability of its results that is really in
question". On this he criticizes Fromm's idea that "the
productive character in the communitarian society is all
social life and no private life".[17] In other words, there
is so much public activity demanded in these sorts of
communitarian activity, that there will not be much time
for oneself or for the family. In a way, the lives of the

people will be regulated too much and we can see that at least one aspect of "freedom" would be deprived. Therefore, although this sort of social system just may solve the problems of alienation, we can already foresee a replacing problem arising.

Birnbach also criticizes Fromm by insisting that this type of social organization is "not an effort to deal with current problems but an attempt to escape from them".[18] However, this again, is based on the assumption that Fromm does not explain the structural steps to achieve his ideal society, but if we understand that Fromm's method starts from human individual reform, we cannot necessarily assert that Fromm is attempting to "escape from" the current problems. Michael Maccoby also defends Fromm:

> Fromm is hopeful about humanity, but not optimistic nor utopian. He writes about human potential for growth and development, but as much as any modern thinker, he recognizes, analyzes, and grapples with the destructive human tendencies......By exploring relationships between destructiveness and social conditions, he directs us to those social arrangement – conditions of work, technology – that must be changed to further positive human development.[19]

This is an interpretation that Fromm is not an escapist, and although not specific, it is an attempt to explain his great commitment to solve the current problems

of the capitalist society. Erich Fromm devoted himself to numerous clinical and field work with actual people, as well as conducted historical studies, in order to solve the contemporary problems of alienation.

In conclusion, it is true that Fromm neglects to design political methods towards realizing his ideal humanitarian communistic society. However, it is not the case that Fromm did not design any means towards attaining this society. Although it is not through political or social revolution, it is through individual character development. He states that the "new Man" who attained such ideal qualities in character will become the cell that would form the ideal society. But then again, in fact, he did not particularly emphasize this slow process of transformation of society and thus this idea is not a major part of his theory. Additionally, since he does not also describe the methods toward attaining such idealistic characters, Fromm is frequently subjected to criticisms of being too utopian and idealistic from both Marxists and capitalists -for he belongs to neither category. He belongs exclusively to his own.

Furthermore, as we have seen, the content of his ideal society itself is, according to some theorists, naive and unrealistic, that it seems very unlikely to replace this twentieth-century capitalist society within the very near future. But realistic or not, there is a question of

whether people would want such a communistic society, and one problem of this kind of society which is raised is that private life would be regulated and minimalized. In other words, since there will be more political and social participation in public meetings and group activities outside the home, the time that one would spend privately for himself or with his family would be diminished. Birnbach questions, "can an individual find solitary quietude in the gamut of membership groups surrounding him?" and also states that "Fromm seems to underestimate the virtues of silent meditation."[20]

However, we should at least give credit to Fromm for his tremendous effort in trying to solve the contemporary problems that we are facing. No matter how much defect his theory contains, he has exposed and elicited numerous psychological aspects of humans that we can study and contemplate, in order to form our own solutions in dealing with the issue of alienation.

Footnotes

[1]Martin Birnbach, Neo-Freudian Social Philosophy (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961), p. 187.

[2]Ibid., pp. 197-8.

[3]Erich Fromm, To Have or To Be (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), pp. 173-4.

[4]Nathaniel Branden, "Alienation", in Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal, ed. by Ayn Rand, (New York: The New American Library, 1966), p. 276.

[5]Birnbach, pp. 198-9.

[6]Ibid., p. 186.

[7] "On humanistic socialism" Progressive.,

[8]Hugh Willmott and David Knights, "The Problem of Freedom: Fromm's Contribution to a Critical Theory of Work Organization", Praxis International, Vol. 2 No. 2, (July 1982), pp. 220-1.

[9]Birnbach, p. 186.

[10]A.S. Garbuzov, "The Conception of Man in the Philosophy of Erich Fromm", Soviet Studies in Philsophy, Vol. 24, (Fall 1985), p. 49.

[11]Ibid., p. 50.

[12]To Have or To Be, pp. 170-1.

[13]Garbuzov, p. 48. My emphasis.

[14]Birnbach, p. 187. My emphasis.

[15]ibid., p. 188.

[16]Ibid., p. 200.

[17]Ibid., p. 201.

[18]Ibid., p. 203.

[19]Michael Maccoby, "Social Character vs. The Productive Ideal: The Contradiction in Fromm's View of Man", <u>Praxis International</u> Vol. 2 No. 2, (July 1982), p. 70.

[20]Birnbach, p. 201.

CHAPTER IV

"BROTHERLY LOVE" AS A SOLUTION TO ALIENATION

In his book, The Art of Loving, Fromm states that
"Love is the only sane and satisfactory answer to the
problem of human existence".[1] In other words, love is the
sole solution to the problem of alienation. To explain how
this love can solve the problem of alienation, Fromm simply
explains the principle that love "springs from the need of
overcoming separateness, that it leads to oneness".[2] This
only means that love will give a person a feeling of unity
with the world or with other people, and he will not have
to feel lonely, insecure or afraid and hence, not alienated
anymore. This itself does not explain the detailed
mechanism required for overcoming alienation within labour,
education, or family relationships.

However, firstly, we should clarify this concept of
love. Fromm writes about different kinds of love; brotherly
love, motherly love, erotic love, self love, and love of
God. If we compare erotic love and brotherly love, Fromm
explains: erotic love "is restricted to one person", and
hence, "it is by its very nature exclusive and not
universal".[3] This is the sort of love that is referred to
when two heterosexual or homosexual peopel are sexually

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attracted to each other. On the other hand, brotherly love is a broader concept and it is "the most fundamental kind of love, which underlies all types of love".[4] This type of love "is the force that keeps the human race together, the clan, the family, society" and without this love, "humanity could not exist for a day".[5] He means the love in "the sense of responsibility, care, respect, knowledge of any other human being, the wish to further his life". It is the kind that the Bible speaks of.[6] It is the kind that makes one help an old lady cross the street; it is the kind that doesn't discriminate race; it is the kind that makes one want to sell good cookies so that the customers will be happy; it is the kind that wishes all wars to end. Others may call this an altruistic love, agape, idealistic love, abstract love, or rational love which is devoid of emotions.

With these two distinctions in mind, we can next examine the argument of Nathaniel Branden, who misinterprets Fromm's notion of love. Branden takes a quote from Fromm:

In essence, all human beings are identical. We are part of One; we are One. This being so, it should not make any difference whom we love.[7]

To this, Branden charges Fromm as follows; "it
should not, in other words, make any difference whether the
person we love is a being of stature or a total nonentity,
a genius or a fool, a hero or a scoundrel."[8] Here, Branden
is mistaken in two points. Firstly, the "love" in the above
passage implies the brotherly love, since Fromm states that
"inasmuch as we are all one, we can love everyone in the
same way in the sense of brotherly love".[9] On the other
hand, for erotic love, Fromm explains that "inasmuch as we
are also different, -erotic love requires certain specific,
highly individual elements which exist between some people
but not between all."[10] Therefore, Branden is mistaken in
not distinguishing the two different types of love and not
realizing that the "love" in "it should not make any
difference whom we love" applies to brotherly love and not
erotic love. It appears that Branden is totally
misconstruing Fromm's idea of love here.

Furthermore, Branden seems to show that he is
completely blocking the idea of brotherly love from his
mind. He quotes two lines from the novel Atlas Shrugged by
Ayn Rand about love; the first is, "Love is...the emotional
price paid by one man for the joy he receives from the
virtues of another".[11] In this novel, this line implicitly,
yet specifically, refers to the "admiration"[12] that three
men feel towards one woman, the woman feel towards the
three men, and one man feel towards another man. This type

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of love is more or less exclusive, and hence closer to erotic love, rather than brotherly love, which is, according to Fromm, a "love for all human beings".[13]

The second line Branden quotes is: "....a morality that teaches you to scorn a whore who gives her body indiscriminately to all men -this same morality demands that you surrender your soul to promiscuous love for all comers",[14] By quoting this, Branden is trying to say that if one supports "the love you ought to feel for every man"[15] (an earlier line in the novel), he must support the promiscuous love of a whore. This clearly shows that he is confusing brotherly love with erotic love, if it is any sort of love.

Thus, we have seen that Branden has failed to distinguish the two types of love, and therefore, his criticism against Fromm's idea of "love as a solution to human existence" is invalid. Here Fromm does not mean erotic love but brotherly love, and Branden is criticizing Fromm from a totally different plane.

Now that we have clarified the notion of brotherly love, we should see the problem that this type of love has. Fromm holds that the principle of capitalism is incompatible with the principle of love because he believes that capitalism "is based on each one seeking his own advantage" and "is governed by the principle of egotism".[16] Modern society, which is a "production centered, commodity-

greedy society", propagandizes to "keep your own advantage in mind, act according to what is best for you",[17] and therefore, love cannot be practiced here. In the capitalist society, "the difference between people is reduced to a merely quantitative difference of being more or less successful, attractive, hence valuable", which is the same with "what happens to commodities on the market".[18] In other words, each person is regarded as a mere means to achieve more wealth, power, and satisfaction for the self, and not as a real human being with real needs and feelings, who needs care, sympathy, and affection. Therefore, in the capitalist society, one feels one's value is constituted primarily "by one's success on a competitive market with ever-changing conditions". So any setback would result in "helplessness, insecurity, and inferiority feelings",[19] and thus, the problems of alienation continue to exist.

On the other hand, he believes that in the ideal communitarian society, as an alternative to capitalism, love can be practiced. Fromm states:

> Man can protect himself from the consequences of his own madness only by creating a sane society.....in which man relates to man _lovingly_, in which he is rooted in bonds of brotherliness and solidarity....[20]

The "sane society" he is referring to is his ideal of the humanistic communitarian society, but the problem here is that Fromm does not explicitly explain how his ideal society is composed of love, nor how love will solve the problem of alienation, so we will have to deduce it logically. Fromm claims that, in his ideal society, "an essential part of workers' participation (is) that they look beyond their own enterprise," and that they are "interested in and connected with consumers as well as with other workers in the same industry, and with the working population as a whole."[21] In other words, true brotherly love is required here, in the sense that one cannot pursue just one's own self interest as in capitalist society. Fromm also believes that the condition for love and for true productivity "is free from all egoboundness", which means being "free from the craving for holding onto things".[22] This is only actualized in his ideal society, where the "new Man" is willing to give up "all forms of having", meaning material possessions, where he is trying "to reduce greed", or is "not a bundle of greedy desires".[23]

Next, the relevant question here is: is it impossible to have true brotherly love in this capitalist society? To this, Branden claims that, "He (Fromm) does not declare that love is impossible under capitalism -merely that it is exceptionally difficult."[24] Branden is right,

since although Fromm does not state so explicitly, he claims that "I am of the conviction that the answer of the absolute incompatibility of love and "normal" life is correct <u>only in an abstract sense</u>." Furthermore, he does admit that even in this capitalist society, "a farmer, a worker, a teacher, and many a type of businessman can try to practice love without ceasing to function economically."[25]

The above concept is a good start in trying to develop the idea that even in this capitalist society, brotherly love <u>can be</u> actualized, and hence, alienation can be overcome. We can proceed by using the logic of Fromm himself. Firstly, he believes that "the love for my own self is inseparably connected with the love for any other self."[26] In other words, self-love and brotherly love are inseparable, i.e. if one loves oneself, then one would love others, and if one loves others, one would love oneself too. His reasoning is this: if you love another person or other people, you love human beings in general, since the objects of your love are incarnations of such human qualities. Since you are also included in the concept of human beings, it entails that you love yourself too. The logic works the other way around also. If you love yourself, the characters that you like in yourself are incarnations of such human qualities in general. Since

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another person or other particular people are human beings too, it entalis that you love others also.

However, one may say that "no, there are selfish people who love themselves and themselves only." To this, Fromm would say that we must distinguish between self-love and selfishness. He claims that a selfish person "seems to care too much for himself" but that he really "hates himself". Furthermore, a selfish person actually "only makes an unsuccessful attempt to cover up and compensate for his failure to care for his real self."[27] In other words, according to Fromm, a selfish person does not love others but he does not love himself either.

There may be many objections to the above idea and one may still say that "there are those who love themselves only." Perhaps so. However, if we can still accept that there is a possibility to love oneself and also others, then one cannot deny that it is possible to actualize brotherly love in this capitalist society in order to overcome alienation, at least on the individual basis.

Richard Norman also believes that "the dichotomy of egoism and altruism is in fact a false dichotomy."[28] In other words, he agrees with Fromm that one can love oneself and others. However, Norman does admit that "the fact remains that at the level of experience conflicts of interests occur."[29] For example, there may be one job opening for you and your friend, and if you take it, a

close friend may be in financial crisis. You may want to leave your home to develop your talent, but your absence may cause heartbreak to your old and sick parents. However, Norman expounds on the notion of "commitment",[30] which is similar to Bernard Williams' notion of "project".[31] In other words, one has certain commitments to the family, friends, job, country, belief, and so on. Sometimes, "other people's interests take precedence over one's own", "but there will be other cases where the interests of others do not have this kind of significance", and Norman claims that in these cases, one will "need to assert one's own interests against others."[32] His assertion is based on the principle of what Fromm calls "fairness" of the capitalist society.[33] In other words, each person has different commitments and it is fair if each person considers that a certain commitment can take precedence over other less important commitments. Now then, can we not accept this reality that each human being has to value certain interests of what he is committed to in order to just carry on a normal life? Then, is it not possible for one to love oneself as such, i.e. having various commitments to fulfill, and also love others, who also have their respective commitments? What this is all leading to is that I believe that it is possible, in our daily lives, that brotherly love can be actualized in the capitalist society, if we accept the reality that each of us, to a certain

extent, does have to fulfill commitments by keeping our own advantages in mind, pursuing material growth, or using other people's services without having any personal interaction.

I will not try to prove that brotherly love can be compatible with capitalism as a principle. Furthermore, if one only sees the actual world in which many people are striving for their own advantage exclusively and are trying to deceive others, they would not seem compatible. I must admit that the development of capitalism did breed a lot of "selfish" people, but it does not entail that it is impossible to foster people who can love oneselves and others in this capitalist society.

However, there are a few points of which to take heed. Firstly, of course, this does not imply that one is permitted to pursue his own interests unconditionally or that one can deprive the weak and the underprivileged. Discretion, rationality, and even benevolence are required. Secondly, I am not stating that this sort of human condition of having various commitments, is unchangeable, and although this is leading to a more or less a conformist like solution, it is not implying that we should succumb and accept the present-day situation with all its problems of alienation.

We have now seen that it is <u>not impossible</u> for brotherly love to be actualized in a capitalist society. The next question is, <u>how</u> can love solve the problems of alienation? In a society which has so many causes for alienation, it would be difficult for a person to be completely alienation-free. Therefore, the only way to overcome it is by trying to realize this brotherly love as much as possible in each sphere of one's life. Since to love others is to love oneself, in terms of the relationship to labour, if one chooses to be engaged in a work in which one can really enjoy and believe in the good it will do to the world, regardless of whether it would bring much material growth or not, it will mean to love oneself and also humanity in a brotherly way, and one may feel fulfilled, have a sense of belonging in society, and not feel so much alienated from the world. However, this may sound too idealistic, for one can say that you must be born and raised in an environment with good conditions or have certain innate abilities, and that the majority are <u>forced</u> into hard labour. All I can say to this is that different classes of people have different barriers, and also that there is at least a possibility for a person of any class to prepare himself not to partake in an undesirable type of labour. In terms of human relationships, one can always make friends and maintain family relationships that one can truly care about and

respect, that are totally independent of materialistic
ties. Even in relationships bound by economic reasons,
there is no reason why one cannot practice brotherly love
there too; to have good human relationships is essential to
overcoming alienation. Furthermore, since it is difficult
to fight in the rigorous competition under the educational
system, one should seek a discipline that one could truly
love and enjoy and perhaps would like to pursue, and then
one may not necessarily feel alienated from the system. If
one finds the competition not worth participating in,
perhaps he can find some other game that he would like to
join.

These may all just sound simple, and of course,
reality is more unkind. However, they are not impossible,
and furthermore, on the other hand, it is also not easy to
change society overnight or to have a dramatic revolution
either. Fromm also concedes:

One must admit that "capitalism" is in itself a complex
and constantly changing structure which still permits
of a good deal of non-conformity and of personal
latitude.[34]

Therefore, as he states, each one of us should
practice brotherly love in our meager daily lives, so that
each may overcome different aspects of alienation and gain
positive subjective freedom. This may sound like a very

weak, non-social sort of solution, but it is the first thing that any individual can do. Then, through a peaceful transformation, someday, this society may gradually change into a world free of alienation, whether it should be under capitalism, socialism, or any other sort of ideology.

Footnotes

[1] Erich Fromm, The Art of Loving (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), p. 133.

[2] Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1941), p. 261.

[3] The Art of Loving, pp. 52-3.

[4] Ibid., p. 47.

[5] Ibid., p. 18.

[6] Ibid., p. 47.

[7] The Art of Loving, p. 55, cited by Nathaniel Branden, "Alienation", in Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal, ed. by Ayn Rand, (New York: The New American Library, 1966), p. 274.

[8] Op. cit. "Alienation", p. 274.

[9] The Art of Loving, p. 56. My emphasis.

[10]Ibid., p. 56-7. My emphasis.

[11]Ayn Rand, <u>Atlas Shrugged</u> (New York: Signet, 1957), p.959, cited in "Alienation", p. 275, p. 276.

[12]Nathaniel Branden, <u>Who is Ayn Rand?</u> (New York: Random House, 1962) pp. 38-9, cited in "Alienation", p. 275.

[13]<u>The Art of Loving</u>, p. 47.

[14]<u>Atlas Shrugged</u>, p. 959, cited in "Alienation", p. 276.

[15]<u>Atlas Shrugged</u>, p. 959.

[16]<u>The Art of Loving</u>, p. 132.

[17]Erich Fromm, <u>Man for Himself</u> (New York: Rinehart, 1947) p. 127.

[18]Ibid., p. 73.

[19]Ibid., p. 72.

[20]Ibid., p. 362. My emphasis.

[21]Erich Fromm, <u>Sane Society</u> (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1955) p. 325.

[22]Erich Fromm, <u>To Have or To Be</u> (New York: Harper and Row, 1976) pp. 173-4.

[23]Ibid., p. 170, p. 171, p. 172.

[24]"Alienation", p. 275. Author's emphasis.

[25] *The Art of Loving*, p. 131, p. 132. My emphasis.

[26] *Man for Himself*, p. 129.

[27] Ibid., p. 131. My emphasis.

[28] Richard Norman, "Self and Others: the Inadequacy of Utilitarianism", *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Supplementary Volume V 1979, p. 182.

[29] Ibid., p. 198.

[30] Norman, p. 193.

[31] Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (England: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 110.

[32] Norman, p. 198.

[33] *The Art of Loving*, p. 129.

[34] Ibid., p. 132.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

Since the development of modern capitalism, we have gained freedom from the various political and social constraints of Medieval feudalism. However, in exchange, we have turned human relationships into means for securing and protecting economic market relations. The idea of competition in the market and in the modern educational system promotes the concept of achievement which sometimes conflicts and destroys traditional bonds such as family ties. Furthermore, we enjoy the convenience of automatization and mass production, but simultaneously realize discomfort towards the transformation of human beings into impersonal objects of production, consumption, and control through mass media.

We have seen that Erich Fromm elicited these negative subjective freedom of the modern period that accompanied the positive objective freedom that we have gained, and that he linked it to the concept of alienation. Alienation is the psychological experience that modern human beings face, such as loneliness, powerlessness, emptiness and insecurity within society, labour, and human relationships.

However, we tend to neglect this negative subjective freedom that we gained through industrialization and modern capitalism and make ourselves believe that people have become happier than those of the Medieval days. Since we cannot go back in time to measure the psychology of the people of the Medieval times, an alternative is to make a study on a society that is still in the state of pre-industrialization. By doing so, we may be able to see a condition still yet devoid of the problems of alienation of the materialistically wealthier industrialized societies.

Fromm's two fold solution to this modern day pathology called alienation is through brotherly love in his humanistic communitarian society. This ideal socialistic society has the characteristics of decentralization of industry and politics, common ownership of the means of production, and complete democracy in making social or community rules and decisions. Although Fromm does not emphasize this, this society is to be attained through a peaceful transformation by special human beings who have developed characteristics that will allow themselves not to be profit oriented, greedy, or exploitative, and who are capable of loving others in a brotherly way.

Since Fromm's idea of socialism is a little too unrealistic and would not likely to replace the present day society in the very near future, and since he believes that

brotherly love, which is the core solution to alienation, is not exactly impossible to be actualized in the capitalist society, we can find a way to develop this brotherly love in our daily lives in order to overcome our individual problems of alienation.

Firstly, we should acknowledge that to love others in a brotherly way is actually to love oneself, and to love oneself is to love others in a brotherly way. In actuality, it can take many different forms, and each could be a solution to alienation in its respective ways. For example, if one chooses and prepares himself for a job that he would truly enjoy and satisfy, he may realize how it would contribute to the good of society, and consequently, might not feel alienated in terms of labour and in terms of being a member of society. If one tries to be concerned with the real needs of other people, whether the relationship is based on economic factors or not, one may have a fulfilled outlook on life and may not feel lonely and insecure. Although mass media offers manifold types of information, and various forces try to manipulate the thoughts of people through them, if one makes rational judgements that is independent of selfish interests, one may not be overwhelmed and feel lost in this world that may seem out of reach.

This may all seem like a spineless, conformist like solution to the contemporary crises of alienation that we are facing, but we should acknowledge that any sort of social change starts from the individual. As Eric Klinger also states:

Obviously, the objective nature of people's life situation plays an important role in determining whether they will become alienated from something. Some jobs, marriage partners, and governments are almost bound to alienate people from them. Nevertheless, each of the requirements for becoming alienated also incorporates an indispensable personal element.... The decision to live with an unsatisfactory situation... is normally an individual's own decision, arrived at after taking into account all of the gains and losses from continuing or not; and the decision rests on the individual's assessment of what might be done to construct attractive alternative life situations.[1]

Finally, although Fromm's ideas on the idealistic society have many flaws and his method of achieving this society is unclear and does not include any political means, he has given one of the most lucid accounts on exposing the psychological problems of alienation that we are facing today. Furthermore, personally, as I am leaving the field of philosophy as an academic discipline in order to move on to the field of political science, which deals with the more concrete problems of reality, Fromm's idea that social reformation should start from psychic

reformation would be an underlying philosophy in whatever political or social policy that I will be supporting from now on.

Footnote

[1]Eric Klinger, _Meaning & Void_ (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1977), p. 239. My emphasis.

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