



## Part Two: The Humanism of Erich Fromm and Its Critique

The reflections on philosophical anthropology and the theory of history presented up to this point have made it clear that Fromm interprets man in view of a specific idea that breaks through the frame of purely scientific observation--that is, his concrete statements on man and history are influenced by such an idea. This idea is part of the humanistic tradition and unfolds in Fromm's understanding of humanistic religion and humanistic ethics. The necessity and legitimacy of both explications result from the human situation itself, namely from reflection about the existential need for a frame of orientation and an object of devotion.

Before giving a more precise religious and ethical definition of Fromm's concept of humanism, that concept must be defined systematically and historically and placed within a specific context: „Humanism, both in its Christian religious and in its secular, nontheistic manifestations is characterized by faith in man, in his possibility to develop to ever higher stages, in the unity of the human race, in tolerance and peace, and in reason and love as the forces which enable man to realize himself, to become what he can be.“<sup>1</sup> In this sense, there has been a humanistic tradition for the last two thousand five hundred years. In antiquity, its representatives were Buddha, the prophets of Israel, Socrates, and Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

The most important idea of humanism is that *humanitas* (in the sense of both mankind and humanness) is not an abstraction but a reality, which means that all of humanity is contained within every single individual and that all people are the same

in their fundamental human qualities.<sup>3</sup> The concept of such an equality of {086} all people is rooted in the Judaeo-Christian tradition of the Old and New Testaments. Since early modern times, its representatives have been thinkers like Nicolas Cusanus, Leibniz, Spinoza, Hume, Herder, Lessing, Goethe and Albert Schweitzer.<sup>4</sup>

Sigmund Freud's discovery of the unconscious and of the dream as man's universal language<sup>5</sup> provided scientific support for the belief in the equality of men:<sup>6</sup> „Making the unconscious conscious transforms the mere idea of the universality of man into the living experience of this universality; it is the experiential realization of humanity.“<sup>7</sup>

This version of the belief in the reality of *humanitas* makes a „normative humanism“ possible. If man's nature or essence is not understood as „a fixed substance which exists in man and which does not change in the historical process but [as referring to] the potentialities and possibilities existing in all men,“<sup>8</sup> then man's nature is the same as the *humanitas* common to all men. As man's nature, it persists through all the variations of human diver-

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. „Humanism and Psychoanalysis“ (1963f), p. 70; *Beyond the Chains of Illusion* (1962a), pp. 17, 27-29.

<sup>4</sup> „Humanism and Psychoanalysis“ (1963f), pp. 70-72.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Fromm, „Der Traum ist die Sprache des universalen Menschen“ (1972a), pp. 8-14.

<sup>6</sup> Psychoanalysis has significance for humanism primarily because, once the anthropological inadequacies of Freud have been removed, it constitutes the basis for such a „belief.“ Cf. Fromm, „Humanism and Psychoanalysis“ (1963f, pp. 74-78; Fromm, „The Application of Humanist Psychoanalysis to Marx's Theory“ (1965c), pp. 207-222.

<sup>7</sup> „Humanism and Psychoanalysis,“ (1963f), p. 77.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 72.

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<sup>1</sup> Fromm, „Humanism and Psychoanalysis“ (1963f), p. 69; cf. „Introduction“ (1965b), p. vii.

<sup>2</sup> Fromm, „Afterword“ (1966d), p. 262.



sity, is normative for all action and creation, and therefore the condition for the possibility of a „normative humanism.“<sup>9</sup>

Closely linked to the belief in the quality of all men on the basis of a *humanitas* they all share are other elements of the humanism concept:<sup>10</sup> the concept of man's dignity, and the belief in man's potential goodness and capacity for freedom. They represent the basis for Fromm's understanding of humanism as „radical humanism.“ „By radical humanism I refer to a global philosophy which emphasizes the oneness of the human race, the capacity of man to develop his own powers and to arrive at inner harmony and at the establishment of a peaceful world. Radical humanism considers the goal of man to be that of complete independence, and this implies penetrating through fictions and illusions to a full awareness of reality.“<sup>11</sup> „Radical“ is thus to be understood in its etymological meaning: both the root and the goal of this humanism is man, and nothing but man.<sup>12</sup>

Methodologically, „radical“ means a radical questioning of all postulates and institutions „which have become idols under the name of common sense, logic and what is supposed to be ‘natural.’“<sup>13</sup> Such radical questioning as attitude and method follows the motto „*de omnibus dubitandum*.“ „It is the dawning of the awareness that the emperor is naked, and that his splendid {087} garments are nothing but the product of one's own phantasy.“<sup>14</sup> Since Fromm believes that this concept of humanism coincides with Marxist theory, he also uses the

term „socialist humanism.“<sup>15</sup>

The discussion in Part Two will first take up Fromm's humanistic religion. We will not shy away from critical comment where Fromm, in setting forth his understanding of humanistic religion, avails himself of a religio-critical humanism that is justified only when it is understood as the counter-concept to atheistic concept of religion. There will be no detailed examination of his religiocritical humanism until Karl Marx is discussed as the source of Fromm's thought. The discussion of humanistic religion will be followed by a discussion of humanistic ethics, whose relevance for a theological ethics will be taken up at the end of this part. {088}

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Beyond the Chains of Illusion* (1962a), p. 27; *The Sane Society* (1955a), pp. 12-14.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. „Humanism and Psychoanalysis,“ (1963f), pp. 72-74.

<sup>11</sup> *You Shall Be as Gods* (1966a), p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> *Beyond the Chains of Illusion* (1962a), p. 142.

<sup>13</sup> „Introduction“ (1970k), p. 8. Cf. *The Heart of Man* (1964a), p. 15. Humanism is „the paradoxical blend of relentless criticism, uncompromising realism, and rational faith.“

<sup>14</sup> „Introduction“ (1970k), p. 8. Cf. Fromm, *The Forgotten Language* (1951a), pp. 74f.

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<sup>15</sup> Cf., e.g., *Beyond the Chains of Illusion* (1962a), p. 142; „Introduction“ (19656), pp. viif; „The Application of Humanist Psychoanalysis to Marx's Theory“ (1965c), pp. 207-209; „Afterword“ (1966d); M. Markovic, „The Possibilities of Radical Humanism,“ pp. 280-283; A. Schaff, *Marxismus und das menschliche Individuum* pp. 220-222, 322, 324. Also, see below, pp. 205-218.



## 4. Humanistic Religion

Fromm's interest in religion resulted from the possibility of contrasting the position of humanism with the traditional idea. His interest is confined to an essential criterion that cuts across nontheistic and theistic religions like a dividing line. It is the distinction „between authoritarian and humanistic religions.“<sup>16</sup> The understanding of humanistic religion presupposes a detailed comprehension of rational and irrational authority.

### Authority and Religion

#### *Rational and Irrational Authority*

Though the concept „authoritarian religion“ already plays a central role in Fromm's 1930 study, „Die Entwicklung des Christudogmas,“<sup>17</sup> it is only in the sociopsychological part of the „Theoretische EntwOrfe fiber Autoritdt and Familie“ (Theoretical sketches on authority and family)<sup>18</sup> that the concept of authority is closely examined. Though the multiplicity of its manifestations makes it impossible to give an ultimate definition of authority in the psychological sense, it can be stated with certainty that an authoritarian relationship is not just enforced behavior and that „the emotional tie of a subordinate to a superordinate person or authority is an element in every authoritarian relationship.“<sup>19</sup> What is decisive is the way authority manifests itself and how the authoritarian relationship takes shape.

An authoritarian relationship is relatively uncomplicated when authority confronts the individ-

ual as a person or an institution and {089} demands obedience. Since the beginning of the modern period, such „external authority“ has been increasingly supplanted by an „internal authority“ that is called duty, conscience, or superego, and whose rule can be even more rigorous than that of an external authority because the individual perceives its commands as his own.<sup>20</sup>

In the twentieth century, a still more invisible form of authority has come into existence. It may be called „anonymous authority.“ To distinguish it from all overt authority, „it is disguised as common sense, science, psychic health, normalcy, public opinion. It does not demand anything except the self-evident.“<sup>21</sup> The distinctive efficacy of anonymous authority lies in the fact that it presents itself as non-authoritarian, which means that not only the one giving orders but the order itself remains invisible.<sup>22</sup> Modern man is ruled by anonymous authorities whose goal is the total conformism of adapted man.<sup>23</sup> Psychologically, this has the same effect as total dependence on an external or overt authority: man is no longer his own master; he is alienated from his being and his productive forces of reason and love. The individual who is ruled by anonymous authority is himself only to the extent that he is part of an anonymous „one“ that determines what he does.

Although the modern authority problem is decisively shaped by the problematics of anonymous authority, central to Fromm's thought is a distinc-

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Escape from Freedom* (1941a), pp. 166f.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>23</sup> On conformism, the mechanisms of anonymous authority, and on anonymous authority generally, cf. *Escape From Freedom* (1941 a), pp. 185-206; *The Sane Society* (1955a), pp. 152-163; „Foreword,“ (1960e), p. 12f.



tion relating to overt authority:<sup>24</sup> the distinction between rational and inhibiting or irrational authority.<sup>25</sup> Because authority is not a quality of a person but an expression of the interpersonal relationship of superiority or inferiority,<sup>26</sup> everything depends on whether the authority involved is rational or irrational.

„Rational authority has its source in competence. The person whose authority is respected functions competently in the task with which he is entrusted by those who conferred it upon him. ... The source of irrational authority, on the other hand, is always power over people. This power can be physical or mental, it can be realistic or only relative in terms of the anxiety and helplessness of the person submitting to this authority.“<sup>27</sup> As an example of a relationship characterized by rational authority, Fromm points to that between teacher and student; as an example of an irrational authority, he cites that between slaveowner and slave.<sup>28</sup>

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 Both authority relationships differ in these essential respects:

1. If the superiority is rational, it wishes to help; where it is irrational, it is intent on exploitation.

<sup>24</sup> In *The Sane Society* (1955a), p. 152. Fromm defines irrational authority as overt authority. It is clear from the context that not only every external but also internal authority (such as that of conscience) belongs in the category of overt authority. But as one examines the use of the word „irrational“ in Fromm's entire *oeuvre*, it becomes clear that the definition of irrational authority as overt authority must not be taken too narrowly.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. the following: *Escape from Freedom* (1941a), pp. 164-166; „Faith as a Character Trait“ (1942c); *Man for Himself* (1947a), pp. 9-14; *The Sane Society* (1955a), pp. 95-98; *To Have or to Be?* (1976a), pp. 36-39; C. Thompson, *Psychoanalysis: Its Evolution and Development*, p. 114.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Escape from Freedom* (1941a), p. 164; *The Sane Society* (1955a), p. 95.

<sup>27</sup> *Man for Himself* (1947a), p. 9.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Escape from Freedom* (1941a), pp. 165f; *The Sane Society* (1955a), pp. 95f.

2. The goal of a rational authority relationship is its own dissolution; the irrational authority relationship is intent on widening the gulf and thus the dependence.
3. The psychological condition is dissimilar in the two cases: in the rational authority relationship, the authority is a model and the elements of love, admiration, and gratitude dominate. In the irrational authority relationship, on the other hand, resentment and hostility--or their opposites, blind admiration and the worship of authority--are dominant.

Defining authority as rational or irrational authority and relation of dependence requires a better understanding of the concepts „rational“ and „irrational.“ When these terms are used adverbially, they usually have the ordinary meaning of „reasonable“ and „unreasonable.“<sup>29</sup> But where the concepts are epithets, they qualify the object in a consistent, clear manner. Thus Fromm speaks of rational and irrational faith, and advances this definition: „By irrational faith I understand the belief in a person, idea, or symbol which does not result from one's own experience of thought or feeling, but which is based on one's emotional submission to irrational authority. ... Rational faith, in contrast, is a firm conviction based on productive intellectual and emotional activity.“<sup>30</sup>

By his very choice of concepts to define rational belief Fromm makes clear the specific sense in which he uses the terms „rational“ and „irrational.“

<sup>29</sup> Cf., e.g., Fromm's use of „irrational“ in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973a), pp. 230f. On the problem of the identification of the irrational, with the unconscious and the rational with consciousness and their attributions by Freud, as opposed to Jung and Adler, cf. Fromm, „Freud's Model of Man and Its Social Determinants“ (1970d), pp. 35-37.

<sup>30</sup> *Man for Himself* (1947a), pp. 201, 204, cf. also *The Art of Loving* (1956a), pp. 102f; „Faith as a Character Trait“ (1942b), p. 313: „Irrational faith ... is based on one's emotional submission to irrational authority. ... Rational faith ... on productive intellectual and emotional activity.“



In all those cases in which an attitude or quality springs from man's powers of reason and love--and thus has the quality of productive activity and therefore presses toward its unfolding and growth--he uses the term „rational.“ It therefore seems indicated to „call rational any thought, feeling or act that promotes the adequate functioning and growth of the whole of which it is a part, and irrational that which tends to weaken or destroy the whole.“<sup>31</sup> The word „irrational“ thus defines a non-productive or alienated activity: „In alienated activity, I do not experience myself as the active subject of my activity; instead, I experience the outcome of my activity as something 'over there,' separated from me and standing above and against me.“<sup>32</sup> {091}

If the irrational means that man does not experience himself as the subject of his activity, then „irrational“ applies fundamentally to all nonproductive reactions to the need for relatedness. But Fromm employs the term „irrational“ especially to characterize orientations that are marked by a symbiotic dependence on an authority. In his thought, „authority“ is an expression for the interpersonal relationship of superiority and inferiority.<sup>33</sup> Rational authority therefore means that an authority-related interpersonal relationship must aim at furthering the powers of reason and love in the weaker individual. The external mark of rational authority is its competence. Although competence implies a position of superiority, its aim is not to enslave the dependent person and to increase his dependence, but rather to lessen the distance between superior and subordinate and promote in the dependent person those powers that will ultimately make a relationship of dependence unnecessary and rational authority superfluous.<sup>34</sup> Irrational authority, on the

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<sup>31</sup> *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973a), p. 263.

<sup>32</sup> *To Have or to Be?* (1976a), pp. 90, 92-97, where Fromm gives an overview of the history of the „activity: passivity“ antithesis.

<sup>33</sup> See p. 88f.

<sup>34</sup> The concept „rational authority“ thus implies that its

other hand, strives to increase the power of the superior at the expense of the weaker. Its goal is total dependence and greater distance, which are to be brought about by suppressing and exploiting the subordinate person's powers of reason and love, to make that person's life wholly dependent on the glory of the superior.

Apropos authoritarian religion, it should be remembered that the distinctive quality of irrational authority is not who is superior but whether the implied intent of the dependence is to strengthen or weaken the subordinate--differently expressed, whether the stronger is competent or exploitative. Therefore authority can be distinguished as rational or irrational independently of the question concerning a divine being. The declaration that God is the superior does not in itself tell us whether the resultant relation of dependence furthers or enslaves man--that is, whether God is a rational or an irrational authority.

#### *The Authoritarian and the Revolutionary Character and Their Dialectic*

To understand the authoritarian character, one must first understand the *genesis of irrational authority*.<sup>35</sup> Irrational authority characterizes an interpersonal relation of dependence, the origin of

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goal is its dissolution (cf. *Escape from Freedom* [1941a], p. 165). But it is probably an adequate interpretation of Fromm when one says that the self-dissolution of rational authority is, in the majority of cases, an intent rather than an actual goal, and that this depends on the degree of competence subordinates can attain. This postulate of the self-dissolution of authority is the hub of Schaar's comprehensive critique, which accuses Fromm of misunderstanding both the nature of freedom and authority, and the functions they have in the lives of individuals and communities. See Schaar, *Escape from Authority*, p. 284.

<sup>35</sup> On what follows, cf. *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, (1950a), pp. 53f; Fromm, *The Revolution of Hope* (1968a), pp. 62-67.



which lies in the conditions of human existence: Man is not only {092} dependent on nature. His reason makes him aware how much he depends not only on his natural environment and its laws but also on certain needs that only emerge along with his capacity for reason and his transcendence of nature.<sup>36</sup>

Man's answer can take two directions: he may either acknowledge his dependencies as limitations of his possibilities and confine himself to the optimal unfolding of his powers of love and reason, or he may give in to those dependencies and begin to worship the powers on which he depends.<sup>37</sup> If man chooses the second alternative, he enters into a relation of dependency that is characterized by an irrational authority: he becomes alienated from his primordial powers, subjects himself to the ideologies of an irrational authority, and is forced into idolatry.<sup>38</sup> The consequence is that man „wants to be ruled.“<sup>39</sup>

Phylogenetically, there is a connection between man's surrender of himself and the genesis of the division of labor and the rise of classes. Ontogenetically, there is a dependence on the prevailing social structure and its character, though such dependence is not, strictly speaking, a determinant. Man can always attempt to mobilize his inner faculties, and to the extent that a human being does unfold them, irrational authority loses its power over

him.<sup>40</sup>

If a person responds to his need for relatedness by subjecting himself to an irrational authority, his character structure should be called „authoritarian.“ The *concept of the authoritarian character* has its own history.<sup>41</sup> During the early thirties, the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research undertook an investigation of the authoritarian character of the German worker and employee in order to gauge Hitler's chances of being elected and „authoritarian character“ is a concept that was formulated in this connection.<sup>42</sup> The various elements of the authoritarian character correspond to those orientations of sadism and masochism that were described by the collective term „symbiosis.“<sup>43</sup> In the authoritarian character, feelings of strength and the experience of identity are based on „a symbiotic subordination to authorities, and at the same time a symbiotic domination of those submitted to his authority.“<sup>44</sup> Two specific traits of the authoritarian character deserve special mention. They can be conceptualized as the paired opposites „powerimpotence“ and „obedience-disobedience.“

Power is a distinctive mark of the irrational relation of {093} dependence. Correspondingly, the attitude toward power is the most important trait

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<sup>36</sup> See pp. 60-62.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (1950a), p. 53.

<sup>38</sup> The various concepts being used here are intended to make clear that alienation, ideology, idolatry, and irrationality all refer to the same process: man renounces his powers of reason and love, his capacity to think and devise theories, his dignity and freedom, his independence and productivity, and makes himself the slave of irrational forces.

<sup>39</sup> Schaar, *Escape from Authority*, p. 288. When Schaar observes that men long to be governed, he means to criticize Fromm's concept of authority. He does not consider the possibility, however, that such a desire is already the result of an irrational relation of dependency.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. the comments on the „revolutionary character,“ below, pp. 93-97.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Fromm, „The Revolutionary Character“ (1963b) in (1963a), pp. 103-105.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. „Sozialpsychologischer Teil“ (1936a); *Arbeiter and Angestellte am Vorabend des Dritten Reiches* (1980a).

<sup>43</sup> See pp. 37-40. A distinction must be made between this type of authoritarian character and another attitude that is especially characteristic of rural or peasant societies and which acknowledges traditional authorities. Such „traditionally authoritarian“ individuals do not depend sado-masochistically or symbiotically on the power of an irrational authority. Cf. E. Fromm and M. Maccoby, *Social Character in a Mexican Village* (1970b), pp. 81f.

<sup>44</sup> „The Revolutionary Character“ (1963b), p. 104. Cf. *Social Character in a Mexican Village* (1970b), p. 80. For a detailed analysis of the authoritarian character, cf. „Sozialpsychologischer Teil“ (1936a); *Escape from Freedom* (1941a), pp. 141-179.



of the authoritarian character. „For the authoritarian character, there exists, so to speak, two sexes: the powerful ones and the powerless ones.“<sup>45</sup> Since he experiences himself as lacking all power of his own,<sup>46</sup> he can acquire strength to act only if he submits to a higher power and attains power through his identification with it. When the authoritarian character acts, his activity means „to act in the name of something higher than one’s own self.“<sup>47</sup> He is persuaded „that life is determined by forces outside his own self, his interest, his wishes. The only possible happiness lies in the subjection to these forces.“<sup>48</sup> Psychologically, the need for power is the expression of impotence: „It is the desperate attempt to gain secondary strength where genuine strength is lacking.“<sup>49</sup> This explains why an authoritarian character who has come to power by symbiotic submission to an irrational authority must demonstrate his lust for power vis-à-vis those weaker than himself.<sup>50</sup> Irrational authority has such strong meaning for the authoritarian character that he perceives any weakening of the power of the irrational authority as life-threatening. Therefore the greater the distance from irrational authority, and the more unattainable and superior it is, the better the protection it affords and the more stable both the authoritarian character as social character and the power relations in a social system will remain.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Escape from Freedom* (1941a), p. 168.

<sup>46</sup> The experience of one’s impotence need not be conscious: „Bourgeois man, in contrast to certain types of religious individual is usually not conscious of the feeling of impotence“ (Fromm, „Zum Gefühl der Ohnmacht“ [1937a], p. 96). The comments on the feeling of impotence were later modified by Fromm: certain characteristics are not to be attributed to the authoritarian character that is marked by symbiosis, but to narcissism.

<sup>47</sup> *Escape from Freedom* (1941a), p. 172.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. „Sozialpsychologischer Teil“ (1936a), pp. 115-117; and more recent corrections in *Social Character in a Mexican Village* (1970b), esp. pp. 80f.

<sup>51</sup> That is the reason all political and socially relevant po-

This function of authority makes the excessive stress the authoritative character places on obedience understandable,<sup>52</sup> for in obedience, the act of submission to irrational authority becomes conscious. The authoritarian character „is happy when he can obey orders, provided merely that they come from an authority that he can fear for its power and the assurance of its bearing, that he can worship and love. The desire to receive orders and the wish to be able to execute them, to subordinate himself to something higher, indeed to lose himself in it, can go so far that he will even enjoy being chastised and mistreated by the stronger.“<sup>53</sup>

Yet even in the authoritarian character, there exists a kind of defiant and oppositional disobedience that rebels against irrational authority. It manifests itself when various irrational authorities compete and the security that irrational authority ordinarily gives the person who submits to it is no longer fully guaranteed. Rebellious disobedience toward the „beloved“ authority is to be {094} understood as a provocative act, intended to force the irrational authority to uphold and strengthen its control. It can also lead to a turning away from one irrational authority in order to submit to another, more powerful one. In either case, the mechanism

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wer systems attempt to establish and stabilize a state religion, party ideology, etc., and that all significant ideological and religious revolutions also result in changes in the power structure.

<sup>52</sup> On the problem of obedience: disobedience, cf. „Sozialpsychologischer Teil“ (1936a), pp. 115-117; *Escape from Freedom* (1941a), pp. 168-170; „The Revolutionary Character“ (1963b); pp. 113-116; „Disobedience as a Psychological and Moral Problem“ (1963d); „Prophets and Priests“ (1967b), pp. 70-72; *You Shall Be as Gods* (1966a), pp. 72-74; *To Have or to Be?* (1976a), esp. pp. 120-125.

<sup>53</sup> „Sozialpsychologischer Teil“ (1936a), pp. 115f. Schaar’s criticism, according to which the greatest mistake Fromm makes is that he is blind to the fact that where authority is absent, fashion rules, is based very precisely on this circular thinking of the authoritarian character who must always think in categories of submission and command to be able to live (*Escape from Authority*, p. 295).



of submission to an irrational authority at the expense of one's own productive independence is unchanged, as is the dominance of the authoritarian orientation in the character structure of the rebel.<sup>54</sup> Only when that person's own power of love and reason is mobilized so that he no longer needs to subject himself to a powerful authority because he experiences his own powers as potencies that enable him to productively and actively turn to the world and others without anyone's help does the character structure also change: the nonproductive authoritarian character then becomes the productive revolutionary character.

The „revolutionary character“<sup>55</sup> is the opposite of the „authoritarian character.“<sup>56</sup> „The most fundamental characteristic of the 'revolutionary character' is that he is independent, that he is free.“<sup>57</sup> Freedom and independence only exist when it is man that thinks, feels, and decides. „He can do so authentically only when he has reached a productive relatedness to the world outside himself which permits him to respond authentically.“<sup>58</sup> The revolutionary character has a critical attitude toward everything that may become an external determinant of human beings. His independence is complete: „The revolutionary ... is the man who has emancipated himself from the ties of blood and soil, from

his mother and his father, from special loyalties to State, class, race, party or religion.“<sup>59</sup> The only thing to which he gives his allegiance is a universal humanism: within himself, he wants to experience all of humanity so that nothing human is alien to him.<sup>60</sup>

Although the preceding quotation suggests that the character type who has achieved all these forms of liberation actually exists, it must be said that the revolutionary character remains but a goal. A glance at Fromm's own research in the field proves this. In the report on an extensive investigation into the character orientation of the inhabitants of a Mexican village, only a single individual is claimed to have a revolutionary character--and even this claim is not certain.<sup>61</sup> The report gives great attention to the special nature of this ideal. The revolutionary character is not {095} simply the free and independent one but one who „expresses a particular quality of independence and the wish to liberate life from conditions that block its free growth.“<sup>62</sup> While this description suggests that the revolutionary character is the fully developed, wholly productive individual who lives in complete independence and wholly through himself, Fromm makes it clear that the revolutionary character is but a step toward the ultimate human being. „Once all are awake, there need no longer be any prophets and revolutionary characters--there will be only fully developed human beings.“<sup>63</sup>

It is the revolutionary character's life to criticize all irrational authorities. He thereby becomes the countertype of the authoritarian character, and, as such, has his right to exist. Fromm never really clarifies whether the revolutionary character is able to relate to rational authority or is merely an anti-authoritarian construct that does not believe that rational authority might exist anywhere outside

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<sup>54</sup> Fromm draws a rigorous distinction between rebel and revolutionary because there is a difference in the dominance in the character structure: „The authoritarian character is never a 'revolutionary'; I should like to call him a 'rebel.' There are many individuals and political movements that are puzzling to the superficial observer because of what seems to be an inexplicable change from 'radicalism' to extreme authoritarianism. Psychologically, those people are typical 'rebels' (*Escape from Freedom* [1941a], pp. 169-170). Cf. „The Revolutionary Character“ (1963b), pp. 105f.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. the bibliographical indications in note 37. See also *Social Character in a Mexican Village* (1970b), p. 82, n. 15.

<sup>56</sup> This is emphasized by Fromm in „The Revolutionary Character“ (1963b), p. 103.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *Social Character in a Mexican Village* (1970b), p. 82, n. 15.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> „The Revolutionary Character“ (1963b), p. 117.



himself. We will examine this question by taking a detailed look at the attitude of the revolutionary character toward obedience and disobedience.

„The revolutionary character is capable of saying ‘no.’ Or, to put it differently: the revolutionary character is a person capable of disobedience.”<sup>64</sup> But by „disobedience“ Fromm does not mean the disobedience of the „rebel without cause ... who disobeys because he has no commitment to life except the one to say ‘no.’”<sup>65</sup> The definition of the revolutionary character as an individual who is capable of saying „no“ points up the contrast with the authoritarian and conformist who can only obey irrational and anonymous authorities and are therefore incapable of saying „no.“ Then there is this alternative: who is to be obeyed? „I am speaking of the man who can disobey precisely because he can obey his conscience and the principles which he has chosen.”<sup>66</sup>

In spite of this definition of „obey,“ Fromm consistently uses the concepts in such a fashion that „disobedience“ is always the positive, and ethically positive, concept, while „obedience“ is used only negatively. Thus he repeatedly judges Eve’s disobedience as man’s first act of self-liberation, while labeling the danger of mankind’s nuclear self-destruction an act of obedience: „Human history began with an act of disobedience, and it is not unlikely that it {096} will be terminated by an act of obedience.”<sup>67</sup> Analogously, historical development is always a history of disobedience where it is a story of man’s self-liberation.

This clear-cut use of the concepts „obedience“ and „disobedience“ has its background in Fromm’s understanding of autonomy and heteronomy. „Obedience to a person, institution or power (heteronomous obedience) is submission; it implies the abdication of my autonomy and the acceptance of a foreign will or judgment in place of my own.

Obedience to my own reason or conviction (autonomous obedience) is not an act of submission but one of affirmation. My conviction and my judgment, if authentically mine, are part of me. If I follow them rather than the judgment of others, I am being myself; hence the word „obey“ can be applied only in a metaphorical sense and with a meaning that is fundamentally different from the one in the case of heteronomous obedience.”<sup>68</sup>

This last statement is especially significant, for „obey“ here means primarily attending to an external authority that is almost necessarily hostile to one’s own authentic self, so that it is only in a metaphorical sense that heeding one’s own authentic judgment can be called „obeying.“ It is insinuated that everything that exists outside the authentic self is heteronomous and hostile to it and demands a heteronomous obedience that means submission to an alien power. Without further elucidating „autonomy“ and „heteronomy,“ Fromm attempts to forestall the misunderstanding that „obedience to another person is ipso facto submission.”<sup>69</sup> He does this by calling attention to the difference between rational and irrational authority, and again explains this difference by the examples of teacher-student and slaveowner-slave. He also gives reasons why rational authority does not imply submission: „‘Rational authority’ is rational because the authority, whether it is held by a teacher or a captain of a ship giving orders in an emergency, acts in the name of reason which-being universal-I can accept without submitting.”<sup>70</sup>

Contrary to his usual practice, Fromm here uses the epithet „rational“ not in the sense of „conducive to productive unfolding“ but in the ordinary sense of „reasonable.“ It must also be noted that he speaks of rational authority only as that of a person and does not raise the question whether an institu-

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>65</sup> „Prophets and Priests“ (1967b), p. 70.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> „Disobedience as a Psychological and Moral Problem“ (1963d), p. 97.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 99. Cf. *You Shall Be as Gods* (1966a), p. 72.

<sup>69</sup> „Disobedience as a Psychological and Moral Problem“ (1963d), p. 100. One notes that he wants to eliminate this misunderstanding as regards obedience to a person but not to an institution.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 101.



tion may not also {097} embody rational authority. This „concession“ to the possibility of obedience to a rational authority does not affect his understanding of the revolutionary character.

In one of his last books, Fromm discusses the connection between sin and disobedience.<sup>71</sup> Here, in the context of the opposition between the authoritarian and the revolutionary character, the ambivalence of his understanding of obedience once again finds expression. While every act of disobedience by the authoritarian character is a sin, the disobedience of the revolutionary character as represented by Prometheus is viewed as a heroic act of liberation: „Prometheus does not submit, nor does he feel guilty. He knew that taking the fire away from the gods and giving it to human beings was an act of compassion; he had been disobedient, but he had not sinned. He had, like many other loving heroes (martyrs) of the human race, broken through the equation of disobedience and sin.“<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> To *Have or to Be?* (1976a), pp. 120-125.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 121. The equation of an act of disobedience and an act of liberation goes along with Fromm's refusal to discuss a necessary and positive obedience to a rational authority. In a section of the manuscript of *To Have or to Be?*, which was removed during the last revision in order to tighten up the presentation, Fromm wrote: „... I decided to use the term 'disobedience' only with reference to irrational authority, and this for the following reason: in the history of civilization, religious and secular authority was principally irrational authority. ... Rational authority was comparatively rare, as was disobedience to it for that same reason. ... That there is no specific term for disobedience to rational authority merely reflects the historical tendency to confuse the two types of disobedience. But perhaps it is preferable to do without a good word and not to use a 'correct' one that has been used ideologically and is confusing for that reason“ (manuscript of May 1975, p. 114). This is not to say, of course, that Fromm does not acknowledge such a thing as obedience to rational authority; he simply refuses to call it by that name. J. S. Glen, *Erich Fromm: A Protestant Critique*, who criticizes both Fromm and Nietzsche for their rejection in principle

Fromm's general description of the revolutionary character already led to the conclusion that it represents the negation of the authoritarian character and must therefore be seen primarily as its antiauthoritarian function. His definition of obedience as disobedience toward (almost) all authorities and his refusal to call the heeding of a rational authority „obedience“ make it clear that Fromm saw a *dialectical nexus between the revolutionary and the authoritarian character*. In view of the omnipresence of irrational authority and the authoritarian character, there remains only the principle of disobedience, of negative criticism, of naysaying, of the revolutionary principle, if man's self-liberation is to seem possible.

The analysis of the authoritarian character as the alienation of man from his productive powers of reason and love suggests the authoritarian character will be negated with the help of the revolutionary character, provided history is understood as a dialectical process. In this dialectic, the authoritarian character represents the negation of productive man—that is, it represents nonproductive and alienated man. The revolutionary character, on the other hand, is the negation of the negation. The goal of the dialectical process is sublation in the wholly productive and fully developed human being. The revolutionary character is antiauthoritarian and disobedient, and must have these qualities. His determination {098} as the negation of the negation also explains why he is not definitive even

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of any heteronomous authority, is probably correct when he notes that neither of them understood the intention of the Gospel. In his view, they considered everything a law that, either as positive or negative legalism, demanded obedience, and believes they were influenced by what they saw in the life of the Church and their experiences with Christians of their acquaintance (p. 88). In this connection, it is interesting to note the significance that obedience to the law and to paternal authority have in the education of children in religious Jewish families. Cf. the dissertation by Johannes Barta, *Jüdische Familienerziehung. Das jüdische Erziehungswesen im 19. and 20. Jahrhundert*, esp. pp. 80-83.



though he embodies productive and developed man. It is only in the sublation of the antagonism between authoritarian and revolutionary that the fully developed individual of messianic time comes into existence. And only if the principle of disobedience determines the future will obedience to irrational powers have no chance and will it be possible to avoid man's premature end by nuclear self-destruction.

Fromm himself only hints at the identification of authoritarian and revolutionary character as negation and negation of the negation, respectively; he does not elaborate it.<sup>73</sup> This identification shows Fromm's divergent and willful positions, especially as regards questions of obedience to authority. But it also reawakens interest in the question *whether rational authority is possible at all*. Using the concepts of irrational authority and revolutionary character as starting points, we will examine this matter once again.

What first strikes one is that the idea of irrational authority as a relation of dependence that deprives man of his inherent productive forces is pervasively present throughout Fromm's work in a great many variations. The discussion of rational authority, on the other hand, is not nearly so extensive. A comparison with the significance of irrational authority in Fromm's work indicates that while rational authoritarian relations, and especially obedience to rational authority, are postulates of everyday life (where they play a large role), he fails to assign them any place in the reality he understands as a dialectical process. Consequently he does not set over against the authoritarian character a productive character orientation as determined by rational authority; rather, the function of stripping the irrational authorities of their power to subject and exploit man is taken on by the revolutionary

character, whose primary aim is the negation of irrational authorities and who demonstrates no positive interest in the necessity of rational authorities. This explains why Fromm does not attach very much importance to presenting a psychological description of the individual who is caught up in a variety of rational dependencies, who must obey the dictums of reason and competence, and who must consciously compromise with the constraints of irrational relations of dependence. Despite Fromm's view of authority as primarily {099} irrational, he provides another, parallel perspective that allows for the reality and efficacy of rational authority, although he consigns it to a specific phase in the historical process.

„Freedom and independence are the goals of human development, and the aim of human action is the constant process of liberating oneself from the shackles that bind man to the past, to nature, to the clan, to idols.“<sup>74</sup> In biblical terms, this process begins with Adam and Eve's awakening from their original tie to blood and soil. „With this first step of severing the ties between man and nature, history--and alienation--begins.“<sup>75</sup> The movement toward independence requires first that the tie to father and mother be cut, and then that one free oneself from social ties that make one the slave of a master and the worshipper of an idol.<sup>76</sup>

In discussing ties of dependence, it is necessary to distinguish between two wholly different kinds of bond.<sup>77</sup> The first is the usually unconscious, emotional tie to the mother, to blood and soil, and its equivalent, which is called „incestuous fixation.“<sup>78</sup> The second is the act of submission to an authority, a form of conduct that normal“becomes conscious when obedience is demanded. Historically, obedience is usually obedience to the father and his representatives--that is, reason, conscience, law, moral and spiritual principles, and, most importantly,

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<sup>73</sup> Cf. „The Revolutionary Character“ (1963b): „Disobedience is a dialectical concept because actually every act of disobedience is an act of obedience .... Every act of disobedience is obedience to another principle.“ But see the comments on Fromm's use of dialectics, pp. 228-243.

<sup>74</sup> *You Shall be as Gods* (1966a), p. 70.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 71f.

<sup>77</sup> On the following, see *ibid.*, pp. 72f.

<sup>78</sup> See p. 51f.



God.<sup>79</sup> „Incestuous fixation is by its very nature a bond with the past and a hindrance to full development.“<sup>80</sup> „In the process of the development of the human race, there was perhaps no other way to help man liberate himself from the incestuous ties to nature and clan than by requiring him to be obedient to God and his laws.“<sup>81</sup> Of course, the patriarchal principle has this function only where the authority demands an obedience that promotes the independence and full development of man. Obedience to a rational authority is therefore assigned a relatively high and positive place value as man comes into his own. „Obedience to rational authority is the path that facilitates the breaking up of incestuous fixation to pre-individual archaic forces.“<sup>82</sup> In this phase of man's development toward what he ought to be a phase that is characterized by a belief in God as a rational authority-belief and obedience have an even more essential function. When man acts obediently toward a god who represents a rational authority, his obedience implies the rejection of all {100} other gods, idols, rulers, and systems of powers that are enslaving and irrational authorities: „*obedience to god is also the negation of submission of man.*“<sup>83</sup>

But the process of man's self-liberation does not end with obedience to an authority. The next step is to enable „him to acquire convictions and principles, and thus to be eventually 'true to him-

self,' rather than to be obedient to an authority.“<sup>84</sup> The goal of the entire process is independence. But the dissolution of incestuous ties and emancipation from obedience to authorities are not tantamount to the attainment of independence. „Independence is possible only if, and according to the degree to which, man actively grasps the world, is related to it, and thus becomes one with it. There is no independence and no freedom unless man arrives at the stage of complete inner activity and productivity.“<sup>85</sup> The greatest plenitude of being human can be experienced only when one is free of all determinations. Man is able to relate to all of mankind in a universal manner only when he has renounced all relations of authority, which always imply the distinction of superior and inferior (i.e., differences), and has become altogether independent. It is only in complete independence that man experiences „all of humanity in himself so that nothing human is alien to him.“<sup>86</sup> While Fromm's presentation of the entire movement toward independence from ties of every kind shows that he imputes positive value to rational authority, it is clear that he considers it a step that must be overcome as man moves toward independence. Even though ontogenetically and phylogenetically, rational authority has a critical function vis-à-vis irrational authority, it must itself be ultimately overcome.

Yet this view of rational authority in Fromm's work can be discovered only where he attempts to verify the totality of the dialectical process by ontogenetic and phylogenetic data. When he deals directly with things as they are, an evolutionary conceptual scheme emerges that allows for several phases in the dialectical process of man's development, and that can therefore confer a positive value on

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<sup>79</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* It is striking that Fromm's formulation „perhaps“ is somewhat vague, as is his restriction of this development to the phylogenetic aspect.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73. Cf. also p. 75: „The idea of serfdom to God was, in the Jewish tradition, transformed into the basis for the freedom of man from man. God's authority thus guarantees man's independence from human authority.“ Although the argument is presented in a less developed form, we already find this concession of an obedience toward a rational authority that is simultaneously disobedience toward an irrational one in Fromm, „The Revolutionary Character“ (1963b) in (1963a), p. 114f.

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 76f. This „final stage“ resembles the description of the revolutionary character, although it reaches universal humanism through the total negation of all authority. Cf. „The Revolutionary Character“ (1963b), p. 116.

<sup>86</sup> „The Revolutionary Character“ (1963b), pp. 116f.



the role rational authority plays in this process.<sup>87</sup> But Fromm does not spend much time discussing this concession because it is his view that the claim of an authority to be rational has historically almost always represented the ideologizing and rationalizing of an irrational claim to authority and rule.<sup>88</sup> It is {101} therefore legitimate in his view not to count on rational authority as a matter of principle and accordingly to reject any and all claims of any authority whatever. Thus it is that a dialectical mode of thought that admits only irrational authority and can therefore call itself revolutionary gains the upper hand.

### *Essential Nature and Function of Religion*

Disregarding the etymology and conceptual history of the word „religion,“<sup>89</sup> and counter to our habit of associating atheistic system with the concept, Fromm enlarges the meaning of the word „religion“ because there is no more suitable term and applies it to „any system of thought and action shared by a group which gives the individual a frame of orientation and an object of devotion.“<sup>90</sup>

<sup>87</sup> This applies especially where his psychoanalytic experience and knowledge become an object of interest for Fromm, and where the gap between historical-philosophical theory and dialectical thought on the one hand, and empirical findings on the other, must not become too large. In this connection, one should recall that the revolutionary character is absent from the investigation into the social character of Mexican peasants (*Social Character in a Mexican Village* [1970b], p. 82). And one should call attention to the presence of a „traditional authoritarian,“ a patriarchal orientation that lacks the distinguishing characteristic of the authoritarian character, i.e., sadomasochistic submissiveness (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 260-262).

<sup>88</sup> Cf. the comments on obedience above.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Fromm's critique of the definition in the Oxford Dictionary: Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (1950a), p. 34.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21; cf. „Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism“ (1960a) pp. 92f. On the basis of this concept of religion, Fromm can call Marxism the most significant reli-

Whether or not man should have a religion is not the decisive question, for as Fromm understands the matter, every man must have one. What counts is the kind of religion he has.<sup>91</sup>

Given this functional definition of religion based on the need for a frame of orientation and an object of worship, three points must be noted:

1. Religion here is understood as a broad spectrum of phenomena that are relatively independent of the original meaning of the word.
2. The nature of religion is understood wholly in terms of its significance as a response to a need, which means that religion is viewed only as a function.
3. This is the view of religion that predominates in Fromm, though it is not the only one. In his early study, „Die Entwicklung des Christuskonzepts,“ he still advocates a concept of religion that is influenced by Freud. It is this early concept to which we now turn.

In Fromm's early writings, the primary task of religion is to prevent „any psychic independence on the part of the people, to intimidate them intellectually, to bring them into the socially necessary infantile docility toward the authorities.“<sup>92</sup> Behind this judgment, we perceive the Freudian view of religious phenomena as satisfactions that are libidinous and imaginary.<sup>93</sup> The following assumptions

religious movement of the nineteenth century (*Vorwort* [1967c], p. 11). In *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, even Fascism and National Socialism are called „secular religions.“

<sup>91</sup> Cf. *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (1950a), p. 26. It is true that this statement does not apply to the concept of religion according to Freud, since Fromm believed that religion in Freud is an illusion that must be overcome. Cf. Fromm, „Die Entwicklung des Christuskonzepts“ (1930a) in (1963a), p. 25; and T. Propper, *Der Jesus der Philosophen und der Jesus des Glaubens*, esp. p. 68.

<sup>92</sup> Fromm, „Die Entwicklung des Christuskonzepts“ (1930a), p. 22.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 22f. On the theological criticism of this early work of Fromm's, cf. T. Propper, *Der Jesus der Phi-*



led Freud to adopt this view of religious phenomena: In the religious attitude of the adult toward God, we find a repetition of the infantile attitude of the child toward the father. This at {102} least explains how religion is possible psychologically. Why religion is necessary, or has been necessary thus far in history, has something to do with its narcotizing effect on feelings of impotence and helplessness. A belief in God offers consolation because it remobilizes the father's protection of the child and the libidinous tie of the child to his father. Belief in God therefore ends when man attains mastery over nature.<sup>94</sup>

As long as Fromm was an orthodox Freudian, he connected the character of religious phenomena—that is, that they are satisfactions occurring in the imagination and therefore not directly harmful—with society's demand that drives be renounced. „Man strives for a maximum of pleasure; social reality compels him to many renunciations of impulse, and society seeks to compensate the individual for these renunciations by other satisfactions harmless for the society—that is, for the dominant classes.“<sup>95</sup> That is why religious phenomena as satisfactions of the imagination stabilize the social structure and social reality generally. Conversely, it is not only the psychic makeup but also the social reality that determines what the content and scope of these imaginary satisfactions will be.

In a society that is marked by class antagonisms, religion has a threefold function: „for all mankind, consolations for the privations exacted by life; for the great majority of men, encouragement to accept emotionally their class situation; and for the dominant minority relief from guilt feelings caused by the suffering of those whom they oppress.“<sup>96</sup> As long as Fromm embraced this view of religion, which underlay his first major work after his dissertation, the treatise „Die Entwicklung des Christus-

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*osophen and der Jesus des Glaubens*, pp. 58-69.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. „Die Entwicklung des Christusdogmas“ (1930a), p. 25.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

dogmas“ (1930), he saw no necessity for religion such as we find in his later formulation concerning the need for a frame of orientation and an object of worship. In the early work, religion is depicted as an opiate, an illusion that is becoming superfluous. And because he has not yet anchored religion in the structure of human needs where it would enjoy some true autonomy, he is able to reduce all its manifestations to the „external situation.“<sup>97</sup> It is the „external situation“ that brings about „psychic change“ and one can analyze „how this psychic change found expression in new religious fantasies and satisfied certain unconscious impulses.“<sup>98</sup> Any autonomous development of religious ideas that would be independent of the {103} determining „external situation“ and the „psychic change“ it produces is unthinkable. The very equation „collective phantasies = certain dogmas“<sup>99</sup> indicates the totally reductionist concept of religion Fromm held while he followed Freud.

In view of his theoretical postulates, the result of Fromm's examination of the „development of the dogma of Christ“ is predetermined: „The transformation of christological dogma, as well as that of the whole Christian religion, merely corresponded to the sociological function of religion in general, the maintenance of social stability by preserving the interests of the governing classes.“<sup>100</sup> The following substantive change occurred: Early Christianity was hostile to authority and the state and satisfied the people's imagination with Jesus as the suffering human being who becomes God. When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire three hundred years later, Jesus „eventually became God without overthrowing God because he was always God.“<sup>101</sup> The Chris-

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<sup>97</sup> „External situation“ refers to economic and social conditions.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90. The element of newness introduced by the Nicene Council was, according to Fromm, „to have changed the tension between God and his Son into harmony since it avoided the concept that a man



tological dogma merely reflects a Christian religion that had succeeded in integrating „the masses into the absolutist system of the Roman Empire.“<sup>102</sup> But the cause of this change was the „change in the economic situation, i.e. the decline of productive forces and its social consequences.“<sup>103</sup>

During the early thirties, Fromm's view of religion was a development of Freud's reductionist concept for Freud felt that religious phenomena „were nothing but“ libidinous fantasy satisfactions. Fromm interpreted both religious phenomena and psychic structure as reflections of the economic and social situation. It was only when he abandoned the libido theory and interpreted man as a contradictory being who must satisfy certain indefeasible needs that his view of religion changed. Now, religion was no longer to be understood merely functionally as an epiphenomenon of certain economic and social conditions, but was derived from the definition of man's nature. In both cases, religion is functionalized, but as an answer to the need for orientation and for an object of worship, religion is now granted an autonomy it did not previously have. In other words, religion becomes necessary.<sup>104</sup>

With the new view of religion as response to

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could become God [and thus] eliminated from the formula the revolutionary character of the older doctrine, namely, hostility to the father.“

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 62; cf. pp. 90f.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>104</sup> Anchoring religion in a need for a frame of orientation and an object of devotion does not mean that the socioeconomic conditions are not essential shaping factors. The abandonment of the Freudian theory of drives and the formulation of inherent existential needs have no effect on the mechanism by which they make their effects felt. The only exception would be if socioeconomic forces were such as to negate the need for a frame of orientation and an object of devotion. Cf. Fromm's analysis of reformers and the period of the Reformation in *Escape from Freedom* (1941a), pp. 63-102, for a statement on the dependence of religion on socioeconomic conditions; see also the brief summary in *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (1950a), pp. 52f.

an existential need, the critical question concerning religion is reformulated. While earlier it was asked whether or not there should be religion, and Freud answered that „religion was to be seen as an illusion that {104} was becoming superfluous.“<sup>105</sup> the question that now arose was what religion ought to be if the concept of it was to comprehend all forms of response to the need for a framework of orientation and an object of devotion. Fromm's answer was simply that religion was either authoritarian or humanist. The reason even find only this single alternative throughout his work has something to do with his view of the history of the idea of God,<sup>106</sup> which rests on certain anterior judgments favoring a nontheistic humanism for which a functional concept of religion is legitimate and appropriate. This humanism can ultimately be concerned only with man.<sup>107</sup>

#### *Authoritarian versus Humanistic Religion*<sup>108</sup>

In his definition of authority and in his distinction between its rational and irrational forms, Fromm does not preclude the theoretical possibility that God might be declared a rational authority.<sup>109</sup> To the patriarchal God who is characterized by rational authority, he ascribes an important historical

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<sup>105</sup> „Die Entwicklung des Christudogmas“ (1930a), p. 25.

<sup>106</sup> See below, pp. 106-112.

<sup>107</sup> This is the reason a critique of Fromm's concept of religion cannot confine itself to the functionalization of religion. This reproach also applies to Paul Tillich who, in his review of *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (1950a), writes that Fromm sympathizes with Freud's theory of projection and claims that he fights against a heteronomous, supranaturalistic theism. Conversely, it should be said that for a theistic religion, the need for a frame of orientation and an object of devotion represents a significant anthropological fact.

<sup>108</sup> The comments on authority (see pp. 88-101) permit a briefer presentation of authoritarian and humanistic religion. On what follows, cf. *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (1950a), pp. 34-55.

<sup>109</sup> See p. 91.



function in the development of the divine image.<sup>110</sup> Yet in a parallel to his antithesis between authoritarian and revolutionary character, he sees religion only as either authoritarian or humanistic. As with his distinction between rational and irrational authority, Fromm acknowledges that there may be a transcendent God who has the characteristics of love and justice. But when it comes to defining the kind of religion that meets the human need for a frame of orientation and an object of devotion, we see the same phenomenon as when he applied theoretical statements on rational and irrational authority to character types: just as he acknowledges nothing but the conflicting alternatives that are the „authoritarian“ and the „revolutionary,“ so he confines himself to a mutually exclusive „authoritarian“ and „humanistic“ religion.

An authoritarian religion demands the recognition of a higher power. This demand for recognition does not lie „in the moral qualities of the deity, not in love or justice, but in the fact that a has control, i.e. has power over man. Furthermore, it shows that the higher power has a right to force man to worship him and that lack of reverence and obedience constitutes sin. The essential element in authoritarian religion and in the authoritarian religious experience is the surrender to a power transcending man.“<sup>111</sup> In this definition of authoritarian religion, the consciousness of a {105} difference between rational and irrational authority is still present. It is lost when Fromm deals with humanistic religion and identifies this kind of religion in theistic systems. „Humanistic religion, on the contrary, is centered around man and his strength. Man must develop the power of reason in order to understand himself, his relationship to his fellow man and his position in the universe. ... He must develop his powers of love for others as well as for himself and experience the solidarity with all living beings. ... Religious experience in this kind of religion is the experience of oneness with the All, based on one's relatedness to the world as it is grasped with

thought and with love.“<sup>112</sup>

The possibility of a religion based on a rational authority relation is no longer considered with reference to a humanistic religion,<sup>113</sup> and this leads to the creation of a specific conception of theism: „inasmuch as humanistic religions are theistic, God is a symbol for *man's own powers* which he tries to realize in his life, and is not a symbol of force and domination, *having power over man*.“<sup>114</sup> The following formulation states the same thing more simply: „God is *not a symbol of power over man but of man's own powers*.“<sup>115</sup> For „while in humanistic religion, God is the image of man's higher self, a symbol of what man potentially is or ought to become, in authoritarian religion God becomes the sole possessor of what was originally man's: of his reason and his love.“<sup>116</sup>

What Fromm calls „theistic“ here has, from the point of view of theists, hardly anything in common with what is understood by theism in the philosophy of religion, for „theistic“ has a specifiable meaning even before it is closely defined. It is true that theism as a concept in the philosophy of religion has no precise definition but takes on a meaning that varies with what it is contrasted with (such as atheism, monotheism, pantheism). Yet it would appear that the following definition is always applicable: „‘theism’ is a doctrine that affirms God's existence in the sense that providence is also affirmed

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. J. S. Glen, *Erich Fromm: A Protestant Critique*, pp. 101f.

<sup>114</sup> *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (1950a), p. 37.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 49f. The assumption that man was originally in full possession of his powers of reason and love corresponds to dialectical thought. The opposite view, according to which man must first detach himself phylo- and ontogenetically from fixations and irrational relations of authority if he is to come into his own, has its origin in the recognition of the data of evolution and empirical science. In this connection, one is struck by the formulation that God is a symbol of what man is potentially, or of what he can become.

<sup>110</sup> See p. 100f.

<sup>111</sup> *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (1950a), p. 35.



and that the latter includes God as person and as free.<sup>117</sup> That Fromm should believe that his definition of God could be called a theistic concept becomes understandable when one looks at his theory of the development of the image of God.<sup>118</sup>

For Fromm, „early Buddhism, Taoism, the teachings of Isaiah, Jesus, Socrates, Spinoza, certain trends in the Jewish and Christian religion (particularly mysticism), the religion of Reason of the {106} French Revolution“ are examples of humanistic religion.<sup>119</sup> If one wished to show that these examples

<sup>117</sup> W. Keilbach, „Theismus,“ p. 16. Cf. J. Möller, *Die Chance des Menschen - Gott genannt*, pp. 311-313.

<sup>118</sup> See pp. 106-112. The failure of the attempt to bring humanism and theism together as regards the concept of God does not mean that theistic systems fail to meet the demands of a humanistic religion. But when the attempt is made to demonstrate humanistic religion in theistic systems, two perspectives become possible: one of them adopts the interpretation of the concept of God that Fromm advances; the other starts off from his distinction between rational and irrational authority, applies it to theistic systems, and then tries to discover in theistic religions concepts of God that are based on rational authority-which is counter to Fromm's approach. But the first perspective should not speak of humanistic religion in theistic systems because the theistic systems have been interpreted humanistically to begin with. The second perspective cannot claim to find in theistic systems either what Fromm means by humanism or what humanism is generally understood to be, for a necessary part of such a humanism is the interpretation of God as nothing more than a symbol of man's own powers.

<sup>119</sup> *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (1950a), p. 37. Fromm spent a good deal of time thinking about certain forms of humanistic religion, but his thought did not always find literary expression. Among the examples mentioned, the following have special importance: Buddhism (cf. *Psychoanalysis and Religion*); Zen-Buddhism (cf. „Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism“ [1960a]); Judaism (cf. *You Shall Be as Gods* [1966a]); and Meister Eckhart (cf. *To Have or To Be?* [1976a], pp. 59-65). Fromm's studies of the Upanishads, Sufism, Plotinus, the Pseudo-Dionysius, the „cloud of unknowing,“ and various forms of Eastern meditation did not find literary expression. In *Psychoanalysis and*

actually have the various characteristics of humanistic religion, certain qualifications would presumably have to be made. But Fromm's enumeration is intended merely for illustration, and it serves this purpose because all the examples have one thing in common: they stand in opposition to a prevailing current. The prophetic, the mystic, and the revolutionary stand in opposition to what is established. This characteristic also makes it clear that humanistic religion always defines itself by what is antithetical to it, though such opposition is not rebellious but revolutionary, for it attacks an ever-changing irrational authority without putting another in its place.<sup>120</sup>

To the extent that any religion is a response to the need for a framework of orientation and an object of worship, it deals with the question of meaning and the question concerning God. Especially as a reaction to an authoritarian religion, humanistic religion has a special relationship to the question about God, and in Fromm's works, it articulates itself in a particular interpretation of the history of the concept of God.

#### Fromm's Interpretation of the History of the Concept of God<sup>121</sup>

*Religion*, the following are mentioned as humanistic religions: early Buddhism (pp. 38-40); Zen Buddhism (pp. 400; Spinoza's religious thought (p. 41); the Old Testament (pp. 42-47); Hasidism (pp. 470; and early Christianity (pp. 480. Cf. the listing in „Afterword“ (1966d) in (1961b).

<sup>120</sup> According to Fromm, Martin Luther is no revolutionary and the theology of the Reformation no humanistic religion for that reason: „While Luther freed people from the authority of the Church, he made them submit to a much more tyrannical authority, that of a God who insisted on complete submission of man and annihilation of the individual self as the essential condition to his salvation“ (*Escape from Freedom* [1941a], p. 81).

<sup>121</sup> On what follows, cf. especially *The Art of Loving* (1956a), pp. 53-60; *Beyond the Chains of Illusion* (1962a), pp. 157-159; *You Shall Be as Gods* (1966a), pp. 17-62; J. J. Petuchowski, „Erich Fromm's Midrash



We must begin by identifying Fromm's methodological and religio-critical *parti pris* in this question: for him, the concept „God“ is „only a historically determined one in which man has expressed the experience of his own higher powers, of his striving for truth and unity during a particular historical period.“<sup>122</sup> The various forms the idea of God and the concept of God have taken are therefore analogies to the highest power in a given society and an expression of its social and political structure.<sup>123</sup> This approach means that the analysis of the concept of God must begin with the analysis of man's character structure, for the particular meaning God has always depends on what man takes to be the highest good.<sup>124</sup>

During the initial phase of human development, which can be understood as man's freeing himself from his primary ties to nature, mother, blood, and soil, man, no longer at one with nature {107} because of his reason, yet tries to find security by clinging to these original ties. Many primitive religions testify to this phase in which totems-trees and animals, for example--are worshipped. As man develops his capacity for making things, he transforms the product of his hands into a god. This is the phase in which gods of earth, silver, and gold are worshipped and man projects his own powers and capacities onto the things he has made.

As man's sense of his own worth grows, his gods come to take on human form: „In this phase of anthropomorphic god worship we find a development in two dimensions. The one refers to the

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of Love,“ pp. 547-549.

<sup>122</sup> *The Art of Loving* (1956a), p. 71; *You Shall Be as Gods* (1966a), pp. 18f: „'God' is one of many different poetic expressions of the highest value in humanism, not a reality in itself.“ In spite of this *a priori* assertion, Fromm wants this position to be viewed as the result of his analysis of the history of the concept of God.

<sup>123</sup> Cf. *You Shall Be as Gods* (1966a), p. 18.

<sup>124</sup> Some of what appears in the following comments was already mentioned above, in connection with the rational authority concept. For the sake of the completeness of the theory, it is repeated here.

female or male nature of the gods, the other to the degree of maturity which man has achieved, and which determines the nature of his gods and the nature of his love of them.“<sup>125</sup>

In many cultures, a matriarchal phase of religion preceded the patriarchal. In these matriarchally structured religions that have their counterpart in a matriarchal social structure, a goddess is the highest being and human beings are the equally valued and equally loved children of this goddess. The transition to the patriarchal phase involves both the primacy of the male in society and the dethroning of the mother goddess. Now the relation between man and divine being is no longer defined by equality among men but depends on the degree to which man complies with the demands of the father god. It is, therefore, its hierarchic structure that defines every patriarchal society.

A further development of the concept of God--and, along with it, of human powers and capacities that now extend to the application of the concept of God to man himself--can be traced in the course of patriarchal religion. Fromm shows, in considerable detail, this development in the Jewish concept of God. Throughout all the modifications of this concept, there persists one underlying idea: that „neither nature nor artifacts constitute the ultimate reality or the highest value but that there is only the ONE who represents the supreme value and the supreme goal for man: the goal of finding union with the world through full development of his specifically human capacities of love and reason.“<sup>126</sup>

At the beginning of the Old Testament account of the concept of God, there stands a god who is represented as an absolute ruler. Having created all there is, he has the power to destroy that creation. His attributes are despotism and jealousy. Examples of {108} this concept of God are the expulsion from Paradise, the Flood, the suggestion that Abraham kill his son Isaac.<sup>127</sup> Yet the absolute power of God

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<sup>125</sup> *The Art of Loving* (1956a), p. 54.

<sup>126</sup> *You Shall Be as Gods* (1966a), p. 22.

<sup>127</sup> On the occasionally rather arbitrary interpretations of



over man is limited by the idea that man can become God's rival if he uses his reason: *Eritis sicut Deus scientes bonum et malum*: You shall be as Gods! For Fromm, the Fall is man's first act of self-liberation and the first realization of the human capacity to become God. „The whole further evolution of the concept of God diminishes God's role as man's owner.“<sup>128</sup> The story of Noah, who makes an agreement with God because God feels remorseful for destroying creation, already makes manifest the evolution of the concept of the divinity: God ceases being the absolute ruler, his image changes from absolute to constitutional monarch who undertakes to respect all life. The idea of a covenant between God and mankind—for this is how Fromm understands the agreement between God and Noah—constitutes, indeed, one of the most decisive steps in the religious development of Judaism, a step which prepares the way to the concept of the complete freedom of man, even freedom from God.<sup>129</sup> The promise to Abraham, and later the covenant with the Hebrews led by Moses, are a broadening of the idea of the compact. Here God obliges himself to observe those principles of justice and love that have made of man a free being, entitled to make demands. God, on the other hand, no longer has the right to refuse his help. The despotic ruler has become the loving father.

In a further phase, „the development ... goes in the direction of transforming God from the figure of a father into a symbol of his principles, those of justice, truth and love. ... In this development, God ceases to be a person, a man, a father; he becomes the symbol of the principle of unity behind the manifoldness of phenomena.“<sup>130</sup> Though the story of God's self-revelation to Moses still has markedly anthropomorphic aspects, it lays the foundation for God's transformation into a symbol when God identifies himself as the nameless One.

biblical texts, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 13-15, and notes on pp. 24 and 26.

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

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>130</sup> *The Art of Loving* (1956a), p. 58.

For Fromm interprets God's answer „I AM WHO I AM“ as „My name is nameless,“ because in the imperfect tense, the grammatical form of the verb „to be“ expresses a living process, a becoming. Only things that have attained their definitive form can have a name; God, therefore, cannot have one, his name is nameless.<sup>131</sup> „This God who manifests himself in history cannot be represented by any kind of image, neither by an {109} image of sound—that is, a name--nor by an image of stone or wood.“<sup>132</sup> It follows from this interpretation that positive statements about God cannot be made, and a negative theology such as Moses Maimonides' and mysticism do, in fact, take this position. Theology as talk about God is no longer possible: „God becomes what he potentially is in monotheistic theology, the nameless One, an inexpressible stammer, referring to the unity underlying the phenomenal universe, the ground of all existence; God becomes truth, love, justice, God is I, inasmuch as I am human.“<sup>133</sup>

Although these comments on the history of the concept of God are necessarily concise,<sup>134</sup> and specific statements provoke contradictions, there is no room for a detailed critique. Instead, we will ask why this sketch of the history of the concept of God was set forth here.

In *The Art of Loving*, Fromm sets forth the history of the concept of God when he shows the parallel between love for God and love for parents and presents what he takes to be the mature human being in these two developments: „In the history of the human race we see--and anticipate--the same development: from the beginning of the love for God as the helpless attachment to a mother Goddess, through the obedient attachment to a fatherly

<sup>131</sup> Cf. *You Shall Be as Gods* (1966a), pp. 29-32.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>133</sup> *The Art of Loving* (1956a), p. 59. On the function of the prophets in the realization of this idea of God, cf. *You Shall Be as Gods* (1966a), pp. 117-121; „The Prophetic concept of Peace“ (1960d) in (1963a), pp. 141-148; „Die Aktualität der prophetischen Schriften“ (1975d).

<sup>134</sup> Fromm provides a brief sketch in *You Shall Be as Gods* (1966a), pp. 61f.



God, to a mature stage where God ceases to be an outside power, where man has incorporated the principles of love and justice into himself, where he has become one with God, and eventually to a point where he speaks of God only in a poetic, symbolic sense.<sup>135</sup>

Fromm's primary interest in presenting this history is to show that it is the „mature“ individual, the „humanistic“ type, independent and free of all external determinants, who is the goal toward which history moves. This interest is nourished in equal measure by psychoanalytic practice and the social and political reality: what is at stake is making fixated and submissive people come into their own. The legitimacy of this goal as the highest possible one has been proved when in the history of the highest goal itself--which in our culture is traditionally called God--the dynamism toward this goal can be shown to be an internal historical principle. In other words, Fromm attempts to demonstrate that history as a development is meaningful and has a goal, and to do so through the course of history itself.

Fromm believes neither in revelation as God's action in history {110} nor in any philosophical equivalent of such action. There are no principles that guarantee the origin, goal, and dynamism of history. There is only man-man who has an infeasible need for a religion of whatever kind, which means that the answers given by atheism and materialism are inadequate and must be replaced by answers provided by nontheism and nonidealism. At the same time, however, the history of the highest goal--that is, the history of the concept of God--demonstrates that the goal of history is fully developed, universal man. Given a humanism for which ultimately only man exists, the history of the concept of God must always, and solely, have been a history of man.<sup>136</sup> All statements about God are

fundamentally statements about man. Divine love and justice are symbols of man's own powers of love and justice, even though they are ascribed to God.

To the extent that the powers he has projected onto God are reclaimed by alienated man, the idea of God becomes unnecessary and man takes charge of himself and his powers. God becomes self-redeemed, universal man.<sup>137</sup> The process of the negation of God takes form in the history of a *theologia negativa*, though Fromm does not acknowledge that the classical *theologia negativa* is not synonymous with an *anthropologia positiva*, which is what his use of the negative theology presupposes.<sup>138</sup>

Fromm's interpretation of the history of the concept of God enables him to discern the goal of

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regards the concept of God becomes relevant in the interpretation of certain stages in the history of the concept of God. Examples would be the „fall“ and the „revelation of the name.“ The various criticisms are summarily alluded to in the title of the book that represents the most extensive treatment of the history of the concept of God. Its title is the promise of the serpent in Paradise: „*You Shall Be as Gods.*“ But Fromm interprets this as: „You shall be gods!“

<sup>137</sup> Cf. the critique of religion in Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx, which can be summarized in the thesis that what man takes to be the highest being is in fact his (i.e., man's) true being.

<sup>138</sup> Using the *theologia negativa* as the expression, in theological language, of man's coming into his own has primarily a religio-critical meaning that goes counter to the view held in the history of theology. For a *theologia negativa* „must not be confused, even conceptually, with some negative aspect of the religious-mystical experience (ever greater absence of God, etc.) and its negative expression“ (H. Vorgrimmler, „Negative Theologie,“ pp. 864f.). It does not satisfy Fromm that the *theologia negativa* should be a corrective for an excessive emphasis on dogma and thus an aid to the act of faith. That is the reason he does not believe that *theologia negativa* pleads for „God's word“ as against „talk about God.“ For his understanding of *theologia negativa* is in line with his humanistic approach and his understanding of mysticism, as will become apparent in Part Four.

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<sup>135</sup> *The Art of Loving* (1956a), p. 81.

<sup>136</sup> In a theism that is characterized by the presence of a revealed God, the history of man is a history of God „for“ man and there is the eschatological hope for union of God and man. The humanist predisposition as



history: fully developed universal man who lives entirely through his own powers of love and reason. The inner dynamics of the history of the concept of God allow this human being to become visible so that statements about God pertain to man. Beyond that, the history of the concept of God also demonstrates the legitimacy of the interpretation according to which the history of the highest goal (God) actually shows the goal of history (man), for historical dynamics consist in the increasing negation of all statements about God. Fromm takes currents of the *theologia negativa*, of Jewish and Christian mysticism, as proof of all this.

The religio-critical „use“ of the history of the concept of God throws light on the problem of the relation between theism and nontheistic humanism. If one applies Fromm's interpretation of the concept of God to atheistic concept of religion, the following nontheistic statements in theistic conceptual garb necessarily {111} result: „The truly religious person,<sup>139</sup> if he follows the essence of the monotheistic idea,<sup>140</sup> does not pray for anything, does not expect anything from God; he does not love God as a child loves his father or his mother; he has acquired the humility of sensing his limitations, to the degree of knowing that he knows nothing about God. God becomes to him a symbol in which man, at an earlier stage of his evolution, has expressed the totality of that which man is striving for, the realm of the spiritual world, of love, truth and justice. ... To love God, if he were going to use this word, would mean, then, to long for the attainment of the full capacity to love, for the realization of that which „God“ stands for in oneself.“<sup>141</sup> The particular quality of these statements is the result of using theistic concepts to express a nontheistic position.

Understanding the history of the highest goal, Fromm assumes, legitimizes the interpretation that the history of the highest goal (God) will allow one

to recognize the highest goal of history (man). Along with this assumption, he postulates that it is precisely the analysis of the history of theistic concepts that shows that while these concepts are the result of historical conditions, they logically press toward their own replacement by a nontheistic conceptual scheme. Theistic systems exist only because they are not logically consistent: „We have seen that for historical reasons the Jews have given the name „God“ to the X, which man should approximate in order to be fully man. ... Although logically the next step in the Jewish development would be a system without „God,“ it is impossible for a theistic-religious system to take this step without losing its identity.“<sup>142</sup> In opposition to Fromm's assumption that the history of theistic concepts and ideas legitimizes their nontheistic (humanistic) interpretation, the attempt was made above to show that such an interpretation can be legitimated through the history of the concept of God only if every theism has previously been viewed from a humanistic perspective. Without this humanistic *parti pris*, it is impossible either to interpret the history of the highest goal as the highest goal of history or to maintain that history itself legitimates such an interpretation.

Seen from Fromm's point of departure, such an interpretation and all its implications for the interpretation of the history of the concept of God are persuasive. But for the theist critic the argument is far from persuasive, for what the humanist sees as theism {112} is nontheism as far as the theist is concerned. Here we can do no more than respect the differences in approach. A deeper examination of Fromm's humanist point of departure, which has been referred to here as a „*parti pris*,“ will not be possible until we come to Part Four, but it should be noted that in spite of their differences, both positions are connected at one point. Anthropologically, both the theist and the humanist nontheist can speak of an experience of self-transcendence that is tied to the indefeasible human need for a

<sup>139</sup> What is meant is the person for whom religion does not involve a transcendent God.

<sup>140</sup> I.e., provided he accepts Fromm's interpretation of the history of the concept of God.

<sup>141</sup> *The Art of Loving* (1956a), pp. 59f.

<sup>142</sup> *You Shall Be as Gods* (1966a), p. 53; cf. *The Art of Loving* (1956a), pp. 60f.



frame of orientation and an object of worship. Everyone has this experience because everyone tries to find an answer to the unsolved problems of his existence, but the experience varies with every human being because it depends on the individual's particular situation and mode of expression. Thus the theist calls it the „experience of God,“ while Fromm speaks of a religious mood or the attitude of the X experience.

### The Humanist Religion As the Realization of the X Experience

The interpretation of the history of the concept of God reveals that the concept is only the finger that points at the moon, as it were. „This moon is not outside ourselves but is the human reality behind the words: what we call the *religious attitude* is an X that is expressible only in poetic and visual symbols.”<sup>143</sup> Every human being experiences this X, though different cultures and social structures give it varying expressions. Behind the different religions, philosophies, and world views, there is the one experience that persists in all conceptual systems. Fromm calls it the X experience. „What differs is the conceptualizations of the experience, not the experiential substratum underlying various conceptualizations.”<sup>144</sup>

<sup>143</sup> *You Shall Be as Gods* (1966a), p. 226. The „finger that points to the moon“ is a popular expression in Buddhist teaching. See, e.g., S. Ohasama, *Zen*, p. 4.

<sup>144</sup> *You Shall Be as Gods* (1966a), p. 57. In contrast to his other writings, Fromm here deliberately avoids concepts such as „religion“ and „religious,“ and uses „X experience“ instead in order to make it clear that religious experience can occur outside of theistic systems. But this concept means several things. Sometimes it is the expression of an experiential substrate that is not defined closely; at other times, it means the same thing as „humanistic religion,“ and is thus a term for an experience that is being understood humanistically, as, e.g., when Fromm refers to the person „who has experienced the value X as the supreme value and tries to realize it in his life“ (ibid., p. 228). In a note

There are two points of departure to the X experience as the experiential substrate of a humanistic religion and they determine the distinctiveness of the X experience. The first is the human being with infeasible existential needs. In opposition to Freud's critique of religion as illusion, Fromm postulates a need for religion that is infeasible and that articulates itself as X experience but to which one should only react humanistically. The other point {113} of departure is the religious and philosophical assumption that the same question and experience X stand behind even the most widely differing systems of orientation. Which orientation best corresponds to human need can be clarified by the humanistic approach and the religio-critical interpretation of the history of the concept of God.<sup>145</sup> Fromm mentions the following psychological characteristics:

1. The X experience is the expression of a consciously felt disquiet about the existential dichotomies of life. Life is experienced as a „problem.“
2. A human being who has the X experience has a definitive hierarchy of values whose highest is the optimal development of his capacities for reason, love, compassion, and courage.

(on p. 57), Fromm establishes a connection between the X experience and Paul Tillich's „ground of being,“ or „depth“ (as a substitute for „God“), and with Altizer's „atheistic Christianity.“ Fromm's understanding of what the X experience is comes very close to Gunter Dux's sociological view of the function of religion: „It is the function of religion to thematize the depth structure of man's view of reality. For it is only through this act of conscious reflection that it becomes possible for man to become aware of his position in the world and to arrive at an interpretation of his life that will make sense and be relevant to his actions“ (G. Dux, *Ursprung, Funktion and Gehalt der Religion*, p. 60).

<sup>145</sup> This path via the interpretation of the history of the concept of God is indicated where a Western concept of religion is the point of departure, because here-in contrast to Eastern mysticism-the X experience is presented inside a theistic framework. Cf. *You Shall Be as Gods* (1966a), p. 57 and note.



3. For the human being who has had the X experience, man is never means but always end.
4. To realize the X experience means to surrender one's ego, one's greed, and to abandon one's fears in order to become „empty“ and thus open to world and man. Seen from this perspective, the X experience can also be called the experience of transcendence, provided transcendence is not equated with a movement toward a transcendent God but refers rather to the transcendence of a narcissistic ego--that is, to a goal within man himself.<sup>146</sup>

The consequences of a realization of the X experience point toward mysticism. All precise statements concerning humanistic religion as the realization of the X experience refer back to Fromm's study of early Buddhism, which began during the twenties.<sup>147</sup> His acquaintance with Daisetz T. Suzuki led to his interest in Zen Buddhism.<sup>148</sup>

The realization of the X experience in humanistic religion as a nontheistic system does not mean, however, that this experience need be confined to Eastern mysticism. In the theistic conceptual system, the X experience is realized in the history of the concept of God: „The idea of the One God expresses a new answer for the solution of the di-

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., pp. 58-60. In the paraphrase following that passage, the use of the term „X experience,“ which has already been interpreted humanistically is adopted by Fromm.

<sup>147</sup> In his study of Buddhism, the books by Georg Grimm were of special import. Most significant among these was *Die Lehre des Buddha. Die Religion der Vernunft*.

<sup>148</sup> Cf. *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (1950a), p. 40: „Zen proposes that no knowledge is of any value unless it grows out of ourselves; no authority, no teacher can really teach us anything except to arouse doubts in us; words and thought systems are dangerous because they easily turn into authorities whom we worship. Life itself must be grasped and experienced as it flows, and in this lies virtue.“ Or, p. 38: „The concept of Nirvana as the state of mind the fully awakened one can achieve is not one of man's helplessness and submission but on the contrary one of the development of the highest powers man possesses.“

chotomies of human existence; man can find oneness with the world, not by regressing to the pre-human state, but by the full development of his specifically human qualities: love and reason.“<sup>149</sup>

Before the realization of the X experience is presented in further detail, the presuppositions for Fromm's humanistic religion will {114} be systematically sketched, using his humanistic point of departure and his interpretation of the history of the concept of God.<sup>150</sup>

The point of departure for every question regarding what it means to be human is man's contradictory existence, which causes him to search for a new identity as an answer. According to the humanist perspective on man and his world, (only) man is the starting point for an answer, although it is man in his historicalness. This dimension of historicalness reveals the idea of the One God that can become the principle of man's oneness with himself and his world under humanist presuppositions. For just as the idea of the One God means the negation of the power of many gods, so does this idea--when understood as principle of identity--mean the negation of all external determinations (heteronomy, authority). The new identity of man with himself and the entire human world is attained when man is wholly at home with himself and determines himself wholly through and by himself, and does so by fully developing his faculties of reason and love.

The transcendence of man is a coming-to-himself, which he attains to the degree that he transcends himself toward his own perfect form, in love and reason. In doing this, he goes beyond all alien or external determinations toward a new identity with himself, with others, and with his world. This

<sup>149</sup> *You Shall Be as Gods* (1966a), p. 61.

<sup>150</sup> *The Art of Loving* (1956a), pp. 61-69, ties the development of the requirements for a humanistic X experience to the postulate of a paradoxical logic. Because Fromm's understanding of Aristotelian and paradoxical logic is problematical (cf. below, notes 152 and 205), the sketch is presented as a consequence of his humanistic approach so that there is no need for a paradoxical logic.



humanistic concept of transcendence makes possible the identity of individual man with mankind, because in the human being who is wholly free of all external determinations, the oneness of all human beings is realized. For this reason, a new identity of man with himself and the human world is the real answer to the need for a frame of orientation and an object of worship. And this new identity is the goal of humanistic religion. It is the X that the humanist can experience only via the negation of all heteronomous determinations of man. To attain it, he must fully realize his capacities of reason and love.

Since man's new identity with himself and the world of man must be „experienced,“ it is useless to try to *think* identity. Whenever concepts and thoughts are deemed the highest good, an untested experience of identity cannot occur. Because they are the products of social and cultural conditions, concepts and thoughts express the variety among men and cultures.<sup>151</sup> In contrast, X stands for the experience that underlies all the various conceptual and intellectual elaborations, an experience that, by its very {115} definition, must remain free of all alienating determinations. The humanistic approach demands that the experience of one's capacities for reason and love--the X experience--be realized only as the negation of all alien determinations.

The truth of humanistic religion is proved in its

<sup>151</sup> This is especially true for the problem of God. Fromm asserts, e.g., that the concept „God“ (not the experience of a highest value underlying the concept) is really „dead“: „In the contemporary world which is no longer guided by Aristotle's systematic thought and by the idea of kingship, the God-concept has lost its philosophical and its social basis“ (*You Shall Be as Gods* [1966a], p. 228). That is also the reason why a quarrel over atheism is pointless, a nineteenth-century relic. The only question Fromm considers decisive today is whether man as highest value is dead (*ibid.*, pp. 228f). Cf. his talk about the „City of God“ as thesis, the „Earthly City“ as antithesis, and the „City of Being“ as synthesis, in *To Have or to Be?* (1976a), p. 202.

realization: when man mobilizes his own powers and thus seeks his new identity himself, he finds his identity. It is not a question of thinking in concepts, it is an experience based on productive activity; it is not theology considering how God is to be understood, but the right way (*halacha*) to experience „God“ as X; it is not religion as the laying down of a particular experience of God in doctrine, but a religious ethos and the experience of the highest values: love and reason. Finally, it is a matter not of interpretation but of change: the experience of man's new identity with himself and the world „ultimately lies, not in thought, but in the act, in the experience of oneness.“<sup>152</sup> The realization of the X experience means „conversion to a humanistic religiosity without religion, without dogma and institutions...“<sup>153</sup>

These characteristics of the realization of the X experience determine the concept and function of religion in the humanistic sense. The point of departure is the fact that reason and love and other religious maxims and ideas are not-or are only inadequately

realized in social life, which means that man is determined heteronomously. As an established and socially relevant entity, religion has its *raison d'être* in antireligious practice. It is its task to realize religious ideas and to keep them alive for a better world. Because it is socially established, religion dissolves when religious ideas become social reality: „social life itself-in all its aspects in work, in leisure, in personal relations-will be the expression of the 'religious' spirit, and no separate religion will be necessary.“<sup>154</sup>

These are the definitions by which humanistic religion orients itself and against which established religions must be measured if they are to satisfy the claim to be religions in the humanistic sense. For Fromm, „this demand for a new, non-theistic, non-

<sup>152</sup> *The Art of Loving* (1956a), p. 65. On the opposites identified above, see *ibid.*, pp. 62-69, where Fromm deduces them from a paradoxical logic.

<sup>153</sup> *To Have or to Be?* (1976a), p. 202.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*



institutionalized 'religiosity' is not an attack on the existing religions. It does mean, however, that the Roman Catholic Church, beginning with the Roman bureaucracy, must convert *itself* to the spirit of the gospel.<sup>155</sup> Whether any established religion is a religion in Fromm's humanistic sense is an open question. {116}

With the demand that all heteronomous determinations be negated, it becomes possible to elevate the humanistic religion of the X experience to the status of a universal religion. By definition, the X experience precludes all attempts to link the nature of this experience to ideas and conceptual systems that are necessarily the product of a particular social structure and culture. Because it is grounded in those existential dichotomies that are common to all human beings, and because it limits itself to an experience accessible to everyone, the X experience is universally valid and definitive. It is the experience of the person who realizes his powers of reason and love and in this realization experiences his transcendence toward his perfect form, universal man. In the individual's identity with himself, he experiences his new oneness with universal man: as his own perfect form and as oneness with mankind.

The new identity of being human in a universal sense is the essence of humanistic religion as a universal religion. But it would be a mistake to assume that this universal humanistic religion is merely the result of the critique of religion. The negation of all heteronomous determinations becomes more than a critique of religion when it directs itself to the conceptualizations of the X experience in the historical religions and other objects of the nonproductive response (ideologies, doctrines, world views) to the need for a frame of orientation and an object of worship.

The external determination of man can be overcome only when those artificial needs (i.e., historical needs in contrast to existential ones) that produce the objects of a critique of religion in the first place are themselves overcome. It is useless to dethrone and negate an authoritarian god unless

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., p. 202.

the artificial need for submission to authority is overcome at the same time.

The negation of external determinations identifies all kinds of greed and (irrational) passions as artificial needs to which man reacts with nonproductive character orientations. The critique of religion, as Fromm understands it, is the negation of heteronomous determination; it refers not only to conceptual systems and ideas and their corresponding social structures but also to the character of man. The X experience becomes possible only when, through strenuous effort, man dismantles his nonproductive orientations and makes his productive forces prevail instead of allowing {117} himself to be governed by greed and irrational passions. In the negation of all external determination, man experiences himself as cause and goal of his belief in the universal man within himself.

### On the Path Toward the Humanistic X Experience

Having presented the characteristics of the X experience in humanistic religion and indicated the conditions that make it possible, based on a consistent humanistic approach that negates all external determinations, we come to the following question: What leads to the X experience and what media facilitate this path toward self-redemption?

Fromm's epilogue to his book *You Shall Be as Gods* ends with this sentence: „What could take the place of religion in a world where the concept of God may be dead but in which the experiential reality behind it must live?“<sup>156</sup> It is the question about religious experience and practice, religiosity and spirituality in a nontheistic religion.

To begin with, the humanistic answer to the question concerning the forms of the X experience can be given in the form of a negation of the religious forms in theistic systems. To the degree that theistic religions understand God as transcendence with which man can enter into relations through certain religious practices, such practices are to be

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<sup>156</sup> *You Shall Be as Gods* (1966a), p. 229.



negated because they are the expression of authoritarian external determination. For there is nothing they do, feel or think which is not somehow related to this power. They expect protection from 'him' (God), wish to be taken care of by 'him,' make 'him' also responsible for whatever may be the outcome of their own actions."<sup>157</sup> Such forms of religion are the expression of a submission to a „magic helper," and therefore forms of the X experience that enslave man,<sup>158</sup> for the same law that applies to the authoritarian and revolutionary character applies to these forms of religion: „The intensity of the relatedness to the magic helper is in reverse proportion to the ability to express spontaneously one's own intellectual, emotional and sensuous potentialities."<sup>159</sup>

In identifying humanistic forms of the X experience, one notices that their distinctiveness is defined by the distinctiveness of the {118} object of the experience. If the X experience is characterized by the fact that X stands for the experience of the new oneness--the identity of universal man with all of humanity--and this X can be experienced to the degree to which external or heteronomous determinations are negated and man (re)gains eo ipso his own powers of reason and love, to experience his new identity in mobilizing these powers--if this

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<sup>157</sup> *Escape from Freedom* (1941a), p. 174.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 174f. In contrast to irrational authority, which can be personified in idols, the „magic helper“ is the expression of a milder form of dependence, though the term emphasizes the forms of relations of dependency more strongly. Fromm's distinctions are quite clear, however. The magic helper is to be seen not only in God and other magical or transcendent persons, but also in parents, wife, husband, lover, superior, etc. The emergence of a new magic helper (as when someone „falls in love“) brings about the collapse of the religious forms of relatedness to the magic helper that had been in force up to that moment. The psychology of the magic helper is the psychology of the authoritarian character, and explains both changes in spirituality and spiritual forms and in the mechanisms of falling in love, and of the failure of such love.

<sup>159</sup> *Escape from Freedom* (1941a), p. 176.

is the case, a theoretical distinction can be drawn between (1) forms of experience whose task it is to negate external determinations so that the person may become aware of his own powers or capacities for oneness; and (2) the highest experience of identity itself, which eludes description but which is the goal of the previously mentioned forms of negation and which realizes itself in mysticism.<sup>160</sup>

All forms of experience whose task it is to negate those external and inner factors and influences that veil the immediate experience of the identity of universal man have this in common: they allow man to become aware of his capacities for a new oneness that is, of his reason and his love. This „awareness," which is more than consciousness, thinking, or knowing,<sup>161</sup> has a negating component and, within that, a component of discovery. It is represented by the „radical awareness“ of the small child in Andersen's fairy tale „The Emperor's New Clothes“ that the emperor is not really wearing splendid garments but is naked. What is involved here is the awareness of both external determinations (idols, irrational authorities, etc.) and inner ones (greedy passions). As we become actively aware of our dependence, we experience the negation of external determinations as our self-liberation.

There are a number of exercises to promote consciousness as the experience of one's own faculties through the negation of all external determinations. Among them are the breathing and gymnastic exercises that help increase concentration.<sup>162</sup> There

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<sup>160</sup> See the following section.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. *The Heart of Man* (1964a), pp. 132f.

<sup>162</sup> In conversations with the author and in unpublished manuscripts, Fromm, who did such exercises daily, referred to the publications of Nyanaponika Thera, specifically his *Der einzige Weg* and *Geiststraining durch Achtsamkeit. Die buddhistische Satipatthana-Methode*. See also Fromm's contribution to the *Festschrift* honoring the seventy-five-year-old Nyanaponika Mahathera, „Die Bedeutung des Ehrwürdigen Nyanaponika Mahathera für die westliche Welt“ (1976b).



are also meditation exercises,<sup>163</sup> through which one can become optimally conscious of physical and intellectual processes in order to attain a higher degree of nonattachment (*Abgeschiedenheit* in the German mystic Meister Eckhart), nongreed, and nonillusion--in short, as optimal negation of external determinations and the awareness of one's own powers. In this endeavor, psychoanalytic self-analysis<sup>164</sup> plays a decisive role. Since it is a critical theory, it can serve to combat social rationalizations--that is, it can function as the {119} critique of ideology,<sup>165</sup> --and it can also effectively counter individual rationalizations. Becoming conscious is the experience of man's liberation from himself, insofar as he has become alienated from his nature through idolatry and irrational passions, to himself, insofar as the negation of alienation permits a new identity.

„Becoming conscious“ is a concept of self-redemption and thus the humanistic counterpart of „revelation,“ at least as understood in Christianity. The forms of experience that produce consciousness are the humanistic „means of salvation.“ Their justification is the aid they render man in attaining the experience of a nexy oneness of his life by experiencing within himself the identity between himself and the world. Yet they are not an extraneous aid or dependency, as is the Christian revealed religion, for example.

### The X Experience As the Mysticism of the ONE

<sup>163</sup> Cf. „Die Bedeutung des Ehrwilrdigen Nyaponika Mahathera fur die westliche Welt“ (1976b) and A. A. Häsler, „Das Udenkbare denken and das Mogliche tun“ (1977b), p. 19.

<sup>164</sup> Fromm's reflections on self-analysis have not been published so far. The comments in P. Nischk, *Kursbuch fur die Seele*, are a result of misunderstandings rather than knowledge of the subject matter.

<sup>165</sup> Ideologies are to be understood as social rationalizations. On the meaning of psychoanalysis for „becoming conscious,“ cf. Fromm, „Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism“ (1960a), esp. pp. 121-127.

The experience of oneness eludes adequate description because it involves the negation of all dependence on what is external to oneself and the exclusive experience of identity.<sup>166</sup> When the attempt is made to articulate this experience, concepts that assert a paradoxical simultaneity of opposites are often used to indicate that the dichotomies of human existence are reconciled in the experience of identity.<sup>167</sup> Such an experience of identity in which the contradictions of human existence are sublated in a nexy oneness without resorting to a transcendent agency that creates oneness (a revealed God who brings reconciliation 'to human history, for example) or to some philosophical equivalent (like the identity of thinking and being in Idealism), and where there is therefore no need to transcend a humanistic position--such an experience can be found only in a nontheistic or a humanistically interpreted theistic mysticism. This kind

<sup>166</sup> „Description“ is heteronomous definition in the sense that it must use objective language and therefore cannot avoid the subject-object dichotomy. On this, see the antiphilosophical position of Daisetz T. Suzuki as drawn in H. Rzepkowski, *Das Menschenbild bei D. T. Suzuki*, pp. 28f.

<sup>167</sup> The difficult question of the extent to which paradoxical statements of the simultaneity of opposites are expressions of a paradoxical logic which contrasts with Aristotelian logic cannot be pursued here. But the following forms must be distinguished from a paradoxical logic such as Fromm presents in *The Art of Loving* (1956a), pp. 61-69: (1) the antilogic of the *mondo* or *koan* in Zen Buddhism according to Suzuki, which eliminates logic altogether (cf. Suzuki's essay in *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis* [1960a], pp. 43ff); (2) the paradoxical formulations of theistic mystics. Especially in a nontheistic interpretation, one has the impression that their statements about God can be made „understandable“ only by a paradoxical logic. This objection does not mean that paradoxical logic might not most aptly verbalize mystical experiences of identity. But such logic need not be understood as the antithesis of Aristotelian logic but as going beyond discursive thought, and therefore as a negation of such thought in favor of mystical experience. Cf. W. Johnston, *Der ruhende Punkt*, pp. 100-105.



of mysticism does justice to all that is demanded by the humanist view of the X experience as response to the need for a new oneness of man, for the decisive element in the mystical experience is „not ... that the multiplicity of manifestations collapses into the one ... but that in the one contemplating the act of contemplation is obliterated,<sup>168</sup> and „that the most profound absorption, overcoming all multiplicity, also leads into the absolute oneness of things.”<sup>169</sup> {120}

Mysticism is legitimated by the fact that „man can perceive reality only in contradictions, and can never perceive in *thought* the ultimate reality-unity, the One itself.”<sup>170</sup> For that reason, mysticism overcomes not only the aporias of philosophical speculation of whatever sort<sup>171</sup> but also a concept of God that is theologically explicable: „In mysticism, which is the consequent outcome of monotheism ... the attempt is given up to know God by thought, and it is replaced by the experience of union with God in which there is no more room--and no need--for knowledge *about* God.”<sup>172</sup> This kind of mysticism,

which is understood nontheistically by Fromm, is the optimal realization of the experience of man's oneness with himself, his life, and his world.

The mystic experience of oneness was discovered and developed in the most diverse cultures and religions as *the vision of the ONE*. Fromm interprets the elaboration of the vision of the ONE from his religio-critical perspective. Just as he interprets the history of the concept of God as the history of the negation of God in favor of man and his capacities of reason and love, so the talk about the experience of the ONE must be seen as the verbalization of a nontheistic mysticism of identity.<sup>173</sup>

In the course of the development of mankind, when the individuation of man had reached a certain point, man responded to all his dichotomies by a vision of the ONE. Man arrived at the „vision of the one in opposition to the multiplicity of facts and phenomena outside himself but also in opposition to the multiplicity of drives and tendencies within himself.”<sup>174</sup> The ONE is characterized by the fact that in the purest form of its experience, it reveals itself as devoid of any and all determinations. It is not a thing, neither does it have a name; it is neither quantifiable nor qualifiable. In this unconcealed form where the ONE is no longer understood as something but as a principle,<sup>175</sup> so that it can be experienced and verbalized only as the identity of opposites, it coincides with Nothingness. The

<sup>168</sup> Martin Buber, *Hasidism*, p. 146. This is the reason all mysticisms are open to the reproach of pantheism, though such reproach misses its target.

<sup>169</sup> G. Simmel, *Hauptprobleme der Philosophie*, p. 15. In this book, Simmel discusses two fundamental attempts „to grasp the totality of Being in a more real way. ... One of them is the way of mysticism, the other that of Kant“ (p. 13).

<sup>170</sup> *The Art of Loving* (1956a), p. 65.

<sup>171</sup> Cf. W. Johnston, *Der ruhende Punkt. Zen and christliche Mystik*, pp. 145f: „It is that mysticism in which one descends to the motionless point or the depth of the soul and thereby acquires a kind of knowledge that is more than conceptual and therefore inexpressible, a kind of meta-thought through which one grasps the unity of all things—a unity that reveals itself increasingly as one progressively rids oneself of all concepts, images and essences and remains wholly calm and receptive.“

<sup>172</sup> *The Art of Loving* (1956a), p. 27. This definition of mysticism also reveals Fromm's nontheistic position in contrast to the understanding of mysticism as *cognitio dei experimentalis* in Thomas Aquinas. It is a definition Gershom Scholem paraphrases as an experimen-

tal knowledge of God that is acquired through living experience (cf. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 4).

<sup>173</sup> Since part of what follows comes from hitherto unpublished writings by Fromm, the comments are primarily based on a taped reply Fromm made to a lecture by Alfons Auer. It was given during the symposium celebrating Fromm's seventy-fifth birthday. In what follows, this document will be referred to as „Fromm *contra* Auer.“

<sup>174</sup> Fromm, „Fromm *contra* Auer“ (1975e), p. 5.

<sup>175</sup> Where the ONE can be determined, it becomes an idol: „The ONE is a nameless principle an effigy of which cannot be made. Idols are things man himself creates. They are the work of his hands to which he submits“ (ibid.)



ONE as NOTHINGNESS is a negation not only of all multiplicity but also of any and every phenomenal reality within and outside man.<sup>176</sup> The word NOTHINGNESS does not mean senselessness or nihilism; quite the contrary. Only where world and man are nothing and every form of desire ceases does man experience the oneness with himself and the world as identity. The mystic experience of the ONE is possible only when world and {121} man are seen quite radically as NOTHINGNESS. This vision of the ONE was first elaborated in the religions of the East: in the Upanishads and Zen Buddhism.<sup>177</sup> Both of these forms of Eastern religion will now be considered more closely under this aspect.

In *Indian thought*, we encounter the vision of the ONE primarily in the Upanishads,<sup>178</sup> in exemplary fashion in Yajnavalkya's teaching about Atman: „This self [Atman] is not this and not that. It is

not palpable for it cannot be destroyed; it cannot hold anything together for nothing sticks to it; it is not tied down, it does not quiver, it suffers no harm.“<sup>179</sup> This great unborn self that is free of aging and death, free of fear and immortal, is Brahman.<sup>180</sup> Brahman as encompassing divine power is Atman, for „The one being [is] experienced within and beyond the many as self [Atman] or divine power [Brahman].“<sup>181</sup> „The Brahman is this Atman: he is knowledge, voice, breath, eye, ear, ether, winds, heat, water, earth, wrath, non-wrath, joy, non-joy, right, non-right, he is everything.“<sup>182</sup> And because the self is everything in the ONE and the ONE is in everything, someone who „knows“ realizes that he is at one with the Atman: „He sees everyone as the self, everyone becomes the self for him, he becomes the self for everyone.“<sup>183</sup>

The self is the principle of the ONE in contrast to all difference and multiplicity because it needs nothing, but exists wholly in and through itself. In the Upanishad from which the above quotations come, namely a conversation between Yajnavalkya and King Janaka, Yajnavalkya is asked what serves man as light. The first answer is, the sun. But when the sun has set, what serves as light? The answer is, the moon. But when the moon also has set, it is fire and finally the voice that serve as the light by which man sits, walks about, works and returns home. „‘But when the sun has set, when the moon has set, when the fire has gone out and the voice fallen silent, what then serves man as light?’ ‘The Self, great king, serves man as light,’ he said, ‘for it is by the

<sup>176</sup> Within philosophical thought also, the vision of the ONE on the basis of the multiplicity of phenomena has found a variety of expressions. As, in mysticism, the experience of the ONE is grasped as the experience of NOTHINGNESS, so does ontology grasp being as the abstraction and negation of every existent. Cf. J. Moller, *Glauben und Denken im Widerspruch?*; and *Die Chance des Menschen-Gott genannt*, especially the historical survey of the problem of God, pp. 11-17.

<sup>177</sup> It is doubtful that one can go along with Fromm and simply speak of the „religions of the East“ (as in *The Art of Loving* [1956a], p. 67). For here also, we are dealing with certain trends both within and outside of the major religions that are viewed as heretical, and all of which are rightly called mysticism.

<sup>178</sup> The Upanishads are part of the Vedas, the oldest religious writings of the Hindus in Sanskrit, „that pass on deeper insights on the nature of sacrifice but especially on God, world and soul which are destined only for the initiates“ (H. von Glasenapp, „Preface“ p. 6). H. Zimmer gives a good survey, including bibliographical information, in *Philosophie und Religion Indiens*; the German paperback contains a detailed general index and an extensive bibliography. P. Deussen provides a comprehensive orientation in *Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Religionen, Vol. I*, sections 1 and 2.

<sup>179</sup> *Brihad-Aranyaka Upanishad*, quoted from H. Zimmer, *Philosophie und Religion Indiens*, p. 326. The literal meaning of „Atman“ is breath, wind. Cf. the theological concept „spirit“ in Christianity.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, quoted from A. Hillebrandt, *Upanishaden*, p. 88.

<sup>181</sup> H. Zimmer, *Philosophie und Religion Indiens*, p. 301. On the identification of Atman and Brahman, cf. H. Oldenberg, *Die Lehre der Upanishaden und die Anfänge des Buddhismus*, pp. 47ff.

<sup>182</sup> *Brihad-Aranyaka-Upanishad* (IV,4), quoted from A. Hillebrandt, *Upanishaden*, p. 84.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.



light of the self that he sits, walks about, works and returns home.”<sup>184</sup> The negation of all external determinations takes man wholly back to himself, to the experience of oneness with himself which proves simultaneously to be the transcendence toward the principle of the ONE that encompasses the all.

In the Upanishads, and especially in the case of Yajnavalkya, the ONE is clearly understood as the principle of negation so that the {122} self (atman) is the ‘it is not thus’ above which ‘nothing higher’ exists.<sup>185</sup> In Buddhism also, there is a vision of the ONE that recognizes the ONE as a NOTHING. The Buddha, although a son of India, „attained the realm where the heat of the sun, rain, social or other distinctions between men, reincarnation, suffering, selfinflicted ascetic torment, things, philosophy and theoretical oneness do not exist, where even every beginning, every end, and every existent vanish. He has attained genuine Nirvana and the truth that is beyond opposites.”<sup>186</sup> Yet the Buddha has no concern with philosophy or speculation. Rather, he inquires of human existence why it creates suffering, and he understands that „man’s greed leaves’ him perpetually unsatisfied and deprives his life of meaning,” and that „this suffering can only be healed if greed is renounced.”<sup>187</sup>

This approach, which asks questions concerning man’s existence and its questionableness and then assigns the answers to the questions to man himself, shows, according to Fromm, Buddhism’s radical humanistic view of man.<sup>188</sup> Such a statement

touches on the difficult question of the extent to which the humanistic approach is peculiar to Buddhism or is merely the expression of a certain method called Zen, which has general validity independently of the religious and dogmatic views of Buddhism and can claim to be the only method to pass on Buddha’s concern.<sup>189</sup> Fromm, who for many years was a friend of Daisetz T. Suzuki, the mediator of Zen in the West, sees the life and teaching of Buddha as humanistic to the highest degree.<sup>190</sup>

For Suzuki, Zen is „the quintessence and the spirit of Buddhism“ and „the teaching of the heart of Buddha.”<sup>191</sup> Zen is „not the destruction of the mind’s activities but their fusion into the one, single power of concentrated vision.”<sup>192</sup> „The final aim of Zen is the experience of enlightenment, called Satori.”<sup>193</sup> The experience of Satori means that one becomes conscious of a state of „perfect self-identity where all conceptual contradictions are effaced.”<sup>194</sup> Satori is thus never knowledge in the usual sense of the term, for „to know means to set the object of knowledge against the knower. ... but to know the thing really in the true sense of the term means to become the thing itself, to be identified with it in its totality, inwardly as well as outwardly.”<sup>195</sup> Zen teaches a way that is opposed to the logical and phi-

a „religion of reason“ which makes Buddhism appear as a science (cf. the title of another work by Georg Grimm, *Die Wissenschaft des Buddhismus*). „For the first time, he [Fromm] saw a spiritual system, a way of life, based on pure rationality and without any irrational mystification or appeal to revelation or authority“ (B. Landis and E. Tauber, „Erich Fromm: Some Biographical Notes,” p. xii).

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>185</sup> Cf. H. Oldenberg, *Die Lehre der Upanishaden*, p. 55, and the discussion on the interpretation of this statement in P. Deussen, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Religionen*, Vol. I, section 2, pp. 136f.

<sup>186</sup> S. Ohasama, *Zen*, pp. 39f.

<sup>187</sup> „Fromm *contra* Auer,” (1975e), p. 3.

<sup>188</sup> There is thus a reason why Fromm’s first interest in Buddhism should have coincided with his turning away from orthodox Judaism. His reading of G. Grimm’s *Die Lehre des Buddha* played a decisive role in this event, for in this book, as in Hermann Cohen’s writings on the philosophy of religion, Fromm found

<sup>189</sup> For some definitions of the relationships between Zen Buddhism and Buddha, see D. T. Suzuki, *Die grosse Befreiung*, pp. 41-45; but also W. Johnston, *Der ruhende Punkt*, pp. 29-31; and S. Ohasama, *Zen*, pp. 5-7.

<sup>190</sup> The meaning Zen Buddhism has for an understanding of Buddha’s teaching is not affected by this.

<sup>191</sup> Suzuki, *Die grosse Befreiung*, p. 43.

<sup>192</sup> S. Ohasama, *Zen*, p. 6.

<sup>193</sup> „Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism“ (1960a), p. 115.

<sup>194</sup> Suzuki, *Living by Zen*, p. 101.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., p. 118-119.



losophical {123} method that prevails in the West. To attain a new oneness and to respond to our existential dichotomies, we have to reach a point that lies this side of all division--experiences that are not yet conditioned by logic, space, and time. This point „when our unconscious consciousness ... comes to itself, is awakened to itself“<sup>196</sup> can only be reached if we withdraw into the inner self. „Satori may be defined as an intuitive looking into the nature of things in contradistinction to the analytical or logical understanding of it.“<sup>197</sup>

„The fundamental object of Zen Buddhism is the penetration into the true nature of one's own mind or one's own soul.“<sup>198</sup> To establish contact with the innermost powers of his nature, man must renounce all that is external and superfluous. „That is the reason Zen rejects everything that even remotely resembles an external authority. Zen has unconditional confidence in man's innermost nature. All authority in Zen comes from within.“<sup>199</sup> Man's innermost being, his true nature, which only becomes the Satori experience when all intellectual understanding is transcended, is man's Buddha nature. Satori is the awakening of the Buddha nature in man. It means a „being at one with nature and the cosmos,“<sup>200</sup> which is attained when enlightened man wholly renounces all external authorities and also logical and spatiotemporal distinctions so that the contemplating subject and the object of its contemplation are identical. Suzuki calls this identity

„self-identity,“ for in contrast to identity, „there is just one object or subject, one only, and this one identifies itself by going out of itself. ... Self-identity is the logic of pure experience or of `Emptiness.' In self-identity, there are no contradictions whatever.“<sup>201</sup>

It is only through the experience of enlightenment that man experiences Prajna--unconscious consciousness. It is only through that enlightenment that he can wholly grasp reality and no longer limit himself to exploring the surrounding world.<sup>202</sup> „Our spiritual yearnings are never completely satisfied unless this Prajna or unconscious knowledge is awakened, whereby the whole field of consciousness is exposed, inside and outside, to our full view. Reality has now nothing to hide from us.“<sup>203</sup> As the expression of an essentially different grasp of reality by the enlightened individual, Prajna can be called a special kind of intuition, „an immediately perceptible experience ... that immediately grasps the totality {124} and individuality of all things.“<sup>204</sup> The enlightened one „thinks like the rain that falls from the sky; he thinks like the waves in the ocean, he thinks like the stars that shine in the nocturnal sky; like the green leaves that sprout when the spring wind is mild. In fact, he is himself the rain, the sea, the stars, the green.“<sup>205</sup>

The vision of the ONE as articulated in the self-identity of Satori is mystical if mysticism is un-

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>197</sup> Suzuki, *Die grosse Befreiung*, p. 123. Suzuki emphasizes time and again that Satori is not a „higher unity in which two contradictory terms are synthesized“ (*Living by Zen*, p. 87). That is why paradoxical statements in Zen differ from paradoxical-sounding statements in dialectical thought.

<sup>198</sup> Suzuki, *Die grosse Befreiung*, p. 55.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., p. 60. If they propose to convey the direct intuitive grasp, common sense and reason are part of such external authority. Zen as mysticism wishes to be hampered by nothing in its direct intercourse with itself (ibid., p. 60).

<sup>200</sup> Cf. H. Rzepkowski, *Das Menschenbild bei D. T. Suzuki*, p. 43, and the sources listed there.

<sup>201</sup> D. T. Suzuki, *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*, p. 30.

<sup>202</sup> „The bifurcation of reality is the work of the intellect; indeed it is the way in which we try to understand it in order to make use of it in our practical life. ... The bifurcation helps us to handle reality, to make it work for our physical and intellectual needs, but in truth it never appeals to our inmost needs. For the latter purpose reality must be taken hold of as we immediately experience it“ (Suzuki, *Living by Zen*, p. 55). In line with this distinction, it is possible to differentiate consistently between two kinds of insight, knowledge, experience, unity, vision, consciousness, etc., in Zen.

<sup>203</sup> Suzuki, *Living by Zen*, pp. 80-81.

<sup>204</sup> Suzuki, preface to Eugen Herrigel, *Zen in the Art of Archery*, p. 8.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p. 9; cf. *Die grosse Befreiung*, pp. 123ff.



derstood as the experience of oneness and of the ONE beyond, and in opposition to, philosophical speculation and logic.<sup>206</sup> At the same time, Zen is a nontheistic vision of the ONE because Zen has no interest in a dogmatic doctrine or a God to be worshipped or the logical question concerning the existence or nonexistence of God.<sup>207</sup> It has, to be sure, an affinity with Western humanism, but only those forms of humanism that are based on mystical experience.<sup>208</sup> More often than not, Western mysticism is strongly theistic, while Zen, at most, uses theistic terminology to make plain its humanistic position.<sup>209</sup> The nontheistic „confession“ of Zen proposes to establish a humanism: „If it is maintained that Zen has no philosophy, that it rejects or denies the authority of any teacher, that it sweeps aside all so-called holy scriptures as if they were refuse, we must not forget that with this act of negation, Zen also sets up something extremely positive

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<sup>206</sup> Die grosse Befreiung, pp. 47ff.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., pp. 52-54. Westerners who reproach Zen with being nihilistic and pantheistic usually do not take into account the distinctive quality of the mystical experience. On this, see Suzuki's answers in *Die grosse Befreiung*, pp. 66ff, 109f; and Suzuki, *Mysticism: Christian and Buddhist*, pp. 48-51; see also H. Rzepkowski, *Das Menschenbild bei D. T. Suzuki*, pp. 47-50.

<sup>208</sup> „When the Buddha was born, he is said to have extended one hand toward heaven, the other toward earth, and to have exclaimed: 'Beyond the heavens and beneath the heavens, I am the only Venerable One' „ (Suzuki, *Die grosse Befreiung*, p. 54). On the question of grounding humanism in the mystical experience of the ONE, see pp. 274-278.

<sup>209</sup> Suzuki writes similarly: „Satori is God's coming to self-consciousness in man-the consciousness all the time underlining human consciousness, which may be called super-consciousness.“ (*Living by Zen*, p. 87) Cf. Suzuki, *Die grosse Befreiung*, p. 135: „Zen does not require the help of a Creator; when it grasps the basis for life's being lived as it is lived, it is satisfied. ... Whoever has God excludes that which is Not-God. This means self-limitation. Zen needs absolute freedom, even from God.“

and eternally valid.“<sup>210</sup>

Fromm believed that the vision of the ONE in the theistic Western religions is usually „distorted by the necessity to express this ONE in the categories of the society in question.“<sup>211</sup> For example, the vision of the ONE articulates itself in the concept of God as a King of kings because, vis-à-vis the many gods, this gives relief to the principle of the ONE. But according to Fromm, such a monotheism has an inherent momentum that propels it toward a mysticism in which the vision of the ONE is increasingly purified of all socially and historically conditioned accidents until the concept of the ONE as a NOTHING appears in all its clarity.

It is again in the history of religion that Fromm sees a validation of his humanistic approach: „I believe that the history of religion can be seen ... as the attempt to cleanse the concept of the ONE more and more of its accidental, historically conditioned residues.“<sup>212</sup> The concept „God“ is such a residue, a customary concept in the theistic religions of the West that symbolizes the necessity that man „see the ONE, that he concentrate on the ONE and {125} thus give unity to his life-but also to his relations to his fellows.“<sup>213</sup>

Fromm finds confirmation of his theory in a number of Western mystics whose understanding of

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<sup>210</sup> Suzuki, *Die grosse Befreiung*, p. 50, quoted from H. Rzepkowski, *Das Menschenbild bei D. T. Suzuki*, p. 48. The encompassing concept of negation that makes the Zen monk renounce all cognitive reason over a period of years because Satori can be experienced only when man denies himself as a creature of reason means that there are hardly any individuals who attain Satori, even in Japan. Fromm therefore believed that Zen Buddhism had few chances of becoming widely effective. There is, an addition, a significantly different assessment of the function of reason and love in Zen. Although Fromm makes very positive statements about Zen, he becomes skeptical when the question concerning the role reason and love play in self-redemption is raised.

<sup>211</sup> „Fromm *contra* Auer“ (1975e), p. 5.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.



the ONE is similar in its indeterminacy to the Eastern forms of vision of the ONE: Plotinus' philosophy of the „hen,“ the Sufism of Rumi, the vision of the ONE in the concept of the godhead in Eckhart, and the „cloud of unknowing.“ What is common to all these forms of mysticism,<sup>214</sup> and what distinguishes them from the theistic mystic trends in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, is their total negation of the concept „God.“ These forms of mysticism do not seek a fusion with a transcendent God; for the sake of the totality of the experience, they understand the ONE as NOTHING. This NOTHING is not the opposite of being. It does not affirm anything because it wishes to be the negation of a negation but is a NOTHING beyond nonbeing and being. With this NOTHING, „every possibility of knowing the absolute by logical methods is denied. One thus looks into 'nothingness' but in this void the perfect Absolute is seized by a direct mystical intuition.“<sup>215</sup>

The vision of the ONE as a NOTHING exists in Buddhism, and through the reception and devel-

<sup>214</sup> Others that could be mentioned here are not as unambiguous, according to Fromm. Examples would be gnostic trends, the Pseudo-Dionysius, and some representatives of a prominent *theologia negativa* associated with the Kabbala.

<sup>215</sup> M. Nambara, *Die Idee des absoluten Nichts in der deutschen Mystik und ihre Entsprechungen im Buddhismus*, p. 276. This concept of the ONE as NOTHINGNESS goes beyond what the Christian *theologia negativa* means. Since following Christ in word and deed is always part of „Christian“ *theologia negativa*, *theologia negativa* in the Christian sense has largely a corrective function; it does not serve the self-dissolution of theology. For Fromm, however, a nontheistic mysticism is the quintessence of a *theologia negativa* (cf. *The Art of Loving* [1956a], p. 60). But Minoru Nambara, *Die Idee des absoluten Nichts in der deutschen Mystik und ihre Entsprechungen im Buddhismus*, p. 276, points out that it is precisely Meister Eckhart who understands the Neoplatonic method of the *via negationis* in a way that leads to a NOTHING that corresponds to the Buddhist NOTHING-which means that Fromm would assent to Eckhart's understanding of this matter.

opment of Neoplatonic ideas, it seems to have found acceptance among a number of Western mystics.<sup>216</sup> Since in these forms of mysticism „Nothing as the other does not confront being but we see the dissolution of all particularity in the general, what is a fundamental distinction in Christian thought, the difference between creator and creature, and the basic presupposition of a personalistic God, are done away with.“<sup>217</sup> The vision of the ONE is realized not as a mystic fusion with a transcendent being but as self-identity in NOTHINGNESS.

Fromm bases his humanistic understanding of theistic mysticism as the poetic expression of what is fundamentally a nontheistic experience of the ONE primarily on Meister Eckhart and his distinction between „god“ and „godhead.“ The preceding reflections suggest that the West also developed a nontheistic vision of the ONE, which in Eckhart converges, especially linguistically, with a tradition of theistic mysticism. But this convergence does not necessarily mean that the „concept of the ONE is obscured“ in a theistic mysticism,<sup>218</sup> and that therefore theistic mysticism is a historically and socially conditioned impure form of the {126} always valid nontheistic vision of the ONE as NOTHINGNESS--and that this impure form must be overcome. Such an argument makes sense only if theistic mysticism is understood as the negation of a humanistic vision of the ONE, a negation that must be overcome.

If the religio-critical component in the underestimation of theistic mysticism is seen as a peculiarity of the humanistic approach, two types of the experience of the ONE can nevertheless be distinguished. Both may be called mysticism because they seek identity only in the experience of oneness and through the negation of all theological and philosophical speculation.

One type of mysticism can be characterized as theistic and/ or humanistic in the sense that it seeks identity in oneness with God and/ or with human-

<sup>216</sup> Cf. Nambara, *Die Idee des absoluten Nichts*, p. 276.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> „Fromm *contra* Auer“ (1975e), p. 6.



ity. This is accomplished when all statements and intellectual constructs about God are recognized to be negations of the experiential reality „God“ and are rejected for that reason. This type of mysticism is the consequence of a *theologia negativa* that, in becoming contentless, renounces all speculative philosophical and theological knowledge of God so that it may attain to a deeper understanding of God and/or man. Such experience of oneness as union obeys a dialectic: Theology as rational talk about God is understood as a negation of God's reality. This negation must, in turn, be negated in order to experience in the experience of oneness with God and/or *humanitas* what is positive in the experience of oneness with oneself, one's life, and one's fellow man. The mystic experience of the ONE must be called theistic and humanistic and is tied to union with God, if theism is not seen as a bar to the plenitude of humanness but rather as the condition of its possibility. It is to be called wholly humanistic (and nontheistic because of the religio-critical basis of humanism) when the negation of the reality of God becomes the condition for the possibility of the mystic experience of the ONE.

The other type of mysticism is called *nontheistic* because it wishes to experience its identity in the total negation of every possible nonidentity. It is only in total negation that man becomes free. In this type of mysticism, therefore, he experiences his self-identity beyond all consciousness, all thought, all reason, all being and nonbeing. Only NOTHINGNESS, which eludes all positive determination, is subject to no spatio-temporal specification, and {127} is NOTHING as such, only this Nirvana makes possible the experience of a self-identity that overcomes all the barriers reason and its limitations and the experience of the world create, and that is both salvation of self and cosmic salvation. Man experiences himself as no longer separate or distinct from anything, as no longer drawn to anything. Greed is no more, and the passions that produce suffering are extinguished. Self-identity is transcendence within this world, without needs, without recourse to any authority whatever, and also without the need to act on behalf of others because „none of us

can save anybody else's soul. One can only save oneself.”<sup>219</sup>

Both types of mysticism have many formal characteristics in common. The most important is the demand of negation. But there are also common substantive elements such as the renunciation of externalities and desires and the negation of intellectual effort in favor of experience. Still, we have here two fundamentally different kinds of mystic experience of the ONE.

Although Fromm's humanistic interpretation of the mystical experience of the ONE was markedly influenced by his encounter with Buddhism, especially with Suzuki's Zen Buddhism, his understanding of the vision of the ONE really belongs to the first type, which is rooted in the Judaeo-Christian Western tradition. This is true especially because Eastern mysticism is fundamentally tragic and tends to express itself in a resigned view of reality that runs counter to the more optimistic tenor of Western humanism. Reason and love are the potentialities of man that make possible a humanistic view of reality, even when that reality is understood as a dialectical process of negation. Fromm's attempt to ground humanism in Zen Buddhism is not persuasive, for where Zen Buddhism assumes the transcendence of negation toward a NOTHING--where negation, in other words, is no longer dialectically sublated because it is necessary to dispense even with dialectics as a form of logic--Fromm no longer follows the Zen approach but interprets this negation dialectically.<sup>220</sup> Reason and love have no place in a process that breaks through all the barriers of reason and its limitations, and transcends relatedness and its specificity.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (1950a), p. 125.

<sup>220</sup> This inconsistency forms the background for the curious identification of paradoxical logic and dialectic (in Marx's and Hegel's meaning of the term), and the contrast between it and Aristotelian logic as developed in *The Art of Loving* (1956a), p. 62.

<sup>221</sup> In the context of this problem, J. H. Schaar's critique that the striving for such experience entails the destruction of the reason that redeems man must be taken seriously. (Schaar, *Escape from Authority*, pp.



Fromm is typically a dialectical thinker and it is on dialectics that he founds his humanism. The nontheistic vision of the ONE as elaborated in Zen Buddhism fulfills this purpose to only a very {128} limited extent because Zen's Eastern mysticism knows no dialectical concept of negation. When

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314-316).

Fromm says his humanism is based on a nontheistic vision of the ONE, he is really expressing his tie to the Western mystical tradition that sees in the process of negation of the mystic experience an element that is critical of theology and religion.<sup>222</sup> {129}

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<sup>222</sup> This is developed on pp. 274-293.

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