

• ERICH FROMM •

On Being Human

Foreword by

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present system but also the physical destruction of the larger part of mankind, if not of all life.)

It appears to me that the situation in which we find ourselves makes the study of the disintegration of systems, and particularly of social systems, not only one of the highest theoretical interest, but also one of vital necessity, if we are to survive. Never has human capacity for understanding of the critical and analytical thought been more necessary than today for the survival of the human race.

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The Search for a Humanistic Alternative

*During the 1968 American presidential primary elections, the sixty-eight-year-old Fromm enthusiastically supported Eugene McCarthy, a candidate of the Democratic Party. (See also Fromm's newspaper advertisement "Why I Am for McCarthy" [E. Fromm, *Ethik und Politik*, pp. 256–60] and the election speech for Eugene McCarthy in Part II of the present volume.) Fromm saw in McCarthy the personification of humanism, a bearer of hope for a fundamental change in the history of humanity. Fromm himself gave many election speeches and traveled for months. In addition, he wrote an entire string of so-called memos, notes that he made available to McCarthy for his election campaign speeches and that McCarthy*

*adopted—more or less unchanged—for these. The following election campaign speech was such a “memo,” which Fromm wrote on March 16, 1968, one week before his sixty-eighth birthday. Thematically, it takes up the burning questions that Fromm discusses more thoroughly somewhat later in his book *The Revolution of Hope* (1968). Particularly the concluding section of the speech shows how taken Fromm was with the mobilization of an alternative humanistic “movement,” for which he at that time believed there was a broad basis in the American population. The shock caused by the election of the Republican, Nixon, might have to do with Fromm’s not having, later, made himself a dynamo of such an alternative movement. In any case, it is certain that a severe heart attack suffered on December 7, 1966, which means before the course of the presidential candidates’ campaign, made such an involvement impossible.*

Where Are We Moving to?

The dangers threatening the world and the United States with nuclear war, with a widening gap between poor and rich nations, by the decay of American cities, and by failure to change the situation of the “underdeveloped” segments of the American population are well known. It is recognized, furthermore, that in spite of this knowledge there is no plan, no effective action, to change the course that, if it is permitted to follow its own momentum, may lead to the collapse of civilization, or possibly to the total destruction of man.

Another fact is gaining recognition. I refer to the new social organization that is emerging in the most highly industrialized countries, especially the United States. This is the totally bureaucratized industrialism, that machine of which machines *and* men are parts, and which Lewis Mumford has called the “megamachine” (1967). The picture of today’s society has been drawn by Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World* (1946) in novelistic fashion, by Mumford in a rich, penetrating cultural and social

analysis, and, recently, although much more superficially, by Zbigniew Brzezinski (1968), who calls it the "technotronic society"; as well as dazzlingly but again only superficially by Herman Kahn in his recent *The Year 2000* (1967). In the new society of the second industrial revolution, described by these writers, the individual disappears. He becomes completely alienated. He is programmed by the principles of maximum production, maximum consumption, and minimal friction. He attempts to relieve his boredom by all kinds of consumption, including drugs and sex. This, and possibilities of neurologically and physiologically produced changes in his feelings, in addition to the manipulation of his thought processes by suggestive methods, will be used in the attempt to provide man's smooth functioning as a part of the megamachine.

This new society toward which we are moving constitutes a change in human existence in comparison to which the change from medieval to modern society is pale, and revolutionary changes like those resulting from the French and Russian revolutions appear like insignificant ripples of history.

What many of those who have accepted this development as unavoidable or as essentially beneficial do not see is the fact that man is not made to be a passive, unalive "thing," and that the state of chronic low-grade schizophrenia (separation of thought from effect) and depression that we see in their beginnings already now will either lead to outbursts of insane violence or to the dying out of such society because of lack of vitality.

What are the alternatives between which we can choose? The one still accepted by the majority—including men of goodwill and intelligence—is to let things go their way and to hope for the best. This alternative may avoid sleepless nights at present, but it will not change the course of the events that are moving toward a catastrophic development.

The second alternative is the one that might be called the "Maoist alternative" (although one cannot be sure whether

those who believe themselves to be Maoists truly represent the thoughts and intentions of the Chinese leaders). This alternative proceeds from the premise that the system is moving toward catastrophe, and that no reform of any kind can change this course. The only chance for avoiding the catastrophe is a change of the system itself, and this change can occur only through revolution on an international scale, meaning that when all the underdeveloped countries turn against the industrial countries, and particularly their leader—the United States—they will be able to overthrow the system, just as the Chinese peasants overthrew their rulers in the cities.

That there is much logic and boldness in this second point of view cannot be denied. Yet it is one of despair, mixed with a good deal of romanticism, phraseology, and adventurism. A general attack against the United States would end in the establishment of fascism within this nation and probably in all other industrialized countries, as well as in the most ruthless dictatorships in the rest of the world. Should the Establishment of the United States see itself in serious danger, it would be forced into risking nuclear war, unless the Chinese themselves were to unleash such a war. But those advocating such a program forget that American society is not yet disintegrating, that many Americans, young and old, are not willing to be led on the path of destruction or of fascism. Furthermore, there exists nothing that could be called a “revolutionary” situation in the United States except in the romantic fantasies of a small number of people, and hence the application of revolutionary means in a non-revolutionary situation is, indeed, phraseology and adventurism.

Is there a third alternative? I believe there is. This possibility, slim as it is, may be offering itself for the last time at the present moment. It is an alternative that is real only as long as American society has not lost the basic elements of a democratic society, and as long as there are a considerable number of people who

have not yet been emotionally emasculated, who have not yet become robots and organization-men.

The first question to be studied and discussed, if one speaks of a third alternative, is: How large a segment is the group, in America—among both young and old—who still have kept enough of the human substance, of the humanist and also the specifically American tradition, to be appealed to intellectually and emotionally? The question is: Are there a considerable number of Americans, ranging from conservatives to radicals, who can be “moved”—moved, in the double sense of the word: “touched” in their feelings and impelled to action? I do not claim to know the answer to this question of how large this segment of “movable” Americans is, and I do not think that anyone has the answer. From my own observation, however, I believe that there is a very good chance that this segment of America is considerable. It should also be noted that what matters here is not whether the segment has a clear awareness of the dangers and of alternatives. What matters is that they sense the truth and can be made aware of what they only sense dimly. The reason why awareness of the danger of the megamachine society could likely mobilize conservatives *and* radicals lies in the fact that the threat is so profound that it touches the vital interests of all those who are not yet completely alienated, and hence who can be alarmed by the threat.

The Conditions for a Humanist-Activist Alternative

The first condition is that people become *aware*, and that is something different from simply agreeing with the ideas they hear. To be aware means to wake up to something that one has felt or sensed without thinking it, and yet that one feels one has always known. It is a process that has a vitalizing and energizing effect because it is an active inner process and not the passive process of listening, agreeing, or contradicting.

Aside from the necessity of becoming aware, the awareness must refer to the system as a whole, and not to isolated and fractionated features. It is not enough to be aware that the war in Vietnam is senseless, dangerous and immoral; that Negro violence is a necessary outcome of the misery of black ghetto life; that more consumption, the use of more gadgets, does not increase happiness but only anaesthetizes the boredom. It is necessary to become aware that all these features are parts of a system that produces, inevitably, all these symptoms; to be aware that nothing is achieved if one fights isolated symptoms, but that one must change the system in which they are rooted.

That means becoming aware of the nature of an ever more totally bureaucratized industrial system guided by the goals of power, prestige, and pleasure, programmed by the principles of maximal production and minimal friction. It is necessary to become aware that this system as a whole dehumanizes man, and that man is no longer as he was in the nineteenth century—the ruler of his machines—but is ruled by them, the worker as well as the manager. Eventually, people must become aware that this system functions only with their consent and help, and that if they want to change it, it can be changed as long as democratic processes exist.

But it is not enough for people to become aware of the system. They must see *alternatives*. Indeed, one of the main obstacles to rational and adequate actions lies in the fact that people either see no alternatives to the status quo or they are presented with false and demagogic alternatives only in order to prove to them all the better that there are no real alternatives. One of these deceptive alternatives is the suggestion of returning to the pre-industrial age or of accepting the society of the megamachine. Another suggestion, in the political field, is that of allowing the collapse of the United States according to the domino theory or of pursuing the Vietnam War until the destruction of all Vietnam is achieved (and America has suffered severe material and moral losses).

Another deceptive alternative is that between the expropriation of all property or accepting the totalitarian, managerial society. Still another is that between theistic religion (Christianity) or soulless, idolatric materialism. The most fundamental of the erroneous alternatives is perhaps that between so-called "realism"—understood as automation uncontrolled by decisions based on human values—and utopianism, understood as unreal and unreliable goals, merely because they have not yet been realized.

The important task is to awaken people to the fact that there are true alternatives, that is to say, real possibilities that are neither the old nor its fictitious opposite. The real alternative in the field of social organization is that of a humanist industrialism: measures such as decentralization, self-management, individual responsible activity in all fields. This means not *expropriation* of property, but *control* of its administration guided by the principles of the optimum value for man's development. Legislation and constitutional amendments will probably suffice, but even constitutional changes could be part of the democratic process. (Cf. the Food and Drug Laws, the anti-monopoly laws, and many other interventions of the state in the field of "individual initiative.")

In the psycho-spiritual field there is the new alternative of a frame of reference that would be common to the theistic and the non-theistic person. In this frame of reference the goal of life is the fullest development of human powers, specifically those of reason and of love, including the transcending of the narrowness of one's ego and the development of the capacity to give oneself as well as a full affirmation of life and all that is alive as against the worship of the mechanical and dead. Eventually, the real alternative to realism and "utopia" results from the syndrome thought—knowledge—imagination—hope, which enables man to see the real possibilities, the seeds of which already exist in the present. If any single element of this syndrome is missing, no new alternatives are seen. The real alterna-

tive suggested here is that of radical changes brought about by using the democratic process and made possible by "moving" a large segment of the American people to act who prefer radical changes over today's physical and mental death.

The critique of the system toward which we are moving and the vision of new alternatives have been given in broad terms by quite a number of people who have occupied themselves with this problem. But what we know is not enough. Especially as far as the alternatives are concerned, a great number of studies and experiments are necessary in order to transform broad ideas into specific suggestions. This holds true for the questions of decentralization, of self-management, of the nature of rational versus irrational human needs, of incentives for work, of the problem of activity versus passivity, of a radical humanist philosophy, and many more problems. Among them, one of the foremost will be to decide whether the use of electronic computers, cybernation, automation, etc., needs to be curbed or modified so that man may regain his control over machines.

Once people begin to become aware of the fundamental problems, and to raise questions, they would challenge—and probably in many cases successfully—the best brains and the most devoted men and women in the various fields of the social and natural sciences, as well as in medicine, architecture, and city planning, to study the possibilities of humanistic alternative systems in a detailed and concrete form that would be in contrast with the alienated and mechanistic alternatives developed by Herman Kahn and others. The essential difference from the work of "think tanks" would be the premise that man is a central category in all planning and predictions. What characterizes Kahn's and other similar works is precisely that they deal with technical possibilities that are more or less predictable, but not with man as he is affected by these technical and social changes, and not with the changes in man that affect society. They ignore the value judgments man has to make in deciding whether he prefers maximal consumption and thus maximal alienation, or

a lesser degree of consumption, that is, consumption as a means for a humanly richer life kept within dimensions that fit human reality. The alienated, quasi-schizophrenic style that has become the fashion with many social scientists necessarily means the elimination of man as a feeling, live, suffering, thinking human being in social analysis.

The Necessity for an Alternative Movement

But even if a considerable segment of the American people were "moved," even if this led to many studies provoked by a new interest in alternatives, this in itself would not be enough. It is a fact that even the best ideas and visions and programs do not in themselves have a lasting impact on man unless he is given a chance to act, to participate, and to share ideas and aims with others. If men are truly moved they will form the nucleus of a "movement" and this movement must permit them, in varying degrees, to cooperate in certain actions, to share feelings, ideas, and hopes, to make sacrifices, and to have to some extent common symbols or even rituals. An idea must be expressed in the flesh of group-feeling and -action in order to become effective. It can be demonstrated that ideas that have become influential were spread by small groups of enthusiastic adherents who impressed others by their enthusiasm and their way of living, by their ideas, and by the fact that the spirit of the idea found expression in the very way the groups constituted themselves and in the forms in which they functioned. (The Essenes, the early Christians, the monastic groups, the Society of Jesus, the Society of Friends, the Freemasons, and the early socialist and anarchist groups, are some examples of these.)

It is especially important for the intellectual to see that there is a need for shared action and feeling, which is greater in the young and in those who do not make intellectual or artistic pursuits their main occupation. Intellectuals are often so saturated with the problems they are working on that they feel little

need for group life, and have not enough understanding for the great need of those who are seeking to find leadership and comradeship for meaningful action. The non-intellectuals' characteristic response to ideas is "that is all very good and true, but what can *I* do about it?" The intellectual knows what *he* can do: He thinks some more, writes another book, and perhaps lectures. But after all this is said and done, the student or the older person who does not participate actively in the intellectual process feels, and is, left alone. His question "What can *I* do about it?" really has a double meaning. One is "How can we change the system?" and the other is "What have you to suggest that *I* can *do* today?"

It is true that a small percentage of activist youth have found ways and means to "do something about it." Their action has consisted mainly in organizing and participating in protests, demonstrations, sit-ins, acts of civil disobedience, or active participation in the racist, feminist, or other struggles. Most of these activities are necessary and of great importance, but they are self-limiting because by their very nature of being mere protest they fail to attract sufficiently large numbers of people or to "move" that large sector of the American population that needs to be moved if there is to be a radical change.

I submit that people, young and old, who seriously believe in the need for an alternative should organize themselves in groups. The value of such groups is, in my opinion, splendidly demonstrated by Lewis Mumford's analysis of the historical function of small groups. He concludes, in *The Myth of the Machine* (1967): "Small seemingly helpless organizations that have an inner coherence and a mind of their own have in the long run often proved more effective in overcoming arbitrary power than the biggest military units—if only because they are so difficult to pin down and confront."

These groups should be relatively small, face-to-face groups of not more than a hundred members each. In order to avoid demagogic leadership and damaging ideology, there should be

no central authority that controls the groups (in this respect, the Society of Friends is a good example). They must have a common idea—that of the search for the “humanist alternative”—and they should discuss the various possible roads to this end. They should overlap all political and religious creeds, and avoid making any particular conceptualization a condition for membership. It is of crucial importance that these groups should be different in principle from “discussion groups.” The participants should oblige themselves to accept a certain conduct of life that demands sacrifice. Suggestions along this line would be that the members refrain from the satisfaction of unnecessary and alienating gadget needs, that they allot 10 percent of their income for purposes that further the aims of the movement, that they develop a new style of life—one of directness, truthfulness, and realism—that they give a certain amount of their time to study and to the active propagation of the aims of the movement among the people with whom they have social contact and with whom they work, and that they show objectivity and a lack of fanaticism as well as *firmness* and courage in all their behavior. This means, for instance, that today they would express their protest against the Vietnam War and the failure to change slum conditions (black and white) in an unequivocal way and in accordance with each person’s conscience. Such groups should also have at least a minimum of common symbols and rituals. One may suggest that periods of shared silence and meditation would be among the groups’ “ritual” expressions. The members should conduct their lives in a manner that would induce solidarity and the overcoming of fanaticism and egotism.

All these ideas are nothing but tentative suggestions. Working out a detailed and valid program for a group’s life would be a matter of serious and prolonged discussion among those who want to participate. It is expected that these groups would form the active nucleus of a movement, and that they would attract a large number of people who are sympathetic to them

and influenced by their dedication and seriousness as well as by the concrete suggestions and proposals emanating from the groups. Some older intellectuals should join the groups, but not as “leaders,” and they should be as responsive to the situation of the young members as the latter should be to the older and more experienced ones.

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A New Humanism as a Condition for the One World

On April 4, 1962, Fromm gave a lecture entitled “A New Humanism as a Condition for the One World” in Sherwood Hall in La Jolla, California. The lecture existed as transcript of the tape as well as in manuscript form among his unpublished writings.

There is no doubt that one world is coming into existence. Probably this is the most revolutionary event in the history of mankind. One world has come into existence, as we can see already, in the sense that industrial production eventually will be common to all peoples of the world and will create a certain closeness between all peoples, greatly enhanced by our new methods of communication. But the question is: whether this

one world will come into existence as a livable world or whether it will end as one great battlefield.

The question indeed is: Is modern man, the man of the twentieth century, really prepared to live in one world? Or is it that we are intellectually living in the twentieth century and emotionally living in the stone age? Is it that while we are preparing this one world our feelings and goals are still those of tribalism? And by tribalism I mean, in fact, an attitude that we find in most all primitive tribes: one has confidence only in the members of one's own tribe, one feels a moral obligation only to the members of one's own tribe, to the people—and this is very essential, although it sounds trivial—an obligation only to those who have eaten the same food, sung the same songs, and spoken the same language. In this tribalism the stranger is considered with suspicion, and projections of all the evil in oneself are made upon this stranger. Morality, in fact, in tribalism, is always an interior morality, valid only for the members of the same tribe; and it doesn't make the slightest difference, humanly speaking, whether this tribe is one of a hundred people or a thousand people or five hundred million people. It is always the same: that the stranger, one who does not belong to the same tribe, is not experienced as a full human being.

We find ourselves in the midst of tribalism. We call it *nationalism*. We, indeed, seem to salute it as the great liberation of nations from former dependence on stronger nations—which in some way of course is true. But at the same time we also see that the nationalism that started in the Western World really only a hundred and fifty years ago as a result of the French Revolution has now become the mode of feeling of almost the entire world. I feel that this is a very dangerous development, in view of the fact that unless man learns to live as *one* man, a part of *one* world, this nationalism will cause conditions and situations in which he is in danger of destroying himself. Unless we develop a new humanism, there will *be* no *one* world.

The History of the Idea of Humanism

When I say a “new humanism” I don’t mean really that there is anything new. Humanism, as a philosophy, is about 2,500 years old. There’s nothing new in it except that it is new for us. We have forgotten humanism for the last fifty years. So let me try to remind you of the history of the idea of humanism in our tradition. I would have to talk about a Chinese and Indian humanism expressed in Taoism and Buddhism, but this would take a little too much time, so I might as well begin with the idea of humanism in the Old Testament.

One expression of humanism in the Old Testament is that God creates only *one* man. And as Talmudic sources say, God created one man only in order to indicate two things: first, that no man can say, “I am superior to you because my ancestors were superior to yours,” and second, to indicate that anyone who destroys one single life is as if he had destroyed mankind. Another expression of the idea of humanism, of the *one* man, is the statement in the Old Testament that man is created in the likeness of God: that all men, hence, are equal, are the same in spite of the fact that they are not the same, because of their all being created in the likeness of God. And eventually you find in the Old Testament a command of love that is very significant and often overlooked and neglected, one that refers not only to the love of our neighbor but that refers to the love of the stranger.

The stranger is precisely the person with whom we are not familiar. The stranger is precisely the person who does not belong to the same tribe or to the same nation or to the same culture, and the Bible says: “Love the stranger, for you have been strangers in Egypt and hence you know the soul of the stranger” (Lev. 19:33). Indeed, only if one has experienced that which the stranger experiences, if one can put oneself in his place, one can understand him, or to put it more broadly, only if one can experience what any other human being experiences can one understand him, can one know what he feels.

Eventually you have perhaps the most explicit expression of Old Testament humanism in the prophetic concept of messianism. There the concept of tribalism is overcome in a vision of all nations being the same favorites of God and not any one nation being the favorite. Let me read you a sentence from Isaiah: "In that day," he says (Is. 19:23–25), "shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria [the traditional two enemies of the Hebrews at that time] and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt and the Egyptian into Assyria and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the land. Whom the Lord of hosts shall bless saying, Blessed be Egypt my people and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine heritage."

This same humanistic tradition is continued in the New Testament. There the command is "Love thine enemy" (Mat. 5:44), and indeed between loving the enemy and loving the stranger there is very little difference, because if I love the enemy the enemy ceases to be a stranger, he becomes my neighbor, he becomes I and, hence, he really ceases to be an enemy. "Love thine enemy" is a paradox, but a paradox only because, in reality, once I love the stranger and the enemy, there is no more enemy.

Of course we know that the Catholic Church was founded on the basis of humanism and universalism, as against national boundaries. In the humanism of the late Middle Ages, a great Christian thinker like Nicholas of Cusa said that the humanity of Christ is binding man in the world and that it is the highest proof of the inner unity of mankind. His version of humanism was precisely that Christ's humanity is a guarantee for the oneness of all men.

The idea of humanism also has its roots in the Greek and Roman tradition. In Sophocles' drama *Antigone*, the heroine was fighting against what we would perhaps call today a fascist emperor, Creon, because she insisted that the law of nature—

which is a law of compassion for men—has precedence over the law of the state, and she is willing to die in order to fulfill the law of humanity when this law of humanity is contradicted by the law of the state. And so she buries her brother in spite of the fact that he was a traitor against the state.

The concept of humanism is expressed not only in Greek *thinking*, in Sophocles' *Antigone*, but also in Greek and Roman philosophy—especially in the concept of natural law, a law rooted in the nature of man and which has precedence over all other man-made, especially state, laws. One sentence from *Antigone* expresses the idea of natural law very beautifully. She says: "Not of today and yesterday is this the law, but ever has it life and no man knows whence it came and how."

You have in the thought of Cicero perhaps the most potent formulation of the natural-law idea, and this thinking of Cicero's entered Christian thought in the Middle Ages and became very powerful, very potent, in the development of Christian thought. Let me just read you one statement by Cicero: "You must now conceive of this whole universe as one commonwealth, of which both gods and men are members." Now, you see, here you have the concept of one commonwealth of all men: not a League of Nations, not a commonwealth of nations, but a commonwealth of men, in which every man has his loyalty to mankind and, as Cicero says very beautifully, ". . . of which both gods and men are members."

It would take too much time to talk about the development of the humanistic idea in the Late Middle Ages, in Thomas Aquinas. I should just like to mention that the idea of natural rights, which you find later on in the eighteenth century and which you find especially in the development of American thought and in the American concept of human rights, is a sequence to the development of natural law as it was developed in both the Greco-Roman and the Judaeo-Christian traditions.

The humanist idea in the Renaissance was one of "humanity," or *humanitas* in Latin (which is characteristic of all modern

thought from the Renaissance on), in a mostly nontheological concept. Nevertheless, it was an idea of humanity that was a direct continuation of Greco-Roman and Judaeo-Christian religious tradition. In this specifically Renaissance concept, man is interpreted in his natural "suchness." Man is as he is and the task given to man is to unfold fully. The ideal of the Renaissance man is a universal man, the many-sided, all rounded realization of humanity within each individual. Each individual is the bearer of all humanity and the task of man is to unfold the humanity within himself.

This Renaissance thinking is then followed by the thinking that is probably the height of humanism in the Western tradition: the thinking of the eighteenth-century, or Enlightenment, philosophers.¹

The humanist thought of the eighteenth century had a concept of man in general, of the essence of man. Now, if we speak of "essence" and stay in the tradition of philosophical terminology, we mean by "essence," briefly, that by the virtue of which a thing is what it is. So if we speak of the essence of man, we speak of that by the virtue of which man is human. Is there such a thing? Today many, if not most, social scientists are prone to believe that while this is true biologically and anatomically (it can hardly be denied), it is not really true psychologically. There are many social scientists who believe that man is born as an empty piece of paper, on which culture or society writes its text. Certainly the philosophers of the eighteenth century did not believe that. They believed that there is such a thing as human nature, a human constitution, more than in simply an anatomical or physiological sense. The philosophers of the eighteenth century elucidated a difference that I believe is very valid today, as it was then, a difference between

1. Cf., especially, E. Cassirer, 1932, and C. L. Becker, 1946; in E. Fromm, 1961, I wrote on the topic of how humanist philosophy is continued in socialist humanism.

this “essence” of man, between human nature as we find it in general, and the specific form in which human nature is expressed in each society and each culture. In other words, we never see human nature as such, we never see man in general, but we can infer from the many manifestations of man in various cultures and in various individuals what that is which man has in common: what that is which is specifically human.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau expressed the same idea, but he made one point that quite a few years later was taken up by Freud again: He pointed to the contradiction between the natural inclinations of man and the demands of society. This was a very important point to make. As I said, Freud made it later in a more specific form pointing to the conflict between sexual demands and the mores of society, and Freud assumed that neurosis actually developed out of this conflict. Well, I’m not so sure that he was right in this specific assumption, but nevertheless Freud’s assumption had a much more *general* validity and meaning, namely, of pointing precisely to that which Rousseau had pointed out: the contradiction between social demands and the demands, let us say, of humanity within man. Let me remind you that John Locke presented a theory postulating that in order to understand what government ought to be, one had only to consult the nature of man. Locke’s theory became very potent in the American tradition because of its influence on Jefferson and others.

I should like to quote a concept by one of the most significant philosophers who wrote about humanism, the German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803). For him, man, in contrast to the animal, was born feeble and needed to develop in himself humanity: “The artificial instinct of reason, humanity, and the human mode of living—the specifically human—is the highest flowering of natural evolution.” Herder inherited the same concept, that man as an animal is the weakest, most helpless, and most incomplete of all animals; but that he has reason, however, that which is specifically human, and in the

development of this specifically human quality he becomes the highest product of natural evolution.

The ideas of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781), another great humanist, went in a similar direction. He considered it the task of man to realize the essence of the human species. You see in Lessing's works the same concept, namely that that which is specifically human—the essence of man, the essence of humanity—must be realized, must be made manifest, must be developed. This is the task of man. And it's quite an irony of history that Lessing spoke of the Third Reich a little over a hundred years before Hitler, as that Reich in which humanity would reach its perfection, in which all human contradictions would be overcome in a new oneness and a new harmony of man.²

The most important of all humanist thinkers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was perhaps Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. I should like to mention a few ideas of Goethe here. One that he expressed, very similar to those of Nicholas of Cusa, as well as those of Herder and Lessing, was the idea that man carries in himself not only his own individuality but all humanity with all its potentialities, although man, because of the limitations of his existence, can realize only part of these potentialities. The goal of life, to Goethe, was to develop through individuality to universality. I should like to stress this, because eighteenth-century thinking up to the philosophy of Goethe (and later of Marx) was a thinking in which one did not believe that one reached universality by diminishing individuality, by making himself like everyone else in order to feel his one-ness with others. On the contrary, it was believed that man, only by developing his own individuality fully, could come to the experience of his own humanity—and that means of all humanity. He would feel one with all, then, precisely because

2. Fromm is here referring to claims that Hitler would make concerning the Germans of the 1930s.

he had become fully himself. And if he does not become fully himself, if he remains, mentally speaking, a stillborn person, then he will neither have nor be able to feel that humanity which he carries within himself.

Perhaps the greatest, most significant expression of Goethe's humanism, and one that is very important for our day, is expressed in a drama that has been translated into English, although I don't think it's available any longer in print. It's the drama *Iphigenia*. Now, there was a Greek drama *Iphigenia*, written by Euripides. The story is briefly this: Iphigenia, the daughter of Agamemnon, was to be sacrificed to the gods in order to obtain favorable winds for the Greek ships (bound for Troy), but a merciful goddess carries her away before she is killed to an island of barbarians where a King Thoas rules, and he is convinced by her to end a custom that he had insisted on up until this time, namely, to kill every stranger who was stranded on his island. This barbaric habit may sound strange to us, but truly we shouldn't be so surprised: The stranger was, as I have said before, the person outside the tribe, hence the person who was not experienced as being fully human in the same sense in which we experience those close to us. It happens that King Thoas makes Iphigenia the priestess of the temple of Artemis. He is kind to her. He trusts her. But one day her brother Orestes comes, with a friend. The three propose to escape, to flee, to go back to Greece without the knowledge of the king—and to steal the idol of Artemis. In the Greek drama, after some difficulties they succeed.

In the drama by Goethe they have the same plan and at first Iphigenia agrees, but after she has agreed she changes her mind because she feels that she cannot betray the king who had confidence in her. She is actually confronted with what we call today "two evils," the greater evil to be killed herself and to have her brother and his friend killed, the lesser evil to betray the king. Now, usually today we are prone to believe that if we have to choose between two evils we should choose the lesser

evil and we forget that in choosing the lesser, we generally only postpone the time until the bigger evil eventually occurs—with even more certainty.

Iphigenia refuses to choose between the two evils and she proposes that there are not necessarily only the two alternatives but might be a third, a third possibility: the possibility of being human. That means to tell the truth to the king, to act fully as a human being, risking the possibility that he might kill her and avoiding the two other evils, which, from a moral standpoint, are both unacceptable. She tells the truth to the king and the king answers:

*And dost thou think that
The uncultured Scythian will attend
The voice of Truth and Humanity
Which Arteus the Greek heard not?*

Iphigenia answers:

*This voice is heard by everyone,
Born beneath whatever clime,
Within whose bosom flows the stream of life
Pure arid unhindered.*

And, indeed, in Goethe's drama the king is touched by the voice of truth and humanity and he sends Iphigenia and her brother and his friend away to their homeland. This drama of Goethe's is important because here is the reliance on the voice of humanity as the one solution that can save man when it seems he is confronted only with the various forces of evil. I believe that this solution of Goethe's has some significance for our time. We seem to be caught in various alternatives that, although using different names, are all alternatives of destruction. I believe that it is very important to recognize that if we take the humanist tradition of our culture seriously, then indeed

we must consider whether there are not other possibilities outside the cliché alternatives, and whether the most important possibility is not the one of humanity and of truth.

Goethe was also—and it is not unimportant to mention this too—a humanist in that he was an anti-nationalist. He lived a long life, as you know, and toward the end of it that nationalism had taken over not only in France but was beginning to do so in Germany. It was an idea rampant in the wars between Napoleon and the Germans, wars that the Germans called “the wars of liberation.” Goethe was certainly one of the greatest *Germans*, but I want to read you a few things he said that counter this. He said in 1814—when Napoleon was already beaten by the victorious German liberation army—that the German nation was nothing, but that the individual German was something; and yet the world imagined the opposite to be true. The Germans should be dispersed throughout the world, Goethe believed, like the Jews, in order fully to develop all the good that is in them for the benefit of mankind. In a letter dated much earlier [March 15, 1799, to Johann Jakob Hottinger], he wrote: “At a time when everyone is busy creating new Fatherlands, the Fatherland of the man who thinks without prejudice and can rise above his time is nowhere and everywhere.” . . .

You can see here how Goethe was opposing the new wave of nationalism that was the very negation of the humanism which had been growing and unfolding in Western culture, one might say, from the thirteenth century through the eighteenth. Goethe was the last of the tradition of humanists in the nineteenth century. Then began the new wave of nationalism, and it is one of those ironies of history that the French Revolution, was based on and stimulated by a philosophy that was essentially humanistic, was precisely the revolution that created the new nationalism, which began to create the new idol, the national state. In the national state, nationalism was combined with the industrial revolution as representing powerful economic interests. Force and nationalistic sentiments were used

in order to realize the powerful economic interests that existed within that national state.

This nationalism, which began in the French Revolution and in the German-French Wars, spread rampant into Germany after 1871, when Germany was finally united. We find it even more rampant later in Germany, as well as in Stalinist Russia and in today's Russia, the Soviet Union. It found its terrifying expression in two world wars; it is equally terrifying as the cause for a possible third and, this time, nuclear war.

I should like to read you something from a man who, in his personal life, represented this change from humanism to nationalism and who expressed it in the most sensitive fashion. He is a Belgian poet, Émile Verhaeren, who was a pacifist, a humanist, and a socialist before 1914 and who changed under the impression of the war, as many other men changed. He wrote, in a book that he dedicated to himself, the following lines: "He who writes this book in which hate is not hidden was formerly a pacifist. For him no disillusionment was ever greater or more sudden. It struck him with such violence that he thought himself no longer the same man, and yet it seems to him that in this state of hatred his conscience became diminished. He dedicates these pages, with emotion, to the man he used to be." Now, this is perhaps the most illuminating expression of a change, in one person, that in reality can be seen as the change in the culture and social climate between two centuries, between eighteenth-century humanism and nineteenth- and twentieth-century nationalism.

I should like to mention briefly that the most important expression of eighteenth-century humanism in the nineteenth century is to be found in Socialist thought of various types—perhaps most clearly in the thought of Marx. Now this may sound surprising to you, because most of you have heard that Marx was materialistic, that he believed that the main motivation of man was material, and so on. Actually Marx is much quoted and little understood, but so is the Bible. Unfortunately,

the most important text of Marx on the concept of man—his most important philosophical text—was not even translated into English until a year ago. But one doesn't need to read it in order to understand that Marx's philosophy was a straight continuation of Spinoza, Hegel, and Goethe and that the kind of so-called Marxism which the Soviet Union claims to have has as much to do with Marx, as, let us say, the Renaissance Popes have to do with the teachings of Christ.

I should like to read you one or two quotations in order at least to make what I say sound less absurd. Marx's aim for man was precisely like that of Spinoza, like that of Goethe: the independent man, the free man: "A being does not regard himself as independent unless he is his own master, and he is only his own master when he owes his *existence* to himself. A man who lives by the favor of another considers himself a dependent being."³ Man is independent only if he "appropriates his manifold being in an all-inclusive way and thus as a whole man." This latter concept of the "whole man" comes from the Renaissance through Spinoza, Leibniz, and Goethe to Marx. Further: "All his *human* relations to the world—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, thinking, observing, feeling, desiring, acting, loving—in short, all the organs of his individuality . . . are . . . the appropriation of *human* reality. . . . Private property has made us so stupid and partial that an object is only *ours* when we have it, when it exists for us as capital or when it is directly eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc., in short, *utilized* in some way. . . . Thus, *all* the physical and intellectual senses have been replaced by the simple alienation of *all* these senses: the sense of *having*. The human being had to be reduced to this absolute poverty in order to be able to give birth to all his inner wealth."

Another statement of Marx is very characteristic for all humanistic thinking; the statement concerns man as an active be-

3. Karl Marx, "Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts," quoted in E. Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*, p. 138.

ing as against a passive being. This statement refers particularly to love. For Marx, as for Spinoza, the problem is never "to be loved," as it is for most of us, and the question is never the principal question, "How does anyone love us?" but the problem is our capacity to love and the quality of love as an *active* quality. "If you love without evoking love in return, that is, if you are not able by the *manifestation* of yourself as a loving person to make yourself a *beloved* person, then your love is impotent, a misfortune"⁴

The Relevance of Humanism for Today

Now I should like to discuss two aspects of humanism that are important for ourselves. One is, if you please, a scientific aspect, namely: Is there such a thing as the "essence of man"? The eighteenth century was rather optimistic about the essence of man. The general picture in that century was that man is reasonable, good, and easily directed or influenced in the direction of the good. Today some people like Reinhold Niebuhr and others assure us that it is almost sinful to have such a naive belief, a belief in the goodness of man. But I don't believe we need such exhortations: The period we have lived through and are living through gives us sufficient proof of the irrationality and even insanity of man that we don't really need to be reminded of how evil man can be. The question is, and I think the essential question for the science of man to discover is: What is the essence of man? What is that that can objectively be described as human?

In my book *The Sane Society* (1955), I have tried to discuss this question. Here I only want to stress that the essence of man is not a substance, that it isn't that man is good or man is bad, but that there is an essence that remains the same throughout history. The essence of man is a constellation or, as Heideg-

4. *Ibid.*, p. 168.

ger calls it, a configuration—a basic configuration. And as I see it, this configuration is precisely one of an existential dichotomy or, to use somewhat less technical language, it is precisely one of a contradiction between man as an animal who is within nature and between man as the only thing in nature that has awareness of itself. Hence, man can be aware of his separateness and lostness and weakness. Hence, man has to find new ways of union with nature and with his fellow man. Man was born, historically and individually, and, when he becomes aware of his separateness from the world, he would become insane unless he found a method to overcome this separateness and find union. This is, I am sure, the strongest passion in man: to avoid and overcome the full experience of separateness and to find a new union.

The history of religion, and the history of man in general (and of individuals, too) show, that there are two ways of overcoming separateness and of achieving union. The one you will find in all primitive religions, and it is a way to return to nature, to make man again into a pre-human animal, as it were, and to eliminate that in man which is specifically human: his reason, his awareness. This elimination is done in all sorts of ways: by drugs, by orgies, or simply by identification with animals, by putting oneself in the state of an animal—especially in the state of, say, a bear, a lion, or a wolf. In other words, it is the attempt to overcome the sense of separateness by ceasing to be human and by regressing, if you please, to the natural state in which man is a part of nature and in which he might become an animal. But, as the Bible expresses it symbolically, once Adam and Eve have left the Paradise—that is, that state of oneness in which man is not yet born as man—two angels with fiery swords watch the entrance and man cannot return.

Mankind's other solution to overcoming separateness and gaining union seems to have been found in the period between 1500 B.C. and 500 B.C. in China, India, Egypt, Palestine, and Greece: Man found oneness not by regressing but by de-

veloping his specifically human powers of reason and of love to such an extent that the world became his home; by becoming fully human he lived in a new harmony with himself, with his fellow men, and even with nature. This was the idea of prophetic messianism. It was also the idea of late-medieval religious thought. And it was the idea of eighteenth-century humanism. In fact, it is still the essence of religious and spiritual thought of the Western tradition: Man's task is to develop his humanity, and in the development of this humanity he will find a new harmony and hence the only way in which he can solve the problem of being born.

Being born, we are all asked a question and we have to give an answer—not one with our mind and our brain, but, every moment, one with our whole person. There are only really two answers. One answer is to regress and one answer is to develop our humanity. And there are many people—and I suppose these days *most* people—who try to avoid the answer and who fill the time with all the many things that we call entertainment or diversion or leisure time or whatever it may be. But I believe we find ultimately that this solution is no solution, that the people who choose it are all bored and depressed, except that they are not aware of this.

I spoke briefly about my own concept of how one could conceptualize the basic constitution of man in terms of constellation rather than in terms of a substance, but of course this topic would require many hours in order to develop, and certainly I shall not try.⁵ Here I only want to add one other thought: The essence of man will become important only to those to whom, and only at a time when, the experience of the oneness of man is alive again. Today it is not alive.

5. See E. Fromm, *Man for Himself: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics*, pp. 38–50; *The Sane Society*, pp. 22–66; and especially E. Fromm and Ramón Xirau, eds., *The Nature of Man*, pp.3–23.

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What, then, is this experience of humanism? With the above survey I have tried to show you that the experience of humanism is that—as Terence expressed it—“Nothing human is alien to me”; that I carry within myself all of humanity; that, in spite of the fact that there are no two individuals who are the same, the paradox exists that we all share in the same substance, in the same quality; that nothing which exists in any human being does not exist in myself. I am the criminal and I am the saint. I am the child and I am the adult. I am the man who lived a hundred thousand years ago and I am the man who, provided we don’t destroy the human race, will live a hundred thousand years from now.

This proposition has a very significant connection with one phenomenon with which it is usually not connected, namely, the phenomenon of the unconscious. Freud was not the first who discovered the unconscious, but he certainly was the first to give it a full systematic exploration. Nevertheless, his concept of the unconscious was still a very limited one. He thought that certain instinctual desires, such as incestuous desires or murderous desires, were repressed. Well, they are. But the problem is a wider one: What is really our consciousness? Our consciousness is all those human experiences of which our particular society permits us to be aware. Usually, aside from very small individual differences, we are aware only of that which our language, our logic, and the taboos of our societies permit us to be aware. There is, you might say, something like a “social filter,” and only those experiences that can pass through that social filter are the things we are aware of; they are our consciousness.

And what is our unconscious? Our unconscious is humanity. Our unconscious is the universal man. Our unconscious is all that is human—the good and the bad—all that exists in everybody, *minus* that small sector which is conscious, which represents the experience, thinking, feeling of the culture that we

are thrown into rather accidentally. Our unconscious is the *total* man, and hence the great significance of being in touch with our unconscious is not to discover our incestuous desires, or this, that, and the other (which may sometimes not be unimportant). The great importance of the Freudian discovery of the possibility of being in touch with our unconscious is, precisely, that if we are in touch with it, then we are in touch with humanity; then we are in touch with the total man in us; and then, indeed, there is no more stranger. Further, there is no more judging of others in the sense that we consider ourselves superior to them. If we are in touch with our unconscious, then, indeed, we experience ourselves as we experience everybody else. Indeed, we overcome that separation within ourselves in which we are aware only of that which is expressed in our particular tribe or culture, and we get in touch with that which we share with all humanity.

Nationalism as well as tribalism are precisely the opposite. There we are not in touch with humanity. We are only in touch with one sector of humanity and we perform a very simple operation: we project all the evil in us on the stranger, and hence the result is that he is a devil and we are the angels. That is what we experience in all wars, what is experienced in fights between people in their personal lives, and that is what we have experienced on both sides in the cold war, too. I believe that man is indeed forced today to choose between a renewal of humanism—of taking seriously the spiritual foundation of our Western culture, which is a foundation of humanism or—having no future at all.

It was, if I could quote him once more, Goethe who said: "There is only one important difference between various historical periods, namely, that between periods which have faith and periods which do not have faith. Those who have faith flourish and are alive, and those who do not have faith decay and eventually die." The thirteenth century and the eighteenth century were undoubtedly periods of faith. I am afraid that

ours in the West is a period of a great lack of faith, that actually the hate we find so rampant more and more in the Western World and the United States is only an expression that people do not love and in fact that they do not know what they live for. Certainly, the hate is an expression of moral despair and of a moral defeatism. If one has to affirm one's culture by trying to save it by war, one will neither save one's values nor even one's life, as things are today.

I believe we still have the choice of whether we can renew the very roots of our tradition, which is the Greek-Roman, Judaeo-Christian tradition of humanism. If we are able to take those values seriously, values about which we talk all the time, then indeed there might come a new vitality to our culture and we might have a future. If we are not able to renew our roots, then whatever we say and whatever our weapons are, the West will not survive. I think we are confronted basically with a decision which is a *fundamental* decision. It is very beautifully expressed in the Old Testament: "I put before you today Life and Death, Blessing and Curse, and you choose Life" [Deuteronomy 30:19]. I believe what man today *has* to choose, in a world that is becoming One World, is precisely Life—and that means a new experience of humanism. If he cannot choose that, he will not, I am afraid, manage the new "One World."