

You are encouraged to read the whole book, and please make a proper citation if needed.

Fromm, E. (1941/1994). *Escape from Freedom*. Routledge.

Chapter 2

P28

This process has two aspects: one is that the child grows stronger physically, emotionally, and mentally. In each of these spheres intensity and activity grow. At the same time, these spheres become more and more integrated. An organized structure guided by the individual's will and reason develops. If we call this organized and integrated whole of the personality the self, we can also say that the *one side of the growing process of individuation is the growth of self-strength*. The limits of the growth of individuation and the self are set, partly by individual conditions, but essentially by social conditions. For although the differences between individuals in this respect appear to be great, every society is characterized by a certain level of individuation beyond which the normal individual cannot go.

The other aspect of the process of individuation is *growing aloneness*. The primary ties offer security and basic unity with the world outside of oneself. To the extent to which the child emerges from that world it becomes aware of being alone, of being an entity separate from all others. This separation from a world, which in comparison with one's own individual existence is overwhelmingly strong and powerful, and often threatening and dangerous, creates a feeling of powerlessness and anxiety. As long as one was an integral part of that world, unaware of the possibilities and responsibilities of individual action, one did not need to be afraid of it. When one has become an individual, one stands alone and faces the world in all its ,perilous and overpowering aspects.

P29

Consciously the child may feel secure and satisfied, but unconsciously it realizes that the price it pays is giving up strength and the integrity of its self. Thus the result of submission is the very opposite of what it was to be: submission increases the child's insecurity and at the same time creates hostility and rebelliousness, which is the more frightening since it is directed against the very persons on whom the child has remained—or become—dependent.

However, submission is not the only way of avoiding aloneness and anxiety. The other way, the only one which is productive and does not end in an insoluble conflict, is that of *spontaneous* relationship to man and nature, a relationship that connects the individual with the world without eliminating his individuality. This kind of relationship—the foremost expressions of which are love and productive

work—are rooted in the integration and strength of the total personality and are therefore subject to the very limits that exist for the growth of the self.

P30

If every step in the direction of separation and individuation were matched by corresponding growth of the self, the development of the child would be harmonious. This does not occur, however. While the process of individuation take place automatically, the growth of the self is hampered for a number of individual and social reasons. The lag between these two trends results in an unbearable feeling of isolation and powerlessness, and this in its turns leads to psychic mechanisms, which later on are described as mechanisms of escape.

P31.

In other words, human *existence and freedom are from the beginning inseparable*. Freedom is here used not in its positive sense of "freedom to" but in its negative sense of "freedom from," namely freedom from instinctual determination of his actions.

P 34-P35.

We see that the process of growing human freedom has the same dialectic character that we have noticed in the process of individual growth. On the one hand it is a process of growing strength and integration, mastery of nature, growing power of human reason, and growing solidarity with other human beings. But on the other hand this growing individuation means grow isolation, insecurity, and thereby growing doubt concerning one's own role in the universe, the meaning of one's life, and with all that a growing feeling of one's own powerlessness and insignificance as an individual.

Primary bonds once severed cannot be mended; once paradise is lost, man cannot return to it. There is only one possible, productive solution for the relationship of individualized man with the world; his active solidarity with all the men and his spontaneous activity, love and work, which unite him again with the world, not by primary ties but as a free and independent individual.

However, if the economic, social and political conditions on which the whole process of human individuation depends, do not offer a basis for the realization of individuality in the sense just mentioned, while at the same time people have lost those ties which gave them security, this lag makes freedom an unbearable burden. It then becomes identical with doubt, with a kind of life which lacks meaning and direction. Powerful tendencies arise to escape from this kind of freedom into submission or some kind of relationship to man and the world which promises relief from uncertainty, even if it deprives the individual of his freedom.

Chapter 3

P63.

nothingness and helplessness. Paradise is lost for good, the individual stands alone and faces the world—a stranger thrown into a limitless and threatening world. The new freedom is bound to create a deep feeling of insecurity, powerlessness, doubt, aloneness, and anxiety. These feelings must be alleviated if the individual is to function successfully.

P81.

Be acceptable to God. Luther's relationship to God was one of complete submission. In psychological terms his concept of faith means: if you completely submit, if you accept your individual insignificance, then the all-powerful God may be willing to love you and save you. If you get rid of your individual self with all its shortcomings and doubts by utmost self-effacement, you free yourself from the feeling of your own nothingness and can participate in God's glory. Thus, 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 a complete submission of man and annihilation of the individual self as the essential condition to his salvation. Luther's "faith" was the conviction of being loved upon the condition of surrender, a solution which has much in common with the principle of complete submission of the individual to the state the "leader".

P83

In the chapter which deals with the psychological mechanism of escape we shall show that this simultaneous love for authority and the hatred against those who are powerless are typical traits of the "authoritarian character."

Once the individual had lost his sense of pride and dignity, he was psychologically prepared to lose the feeling which had been characteristic of the medieval thinking, namely, that man, his spiritual salvation, and his spiritual aims were the purpose of life; he was prepared to accept a role in which his life became a means to purposes outside of himself, those of economic productivity and accumulation of capital. Luther's views on economic problems were typically medieval, still more so than Calvin's.

P91.

One possible way to escape this unbearable state of uncertainty and the paralyzing feeling of one's own insignificance is the very trait which became so prominent in Calvinism: the development of a frantic activity and a striving to do something. Activity in this sense assumes a compulsory quality: *the individual has to be active in order to overcome his feeling of doubt and powerlessness*. This kind of effort and activity is not the result of inner strength and self-confidence; it is a desperate escape from anxiety.

P94

The inner compulsion was more effective in harnessing all energies to work than any

outer compulsion can ever be. Against external compulsion there is always a certain amount of rebelliousness which hampers the effectiveness of work or makes people unfit for any differentiated task requiring intelligence, initiative, and responsibility. The compulsion to work by which man was turned into his own slave driver did not hamper these qualities. Undoubtedly capitalism could not have been developed had not the greatest part of man's energy been channeled in the direction of work. There is no other period in history in which free men have given their energy so completely for the one purpose: work. The drive for relentless work was one of the fundamental productive forces, no less important for the development of our industrial system than steam and electricity.

P97

In order to understand this phenomenon fully, it is necessary to realize that the attitudes toward others and toward oneself, far from being contradictory, in principle run parallel. But while hostility against others is often conscious and can be expressed overtly, hostility against oneself is usually (except in pathological cases) unconscious, and finds expression in indirect and rationalized forms. One is a person's active emphasis on his own wickedness and insignificance, of which we have just spoken; another appears under the guise of conscience or duty.

P99

Man was deprived of the security he had enjoyed, of the unquestionable feeling of belonging, and he was torn loose from the world which had satisfied his quest for security both economically and spiritually. He felt alone and anxious. But he was also free to act and to think independently, to become his own master and do with his life as he could—not as he was told to do.

However, according to the real life situation of the members of different social classes, these two kinds of freedom were of unequal weight. Only the most successful class of society profited from rising capitalism to an extent which gave them real wealth and power. They could expand, conquer, rule, and amass fortunes as a result of their own activity and rational calculations. This new aristocracy of money, combined with that of birth, was in a position where they could enjoy the fruits of the new freedom and acquire a new feeling of mastery and individual initiative. On the other hand, they had to dominate the masses and to fight against each other, and thus their position, too, was not free from a fundamental insecurity and anxiety. But, on the whole, the positive meaning of freedom was dominant for the new capitalist. It was expressed in the culture which grew on the soil of the new aristocracy, the culture of the

P100-101

Our main interest, however, has been taken up by the reaction of the middle class. Rising capitalism, although it made also for their increased independence and initiative, was greatly a threat. In the beginning of the sixteenth century the individual of the middle class could not yet gain much

power and security from the new freedom. Freedom brought isolation and personal insignificance more than strength and confidence. Besides that, he was filled with burning resentment against the luxury and power of the wealthy classes, including the hierarchy of the Roman Church. Protestantism gave expression to the feelings of insignificance and resentment; it destroyed the confidence of man in God's unconditional love; it taught man despise and distrust himself and others; it made him a tool instead of an end; it capitulated before secular power and relinquished the principle that secular power is not justified because of its mere existence if it contradicts moral principles; and in doing all this it relinquished elements that had been the foundations of Judaeo-Christian tradition. Its doctrines presented a picture of the individual, God, and the world, in which these feelings were justified by the belief that the insignificance and powerlessness which an individual felt came from the qualities of man as such and that he ought to feel as he felt.

Chapter 4

P108

In one word, capitalism not only freed man from traditional bonds, but it also contributed tremendously to the increasing of positive freedom, to the growth of an active, critical, 'responsible self.

However, while this was *one* effect capitalism had on the process of growing freedom, at the same time it made the individual more alone and isolated and imbued him with a feeling of insignificance and powerlessness.

Chapter 5

P137

The term normal or *healthy* can be defined in two ways. Firstly, from the standpoint of a functioning society, one can call a person normal or healthy if he is able to fulfill the social role he is to take in that given society. More concretely, this means that he is able to work in the fashion which is required in that particular society, and furthermore that he is able to participate in the reproduction of society, that is, that he can raise a family. Secondly, from the standpoint of the individual, we look upon health or normalcy as the optimum of growth and happiness of the individual.

P138

Between the two concepts of health. The one is governed by social necessities, the other by values and norms concerning the aim of individual existence.

P139

From a standpoint of human values, however, a society could be called neurotic in the sense that its members are crippled in the growth of their personality. Since the term *neurotic* is so often used to denote lack of social functioning, we would prefer not to speak of a society in terms of its being neurotic, but rather in

terms of its being adverse to human happiness and self-realization.

The mechanisms we shall discuss in this chapter are mechanisms of escape, which result from the insecurity of the isolated individual.

Chapter 6 P237-P238

The function of an authoritarian ideology and practice can be compared to the function of neurotic symptoms. Such symptoms result from unbearable psychological conditions and at the same time offer a solution that makes life possible. Yet they are not a solution that leads to happiness or growth of personality. They leave unchanged the conditions that necessitate the neurotic solution. The dynamism of man's nature is an important factor that tends to seek for more satisfying solutions if there is a possibility of attaining them. The aloneness and powerlessness of the individual, his quest for the realization of potentialities which developed in him, the objective fact of the increasing productive capacity of modern industry, are dynamic factors, which constitute the basis of the growing quest for freedom and happiness. The escape into symbiosis can alleviate the suffering for a time but it does not eliminate it. The history of mankind is the history of growing individuation, but it is also the history of growing freedom. The quest for freedom is not a metaphysical force and cannot be explained by natural law; it is the necessary result of the process of individuation and of the growth of culture. The authoritarian systems cannot do away with the basic conditions that make for the quest for freedom; neither can they exterminate the quest for freedom that springs from these conditions.

Chapter 7

P240

The right to express our thoughts, however, means some thing only if we are able to have thoughts of our own; freedom from external authority is a lasting gain only if the inner psychological conditions are such that we are able to establish our own individuality.

P256

We believe that there is a positive answer, that the process of growing freedom does not constitute a vicious circle, and that man can be free and yet not alone, critical and yet not filled with doubts, independent and yet an integral part of mankind. This freedom man can attain by the realization of his self, by being himself. What is realization of the self? Idealistic philosophers have believed that self-realization can be achieved by intellectual insight alone.

P257

emotion, were crippled. We believe that the realization of the self is accomplished not only by an act of thinking but also by the realization of man's total personality, by the active expression of his emotional and intellectual potentialities. These potentialities are present in everybody; they become real only to the extent to which they are expressed. In other words, *positive freedom consists in the spontaneous activity of the total, integrated personality.*

P 259

Why is spontaneous activity the answer to the problem of freedom? We have said that negative freedom by itself makes the individual an isolated being, whose relationship to the world is distant and distrustful and whose self is weak and constantly threatened. Spontaneous activity is the one way in which man can overcome the terror of aloneness without sacrificing the integrity of his self; for in the spontaneous realization of the self man unites himself anew with the world—with man, nature, and himself. Love is the foremost component of such spontaneity; not love as the dissolution of the self in another person, not love as the possession of another person, but love as spontaneous affirmation of others, as the union of the individual with others on the basis of the preservation of the individual self.

P261.

If the individual realizes his self by spontaneous activity and thus relates himself to the world, he ceases to be an isolated atom; he and the world become part of one structuralized whole; he has his rightful place, and thereby his doubt concerning himself and the meaning of life disappears. This doubt sprang from his separateness and from the thwarting of life; when he can live, neither compulsively nor automatically but spontaneously, the doubt disappears. He is aware of himself as an active and creative individual and recognizes that there is only one meaning of life: the act of living itself.

P268

It has been the thesis of this book that freedom has a twofold meaning for modern man: that he has been freed from traditional authorities and has become an "individual," but that at the same time he has become isolated, powerless, and an instrument of purposes outside of himself, alienated from himself and others; furthermore, that this state undermines his self, weakens and frightens him, and makes him ready for submission to new kinds of bondage. Positive freedom on the other hand is identical with the full realization of the individual's potentialities, together with his ability to live actively and spontaneously. Freedom has reached a critical point where, driven by the logic of its own dynamism, it threatens to change into its opposite. The future of democracy depends on the realization of the individualism that has been the ideological

aim of modern thought the Renaissance.

P270

from this premise that the realization of positive freedom and individualism is also bound up with economic and social changes that will permit the individual to become free in terms of the realization of his self. It is not the aim of this book to deal with the economic problems resulting from that premise or to give a picture of economic plans for the future. But I should not like to leave any doubt concerning the direction in which I believe the solution to lie.