

## AP4CTE AP Seminar: Building a Dynamic Workforce

### *Research Strategies for Innovating and Problem-solving Across Career Paths*

#### Module 3

#### *The Sane Society*

#### **from Chapter 5: Man in Capitalistic Society**

*Erich Fromm*

#### **C. Twentieth-century society**

##### *1. Social and economic changes*

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Let us take another look at the most important elements in twentieth-century Capitalism: the disappearance of feudal traits, the revolutionary increase in industrial production, the increasing concentration of capital and bigness of business and government, the increasing number of people who manipulate figures and people, the separation of ownership from management, the rise of the working class economically and politically, the new methods of work in factory and office—and let us describe these changes from a slightly different aspect. The disappearance of feudal factors means the disappearance of irrational authority. Nobody is supposed to be higher than his neighbor by birth, God's will, natural law. Everybody is equal and free. Nobody may be exploited or commanded by virtue of a natural right. If one person is commanded by another, it is because the commanding one bought the labor or the services of the commanded one, on the labor market; he commands because they are both free and equal and thus could enter into a contractual relationship. However, with irrational authority—rational authority became obsolete, too. If the market and the contract regulates relationships, there is no need to know what is right and what is wrong and good and evil. All that is necessary is to know that things are *fair*—that the exchange is fair, and that things “work”—that they function.

Another decisive fact which the twentieth-century man experiences is the miracle of production. He commands forces thousands of times stronger than the ones nature had given him before; steam, oil, electricity, have become his servants and beasts of burden. He crosses the oceans, the continents—first in weeks, then I days, now in hours. He seemingly overcomes the law of gravity, and flies through the air; he converts deserts into fertile land, makes rain instead of praying for it. The miracle of production leads to the miracle of consumption. No more traditional barriers keep anyone from buying anything he takes a fancy to. He only needs to have the money. But more and more people have the money—not for the genuine pearls perhaps, but for the synthetic ones; for Fords which look like Cadillacs, for the cheap dresses which look like the expensive ones, for cigarettes which are the same for millionaires and for the workingman. Everything is within reach, can be bought, can be consumed. Where was there ever a society where this miracle happened?

Men work together. Thousands stream into the industrial plants and the offices—they come in cars, in subways, in buses, in trains—they work together, according to a rhythm measured by the experts, with methods worked out by the experts, not too fast, not too slow, but together; each a part of the whole. The evening stream flows back: they read the same newspaper, they listen to the radio, they see the movies, the same for those on the top and for those at the bottom of the ladder, for the intelligent and the stupid, for the educated and the uneducated. Produce, consume, enjoy together, in step, without asking questions. That is the rhythm of their lives.

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What kind of men, then, does our society need? What is the “social character” suited to twentieth-century Capitalism?

It needs men who co-operate smoothly in large groups; who want to consume more and more, and whose tastes are standardized and can be easily influenced and anticipated.

It needs men who feel free and independent, not subject to any authority, or principle, or conscience—yet willing to be commanded, to do what is expected, to fit into the social machine without friction. How can man be guided without force, led without leaders, be prompted without any aim—except the one to be on the move, to function, to go ahead...?

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#### 2. *Characterological changes*

##### A. QUANTIFICATION, ABSTRACTION

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Today, when only about 20 per cent of our working population is self-employed, the rest work for somebody else, and a man’s life is dependent on someone who pays him a wage or a salary. But we should say “something,” instead of “someone,” because a worker is hired and fired by an institution, the managers of which are impersonal parts of the enterprise, rather than people in personal contact with the men they employ. Let us not forget another fact: in precapitalistic society, exchange was to a large extent one of goods and services; today, all work is rewarded with money. The close fabric of economic relations is regulated by money, the abstract expression of work—that is to say, we receive different quantities of the same for different qualities; and we give money for what we received—again exchanging only different quantities for different qualities. Practically nobody, with the exception of the farm population, could live for even a few days without receiving and spending money, which stands for the abstract quality of concrete work.

Another aspect of capitalist production which results in increasing abstractification is the increasing division of labor. Division of labor as a whole exists in most known economic systems, and, even in most primitive communities, in the form of division of labor between the sexes. What is characteristic of capitalistic production is the degree to which this division has developed. While in the medieval economy there was a division of labor let us say between agricultural production and the work of the artisan, there was little such division within each sphere of production itself. The carpenter making a chair or table made the whole chair or the whole table, and even if some preparatory work was done by his apprentices, he was in control of the production, overseeing it in its entirety. In the modern industrial enterprise, the worker is not in touch with the whole product at any point. He is engaged in the performance of one specialized function, and while he might shift in the course of time from one function to another, he is still not related to the concrete product *as a whole*. He develops a specialized function, and the tendency is such, that the function of the modern industrial worker can be defined as working in a machinelike fashion in activities for which machine work has not yet been devised or which would be costlier than human work. The only person who is in touch with the whole product is the manager, but to him the product is an abstraction, whose essence is exchange value, while the worker, for whom it is concrete, never works on it as a whole.

Undoubtedly without quantification and abstractification modern mass production would be unthinkable. But in a society in which economic activities have become the main preoccupation of man, this process of quantification and abstractification has transcended the

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realm of economic production, and spread to the attitude of man to things, to people, and to himself.

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It is quite customary to talk about a “three-million-dollar bridge,” a “twenty-cent cigar,” a “five-dollar watch,” and this not only from the standpoint of the manufacturer or the consumer in the process of buying it, but as the essential point in the description. When one speaks of the “three-million-dollar bridge,” one is not primarily concerned with its usefulness or beauty, that is, with its concrete qualities, but one speaks of it as of a commodity, the main quality of which is its exchange value, expressed in a quantity, that of money. This does not mean, of course, that one is not concerned also with the usefulness or beauty of the bridge, but it does mean that its concrete (uses) value is *secondary* to its abstract (exchange) value in the way the object is experienced. The famous line by Gertrude Stein “a rose is a rose is a rose,” is a protest against this abstract form of experience; for most people a rose is just *not* a rose, but a flower in a certain price range, to be bought on certain social occasions; even the most beautiful flower, provided it is a wild one, costing nothing, is not experienced in its beauty, compared to that of the rose, because it has no exchange value.

In other words, things are experienced as commodities, as embodiments of exchange value, not only while we are buying or selling, but in our attitude toward them when the economic transaction is finished. A thing, even after it has been bought, never quite loses its quality as a commodity in this sense; it is expendable, always retaining its exchange-value quality. A good illustration of this attitude is to be found in a report of the Executive Secretary of an important scientific organization as to how he spent a day in his office. The organization had just bought and moved into a building of their own. The Executive Secretary reports that during one of the first days after they had moved into the building, he got a call from a real estate agent, saying that some people were interested in buying the building and wanted to look at it. Although he knew that it was most unlikely that the organization would want to sell the building a few days after they had moved in, he could not resist the temptation to know whether the value of the building had risen since they had bought it, and spent one or two valuable hours in showing the real estate agent around. He writes: “very interested in fact we can get an offer for more than we have put in building. Nice coincidence that offer comes while treasurer is in the office. All agree it will be good for Board’s morale to learn that the building will sell for a good deal more than it cost. Let’s see what happens.” In spite of all the pride and pleasure in the new building, it had still retained its quality as a commodity, as something expendable, and to which no full sense of possession or use is attached. The same attitude is obvious in the relationship of people to the cars they buy; the car never becomes fully a thing to which one is attached, but retains its quality as a commodity to be exchanged in a successful bargain; thus, cars are sold after a year or two, long before their use value is exhausted or even considerably diminished.

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But the abstractifying and quantifying attitude goes far beyond the realm of things. People are also experienced as the embodiment of a quantitative exchange value. To speak of a man as being “worth on million dollars,” is to speak of him not any more as a concrete human person, but as an abstraction, whose essence can be expressed in a figure. It is an expression of the same attitude when a newspaper headlines an obituary with the words “Shoe Manufacturer Dies.” Actually a *man* has died, a man with certain human qualities, with hopes and frustrations, with a wife and children. It is true that he manufactured shoes, or rather, that he owned and

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managed a factory in which workers served machines manufacturing shoes; but if it is said that a “Shoe Manufacturer Dies,” the richness and concreteness of a human life is expressed in the abstract formula of economic function.

The same abstractifying approach can be seen in expressions like “Mr. Ford produced so many automobiles,” or this or that general “conquered a fortress”; or if a man has a house built for himself, he says, “I built a house.” Concretely speaking, Mr. Ford did not manufacture the automobiles; he directed automobile production which was executed by thousands of workers. The general never conquered the fortress; he was sitting in his headquarters, issuing orders, and his soldiers did the conquering. The man did not build a house; he paid the money to an architect who made the plans and the workers who did the building. All this is not said to minimize the significance of the managing and directing operations, but in order to indicate that in this way of experiencing things, sight of what goes on concretely is lost, and an abstract view is taken in which one function, that of making plans, giving orders, or financing an activity, is identified with the whole concrete process of production, or of fighting, or of building, as the case may be.

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Science, business, politics, have lost all foundations and proportions which make sense humanly. We live in figures and abstractions; since nothing is concrete, nothing is real. Everything is possible, factually and morally. Science fiction is not different from science fact, nightmares and dreams from the events of next year. Man has been thrown out from any definite place whence he can overlook and manage his life and the life of society. He is driven faster and faster by the forces which originally were created by him. In this wild whirl he thinks, figures, busy with abstractions, more and more remote from concrete life.

#### B. ALIENATION

The forgoing discussion of the process of abstractification leads to the central issue of the effects of Capitalism on personality: the phenomenon of alienation.

By alienation is meant a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as an alien. He has become, one might say, estranged from himself. He does not experience himself as the center of his world, as the creator of his own acts—but his acts and their consequences have become his masters, whom he obeys, or whom he may even worship. The alienated person is out of touch with himself as he is out of touch with any other person. He, like the others, are experienced as things are experienced; with the sense and with common sense, but at the same time without being related to oneself and to the world outside productively.

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But while the use of the word “alienation” in this general sense is a recent one, the concept is a much older one; it is the same to which the prophets of the Old Testament referred as *idolatry*. It will help us to a better understanding of “alienation” if we begin by considering the meaning of “idolatry.”

The prophets of monotheism did not denounce heathen religions as idolatrous primarily because they worshiped several gods instead of one. The essential difference between monotheism and polytheism is not one of the *number* of gods, but lies in the fact of self-alienation. Man spends his energy, his artistic capacities on building an idol, and then he worships this idol, which is nothing but the result of his own human effort. His life forces have flown into a “thing,” and this thing, having become an idol, is not experienced as a result of his own productive effort, but as something apart from himself, over and against him, which he

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worships and to which he submits. As the prophet Hosea says (XIV, 8): “Assur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses; *neither will we say any more to the work of our hands*, you are our gods; for in thee the fatherless finds love.” Idolatrous man bows down to the work of his own hands. *The idol represents his own life-forces in an alienated form.*

The principle of monotheism, in contrast, is that man is infinite, that there is not partial quality in him which can be hypostatized into the whole. God, in the monotheistic concept, is unrecognizable and indefinable; God is not a “thing.” If man is created in the likeness of God, he is created as the bearer of infinite qualities. In idolatry man bows down and submits to the projection of one partial quality in himself. He does not experience himself as the center from which living acts of love and reason radiate. He becomes a thing, his neighbor becomes a thing, just as his gods are things. “The idols of the heathen are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not; they have ears but they hear not; neither is there any breath in their mouths. They that make them are like them; so is everyone that trusts in them.” (Psalm 135).

Monotheistic religions themselves have, to a large extent, regressed into idolatry. Man projects his power of love and of reason unto God; he does not feel them any more as his own powers, and then he prays to God to give him back some of what he, man, has projected unto God. In early Protestantism and Calvinism, the required religious attitude is that man *should* feel himself empty and impoverished, and put his trust in the grace of God, that is, into the hope that God may return to him part of his own qualities, which he has put into God.

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What is common to all these phenomena—the worship of idols, the idolatrous worship of God, the idolatrous love for a person, the worship of a political leader or the state, and the idolatrous worship of the externalization of irrational passions—is the process of alienation. It is the fact that *man does not experience himself as the active bearer of his own powers and richness, but as an impoverished “thing,” dependent on powers outside of himself, unto whom he has projected his living substance.*

As the reference to idolatry indicates, alienation is by no means a modern phenomenon. It would go far beyond the scope of this book to attempt a sketch on the history of alienation. Suffice it to say that it seems alienation differs from culture to culture, both in the specific spheres which are alienated, and in the thoroughness and completeness of the process.

Alienation as we find it in modern society is almost total; it pervades the relationship of man to his work, to the things he consumes, to the state, to his fellow man, and to himself. Man has created a world of man-made things as it never existed before. He has constructed a complicated social machine to administer the technical machine he built. Yet this whole creation of his stands over and above him. He does not feel himself as a creator and center, but as the servant of a Golem, which his hands have built. The more powerful and gigantic the forces are which he unleashes, the more powerless he feels himself as a human being. He confronts himself with his own forces embodied in things he has created, alienated from himself. He is owned by his own creation, and has lost ownership of himself. He has built a golden calf, and says “these are your gods who have brought you out of Egypt.”

What happens to the *worker*? To put it in the words of a thoughtful and thorough observer of the industrial scene: “in industry the person becomes an economic atom that dances to the tune of atomistic management. Your place is just here, you will sit in this fashion, your arms will move x inches in a course of y radius and the time of movement will be .000 minutes.

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“Work is becoming more repetitive and thoughtless as the planners, the micromotionists, and the scientific managers further strip the worker of his right to think and move freely. Life is being denied; need to control, creativeness, curiosity, and independent thought are being balked, and the result, the inevitable result, is flight or fight on the part of the worker, apathy or destructiveness, psychic regression.”<sup>22</sup>

The role of the *manager* is also one of alienation. It is true, he manages the whole and not part, but he too is alienated from his product as something concrete and useful. His aim is to employ profitably the capital invested by others, although in comparison with the older type of owner-manager, modern management is much less interested in the amount of profit to be paid out as dividend to the stockholder than it is in this efficient operation and expansion of the enterprise. Characteristically, within management those in charge of labor relations and of sales—that is, of human manipulation—gain, relatively speaking, an increasing importance in comparison with those in charge of the technical aspects of production.

The manager, like the worker, like everybody, deals with the impersonal giants: with the giant competitive enterprise; with the giant national and world market; with the giant consumer, who has to be coaxed and manipulated; with the giant unions, and the giant government. All these giants have their own lives, as it were. They determine the activity of the manager and they direct the activity of the worker and clerk.

The problem of the manager opens up one of the most significant phenomena in an alienated culture, that of *bureaucratization*. Both big business and government administrations are conducted by a bureaucracy. Bureaucrats are specialists in the administration of things *and of men*. Due to the bigness of the apparatus to be administered, and the resulting abstractification, the bureaucrats' relationship to the people is one of complete alienation. They, the people to be administered, are objects whom the bureaucrats consider neither with love nor with hate, but completely impersonally; the manager-bureaucrat must not feel, as far as his professional activity is concerned; he must manipulate people as though they were figures, or things. Since the vastness of the organization and the extreme division of labor prevents any single individual from seeing the whole, since there is no organic, spontaneous co-operation between the various individuals or groups within the industry, the managing bureaucrats are necessary; without them the enterprise would collapse in a short time, since nobody would know the secret which makes it function. Bureaucrats are as indispensable as the tons of paper consumed under their leadership. Just because everybody senses, with a feeling of powerlessness, the vital role of the bureaucrats, they are given an almost godlike respect. If it were not for the bureaucrats, people feel, everything would go to pieces, and we would starve. Whereas, in the medieval world, the leaders were considered representative of a god-intended order, in modern Capitalism the role of the bureaucrat is hardly less sacred—since he is necessary for the survival of the whole.

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What is the attitude of the *owner* of the enterprise, the capitalist? The small businessman seems to be in the same position as his predecessor a hundred years ago. He owns and directs his small enterprise, he is in touch with the whole commercial or industrial activity, and in personal contact with his employees and workers. But living in an alienated world in all other economic and social aspects, and furthermore being more under the constant pressure of bigger competitors, he is by no means as free as his grandfather was in the same business.

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<sup>22</sup> J.J. Gillespie, *Free Expression in Industry*, The Pilot Press., Ltd., London, 1948.

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But what matters more and more in contemporary economy is big business, the larger corporation. As Drucker puts it very succinctly: “In fine, it is the large corporation—the specific form in which Big Business is organized in a free-enterprise economy—which has emerged as the representative and determining socio-economic institution which sets the pattern and determines the behavior even of the owner of the corner cigar store who never owned a share of stock, and of his errand boy who will never set foot in a mill. And thus the character of our society is determined and patterned by the structural organization of Big Business, the technology of the mass-production plant, and the degree to which our social beliefs and promises are realized in and by the large corporations.”<sup>24</sup>

What then is the attitude of the “owner” of the big corporation to “his” property? It is one of almost complete alienation. His ownership consists in a piece of paper, representing a certain fluctuating amount of money; he has no responsibility for the enterprise and no concrete relationship to it in any way. This attitude of alienation has been most clearly expressed in Berle’s and Means’ description of the attitude of the stockholder to the enterprise which follows here: “(1) The position of ownership has changed from that of an active to that of a passive agent. In place of actual physical properties over which the owner could exercise direction and for which he was responsible, the owner now holds a piece of paper representing a set of rights and expectations with respect to an enterprise. But over the enterprise or its physical property. It has often been said that the owner of a horse is responsible. If the horse lives he must feed it. If the horse dies he must bury it. No such responsibility attaches to a share of stock. The owner is practically powerless through his own efforts to affect the underlying property.

“(2) The spiritual values that formerly went with ownership have been separated from it. Physical property capable of being shaped by its owner could bring to him direct satisfaction apart from the income it yielded in more concrete form. It represented an extension of his own personality. With the corporate revolution, this quality has been lost to the property owner much as it has been lost to the worker through the industrial revolution.

“(3) The value of an individual’s wealth is coming to depend on forces entirely outside himself and his own efforts. Instead, its value is determined on the one hand by the actions of the individuals in command of the enterprise—individuals over whom the typical owner has no control, and on the other hand, by the actions of others in a sensitive and often capricious market. The value is thus subject to the vagaries and manipulations characteristic of the market place. It is further subject to the great swings in society’s appraisal of its own immediate future as reflected in the general level of values in the organized market.

“(4) The value of the individual’s wealth not only fluctuates constantly—the same may be said of most wealth—but it is subject to a constant appraisal. The individual can see the change in the appraised value of his estate from moment to moment, a fact which may markedly affect both the expenditure of his income and his enjoyment of that income.

“(5) Individual wealth has become extremely liquid through the organized markets. The individual owner can convert it into other forms of wealth at a moment’s notice and, provided the market machinery is in working order, he may do so without serious loss due to forced sales.

“(6) Wealth is less and less in a form which can be employed directly by its owner. When wealth is in the form of land, for instance, it is capable of being used by the owner even though the value of land in the market is negligible. The physical quality of such wealth makes possible

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<sup>24</sup> ct. Peter E. Drucker, *Concept of the Corporation*, the John Day Company, New York, 1946. Pp. 8, 9.

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a subjective value to the owner quite apart from any market value it may have. The newer form of wealth is quite incapable of this direct use. Only through sale in the market can the owner obtain its direct use. He is thus tied to the market as never before.

“(7) Finally, in the corporate system, the ‘owner’ of industrial wealth is left with a mere symbol of ownership while the power, the responsibility and the substance which have been an integral part of ownership in the past are being transferred to a separate group in whose hands lies control.”<sup>25</sup>

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The process of *consumption* is as alienated as the process of production. In the first place, we acquire things with money; we are accustomed to this and take it for granted. But actually, this is a most peculiar way of acquiring things. Money represents labor and effort in an abstract form; not necessarily *my* labor and *my* effort, since I can have acquired it by inheritance by fraud, by luck, or any number of ways. But even if I have acquired it by *my* effort (forgetting for the moment that *my* effort might not have brought me the money were it not for the fact that I employed men), I have acquired it in a specific way, by a specific kind of effort, corresponding to my skills and capacities, while, in spending, the money is transformed into an abstract form of labor and can be exchanged against anything else. Provided I am in the possession of money, no effort or interest of mine is necessary to acquire something. If I have the money, I can acquire an exquisite painting, even though I may not have any appreciation for art; I can buy the best phonograph, even though I have no musical taste; I can buy a library, although I use it only for the purpose of ostentation. I can buy an education, even though I have no use for it except as an additional social asset. I can even destroy the painting or the books I bought, and aside from a loss of money, I suffer no damage. Mere possession of money gives me the right to acquire and to do with my acquisition whatever I like. The *human* way of acquiring would be to make an effort qualitatively commensurate with what I acquire. The acquisition of bread and clothing would depend on no other premise than that of being alive; the acquisition of books and paintings, on my effort to understand them and my ability to use them. How this principle could be applied practically is not the point to be discussed here. What matters is that the way we acquire things is separated from the way in which we use them.

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Our way of consumption necessarily results in the fact that we are never satisfied, since it is not our real concrete person which consumes a real and concrete thing. We thus develop an ever-increasing need for more things, for more consumption. It is true that as long as the living standard of the population is below a dignified level of subsistence, there is a natural need for more consumption. It is also true that there is a legitimate need for more consumption as man develops culturally and has more refined needs for better food, objects of artistic pleasure, books, etc. But our craving for consumption has lost all connection with the real needs of man. Originally, the idea of consuming more and better things was meant to give man a happier, more satisfied life. Consumption was a means to an end, that of happiness. It now has become an aim in itself. The constant increase of needs forces us to an ever-increasing effort, it makes us dependent on these needs and on the people and institutions by whose help we attain them. “Each person speculates to create a new need in the other person, in order to force him into a

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<sup>25</sup> cf. A. A. Berle and G. C. Means, *The Modern Corporation and Private Property*, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1940, pp. 66-68.



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new dependency, to a new form of pleasure, hence to his economic ruin...with a multitude of commodities grows the realm of alien things which enslave man.”<sup>29</sup>

Man today is fascinated by the possibility of buying more, better, and especially, new things. He is consumption-hungry. The act of buying and consuming has become a compulsive, irrational aim, because it is an end in itself, with little relation to the use of, or pleasure in the things bought and consumed. To buy the latest gadget, the latest model of anything that is on the market, is the dream of everybody, in comparison to which the real pleasure in use it quite secondary. Modern man, if he dared to be articulate about his concept of heaven, would describe a vision which would look like the biggest department store in the world, showing new things and gadgets, and himself having plenty of money with which to buy them,. He would wander around open-mouthed in this heaven of gadgets and commodities, provided only that there were ever more and newer things to buy, and perhaps that his neighbors were just a little less privileged than he.

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The alienated attitude toward consumption not only exists in our acquisition and consumption of commodities, but it determines far beyond this the employment of leisure time. What are we to expect? If a man works without genuine relatedness to what he is doing, if he buys and consumed commodities in an abstractified and alienated way, how can he make use of his leisure time in an active and meaningful way? He always remains the passive and alienated consumer. He “consumes” ball games, moving pictures, newspapers and magazines, books, lectures, natural scenery, social gatherings, in the same alienated and abstractified way in which he consumes the commodities he has bought. He does not participate actively, he wants to “take in” all there is to be had, and to have as much as possible of pleasure, culture and what not. Actually, he is not free to enjoy “his” leisure; his leisure-time consumption is determined by industry, as are the commodities he buys; his taste is manipulated, he wants to see and to hear what is conditioned to wanted to see and to hear; entertainment is an industry like any other, the customer is made to buy fun as he is made to buy dresses and shows. The value of the fun is determined by its success on the market, not by anything which could be measured in human terms.

In any productive and spontaneous activity, something happens within myself while I am reading, looking at scenery, talking to friends, etcetera. I am not the same after the experience as I was before. In the alienated form of pleasure nothing happens within me; I have consumed this or that; nothing is changed within myself, and all that is left are memories of what I have done. One of the most striking examples for this kind of pleasure consumption is the taking of snapshots, which has become one of the most significant leisure activities. The Kodak slogan, “You press the button, we do the rest,” which since 1889 has helped so much to popularize photography all over the world, is symbolic. It is one of the earliest appeals to push-button power-feeling; you do nothing, you do not have to know anything, everything is done for you; all you have to do is press the button. Indeed, the taking of snapshots has become one of the most significant expressions of alienated visual perception, of sheer consumption. The “tourist” with his camera is an outstanding symbol of an alienated relationship to the world. Being constantly occupied with taking pictures, actually *he* does not see anything at all, except through the

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<sup>29</sup> K. Marx, “Nationalökonomie und Philosophie,” 1844, published in *Die Frühschriften*, Alfred Kröner Verlag, Stuttgart, 1953, p. 254. (My translation, E.F.)

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intermediary of the camera. The camera sees for him, and the outcome of his “pleasure” trip is a collection of snapshots, which are the substitute for an experience which he could have had, but did not have.

Man is not only alienated from the work he does, and the things and pleasures he consumes, but also from the *social forces* which determine our society and the life of everybody living in it.

Our actual helplessness before the forces which govern us appears more drastically in those social catastrophes which, even though they are denounced as regrettable accidents each time, so far have never failed to happen: economic depressions and wars. These social phenomena appear as if they were natural catastrophes, rather than what they really are, occurrences made by man, but without intention and awareness.

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What is the relationship of *man toward himself*? I have described elsewhere this relationship as “marketing orientation.”<sup>32</sup> In this orientation, man experiences himself as a thing to be employed successfully on the market. He does not experience himself as an active agent, as the bearer of human powers. He is alienated from these powers. His aim is to sell himself successfully on the market. His sense of self does not stem from his activity as a loving and thinking individual, but from his socio-economic role. If things could speak, a typewriter would answer the question “Who are you?” by saying “I am a typewriter,” and an automobile, by saying “I am an automobile,” or more specifically by saying, “I am a Ford,” or “a Buick,” or “a Cadillac.” If you ask a man “Who are you?”, he answers “I am a manufacturer,” “I am a clerk,” “I am a doctor”—or “I am a married man,” “I am the father of two kids,” and his answer has pretty much the same meaning as that of the speaking *thing* would have. That is the way he experiences himself, not as a man, with love, fear, convictions, doubts, but as that abstraction, alienated from his real nature, which fulfills a certain function in the social system. His sense of value depends on his success: on whether he can sell himself favorably, whether he can make more of himself than he started out with, whether he is a success. His body, his mind and his soul are his capital, and his task in life is to invest it favorably, to make a profit of himself. Human qualities like friendliness, courtesy, kindness, are transformed into commodities, into assets of the “personality package,” conducive to a higher price on the personality market. If the individual fails in a profitable investment of himself, he feels that *he* is a failure; if he succeeds, *he* is a success. Clearly, his sense of his own value always depends on factors extraneous to himself, on the fickle judgment of the market, which decides about his value as it decides about the value of commodities. He, like all commodities that cannot be sold profitably on the market, is worthless as far as his exchange value is concerned, even though his use value may be considerable.

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<sup>32</sup> cf. my description of the marketing orientation in *Man for Himself*, p. 67 ff. The concept of alienation is not the same as one of the character orientations in terms of the receptive, exploitative, hoarding, marketing and productive orientations. Alienation can be found in any of these non-productive orientations, but it has a particular affinity to the marketing orientation. To the same extent it is also related to Riesman’s “other-directed” personality which, however, though “developed from the marketing orientation,” is a different concept in essential points. Cf. D. Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1950, p. 23.

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#### C. VARIOUS OTHER ASPECTS

...

##### v. *Work*

What becomes of the meaning of *work* in an alienated society?

We have already made some brief comments about this question in the general discussion of alienation. But since this problem is of utmost importance, not only for the understanding of present-day society, but also for any attempt to create a saner society, I want to deal with the nature of work separately and more extensively in the following pages.

Unless man exploits others, he has to work in order to live. However primitive and simple his method of work may be, by the very fact of production, he has risen above the animal kingdom; rightly has he been defined as “the animal that produces.” But work is not only an inescapable necessity for man. Work is also his liberator from nature, his creator as a social and independent being. *In the process of work, that is, the molding and changing of nature outside of himself, man molds and changes himself.* He emerges from nature by mastering her; he develops his powers of cooperation, of reason, his sense of beauty. He separates himself from nature, from the original unity with her, but at the same time unites himself with her again as her master and builder. The more his work develops, the more his individuality develops. In molding nature and re-creating her, he learns to make use of his powers, increasing his skill and creativeness. Whether we think of the beautiful paintings in the caves of Southern France, the ornaments on weapons among primitive people, the statues and temples of Greece, the cathedrals of the Middle Ages, the chairs and the tables made by skilled craftsmen, or the cultivation of flowers, trees or corn by peasants—all are expressions of the creative transformation of nature by man’s reason and skill.

...

With the collapse of the medieval structure, and the beginning of the modern mode of production, the meaning and function of work changed fundamentally, especially in the Protestant countries. Man, being afraid of his newly won freedom, was obsessed by the need to subdue his doubts and fears by developing a feverish activity. The outcome of this activity, success or failure, decided his salvation, indicating whether he was among the saved or the lost souls. *Work, instead of being an activity satisfying in itself and pleasurable, became a duty and an obsession.* The more it was possible to gain riches by work, the more it became a pure means to the aim of wealth and success. Work became, in Max Weber’s terms, the chief factor in a system of “inner-worldly asceticism,” an answer to man’s sense of aloneness and isolation.

...

The religious attitude toward work as a duty, which was still so prevalent in the nineteenth century, has been changing considerably in the last decades. Modern man does not know what to do with himself, how to spend his lifetime meaningfully, and he is driven to work in order to avoid an unbearable boredom. But work has ceased to be a moral and religious obligation in the sense of the middle-class attitude of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Something new has emerged. Ever-increasing production, the drive to make bigger and better things, have become aims in themselves, new ideals. Work has become alienated from the working person.

What happens to the industrial worker? He spends his best energy for seven or eight hours a day in producing “something.” He needs his work in order to make a living, but his role is essentially a passive one. He fulfills a small isolated function in a complicated and highly

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organized process of production, and is never confronted with “his” product as a whole, at least not as a producer, but only as a consumer, provided he has the money to buy “his” product in a store. He is concerned neither with the whole product in its physical aspects nor with its wider economic and social aspects. He is put in a certain place, has to carry out a certain task, but does not participate in the organization or management of the work. He is not interested, nor does he know why one produces this, instead of another commodity—what relation it has to the needs of society as a whole. The shoes, the cars, the electric bulbs, are produced by “the enterprise,” using the machines. He is a part of the machine, rather than its master as an active agent. The machine, instead of being in his service to do work for him which once had to be performed by sheer physical energy, has become his master. Instead of the machine being the substitute for human energy, man has become a substitute for the machine. *His work can be defined as the performance of acts which cannot yet be performed by machines.*

...

This relationship of the worker to his work is an outcome of the whole social organization of which he is a part. Being “employed,”<sup>49</sup> he is not an active agent, has no responsibility except the proper performance of the isolated piece of work he is doing, and has little interest except the one of bringing home enough money to support himself and his family. Nothing more is expected from him, or wanted from him. He is part of the equipment hired by capital, and his role and function are determined by this quality of being a piece of equipment. In recent decades, increasing attention has been paid to the psychology of the worker, and to his attitude toward his work, to the “human problem of industry”; but his very formulation is indicative of the underlying attitude; there is a human being spending most of his lifetime at work, and what should be discussed is the “*industrial problem of human beings,*” rather than “*the human problem of industry.*”

...

The alienated and profoundly unsatisfactory character of work results in two reactions: one, the ideal of complete *laziness*; the other a deep-seated, though often unconscious *hostility* toward work and everything and everybody connected with it.

It is not difficult to recognize the widespread longing for the state of complete laziness and passivity. Our advertising appeals to it even more than to sex. There are, of course, many useful and labor saving gadgets. But this usefulness often serves only as a rationalization for the appeal to complete passivity and receptivity. A package of breakfast cereal is being advertised as “*new—easier to eat.*” An electric toaster is advertised with these words: “... the most distinctly different toaster in the world! Everything is done *for* you with this new toaster. You need not even bother to lower the bread. Power-action, though a unique electric motor, *gently takes the bread right out of your fingers!*” How many courses in languages, or other subjects are announced with the slogan “effortless learning, no more of the old drudgery.” Everybody knows the picture of the elderly couple in the advertisement for a life-insurance company, who have retired at the age of sixty, and spend their life in the complete bliss of having nothing to do except just travel.

Radio and television exhibit another element of this yearning for laziness: the idea of “push-button power”; by pushing a button, or turning a knob on my machine, I have the power to produce music, speeches, ball games, and on the television set, to command events of the world

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<sup>49</sup> The English “employed” like the German *angestellt* are terms which refer to things rather than to human beings.

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to appear before my eyes. The pleasure of driving cars certainly rests partly upon this same satisfaction of the wish for push-button power. By the effortless pushing of a button, a powerful machine is set in motion; little skill and effort is needed to make the driver feel that he is the ruler of space.

But there is far more serious and deep-seated reaction to the meaninglessness and boredom of work. It is a hostility toward work which is much less conscious than our craving for laziness and inactivity. Many a businessman feels himself the prisoner of his business and the commodities he sells; he has a feeling of fraudulency about his product and a secret contempt for it. He hates his customers, who force him to put up a show in order to sell. He hates his competitors because they are a threat; his employees as well as his superioris, because he is in a constant competitive fight with them. Most important of all, he hates himself, because he sees his life passing by, without making any sense beyond the momentary intoxication of success. Of course, this hate and contempt for others and for oneself, and for the very things one produces, is mainly unconscious, and only occasionally comes up to awareness in a fleeting thought, which is sufficiently disturbing to be set aside as quickly as possible.

...

*Erich Fromm was a twentieth-century German social psychologist, psychoanalyst, and philosopher of humanism. He is credited with challenging the behavioral theories of people like Freud, advancing instead the central ide of freedom as fundamental to human nature. His many works investigate the tensions between individual will and communal conformity, as they play out in things like 'work' as noted here in the passages given. The Sane Society—published in 1955—investigates the psychological pathologies at the societal level, questioning capitalism's consistency with healthy human enterprise.*