

THE NEED FOR FREEDOM AS THE GROUNDS OF AGGRESSION

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Abstract:

One of the things Isaiah Berlin noticed in his essay on freedom was the contradiction of human values. Of course, our ideal of living is their harmonization or their falling under a supreme value, such as the Good. In reality, however, the values contradict each other. Also, the ideal of the ego is to comply with the image of the type of man that society forms for itself at a given moment. The smaller the society, the more coherent, the more entire and simpler this image is. As society becomes more complex – the ideal image of man – becomes increasingly incoherent, more contradictory; thus, it becomes more difficult if not impossible to satisfy the individual as such. According to Erich Fromm, the growth of aggression in both directions – destructive and self-destructive – is not at all alien to such a “contradiction” of the values of a complex society. The need for freedom from pressures from many sides, the need to find a morbid “oneness” in the simplicity of death or the self-forgetfulness – can be seen as a possible explanation for the increase in aggression nowadays. Also, another connection between the need for freedom and aggression is seen, in this article, as given by the condition of the human being – as it has been confirmed, so many times, by the philosophical and biological anthropology: man tries to decondition himself, to adapt the environment to its own needs, which implies, depending on the degree of evolution of society, an act of violence done to the external reality. To a certain extent, however, such a tendency to deconditioning, to adapt the environment to our own needs (building nests, decorating, dances) can be found in all living nature.

The main conclusions of this article are: 1. The very tendency towards freedom, towards the liberation from the natural conditions can constitute a new argument in favor of the “solidarity” with the whole living world; 2. Following the very inner springs of deconditioning, it means that in its proper sense and in its highest degree freedom is the turning of the will to dominate upon itself, the self-limitation and channeling of the impulse to dominate from the external environment to the goals and ideals of the internal environment, that is spiritual in itself. Often such finality is not alien to an immense responsibility on the other non-human beings.

Key words: sadism, necrophile, biophile, Fromm, theories of aggression, freedom

The ladder of civilization: Happiness decreases as we go up. An increasingly complex society demands people in contradictory ways

The human being, unlike other living things, is challenged in multiple, often contradictory ways. We can hardly imagine a tragic situation among animals, a situation in which choice becomes downright impossible. Buridan's donkey is a simple parable of the tragedy of human life because the life of an animal is of such a nature that it does not (much) leave room for the undecidable.

Only man can let himself die because he cannot choose between two incompatible options: the life of which of my sons should I save? What comes first – the duty towards the laws of the city or the piety? Why are things like this with regard to the man and, above all, to the civilized man, because, behold, as society evolves, the individual is more and more “broken”, more torn among its various divergent demands, each with its own axiology and which is often incompatible with each of the others.

An answer to such questions is given by Erich Fromm who, consistent with his theoretical system, states in *the Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* that man, unlike other living things, lacks his own instinctual essence. The man is human only because of the social and cultural framework in which he appears; in other words he is, by definition, a cultural being. But as he is, by definition, a cultural being, this means that he is human only within some contexts, within some conjunctures – several contexts, several conjunctures – of which many are mutually incompatible.¹

As it is culturally defined – the human being is the only being who can give his life for a non-biological cause, because there is something more unbearable than not being: not being human anymore. The “substance” of the human being is not his life, it is not his fact of being, but his self-image, the way he represents himself, and this self-image and self-representation act as the ultimate grounds, ultimately having the same force as the instinct. Certainly, this self-representation depends upon the mental and symbolic universe of an age or society and it may differ from one age or society to another. For a Spartan, the greatest virtue was the military virtue, for an Athenian – the ability to speak and lead, for a medieval

¹ Socrates had a special gift – we might even say a sophist gift– in observing the difficulty (*aporia*) of being human. For example, in *Crito*, written by Plato at a young age, therefore being part of that category of dialogues considered the most faithful to the historical image of Socrates, the following aporia occurs: I remain human only insofar as I am righteous and I am righteous only because I observe the laws and the dispositions of my city, but if by reason of the laws I suffer an injustice, is it right to continue to observe them and to obey the dispositions taken, or is it better to break them? But by obeying the law only when it suits me – am I right?

Christian – the power of the faith, for an industrial man – the capital and the amount of income achieved, for a modern man – the self-affirmation and the development of his own self.

If we look at the examples above, we can see that by far the most cohesive, monolithic society was the Spartan society – a totally militarized society, where the few divisions that existed revolved around the supreme value of soldiers. Those societies in which the social division has not been realized, the hunter-gatherer societies were even more “privileged” – not only because such an arrangement is governed by values such as the cooperation and the equality, the compassion and the benevolence, but also – first and foremost – because, in the absence of this division, the human individual was not forced to play several roles, some of them, as we have seen, were incompatible, as it happens in the so-called civilized societies.

The individual living in a “primitive” collectivity is much more unified with himself, given that the “roles” within that society are few and open to all, so that any individual can “grasp” and “play” them all: the hunter and the healer are not exclusive specializations, nor are the dancer or the hut builder. An individual includes within himself the society of which he is a part because he himself is or can be a hunter and a gatherer, a dancer or a builder.

The division of labor and the social division become structural for the “civilized” society – with undoubted benefits in the sense of making work more efficient. According to Fromm, the discovery of agriculture was the decisive step (the so-called “Neolithic revolution”) because it led to the occurrence of a surplus and thus to the possibility of maintaining and using entire parts of the population for purposes other than the production of food and goods necessary for survival, such as the construction of pyramids, religious edifices or war machines or the conquest of other territories by specialized and properly equipped military troops.

In such a society the cultivator is *different* from the bearer of arms; the craftsman is different from the farmer and the soldier as well as from other craftsmen, the priest and the educated stand out from others to the point of using a sacred, secret language and having customs forbidden to the rest of the community. This creates not only a rift between the individual and the society, but also a rift within the individual himself that “multiplies” within himself, thus reflecting the external social multiplicity.

For one way or another, against these distinctions, every individual has a tangent with all other existing social roles. The ancient Egyptian also builds his little pyramid, even if he is not a pharaoh or a high priest. In the same way, the farmer is now and then at least a little of a warrior – either to defend his country, or because he is sometimes called to arms to defend

the fortress he lives in. But soldiers also intersect with the farmer, in some societies, such as the Roman society or the Spartan society and he receives a plot of land as a reward for performing the military service.

The aristocrats, the priests and the kings – they were not forbidden at all – on the contrary! – to interfere with the other roles of the society, because they owned land, they depended on the production of grains, they secured their social position on the basis of grains or on the power of arms. So the man in the civilized society is a man multiplied in him, a man who must simultaneously play several roles and some of them contradictory.

Let us take the example of today's society, whose model (as we had agreed) is the affirmation and development of man's own self. The problem that arises is how we can develop our own self (which implies a certain unity of the self) while the man is forced to play various roles: he has the duties of a parent and a child at the same time (due to the increase in the life expectancy, people nowadays they mature and grow old alongside their parents, whose support in many cases falls to them); he is employed in a corporation; he is his own driver; he has to take care of buying and possibly cooking food; he has to inform and educate himself; he has to be up to date with the technological and scientific news – although he can really understand very little of the latter; he is also forced to be active in various social and political registers (to vote, possibly to run for office, to protect the environment or participate in helping others).

We can say about nowadays man that he is overworked, but such a formula makes us lose sight of the fact that we are talking about *demands in opposite directions*: for example, we work in a corporation whose activity impacts the environment that we believe in protecting and we are really involved in our capacity as environmental activists; we want to educate ourselves and read – but the gainful activities barely allow us a short respite, which is insufficient for these rather time-consuming purposes; we are forced by today's technocentrism to surround ourselves with the latest technologies – intended to make work easier, but to acquire them we are forced to spend more and therefore to work harder.

Here are just a few examples of *the contradictory meanings* of today's humanity among which we are forced to navigate, to constantly negotiate, to make tight turns, to avoid a collision at the last moment; sometimes to run red lights or make dangerous maneuvers, or even to drive on the wrong side of the road.

Already a few centuries ago Blaise Pascal noticed the number of contradictions that characterize the human being, as he himself was simultaneously a mystic *and* a scientist. And perhaps, indeed, things have never been different since the civilization – that is, the division –

of human society made it felt. It's just that as the degree of complexity of civilization increases – the feeling of rupture, of alienation from society and from oneself (an internal reflex of the social) reaches a paroxysmal level.

Today's “multiplied” man feels that he is overwhelmed, that he cannot respond coherently to the various demands of the roles he has to play. Hence the denial, the depression, the abandonment, the giving up or the postponing of tasks *sine die*, are “solutions” that do not bring him reconciliation or peace, but, on the contrary, a feeling of guilt, failure or inner emptiness.

The book of one of the most pessimistic – and lucid – thinkers of the 20th century, Emil Cioran, is entitled *Sfârtecure* (Shattering), in French, in the original, *Écartèlement*, a term that refers to a medieval execution practice that consisted in tying the limbs of the condemned to four horses driven in opposite directions. (The same author also signed the book with a quite similar title: *Tratat de descompunere* (Treatise on decomposition), in French, in the original: *Précis de décomposition!*). Moreover, a favorite object of analysis in his books from the French period is precisely this evil of the civilization, of civilizing – represented by the ever-increasing loss of the original simplicity, by the ever-widening betrayal of the simplicity of life... of “the good savage”.

Although the introduction of the theory of the increase in the degree of anxiety or discomfort of the individual directly proportional to the degree of civilization of the society in which he lives is linked to Sigmund Freud, however – we will immediately return to Freud's conception – an explanation that utilizes, in a somewhat customary way sociological, the terms of the existential philosophy, in this case those of Søren Kierkegaard and of the Heideggerian existential analysis seem much more satisfactory to us. Martin Heidegger – in his famous *Being and Time* – sees man (*Dasein*) as his own *possibility of being*.

According to his viewpoint, the meaning of the human existence is given by the “opening” of the being to its own essence, in other words, by understanding the things present in reality man makes them *be* – and they are in as many ways as they are seen, internalized and understood by the human beings. Thus for a plowman – the sky is linked to his field (as the origin of the rain and the place of the sun), while for an astronomer – the sky is an optical phenomenon, the sun is a star of a certain age, and so on. So there are more meanings of the notion of *being*, more meanings of being of the existences that man is aware of.

Moreover, in each historical era the humanity had a certain general vision of what the world and life were about, which means that in each era (here Heidegger's ideas highly resemble the Hegelian theory of history) a certain meaning of the Being is “revealed”. Unlike Hegel,

however, Heidegger does not proclaim that the history of being – and therefore of man – would have an end, a finality, but – rather in agreement with Leibniz – he hints that the existence possibilities of Being, i.e. its meanings are infinite and inexhaustible.

But what happens in the issue of the man as an individual? How can he feel accomplished, fulfilled – given that, behold, the Being is infinite – while he is finite? If the meaning of his existence is to bring to light the meanings of the being – can he ever affirm of himself that he really *is*? – since the meanings of being exceed him in their infinity, not only at the level of entire time, but also of the contemporary duration, for he cannot achieve all the forms and possibilities of *being* present in his own era; he cannot be a plowman and also an astronomer, a poet, a businessman and a philosopher at the same time.

Here, Heidegger uses some beautiful phrases, saying for example – also in accordance with Leibniz's “monad” – that the being is fully present in each of *the perspectives* on it, or that man reaches his most authentic possibility of being (and therefore the most complete) when listening to a mysterious inner drive, a “call” of the being also leaving the sphere of the impersonal Self, the consistent everyday life, and so forth.

We believe, on the contrary, that on this point Heidegger is wrong and that Kierkegaard. Søren Kierkegaard perceived the existence of a real suffering produced by the relationship of the individual with the infinity of his possibilities of being and therefore of his anxiety – varying from melancholy to despair – in front of the possibility of choice. Any choice leaves aside an infinity of possibilities and that is why one of the solutions of the individual – noted by Kierkegaard – is to not make any choice in order to float in the indeterminacy of all the possibilities of being, in this virtual infinity. Because we can only virtually speak of infinity, only as long as nothing is actually achieved.

We also believe that this “infinity” is not as abstract as Kierkegaard or Heidegger makes it out to be. And we also think that *the numerical*, quantitative dimension of the infinite is not essential, but its *logical*, qualitative dimension is. The increase in the degree of civilization leads, as we showed above, to a complexification of the society, i.e. to a diversification to the point of antagonism of social roles – and given that the individual reflects the society in which he lives on a psychic level – he will internalize its multiplicity and antagonism, he will literally feel *shattered*, that is, driven in opposite directions.

The infinite is not just that endless string of numbers, it is that which no longer has limit, configuration, that which is stripped of its natural edges, thus being dissolved. (Given this negative meaning of the infinity, the ancient Greeks – unlike the moderns – used the limit as an essential attribute of being, while the infinity was attributed to the non-being.)

So the qualitative infinity invoked here means dislocation and refers to that which cannot stay together, in one place, because of the contradictory forces to which it is subjected. The debordering takes the form of disfigurement. Often the action of this qualitative infinity is explicit: the individual is made to play contradictory roles in order to be human, as demonstrated by the ancient tragedies or the Socratic aporetic dialogues.

Other times this is implicit: the individual feels drawn to an incompatible variety of “temptations to exist”, to use a Cioran’s title once more. There is a pressure in the civilized man to cover as much of the field of possible experiences as possible; he is almost never satisfied with one role and at the limit he wants to play them all. Envy is an evil of the civilized society precisely because the individual feels *frustrated* by the non-fulfillment of some *possibilities of being* that he feels they rightfully belong to him. Since he could also ..., it means that he was dispossessed of an asset to which he was equally entitled.

The envy and also the guilt, the resentment, the feeling of failure, distraction, hyperactivity, addiction to work, but also to a continuous stimulation through the flow of information or entertainment find their roots here. The poor Pahom from Tolstoy’s story “How much land does a man need?” trying to his death to cover as much land as possible for the fixed price of a thousand rubles might seem – if tragedy admitted degrees of comparison – a less tragic figure than that of today’s “consumer” running from morning to night and from birth to death to include as wide an area of options as possible, of possibilities of being, of “roles” to play – as we have previously seen, many of them incompatible.

His greed for *land* centered his existence, acting as an integrative finality of the other parts of him, while today the life of man is divided into many and contradictory directions. A modern-day Pahom would no longer follow a concentric route, but run madly in all directions, left and right, up and down, forward and backward, trying to cover, centrifugally and explosively, the infinity of possible experiences...

Today’s consumer has an even sadder fate than that of Tolstoy’s character because even before death joy does not fill his heart at the thought that he managed to cover with his steps as much land as he wanted; he always remains ridiculed, minimized by the qualitative, the logical infinity, which is inexhaustible by definition characterizing the consumer society.

It is very interesting that this very democratic and egalitarian society whose positions or roles are apparently “open” to all increases the anxiety of the individual much more than the society divided explicitly into antagonistic classes did. The slave or the poor man in Egypt or ancient Rome felt to a very small degree *the possibility of becoming* a pharaoh or an

emperor, in any case he did not blame himself for not being so and, with rare exceptions, he did not even want it to become reality.

The poverty and the slavery could be regarded with a kind of resignation, as in the face of a fatality². At all times the individual is a miniature city, he reflects in his psychic forum the existing social structure. The Egyptian slave also builds his little pyramid, like the pharaohs, the slave Epictetus wants to be – at least in a figurative sense, a master of his own desires and fears – a free man.

The compensations are easy to obtain on the symbolic, religious, or minimum achievement (small pyramids) level in societies where *class antagonism is extremely strongly emphasized*. However, the consumerist society maintains among the population the illusion of the accessibility of top financial or political positions to everyone. When the multi-billionaire Mark Zuckerberg dresses up in a twenty-dollar t-shirt – the message is that he's someone who's made it in life, so anyone can *realistically* reach the same level of wealth. The poor of today, unlike the poor of yesterday, adds to the misery of scarcity – the guilt of not having achieved the possibility of being which, behold, was so accessible to him. He will devote a lot of time to his plans to get rich, to “make money” – but all these unrealistic and unachievable plans only increase his anxiety and guilt.

The birth seen as shattering. The tossing into the world and the presence of evil

According to Erich Fromm, the human destructiveness comes not from an instinct, but from a type of *character* – cultivated by some societies, mainly agricultural and strongly divided societies (where the property is a supreme value). It is about the *necrophilic* character – possessed by the phantasms of dismemberment, disintegration and the attraction-repulsion exerted by putrescence, filth and excrement. This character expresses symbolically and in a fantasmatic manner the situation of the non-integrated, broken, shattered individual. On the one hand the phantasm of the dismemberment expresses his own inner dismemberment (*there is no unity among the social roles assigned to him*), on the other hand the phantasms of death (dreams depicting graves, toilets full of feces or, in extreme cases, properly speaking necrophilia: the sexual attraction exerted by the sight of a corpse) expresses the rupture, the hiatus, the caesura, the discontinuity between the individual and the social body that “gave him birth”.

² As Epictetus does for example in his Manual

This "mother" is a dead mother or a mother of death that triggers on the individual the complex of a "malignant incest": of "restoring" the bond with the "mother" in terms of expulsion, excretion, evacuation. In such a vision, the born is nothing but a "viable abortion" and "rather they make happy not the living, those who have life in them to live, but the dead. But happier than these is the one not yet born and who has not seen what evil deeds are done beneath the sun"³.

So the "connection" with a mother of death is also done through images and symbols of death, while a mother of life acts on the "biophilic" character through the complex of a "benign" incest, where the attachment, affection, unconditional love and shared joy are indispensable connecting elements. The "biophilic" individual restores or maintains the connection with the mother – imagined as a source of life – by promoting life (creation, construction, procreation, good mood), while the "necrophilic" individual maintains the connection with the mother – imagined as a grave, as a symbol of death or as a "source" of death – through the production of destructive acts (from the destruction of the good mood or the "mood" of the diners to the destruction of cities or the whole world).

He thus reproduces his "anti-birth" to which he owes his existence – through movements directed against life, even if he rationalizes this impulse with justifications such as: "in order to build we must first demolish".

We mentioned the *Ecclesiastes* as an emblematic text for the desires and imagery of the necrophilic character, and an investigation of the social, economic and political conditions existing in the era of such ideational, philosophical or artistic productions should be opened.⁴ For a text like the *Ecclesiastes* cannot be attributed solely to the disapproval of a single individual; since it was eventually contained in a sacred writing it is clear that it is representative of a widespread type of sensibility.

In the same way we can think about *the regressive soteriology* present in the philosophical or religious texts of the Gnostic type, where the pre-existence, the non-creation and finally the non-existence itself are apologized. In this vision, the matter is the substance of evil, and the Creator – its origin, since he "torn" us from the unity of the absolute void throwing us into a world of multiplicity and diversity. Some practices of the medieval Gnostic movements

³ *The Book of Job, the Ecclesiastes, The Book of Jonah, The Book of Ruth, The Song of Songs* translated and annotated by Petru Creția, Humanitas, București, 1995, p 124

⁴ "It was undoubtedly written after the Exile, probably towards the end of the 3rd century BC, in a Palestinian environment and, despite the era of writing and some analogies, without any Greek influence. Rather, some Assyro-Babylonian roots (The wise man's quarrel with his servant) or Egyptian (Song of the blind harpist) should be taken into account." Petru Creția, „Comentariu la Ecleeziastul” în *Cartea lui Iov Ecleeziastul Cartea lui Iona Cartea lui Ruth Cântarea Cântărilor* traduse și comentate de Petru Creția, Humanitas, București, 1995, pp 103-104

included – quite illustrative of necrophilic behavior – the dismemberment, dismemberment and consumption of the human fetus, expelled either through birth or abortion.

Regarding the constitutive "nihilism" of the Christianity, Friedrich Nietzsche pointed out its "necrophilic" character, but also the historical and social conditions that led to its spread – the disinherited, the expelled, the expatriates, the foreigners are the fiercest deniers of existence.

The pessimism of the 19th century and also the current anti-natalism, could be defined, from the genetic viewpoint, as a theoretical expression of the enormous complexity of society and implicitly of the multiplication of social roles, often contradictory, that man must play, simultaneously, in order to be and to remain human, which leads to the installation of the necrophilic character. Thus the "oneness" is found through the destruction of life – in others or in oneself. As we stated elsewhere, man prefers to die – than not to be a man, and in the current conditions it is almost impossible to meet all the human criteria as they are either contradictory or too many to be fully satisfied.

The Biology of Evil. Instinctualist theories of the aggression as destructiveness and of the self-destructiveness (Freud, Lorenz)

On the contrary, Sigmund Freud tried to find the explanation for the destructive madness of the First World War by introducing into the living substance itself two contradictory tendencies, the so-called life (*Eros*) and death (*Thanatos*) drives. Both follow the same principle of conservation, of homeostasis (where the creation of tension equates to unpleasantness, and the de-tensioning or the elimination of disturbing stimuli equates to pleasure), the death drive being a kind of supreme achievement of homeostasis (reducing all stimuli to zero level – the Nirvana Principle).

The maintenance of existence as such is due to the balance of these two tendencies. Normally an individual entity (a single cell) self-destructs at some point, but with the multicellular organization – the death drive manifests itself mainly externally, through the musculature and through the mouth / digestion. From this moment on, the non-discharge of the death drive externally, through destructiveness directed at external enemies, threatens to return internally as self-destructiveness, following the same pattern as the secondary narcissism (the reinvestment in the self of the libido withdrawn from the object).

However, the individual or the collective feels that it can protect itself from such a return of aggression and destructiveness towards its own existence by manifesting it, naturally, towards other existences and thus obtaining, at least for a while, its balance – hence the war

and so on. The alternative would be the sublimation of the death drive through symbolic or cultural deeds.

With all the demarcations from psychoanalysis, Konrad Lorenz inherits the foundations of the Freudian psychoanalytic theory of aggression since for him too, the aggression represents a kind of internal psychic "energy" that, if not released in time, will accumulate, causing it to "boil" the entire system until it explodes and self-destructs. The Nobel Laureate, creator of ethology, tries to prove in the *On Aggression* – the presence of this "hydraulic" mechanism in all living world – from the fish swimming in the aquarium to geese, pigeons, the western jackdaw and the deer.

The biological "reason" for the presence and triggering of this aggressive "instinct" is obviously the survival: the defense against the attack of an enemy, i.e. the activation of the energy necessary to capture and consume the prey. The inhibition of this aggressive mechanism is also due to the biological reason of survival – because in an intraspecific fight (among members of the same species) – the exposure of the vulnerable parts of the loser (in wolves and dogs – the neck and belly, in monkeys – the rear) decouples the reaction aggressive, the triumphant animal is simply "paralyzed" in the face of these evidences of submission. The caged flying birds give examples of cruelty – similar to those committed by humans, in that they do not stop their attack even though the victim is already neutralized.

However, Lorenz's explanation is simple: in conditions of freedom, the defeated bird would have flown away – which it can no longer do because of its captivity, as it is forced to remain in the proximity of the aggressor, an "offensive" fact, interpreted by the latter as a reason to continue the attack.

Another thing Lorenz found is that, in general, under the conditions of captivity the aggressiveness of animals increases and the causes are the reduction of the "territory", the increase in density (Edward Hall documents the connection between density and stress; increasing the population beyond a certain level is associated with the appearance of epidemics or anomalous behaviors), but equally, the failure to satisfy some needs, usually underestimated in the case of animals, such as the curiosity, the play, the exploring of the environment, which leads to the installation of unbearable boredom – from which the animal tries to escape by acting aggressively, towards other animals or towards himself, if it is not simply developing a lethargic depression.

It is no coincidence – Lorenz believes, and on this point Fromm agrees with him – that this explanation is also valid in the case of the human aggression, given that people live in cities and homes that reproduce the conditions of captivity in zoos.

Rejecting the instinctualist theories on aggression – The arguments of Erich Fromm

Erich Fromm, however, differentiates himself from Lorenz – as well as from Freud – regarding the "hydraulic" theory of aggression professed by the other two. First of all, some terminological clarifications must be introduced: the so-called "aggressive" actions of animals are in fact a "defensive" aggression – and the latter really has a clear biological purpose, that of defense, of intimidating the opponent. As for hunting, Fromm states, quoting Lorenz himself, a lion is as aggressive in biting the gazelle he has taken as we are in looking at the roast turkey on our plate.

The defensive aggression is exercised under specific conditions, as a defensive reaction to a threat, and if these conditions are not met or if the flight remains a viable option (according to the fight or flight model), then the aggression will not occur and it will gather inside the psyche, as in an airtight container, threatening it with the damage or the explosion. Moreover the aggression is far from being a "substance", an "energy", a "secretion" that needs to be released now and then, but – as a defensive aggression – it is one of the possible response options, that of adaptive behavior to environmental conditions.

We need to remember that it is not even the only answer option – and thus Fromm also opposes the behaviorist theory – for which the stimulus-response relationship indicates a certain type of fatality and therefore, in its essence, it does not differ from the instinctualist theories.

In order to talk about aggression in the true sense of the term, Fromm believes, we must refer to *the intraspecific* aggression (shown among members of the same species) and *the interspecific* aggression (toward members of other species) exercised as a self-contained, self-motivating activity. However, the intention of *causing pain or death to another entity or self – in order to obtain the satisfaction triggered by such damage / injury* – cannot be encountered under normal conditions of freedom in other living creatures besides the humans.

In other words, it is devoid of any biological support and – given that it is found only in the case of the human being – we are forced to accept that its only source, its only foundation is a socio-cultural foundation. The aggressiveness of the human being is diffused from the cultural model of the *macro* and *micro*-social framework in which the individual develops, to which the historical conditions likely to favor or, on the contrary, inhibit its manifestation (Hitler would have remained, perhaps, a traveling merchant of postcards – if

there hadn't been a whole political and social conjuncture to favor him), the individual's temperament, his degree of education and, obviously, his own freedom of choice are added.

In a word, *the character* is the origin of the aggressive or the non-aggressive behavior. But the character, even in a sketchy description, is the resultant of the action of a significant number of "forces" to which the imponderable is added – which matters so much after all! – due to the "unpredictable" freedom of choice of the individual. Fromm's definition of man in the terms of the adaptive behavior sounds like this: unlike other animals that adapt their needs to the environmental conditions, man adapts the environment to his needs. (Just one example: the temperature drop of the environment causes, among other animals, either to adopt hibernation or to migrate, or to regulate the reproductive cycle, while man *warms* the environment – by heating the habitat with the help of the fire, clothing or shelters.)

Here we may encounter the riddle of the whole problem of the aggressiveness and of the non-aggressiveness. In adapting the environment to our own needs, we can distinguish the presence of the original act i.e. the constitutive impulse of *violence*. Man no longer submits to nature, but he tries to submit nature to his own will. He *forces* nature to comply according to his own desires, he tries to dominate it. This kind of behavior is fundamentally human – and therefore it can extend to anything – from the animals he domesticates and uses to dominating other people and himself. The magical and religious behavior originates in the same exercise of the will toward "forces," the invisible powers hidden within or beyond the phenomena of nature.

The magical and religious rituals attempt to harmonize these forces with the human will, either by manipulating them almost mechanically in the magical ritual or by supplication in the prayer. That is precisely why there is an obvious association – noted by Fromm – between the degree of imposition on nature (the type of economy) and the degree of violence, of aggression within that very society. There is a drop in aggressiveness in the economies where *the degree of taxation* is, in turn, minimal (gatherer-hunter societies) and it increases exponentially with the exploitation of nature through agriculture and industry.

The cultivation of the earth is literally *a symbolic rape* of the earth, the sowing by man of a primordial element, an action in which the other elements (water, fire and air) are involved. Through agriculture, the human being dominates not only the soil, but all the elements, the earth as a whole. (If the earth is imagined as the primordial mother – it can be said that the basis of the cultural and religious archetype of incest lies in the action of cultivating the earth as the original and therefore constitutive sin of humanity.)

The empirical rehabilitation of idealism. Man as the "leader" of the movement of emancipation from the forces of nature

This movement of emancipation from the forces of nature, from the natural conditioning is nothing else – no matter how hard we avoid the temptations of *idealistic philosophy* – than the direct expression of the aspiration towards Freedom of man, and we will see whether this applies only to the man. Indeed today, in full dominance of the empirical paradigm of the sciences, the "Science" as conceived by an idealist philosopher such as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel interests the historians alone.

However, we find in Hegel one of the most ingenious and convincing explanations of the human violence or aggression, in what is called the master-slave dialectic. In a struggle for "life and death", Hegel states, the one who frees himself from the (natural) fear of death and who therefore places *the value* of simply living the value of his own freedom before the natural life. The defeated is, on the contrary, subject to the natural fear of death only because he is not free in this sense he can also become the master's slave.⁵

However cautious we may be regarding the Hegelian vision of freedom, we can only note a certain tendency towards emancipation and towards the liberation from the domination of the forces of nature, which are present in other living beings as well. Even if Fromm's definition of the human being remains valid, the distinction between man and animal remains, at least with respect to higher or "intelligent" animals, a gradual rather than a radical distinction. There are behaviors intended to adapt the environment to the individual's needs, even if in a rudimentary form, in other – quite numerous – species of animals.

From swallow nests or the weaver bird orbs to vented termite "castles" and dens, from the cultivation of fungi inside the anthill by a species of ants to fishing techniques learned by certain birds as a result of living together with people in a fishing village or those used by

⁵We do not go into all the details of this dialectic, we only recall that the master does not kill his subject because in the recognition of himself as master he can contemplate and enjoy his own freedom; this occurs partially, however, given that the slave is no longer his equal, or the freedom can only be truly recognized by a free being, equal to him, which is why he will dedicate himself to military activities, to challenge other free beings. We could say that the "master" becomes addicted to the moment of proof, of demonstrating his free and fearless condition, and therefore turns into a tireless warrior. In turn, the slave – used for physical labor – makes the free man free himself even more from the powers of nature because it provides him with food and the necessities of life, even luxury, without him making any effort in this respect. Nevertheless – and here we encounter the dialectical reversal – freeing himself from nature, the "master" alienates himself from it, by becoming dependent on the services of the subjects who, in return, satisfy their need for freedom by: a. of nature, through science and technology, by understanding the phenomena of nature and by inventing techniques and machinery designed to ease the effort and thus release the burden of physical work, and b. by "inventing" some "saving" religions or philosophies, such as Christianity or Stoicism, which depicts a world in which the differences between masters and slaves are erased, and the slave is recognized as a free being – even superior to the earthly master – by an absolute court.

crows to crack nuts by throwing them in the path of motor vehicles, without leaving aside one of the most spectacular examples of compensation for a natural "deficit", in this case the absence, in males, of coloring alive, by exercising a true artistic act – it is about the satin bowerbird (*Ptilonorhynchus violaceus*) that tries to attract the female by decorating the nest and its surroundings with brightly colored pebbles – all these ethological documents and many others plead in favor of the fact that the aspiration towards emancipation from under the natural conditioning is not entirely specific to the human being, even if it is achieved, to the greatest extent, within the human world.

The supremacy of the human being in the order of nature can thus find a ..."natural" legitimacy: since every being *aspires* to emancipation from the natural conditioning, therefore to freedom, it is entitled to occupy the top of the hierarchy as it achieves this aspiration in the highest degree. From this perspective, part of the domestication of animals can be related to the "recognition" by some animals of a higher level of freedom achieved by humans and thus a voluntary integration of some animals (cats, dogs, pigeons) into the human habitat, rather than with the imposition of man's will upon their will. Certainly, the emancipation from the forces of nature attracts direct benefits (source of food, shelter, security), but beyond these "biological" interests, the connoisseurs and the animal lovers know well that often the "psychological" motivation takes prevail: an animal, especially a social animal, it is attracted rather by the "force" exerted by curiosity or petting.

The origin of aggression: the frustration of freedom. Freedom as the basis of Good

Consequently, the foundations of the two types of character and cultural models of society identified by Fromm, the biophilic character and the necrophilic character, can be fully understood in the light of this vision. The aggressiveness as the imposition of one's will to *the detriment* of another person or entity is the deviant result of a frustration of *freedom* – as a fundamental need of the human existence and, as we have seen, as a fundamental aspiration of the animal, especially of the higher and social animals.

The aggressiveness, Fromm believes, is found especially in the case of those categories of people who feel unfulfilled, in the deepest human sense of achievement and fulfillment: that of freedom. It is known that those who endure deprivation and violence for a long time tend to become abusive and aggressive themselves towards others who are weaker (the military service is one of the examples along others such the life in prison, the famous string of the

propagation of violence: the boss yells at the father, the father yells at the mother, the mother yells at the child and the child yells at the dog.)

In other words, we try to overcompensate for insulting our own will and freedom by imposing *a total* act of will. The more explosive, the more arbitrary, the more brutal the act – the more "voluntary", the "stronger" the will seems to us. Let's us also take into account the fact that the "outbursts" of anger can also be explained by the fact that most of the time the person in question only has a very limited time to express himself; his living conditions prevent or they repress the manifestation of the acts of will, thus explaining the scandal-type outbursts such as the "biting through the fence" or the "stabbing on the back".

Within the other cultural or social model, the *biophilic* model, the tendency to freedom and domination, as this is constitutive of the human being, manifests itself primarily and essentially as self-dominion and the limitation of one's own will. The model of the secondary narcissism—applied by Freud to both self-love and the self-hate – can now reveal its positive, beneficial valences: the withdrawal of the "aggressiveness" from the object and its reinvestment in the ego only secondarily and deviantly leads to masochism.

This paramount and authentic action leads, paradoxically, precisely to the enhancement of the human freedom. The greatest achievements of human existence – even those related to dominating the nature and exploiting thereof – are primarily due to this inward turning of the will to dominate, the capacity for self-control and the resistance to frustration, to postpone the fulfillment of objectives. And if the hunter-gatherer societies appear to us or are even devoid of aggressive manifestations and violence, this is due to the imposition of *a limitation on the exercise of the will to dominate nature*.

What we call animism, and it is known as the most basic religious manifestation known, is the "theoretical" expression of such self-limitation: the "savages" extend the same power that animates them to the level of other creatures whom, even if they hunt, they respect, worshiping them within a cult (the cult of the bear), thus thanking them for the meat offered, and so on, as the game is strictly limited to the needs of survival and so forth.

Such a beneficial, compassionate and empathic self-limiting behavior is found both in the hunter-gatherer (who is more of a gatherer than a hunter) and in...those who embrace the principle of liberty formulated by John Stuart Mill: my liberty extends to the freedom of the other, the free exercise of my will cannot infringe on the free exercise of another's will. Well, although we "feel" that this principle sounds very good and it is obvious that this is a common sense principle, we cannot explain it, nor understand why, in practice, it is so often violated. As although it has the appearance of a tautology, the violation of the other's freedom

is not contradictory except on a completely abstract level, where freedom would be an independent entity (and the free individuals some avatars of "Freedom").

On a concrete level, not only does the violation and domination of another's will not represent a contradiction of my freedom, but it can be seen as the only way of acquiring, achieving my own freedom, a confirmation of my status as a free being (as we saw that occurs in the first phase of the master-slave dialectic).

The (psychological) basis of this intuitive understanding now appears with absolute clarity: the self-limitation of the will to dominate⁶ it is the perfect, *complete* achievement of the human freedom as the domination of one's own human nature is the will to dominate nature. If the "nature" of man is, as Fromm believes, of a cultural nature and it means to *dominate nature*, then the most complete, if not even paramount and essentially human exercise of this nature is achieved on itself as self-dominion, as the domination of its own will to dominate. The finality of the act of education (from the most primitive to the most evolved forms) is the awakening in the human individual of *this meaning of freedom*, at the end of which it is assumed that he will have internalized and assimilated the role of control and censor played during childhood by parents, educators, teachers.

As it is carried out naturally, the educational process should mean no more than a staging of a "play" that the mature individual will later play alone, in his inner circle of being his own parent and child, teacher and student, king and subject, manager and employee. Rarely, however, does education achieve this "natural" goal. Most of the time it boils down to a confrontation between the wills of the parents or the teachers and those of the children or the students, each of trying, as the case may be, either to control the other or to escape from this domination. The will of the parent or of the teacher does not insinuate itself into the psyche of the child/student to become the will of self-dominance, but it remains external and contrary to the will of the child/student who in turn tries to assert his own by contradicting the dominant person of the parent or teacher, either through rebelliousness, or by not observing the tasks received or the program.

In Fromm's substantial analysis of Hitler, sufficient evidence is provided according to which the tyrant he was to become was an insubordinate, undisciplined, unwilling student: the failures during high school or the two missed entrance exams to the Academy of Fine Arts, the lack of systematic study of paintings that condemn him to artistic mediocrity, although he is endowed with undoubted talent. Seemingly paradoxical, the "will-less" man has become

⁶ The will to dominate whose "biological" meaning is the adaptation of the environment to the needs of man – who is one of the most vulnerable beings in nature.

the apologist for the strong will. In fact, the so-called "lack of will" is by no means a "weak" will, perhaps an un-free will, but by no means a "weak" will. On the contrary, Hitler shows stubbornness, tenacity and recklessness (the latter as a soldier in World War I) which shows that his disobedience to school rules and discipline came from the fact that he felt them as offending his own will; that was nothing but a manifestation, at that point *passive*, of the terrible aggression to come.

Fromm asks the question: "How many virtual Hitler's are there among us?" And indeed there are many. They are those for whom freedom means first and foremost the manifestation of the will to dominate, *the immediate* achievement of the – fundamentally human – desire to adapt the environment to their needs. The sadomasochism, the criminality, the children's hysteria, but also certain types of suicide and depression are nothing more than the putting into practice of the actual achievement of this *concept of freedom*! They would not occur if the people who commit such crimes viewed freedom differently, that of dominating one's own will to dominate, a meaning exemplified by spiritual masters such as Jesus, Buddha, Socrates and other saints or ascetics or many scholars, thinkers and artists.

The lack of the un-reflected understanding of freedom, is also revealed by the feeling of emptiness, insurmountable boredom that the simple achievement of the will to dominate brings: the blank look in the eyes of the criminal after having committed the murderous thought, the disorientation of the one who does not know what to do on *a weekend* or on a holiday with his spare time when no one tells him what to do anymore, but also the void we feel in front of the release of certain desiderative tensions (sexual desire, digestive needs, social ambition, thirst for revenge).

How different is the other concept of freedom which, although it has the same origin as the one discussed above, in this case the adaptation of nature to the needs of man and the will to dominate is first exercised over one's own will to dominate and only in this new capacity, as derivative will of the second order, and over other entities or existence in general, in a creative and original way. The writer who sits for long hours in a chair to write his novel – ignoring or postponing normal physiological processes, the artist, the painter, the mathematician – reflecting for years on a single problem are people whose freedom – creative and original – manifests itself in firstly as the domination of their own will to dominate and to adapt the environment to their needs. Jesus exhorts his disciples to listen to their "Father" within them, for they are, at the same time, their own sons and their own fathers.

Only such an understanding of freedom paves the way for empathy and compassion; only such an understanding makes us see that the aspiration for freedom defines every human

being and even some animals. As a species, man finds himself on the highest stage of the achievement of this aspiration, but we have seen that this stage is divided into two: the man dominated by the will to dominate and the man who dominates this will to dominate. The latter is the truly free man, the man who has ceased to be dominated by his own will to dominate. Nietzsche speaks of three stages of the spirit: the camel, the lion and the child.

To become a child – the final stage of the Nietzschean evolution, the supreme degree of maturation, the expression of complete freedom, originality, creativity and spontaneity – you must first of all be a beast of burden, to know how to bear, to endure, to obey and to be patient. As a "lion", the spirit rises and overturns the tables of laws and values but only because, in the form of a camel, it has carried them on its back for so long; finally, in its stage as a child, the spirit also subdues the lion, with its will to dominate, to impose, in the ingenuity of the creative game. And all creative acts have in common is the feeling that an "inner" voice dictates them, above the "own" will – the text or the melody or that they receive from somewhere else the image that they try to contain in a painting, sculpture or storytelling – while feeling absolutely and truly free.⁷

An excellent work on this topic was written by Ștefan Afloroaei, entitled *Despre simțul vieții. Întrebări, perplexități, răspunsuri* (About the meaning of life; Questions, perplexities, answers).⁸ We reiterate here a passage from a chronicle of this book: "Finally, Ștefan Afloroaei outlines a different possibility: that of the unconditional choice. By <<unconditional>>, however, he does not mean a choice beyond any conditions of possibility, but a choice freed from the imperative of the freedom of choice. In a completely paradoxical way, outlined on the verge of what can barely be thought or spoken, we have the feeling of complete freedom precisely when something seems to attract us – like a fatality, like a necessity – from beyond us, encompassing us entirely: whether we speak of the vocation of faith or creation, of a great love or a great cause to which we dedicate ourselves or more precisely which makes us dedicate ourselves to it.

In such moments we feel that the meaning of our existence is fulfilled and this meaning <<chose>> us, because we have answered – without wanting in a sense of our own – to a call of our own being. Such a realization of the meaning of existence – which goes far beyond the usual understanding of the freedom of choice – suspends the relationship between will and action, bringing freedom into the space of the paradox: I am free when I am chosen by what gives meaning to my own existence. The people who have a strong faith and also the brilliant

⁷ See Liviu Rusu, *Eseu despre creația artistică*, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1989

⁸ *Op. cit.*, Polirom, 2021

of genius testify to the bliss produced by this call that comes from beyond them; the very cancellation of the <<freedom of choice>> gives them the feeling of a real freedom, a liberation towards an authentic self – always beyond everything we can know, imagine and anticipate at a given moment.

It is not only in a positive sense that such an emergence of meaning beyond the freedom of choice takes place – but also in those positions of life's negativity: death, suffering or the terrifying force of an existential dilemma. In the *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* – both the person to be killed and his killers, and also those who assist – struck as if by a strange catalepsy – at the preparations for the crime – understand that they are caught in a scenario of fatality that makes them "invisible". They are fated, all doomed to an event that impact their lives completely – giving it a total and, equally, unpredictable meaning.”⁹

It is quite revealing that the idea according to which freedom constitutes the very basis of the human being has been felt since the earliest times of the philosophical reflection and expressed, indirectly, in the form of various imperatives of authentic human existence. These are the cultural expressions of the primary feeling of being human that, to varying degrees, humanity has always been aware of and they have symbolized: *the deconditioning, the emancipation from the primary forces of nature by adapting nature to man's desires and needs.*

To be human has been translated at different times by the "liberation" from the power of the senses (Parmenides, Plato), from the power of fear (Epicurus, Epictetus), from the power of death (Buddha, Jesus), from the power of the pre-judgment, of "idols" (Bacon, Descartes), from the power of ignorance, from under the power of faith and unreasonable hope – in the gods, in immortality (Democritus, Lucretius, Camus), from the power of habit, seen as second nature (French moralists) or of sin – seen as a corrupt nature (Christian theology), even from the power of technology – at the moment when it begins to act on man with the force of an elemental power, beyond him. We think that the spirit of an era is given by a specific conception of the human freedom, of the essential deconditioning – the one that frees him and which opens man to his own essence.

This deconditioning "drive", this emancipation struggle against nature extends, as we could already see, even to what could be considered as human "nature", at least in a first sense, in a posture which is primary and raw – the "self" was at times declared the "natural" power from which man must free himself; at other times it was declared to be his own logical

⁹ Horia Pătrașcu, „Alegerea necondiționată a sensului vieții” (The unconditional choice of the meaning of life) în *Observator cultural* nr. 1065 din 09.06.2021

thinking or belief in a rational truth (the sophists or, with another meaning, the Apophatic thinking – from Plotinus and Neoplatonists to Christian theologians and surrealists), the "natural" feelings (love, hate) or even moral feelings (in the case of the philosophy of libertinism represented by the Marquis de Sade), of political or social "nature" (eremitism and anarchism).

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