Insights like that are not the kind on which systems are built. What they demand of us instead is that we constantly see things afresh, constantly develop new approaches. Fromm did not want disciples; he did not want to found a school. A spirit like his expends itself fully to avoid being co-opted. He observed of himself, with no small pleasure, that his capacity for abstract thought was minimal. The only way he could think philosophically was in concrete terms.

In the late evening on January 5, 1974, South German Radio broadcast the autobiographical sketch "In the Name of Life." In the course of two leisurely hours, Erich Fromm told us things about himself that would never have been recorded were it not for this program. An actress who was playing in the Stuttgart production of Lessing's classic drama Nathan der Weise (Nathan the Wise) at the time came home from the theater, turned on her radio, heard the program, and then called me right away, despite the hour, to share her feelings with me. She had left one Nathan, she said, only to find herself in the presence of another.

Fromm was neither sorcerer nor scholastic. His talent for letting the heart speak along with the mind is a quality that used to go under the name of wisdom.

The Passive Personality

If we are going to talk about "affluence and ennui," then it seems useful to me to make some preliminary remarks about the meanings of those words. Clarity about definitions is crucial in any discussion, this one included. If we grasp the meaning of a word in all its ramifications and connotations, then we can often better understand certain problems that are circumscribed by that word. Its definition and history help our understanding.

The phrase "the affluent society" has stuck with us ever since John Kenneth Galbraith's book of that title appeared in 1958. "Affluence" derives from the same Latin verb (fluere, to flow) that "fluid" does, and it means, quite literally, an overflow. But, as we are all aware, an overflow can be either good or bad. If the Mississippi River overflows its banks in a flood, that is a disaster. But if a farmer has a bumper crop and his grain bins are full to overflowing, that is good. "Affluence," then, is an ambiguous term. It can suggest the abundance that makes life a pleasure rather than a struggle for mere survival, or it can mean superfluity, an overwhelming and even fatal excess.
There is nothing ambiguous about "abundance" and "superfluity," even though there is little difference in their root meanings. "Abundance" comes to us from the Latin word unda (wave), which English still retains in its basic meaning in words like "undulate" and "undulant." Abundance, too, means an "overflowing," yet it has acquired an altogether positive meaning in our language. An abundant land provides us with more than just the basic necessities. It is a land of plenty, what the Old Testament describes as "a land flowing with milk and honey." Or suppose you have been to a party where there was no scarcity of refreshments. You might say, "The wine flowed in abundance," and you would mean something positive by that. There was no shortage of good things, no rationing, no need to worry about overdoing today and going without tomorrow.

But if we want to suggest the negative aspects of an "overflowing," the word that comes to mind is "superfluous." That word, like "affluent," goes back to the Latin verb fluere, and a superfluity is therefore a "super-flowing." Here, however, the overflow is seen in a strictly negative light. It is pointless, wasteful. If you say to someone, "Your presence here is superfluous," you’re really saying, "Why don’t you go away?" You are not saying, "How nice that you’re here," which is what you do mean, more or less, if you speak of wine being present in abundance. So whenever we speak of affluence, we have to ask ourselves whether we mean a positive, enlivening abundance or a negative, deadening superfluity.

Turning now to "ennui," we find that its basic meaning is stronger than our current definition of boredom or a feeling of dissatisfaction and weariness. Ennui and the English word "annoy" both derive from the Latin inodis, "to make loathsome or hateful."

We might ask ourselves now, taking our clues from these words we have just examined, whether superfluity doesn’t lead to boredom, disgust, and hatred. If so, then we should ask ourselves some hard questions about our affluent society. By "we" I mean modern industrial society as it has developed in the United States, Canada, and Western Europe. Do we live in affluence? Who in our society lives in affluence, and what kind of affluence is it, an affluence of abundance or an affluence of superfluity? To put the question more simply yet: Is it good affluence or bad affluence? Does our affluence produce ennui? Does affluence necessarily produce ennui? And what would a good, abundant, ebullient kind of affluence look like, an affluence that does not produce ennui? Those are the questions I mean to discuss here.

But first let me make a preliminary remark bearing on psychology. Because I am a psychoanalyst, I will be touching on psychological questions again and again in the course of these remarks, and I want you to understand from the outset that my point of view is that of depth psychology or, to use another term for the same thing, of psychoanalysis. I’d like to mention briefly a point that will be familiar to many of you: There are two possibilities, two approaches to the psychological study of the human psyche. At the moment academic psychology studies human beings primarily from the standpoint of behaviorism. In other words, such study is limited exclusively to what can be directly seen and observed, to what is visible and what can therefore be measured and weighed, for whatever cannot be directly seen and observed cannot be measured or weighed either, at least not with sufficient precision.

Depth psychology, the psychoanalytical method, proceeds differently. It has different goals. It does not limit its study of human actions and behavior solely to what can be seen. It inquires instead into the nature of behavior, into the motives underlying behavior. Let me give a few examples of what I mean. You can describe, for instance, a person’s smile. That is an action that can be photographed, that can be described in terms of the musculature of the face, and so on. But you know very well that there are differences among the smile of a salesgirl in a shop, the smile of someone who is antagonistic toward you but wants to hide his antagonism, and the smile of a friend who is happy to see you. You are able to distinguish among hundreds of kinds of smiles that take rise from different psychic states. They are all smiles, but the things they express can be worlds apart. No machine can measure or even perceive those differences. Only a human being who is not a machine—you, for example—can do that. You observe not only with your mind but also, if I may be allowed such an old-fashioned expression, with your heart. Your whole being comprehends what transpires before it. You can sense what kind of smile you’re seeing. And if you can’t sense things like that, then you’ll be in for a lot of disappointments in your life.

Or take a very different kind of behavior: the way someone eats. All right, so someone eats. But how does he eat? One person wolfs his food down. Another person’s manner at table reveals...
that he is pedantic and attaches great importance to doing things in an orderly fashion and cleaning up his plate. Still another eats without haste, without greediness. He enjoys his food. He simply eats and takes pleasure in eating.

Or take still another example. Someone bellows and turns red in the face. You conclude he is angry. Surely he is angry. But then you take a little closer look at him and ask yourself what it is this person is feeling (perhaps you know him fairly well), and suddenly you realize that he is afraid. He is frightened, and his rage is simply a reaction to his own fear. And then you may look even deeper still and realize that this is a human being who feels thoroughly helpless and powerless, someone who is afraid of everything, of life itself. So you have made three observations: that he is angry, that he is afraid, and that he feels a profound sense of helplessness. All three observations are correct. But they relate to different levels of his psychic structure. The observation that takes in his sense of powerlessness is the one that registers most profoundly what is going on inside him. The observation that takes in nothing but his rage is the most superficial. In other words, if you react by flying into a rage as well and see nothing but an angry person in the other individual, then you have failed to see him at all. But if you can look behind the façade of the angry person and see the frightened one, the one who feels helpless, then you will approach him differently, and it may happen that his anger will subside because he no longer feels threatened. From the outside but rather what normal? After all, don’t all of us want to add to what we have? The problem, if there is one, is that we don’t have enough money, not that there’s anything wrong with the desire to own more and more. . . . I realize very well that many of you feel this way. But perhaps an example will show that the issue is not as simple as it may look at first glance. My example is one that will be familiar to you, but I hope very few of you are personally affected by it. Consider someone who is suffering from obesity, someone who simply weighs too much. Obesity can be caused by a glandular malfunction, but more often than not it is simply the result of overeating. The obese person has a snack here, a snack there; he has a weakness for sweets; he is always nibbling on something. And if you look more closely, you’ll see not only that he is constantly eating but that he is driven to eat. He has to eat. He can’t stop eating any more than some smokers can stop smoking. And you know that people who do stop smoking will often start to eat more. They excuse themselves by saying that anyone who quits smoking automatically gains weight. And that is one of the common rationalizations people
give for not giving up smoking. Why do we cling to those rationalizations? Because the same need to take something into our mouths, to consume things, finds expression in eating, in smoking, in drinking, or in buying things.

Doctors are constantly warning people who eat, drink, and smoke compulsively that they may die prematurely of a heart attack. If those people act on their doctors warnings and stop their habits, they often suddenly succumb to attacks of anxiety, insecurity, nervousness, depression. Here we see a remarkable phenomenon: Not eating, not drinking, not smoking can make people afraid. There are people who eat or buy things not to eat or to buy but to quell their feelings of anxiety or depression. Increased consumption offers them a way out of their dejection. Consuming promises healing, and in fact satisfying that kind of hunger does bring some relief from underlying depression or anxiety. Most of us know from our own experience that if we are feeling nervous or depressed we are more prone to go to the refrigerator and find what feels like relief in eating or drinking something for which we have no real appetite. In other words, eating and drinking can actually take over the function of a drug, acting like a tranquilizer. And food and drink are more pleasant because they taste good as well.

A depressed person feels something like a vacuum inside him, feels as if he were paralyzed, as if he lacked what it takes to act, as if he could not move properly for lack of something that might set him in motion. If he consumes something, the sense of emptiness, paralysis, and weakness may leave him temporarily, and he may feel: I am someone after all; I have something in me; I'm not a nothing. He fills himself with things to drive out his inner emptiness. He is a passive personality who senses that he amounts to very little and who represses those inclinations by consuming, by becoming Homo consumen.

I have just introduced the concept of the "passive personality," and you will want to know what I mean by that. What is passivity? What is activity? Let me begin with the modern definitions of passivity and activity, definitions that will be quite familiar to all of you. Activity is understood to mean any goal-oriented action that requires energy. It can be either physical or mental work, and it can include sports as well, for we generally think of sports in a utilitarian way, too: Participation in them either promotes health or enhances the prestige of our country or makes us famous or earns us money. It is usually not pleasure in the game itself that moves us to participate in sports but rather some end result. Anyone who exerts himself is active. We then say he is "busy." And to be "busy" is to be engaged in "business."

What constitutes passivity in this view? If we produce no visible results, no palpable achievement, then we have been passive. Let me cite an obvious example: Someone sits still looking out into the landscape, just sits there for five minutes, half an hour, maybe even an hour. He does nothing but look. Because he is not taking any pictures but is simply immersing himself in what his eyes are perceiving, we might regard him as strange and would not be at all inclined to grace his "contemplativeness" with the name of activity. Or consider someone who meditates (though in our Western culture the sight of someone meditating is rare indeed). He is attempting to become aware of himself, of his own feelings, his moods, his inner state of being. If he meditates regularly and systematically, he may spend hours at it. Anyone who understands nothing of meditation would consider that meditator a passive person. He is not doing anything. Perhaps his whole effort is aimed at driving every last thought out of his mind, thinking about nothing, and simply being. That may strike you as peculiar. Try it sometime, just for two minutes, and you'll see how difficult it is, how something or other will keep popping into your head, how defenseless you are against those thoughts because we find it nearly intolerable to sit still and turn off our thoughts.

For great cultures in India and China that kind of meditation is vitally important. Unfortunately that is not the case with us, because, ambition-ridden as we are, we think everything we do has to have a purpose, to achieve something, to produce a result. But if you try to forget about results for once, if you can concentrate and bring enough patience to this exercise, you may find the "idleness" very refreshing indeed.

All I have meant to suggest here is that our modern usage labels behavior that produces visible results activity, while passivity appears to be pointless. It is behavior in which we detect no output of energy. That we see activity and passivity that way has to do with the issue of how and what we consume. If we consume the superfluous things our "bad affluence" supplies us with, what appears to be activity on our part is really passivity. What kind of creative activity, of "good affluence," of richness, of resistance can we imagine that would allow us to be more than mere consumers?
Ennui in Modern Society

Let’s reflect for a moment on the classic definitions of activity and passivity we find in Aristotle, Spinoza, Goethe, Marx, and many other thinkers of the Western world over the last two thousand years. Activity is understood as something that brings the powers inherent in people to expression, that helps give birth, that brings to life both our physical and emotional, both our intellectual and artistic capacities. Perhaps some of you will not quite understand what I mean when I speak of powers inherent in people, for we are accustomed to thinking of power and energy as residing in machines, not in people. And whatever powers human beings do possess are channeled primarily into inventing and operating machines. As we marvel more and more over the power of machines, we understand less and less of the wonderful powers of human beings. We no longer quite believe those lines from Sophocles’ Antigone: “Numberless are the world’s wonders, but none/More wonderful than man.” A rocket that can fly to the moon seems far more wonderful to us than a mere human being. And in a certain sense we feel that in our modern inventions we have created things more marvelous than God did when he created man.

We have to reorient our thinking if we mean to focus our attention on human consciousness and on the development of the vast potential human beings have. We possess not only the ability to speak and to think but also a capacity for ever deeper insight, for ever greater maturity, a capacity for love and for artistic expression. All those things are potentially present in us, waiting to be developed. Activity, being active in the way that the authors I have named understand it, means just that: the bringing out, the manifestation of those powers that human beings have but that usually remain hidden or suppressed.

I’d like to read you some lines from Karl Marx here. You will quickly realize that this is a very different Marx from the one you usually encounter at the university, in the media, or in propaganda issued by either the Left or the Right. This quotation is from the Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts (MEGA, I, 3, p. 149): “If you take as your point of departure the human being as human being and his relationship to the world as a human one, then you can give only love in return for love, trust in return for trust, etc. . . . If you want to influence other people, then you have to be a person who genuinely stimulates and challenges others. Each of your relationships with people—and with nature—has to be a specific expression of your own true, individual life appropriate to the object of your intentions. If you love without awakening love in return, that is, if your love as love does not produce a loving response, if the expression of your being as a loving person does not make you loved, then your love is powerless and brings unhappiness.”

It is clear that Marx speaks of loving here as a kind of activity. It rarely occurs to modern man that he can create anything through love. His usual and almost exclusive concern is to be loved, not to emanate love himself, not to awaken love in others through his love for them and so to create something new, something that had not existed in the world before. That is why he thinks that being loved is purely a matter of chance or something you can make happen by buying all sorts of things that will supposedly make you lovable, everything from the right mouthwash to an elegant suit or an expensive car. Now, just what the right mouthwash or the right suit will do for you I really can’t say. But I do have to acknowledge as an unfortunate fact that many men are loved for their sporty cars. And here we have to add, of course, that many men are fonder of their cars than they are of their wives. At any rate, both partners to such an arrangement often seem quite content, but after a while they will become bored with each other and possibly even hate each other, because they have both been deceived or will at least feel deceived. They thought they were loved, but in reality all they have done is pretend at love. They have not practiced active love.

Similarly, when we say, in the classic sense of the word, that someone is passive, we do not mean that he sits still, reflects, meditates, or looks at the natural world; we mean instead that he is driven by forces he does not control, that he cannot act but can only react.

On the subject of reaction we should not forget, of course, that most of our activity consists of reacting to stimuli, to situations, which, because we are familiar with them, evoke a given response from us when we perceive the appropriate signal. Because the dog in Pavlov’s experiment had learned to associate food with the sound of a bell, he developed an appetite whenever he heard the
passions that create suffering. They are forms of ambition, greed, the lust for power, gluttony. All addictions are forms of passion which stem in turn from the Latin verb meaning "driveness" or compulsion manifested as passion is, in reality, passivity, no matter how great a stir it may make.

For our purposes of this very kind: Man is a reactive being. Present him with a stimulus, and he will promptly react to it. We can experiment in the same way with rats, with mice, with monkeys, with human beings, even with cats, though with cats things don't always go as they're supposed to. Human beings—alas!—are the most susceptible to that approach. Behaviorism assumes that all human behavior is essentially governed by the principle of rewards and punishments. Reward and punishment are the two great stimuli, and a human being will presumably react to them the way any other animal does. He will learn to do the things for which he is rewarded and not to do the ones for which there is a threat of punishment. He doesn't necessarily have to be punished; the threat of punishment alone suffices. Every now and then, of course, a few people do indeed have to be punished so that the threat of punishment does not become an empty threat.

Now let's look at what it means to be "driven." Take a drunken person, for example. He may well be very "active." He yells and waves his arms around. Or think of someone in that psychotic state that we describe as "manic." Such a person is hyperactive; he thinks he can help the whole world; he talks a blue streak, sends telegrams, gets things moving. He appears to be prodigiously active. But we know that in the first case the motor behind the activity is alcohol; in the manic patient, it is some electrochemical malfunction in the brain. The external manifestations in both cases, though, appear to be those of extreme activity.

"Activity" that is either a mere reaction to a stimulus or a "drivenss" or compulsion manifested as passion is, in reality, passivity, no matter how great a stir it may make. Our words "passion" and "passive" derive from passio and passivus respectively, both of which stem in turn from the Latin verb meaning "to suffer." So if we say of someone that he is a very passionate person, we are paying him a rather dubious compliment. The philosopher Schleiermacher once said: Eifersucht ist eine Leidenschaft, die mit "Jealousy is a passion that eagerly pursues what brings about suffering. That is true not only of jealousy but of any passion that takes on a compulsive character: ambition, greed, the lust for power, gluttony. All addictions are passions that create suffering. They are forms of passivity. "Passion" has taken on a wider range of meaning in our modern usage and so has lost the clarity it once had. I will not go into the reasons for that here.

Now if you take a close look at the activity of people who merely react or who act compulsively, people who are therefore passive in the classical sense, you will notice that their reactions never take a new direction. Their reactions are always the same. The same stimulus will always produce the same reaction. You can predict with certainty what will happen each time. Everything can be calculated. There is no individuality in evidence here; no powers of thought come into play; everything seems to be programmed: the same stimulus, the same effect. We see the same thing happening that we can observe with rats in a laboratory. Since behaviorism sees the human being primarily as a mechanism, it makes similar assumptions about him: A certain stimulus will evoke a certain response. The study and exploration of that phenomenon and the formulation of prescriptions based on it is what the behaviorists call science. Perhaps it is a science, but it is not a humane one, for a living human being never reacts twice in precisely the same way. At each moment he is a different person. And though he may never be a totally different person, he is at least never exactly the same. Heraclites expressed the same idea when he said, "It is impossible to wade into the same river twice." He would say that behavioral psychology may be a science, but it is not a science of man. It is rather a science of alienated man conducted with alienated methods by alienated researchers. It may be capable of illuminating certain aspects of human nature, but it does not touch on what is vital, on what is specifically human about human beings.

I'd like to give you an example illustrating the difference between activity and passivity, one that made a great impact on industrial psychology in America. The Western Electric Company commissioned Professor Elton Mayo to find out how the productivity of unskilled female workers in its Hawthorne plant in Chicago could be increased. Mayo proceeded on the assumption that the workers would probably be more productive if they were given a ten-minute break in the morning and perhaps another ten-minute coffee break in the afternoon, and so on. Those unskilled workers had the very monotonous task of winding coils for electromagnets. Their work required neither skill nor exertion; it was the most
passive, dreary work imaginable. Elton Mayo explained his experiment to the workers and then proceeded to give them a coffee break in the afternoon. Productivity increased immediately. Everyone was, of course, delighted to see how well the idea worked. Then Mayo went a step further and gave the workers a break in the morning, too, and productivity increased once again. Still further improvements in working conditions brought even greater gains in productivity, and so it seemed that Mayo's theory had been proved conclusively.

Any ordinary professor would have broken off his experiment at that point and advised Western Electric's management to sacrifice twenty minutes of work time a day in the interests of increased production. Not so Elton Mayo, who was quite an ingenious fellow. He was wondering what would happen if he withdrew the amenities he had granted the workers. So he canceled the afternoon coffee break—and production continued to increase. Then he took away the morning break, too. Another increase in production. And so on and so forth. At that point some professors might have shrugged their shoulders and declared the experiment invalid. But in this case it suddenly dawned on Mayo that those unskilled workers had, for the first time in their lives, developed an interest in what they were doing. The winding of coils remained as monotonous as it had ever been, but Mayo had explained his experiment to the workers and drawn them into it. They felt that they were working in a meaningful context, that they were contributing something that profited not only an anonymous management but the entire work force as well. Mayo was thus able to demonstrate that it was this unexpected interest, this sense of participation and not the morning and afternoon coffee breaks, that had increased production. The experiment inspired a new approach to industrial psychology: The interest people brought to their work appeared to have a greater bearing on their productivity than did breaks, pay increases, or any other amenities. I'll be coming back to this point later on, but for now all I wanted to do was emphasize the crucial difference between activity and passivity. As long as the Western Electric workers had no interest in their jobs, they remained passive. But the minute they were given a part in the experiment, they felt that they were making a real contribution; they became active and developed an entirely different attitude toward their work.

Take another, simpler example. Imagine a tourist—with a cam-


Now it’s a remarkable phenomenon in our culture that people do not fully acknowledge or—perhaps we should say—are not fully conscious of what a grave affliction boredom is. Take someone in solitary confinement or, to use a less drastic example, take someone who simply doesn’t know what to do with himself for whatever reason. Unless such a person has the resources within himself to engage in some vital activity, to produce something, or to call his intellectual powers into play, then he will perceive his boredom as a burden, an encumbrance, a parathesis that he will not be able to explain by himself. Boredom is one of the worst forms of torture. It is a very modern phenomenon, and it is spreading rapidly. A person who is at the mercy of his boredom and unable to defend himself against it will feel severely depressed. You may feel moved to ask here why most people don’t notice how grave a malady boredom is and how much suffering it causes us. I think the answer is quite simple. We produce today so many things that people can take to help them cope with their boredom. We can temporarily sweep our boredom under the rug by taking a tranquilizer or drinking or going to one cocktail party after another or fighting with our wives or turning to the media for amusement or devoting ourselves to sexual activity. Much of what we do is an attempt to keep ourselves from fully acknowledging our boredom. But don’t forget that uneasy feeling that often overtakes you when you’ve watched a stupid movie or repressed your boredom some other way. Remember the hangover that hits you when you realize that what you did for diversion actually bored you to death and that you haven’t made use of your time but have killed it. Another remarkable thing about our culture is that we will go to any lengths to save time, but once we have saved it we kill it because we can’t think of anything better to do with it.

Manufactured Needs

It is a commonly held view—not only among laymen but also among many scientists—that human beings are machines that function in accordance with certain physiological requirements. They experience hunger and thirst; they have to sleep; they need sex, and so on. The physiological or biological needs have to be met. If they are not, people will become neurotic or, if they don’t eat, for example, they will die. If those needs are met, however, then everything is just fine. Now the only trouble with that view is that it’s wrong. It can happen that all a person’s physiological and biological needs are met but he is still not satisfied, still is not at peace with himself. Indeed, he may be psychologically quite ill even though he seems to have everything he needs. What he lacks is an animating impulse that would make him active.

Let me give you a few brief examples of what I mean. In recent years some interesting experiments have been conducted in which people have been deprived of all stimuli. They have been placed in complete isolation in a small space where the temperature and illumination remain constant. Their food is shoved in to them through a hatchway. All their needs are met, but there are no stimuli. The conditions are comparable, say, to those a fetus experiences in the womb. After a few days’ exposure to this kind of experiment, people begin to develop serious pathological tendencies, often schizophrenic ones. Although their physiological needs are satisfied, this state of passivity is psychologically pathogenic and can lead to insanity. What is a normal situation for a fetus (although even a fetus is not as fully deprived of stimuli as the subjects in those experiments are) produces illnes in an adult.

In still other experiments, people have been prevented from dreaming. It is possible to do this because we know that very rapid eye movements accompany dreaming. If an experimenter wakes a subject when he sees rapid eye movements, he can keep that individual from dreaming. People subjected to this experiment, too, developed serious symptoms of illness. This suggests that dreaming is a psychic necessity. Even when we are asleep, we remain mentally and psychologically active. If we are kept from that activity, we become ill.

The animal psychologist Harlow found in his experiments with monkeys that primates could maintain their interest in a complicated task. No rewards were offered or punishments inflicted. Because Harlow did not make any use of the stimulus-response mechanism, it was clear that the animals persisted in their work out of sheer interest in it. Animals, too, especially the primates, can develop
high levels of interest and are not motivated exclusively by the promise of food or the fear of punishment.

Let me mention still another example. Human beings were producing art as long ago as 30,000 years. We are inclined to belittle that work today by saying it served purely magical ends. Think of the incredibly beautiful and graceful renderings of animals we find in cave paintings. The motivation for those paintings was presumably to ensure success in the hunt. That may well be, but does that explain their beauty? The needs of magic could have been met with far less artistic painting and decorating of caves and vases. The beauty that we can still perceive and enjoy today was an added extra. In other words, people have other interests that go beyond the practical, the functional, the object as tool or utensil. They want to be active in a creative way; they want to give shape to things, to develop powers latent in themselves.

The German psychologist Karl Buehler has coined the very apt phrase “the delight of function” to suggest the joy that activity can bring with it. People enjoy functioning not because they need this thing or that thing but because the act of making something, the utilization of their own capacities, itself is a pleasurable experience. That point has, of course, an important bearing on education. A brilliant Italian teacher, Maria Montessori, realized that children can be trained with the old system of rewards and punishments, but they cannot be educated with it. Numerous studies designed to test that idea have confirmed that people do indeed learn better when what they do is itself inherently satisfying.

I believe a human being is fully himself only when he expresses himself, when he makes use of the powers within him. If he cannot do that, if his life consists only of possessing and using rather than being, then he degenerates; he becomes a thing; his life becomes pointless. It becomes a form of suffering. Real joy comes with real activity, and real activity involves the utilization and cultivation of human powers. We should not forget that exerting our minds encourages the growth of brain cells. That is a fact supported by physiological evidence. Indeed, the growth of the brain can even be weighed and is analogous to the strengthening of muscles of which we make increased demands. If we never subject our muscles to more stress than they are accustomed to, they will remain at the stage of development they have attained, but they will never come near what they are potentially capable of.

Now I would like to introduce some social and economic consid-

ersations into our discussion of affluence. We can distinguish a few major phases in human history. Perhaps we should begin by noting that the phase in which man evolved from the apes was a very long one extending over a few hundred thousand years. There was no single step or moment that marked the completion of that development. It was a long process in which quantitative factors underwent a very gradual transformation into qualitative ones. The evolutionary process that produced the precursor of modern man was more or less complete only 60,000 years ago; and Homo sapiens, a creature who is just like us today, first appeared about 40,000 years ago. Our beginnings, then, go back only a very short time.

What is it that distinguishes man from the animals? It is not his upright posture. That was present in the apes long before the brain began to develop. Nor is it the use of tools. It is something altogether new, a previously unknown quality: self-awareness. Animals, too, have awareness. They are aware of objects; they know this is one thing and that another. But when the human being as such was born he had a new and different consciousness, a consciousness of himself; he knew that he existed and that he was something different, something apart from nature, apart from other people, too. He experienced himself. He was aware that he thought and felt. As far as we know, there is nothing analogous to this anywhere else in the animal kingdom. That is the specific quality that makes human beings human.

From the moment that man was born as what we would call a full human being he lived for roughly 30,000 years in a situation of prevailing hardship, of perpetual shortage. He lived by hunting animals and by gathering foodstuffs that he could use but had not cultivated. Life in that period was marked by poverty and need. But then came a great revolution that is sometimes called the Neolithic evolution. That revolution occurred about 10,000 years ago. Man began to produce, to create material goods. He no longer lived only from what he happened to find or from the yield of the hunt but became a farmer or herdsman. He produced more than he needed at the moment, using his foresight, his intelligence, and his skills to make what he needed himself.

The first farmers with their simple plows may strike us today as very primitive, but they were the first people to escape from total dependence on the whims of nature, to which all men before had been subject, and to start using their brains, imaginations, and energies to influence the world and create more hospitable

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environments for themselves. They planned; they provided for the future; they created, for the first time, a relative affluence. They soon left primitive methods of agriculture and animal husbandry behind. They developed culture; they developed cities; and a second era followed quickly on the heels of the first: an era characterized by relative affluence. By “relative affluence” I mean a state in which the earlier poverty and need had been overcome but in which the new affluence was too confined to let everyone partake of it. The minority that controlled society and accumulated increasing power kept the best of everything for itself, leaving only the leftovers for the majority. The table was not set for everyone. Affluence was not available to all. Thus, though we may be oversimplifying for the sake of brevity, we can speak of the relative affluence (or relative poverty) that has been the rule since the beginning of the Neolithic revolution and that is still, to some measure, the rule today.

Relative affluence is a two-edged sword. On the one hand, people were able to develop cultures. They had the material base they needed to build buildings, organize states, support philosophers, and so forth. But on the other hand, the consequence of relative poverty was that a small group had to exploit a large one. Without the majority, that economy could not have flourished. The warring impulse is not, as many people like to claim, rooted in human instinct, in man’s natural drive to destroy. War had its beginnings in the Neolithic period from the moment when there were things worth taking away from someone else and when people had established their communal life in such a way that they could invent war as an institution and use it to attack others who had something they wanted. We usually have complicated reasons on hand to explain why we go to war. “We were threatened!” we say, and that is supposed to justify a war. The real motivations behind wars are usually pathetically transparent.

So we have relative affluence, this accomplishment of the Neolithic period, to thank for culture on the one hand and for war and the exploitation of man by man on the other. Ever since that period human beings have lived more or less in a zoo. Accordingly, the entire field of psychology, which is based on the observation of human beings, can be compared with that stage in ethology when all of our knowledge of animals was based on observations made in zoos and not in the wild. It has become particularly clear to psychologists that animals in zoos behave very differently from animals in the wild. Solly Zuckerman observed that the sacred baboons in the London Zoo in Regents Park were incredibly aggressive. He assumed at first that the trait lay in the nature of those particular primates. But when other scientists observed those baboons in the wild, they found them not very aggressive at all. Imprisonment, boredom, the limitations on freedom—all these things encouraged the development of an aggression that was absent in natural conditions.

My point is simply that both man and animal behave differently when they are held captive from the way they do when they are free. But then the first industrial revolution brought about a great change in the human situation, a change that had its beginnings as far back as the Renaissance but has come to a head in our century: All of a sudden mechanical energy took the place of natural energy, that is, energy supplied by animals and human beings. Now machines supplied the power that had formerly been supplied by living beings. And at the same time a new hope arose. If that energy could be harnessed, then everyone, not just a minority, could enjoy the fruits of affluence.

On the heels of the first revolution followed another that has been called the second industrial revolution. In this revolution machines replace not only human energy but also human thought. I am referring here to the science of cybernetics and to the machines that have themselves assumed control of other machines and of the production process. Cybernetics has increased and continues to increase production possibilities to such a massive degree that we can realistically foresee a time—assuming that a war does not break out first or that humanity is not decimated by hunger or epidemics—when the new production methods will provide absolute affluence. At that point no one will be poor or in need any more; everyone will know affluence. Human life will not be cluttered with the superfluous but will be marked by a positive abundance that frees people from the fear of hunger, the fear of violence.

Our modern society has developed still another thing that never existed before. It produces not only goods but also needs. What do I mean by that? People have always had needs. They have had to eat and drink. They have wanted to live in attractive homes, and so forth. But if you look around you today you will note the ever increasing importance that advertising and packaging have acquired. It is rare for desires to arise within people any more; desires are awakened and cultivated from without. Even someone
who is well off will feel poor when confronted with the plethora of goods the advertisers want him to want. There is no doubt whatsoever that industry will succeed in creating needs that it will then set about satisfying, indeed, will have to satisfy if it means to stay alive in the present system, for in that system the production of a profit is the test of viability. Our present economic system is based on maximum production and maximum consumption. The nineteenth-century economy was still based on the idea of maximizing savings. Our grandparents considered it a vice to buy something you didn't have the money to pay for. Today that has become a virtue. And, conversely, anyone without such artificial needs, anyone who does not buy on credit, anyone who buys only what he truly needs borders on the politically suspect; he is a peculiar sort. People who don't own television sets stand out. They are obviously not quite normal. Where will this all lead us? I can tell you. The unlimited increase of consumption produces a type of person who is devoted to an ideal, indeed, to what is almost a new religion, the religion of the Big Rock Candy Mountain. If we ask ourselves how modern man envisions paradise, we are probably correct in saying that, unlike the Mohammedans, he does not expect to find himself surrounded by beautiful women there (a decidedly male view of paradise anyway). His vision is of an immense department store where everything is available and where he will always have money enough to buy not only everything he wants but also just a little bit more than his neighbor. That is part of the syndrome: His sense of self-worth is based on how much he has. And if he wants to be the best he has to have the most.

The question of where to call a halt founders in the almost frenzied rounds of production and consumption, and even though most people in this economic system have much more than they can use, they still feel poor because they cannot keep up with the pace of production or the mass of goods produced. This situation promotes passivity as well as envy and greed and, ultimately, a sense of inner weakness, of powerlessness, of inferiority. A person's sense of self comes to be based solely on what he has, not on what he is.

The Crisis of the Patriarchal Order

As we have seen, orienting our lives to consumption creates a climate of superfluity and ennui. The problem is closely related to a crisis that is affecting the entire Western world now but mostly goes unrecognized, because more attention is given to its symptoms than to its underlying causes. What I have in mind here is the crisis of our patriarchal, authoritarian social structure.

What exactly is that structure? Let me begin my explanation by harking back to one of the greatest thinkers of the nineteenth century, the Swiss scholar Johann Jakob Bachofen, who was the first to demonstrate systematically that societies are based on one of two completely different structural principles: a gynecocratic, matriarchal one or a patriarchal one. What is the difference between them?

In patriarchal society as we know it from the Old Testament and from the Romans and as we still have it today, the father owns and rules the family. When I use the word “own” here I mean it quite literally; for originally, in primitive patriarchal law, wives and children were as much the property of the pater familias as slaves or cattle were. He could do with them what he wished. If we think of today's youth, it may seem that we have come a long way from that ancient law. But we should not overlook the fact that the patriarchal principle has been in force in the Western world, in more or less drastic form, for about 4,000 years.

In a matriarchal society, things are just the other way around. The person who is most respected, who is regarded as the undisputed head of the family, and of whom no one would dream of referring to as a “ruler” is the mother, the maternal figure. There is a vast difference between paternal love and maternal love, and that difference is of great importance. Paternal love is by its very nature always a conditional love. Children have to earn it by meeting certain requirements. Now please don’t misunderstand me. When I speak of paternal love, I don’t mean the love of Father X or Father Y; I mean paternal love in the abstract. Max Weber would have spoken of an “ideal type.” The father loves that son best who best fulfills the father's expectations and demands. That son is then the most likely to become his father's successor and heir. In a patriarchal family structure there is usually a favorite son, ordinarily—but not necessarily—the eldest. If you look back in the Old Testament, you'll find that there is always a favorite son there. His father grants him a special status; he is the “chosen one.” He pleases his father because he obeys him.

Things are just the opposite in a matriarchal structure. A mother loves all her children equally. They are all, without exception, the
fruit of her womb, and they all need her care. If mothers nursed only those of their infants who pleased them and obeyed them, then most children would die. As you know, an infant hardly ever does what its mother would like it to do. If mothers were guided by paternal love, that would be the biological, physiological end of the human race. A mother loves her child because it is her child, and that is why no hierarchies develop in matriarchal societies. There is instead the same love available to all who need care and affection.

What I have just presented here is a brief summary of Bachofen's ideas. In a patriarchal society, the ruling principles are the state, the law, the abstract. In a matriarchal one, they are the natural bonds that draw people together. They do not have to be thought up and put into practice. They are natural bonds that are simply there. If you want to take the time to read Sophocles' Antigone, you'll find there everything I've been trying to tell you here but in a much fuller and more interesting form. The play chronicles a battle between the patriarchal principle, embodied by Creon, and the matriarchal principle, represented by Antigone. For Creon, the law of the state stands supreme, and whoever defies that law has to die. Antigone, however, follows the law of blood ties, of humanity, of sympathy, and no one can violate this highest of all laws. The play ends with the defeat of the principle we would call fascist today. Creon is portrayed as a typically fascist leader who believes in nothing but power and in a state to which the individual has to subordinate himself totally.

We mustn't fail to mention religion in this context. Ever since the Old Testament, the religion of the Western world has been patriarchal. God is depicted as a great authority we should all obey. In Buddhism, however, to mention only one example of another major religion, that authoritarian figure is not present. The view of the conscience as an internalized authority is an inevitable outgrowth of patriarchal society. What Freud meant when he spoke of the superego was our internalizing of paternal commands and prohibitions. My father no longer has to tell me, “Don't do that!” to keep me from doing something. I have absorbed my father into myself. The “father inside me” commands and prohibits. But the force of the command or prohibition still goes back to paternal authority. Freud's description of conscience in a patriarchal society is completely correct, but he is mistaken in regarding that kind of conscience as conscience per se and in failing to see conscience

in a societal context. For if we look at nonpatriarchal societies, we find quite different forms of conscience. I cannot and do not want to go into this issue in any detail here, but I do at least want to mention that there is a humanistic conscience that stands in direct opposition to the authoritarian one. A humanistic conscience is rooted in the individual himself and communicates to him what is good and beneficial for him, for his development, for his growth. That voice often speaks very softly, and we are good at ignoring it. But in the realm of physiology as well as in that of psychology researchers have found signs of what we might call a “health conscience,” a sense for what is good for us; and if people listen to that voice inside them, they will not obey the voice of some external authority. Our own internal voices guide us in directions that are compatible with the physical and psychic potential of our particular organisms. Those voices tell us: You're on the right track here; you're on the wrong one there.

We have to keep all this in mind when we consider the present crisis of the patriarchal, authoritarian order, a crisis that confronts us with a remarkable situation. In the Western world, we are experiencing the disintegration of traditional values. And as I have already suggested, that disintegration, that crisis, is in some way linked to our problem of affluence. Let me try to make this clearer. The more deprivation a person has to put up with, the more obedient he has to be so that he will not rebel against the deprivation imposed on him. He is told that the deprivation he is forced to endure is meaningful and inevitable, something that God or the state or the law—or whoever—has to demand of him. If it were not for unquestioning obedience, it might occur to people that they don't feel like being deprived any longer. And that would, of course, be extremely dangerous for any social order in which deprivation and obedience are indispensable structural elements. Society as we know it could not exist any more if psychological mechanisms and social institutions had not firmly implanted obedience and the acceptance of deprivation as widespread attitudes in it. But if affluence increases, the belief that we have to be obedient and accept deprivation will necessarily lose its force. Why should we submit to an authority that asks us to obey and suffer deprivation? We can have just about anything we want in any case. That is one reason for the present crisis.

Another no doubt lies in the new methods of production. In the first industrial revolution, that is, throughout the nineteenth
century and well into the twentieth, when old-fashioned machines were in use, it was essential for the worker to obey, because his work was the only thing that kept his family from starving. Some of that forced obedience is still with us, but that is changing rapidly as production shifts more and more away from outmoded mechanical technologies and toward modern cybernetic ones. With the new technology, the form of authoritarian obedience that was needed in the previous century is no longer necessary. Today work is characterized by team effort, and people are working with machines that, for the most part, correct their mistakes themselves. The old obedience has been replaced with a kind of discipline that does not require subordination. Workers play with cybernetic machines almost as one would at chess. That is surely something of an exaggeration, but a fundamental change in our attitude toward machinery has taken place. The old relationship of supervisor and worker is becoming less common; a style characterized by cooperation and interdependence is gaining ground. Let me add as an aside that the new working climate is not so idyllic, not so positive, as is sometimes claimed or as it may appear in what I have just said here. I do not mean to claim that modern production methods have put an end to alienation and helped us achieve independence. All I have wanted to do here is call attention to important departures from the past.

Still another reason for the crisis of the patriarchal, authoritarian order is the fact of political revolution. Starting with the French Revolution we have experienced a whole series of revolutions, none of which has fulfilled its promises and goals, but all of which, however, have undermined the old order and called authoritarian structures into question. We have witnessed the slow but sure demise of the blind obedience without which the feudal system could not have maintained itself. The very fact of a revolution that is even partially successful, a revolution that is not a total failure, demonstrates that disobedience can be victorious.

In authoritarian morality there is only one sin, which is disobedience, and there is only one virtue, which is obedience. No one will admit that outright—except perhaps in reactionary circles—but in reality the underlying conviction of our educational system and of our whole system of values is that disobedience is the root of all evil.

Take the Old Testament, for example. What Adam and Eve did was not in itself bad. On the contrary, their eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was what made the development of humankind possible. But they were disobedient, and the tradition has interpreted that disobedience as original sin. And in a patriarchal society disobedience is in fact original sin. But now that the patriarchal order has been called into doubt, now that it is in a state of crisis and collapse, the concept of sin itself has become altogether questionable. We shall be coming back to this point later.

Along with the revolution of the middle class and the revolution of the workers we have to mention another very important one: the feminist revolution. Even though that revolution may assume some rather bizarre forms now and then, it has made remarkable advances. Women, like children, used to be regarded as objects, as the property of their husbands. That has changed. They may still be at a disadvantage in a man's world, receiving less pay, for example, than a man does for the same work; but their overall position, their consciousness, is considerably stronger than it was. And all the signs would seem to indicate that the women's revolution will go forward, just as the revolution of children and young people will. They will continue to define, articulate, and stand up for their own rights.

And now let me mention the last and what I think to be the most important reason for the crisis of patriarchal society. Ever since the middle of this century many people, but primarily young people, have come to the conclusion that our society is incompetent. Now you may object that we have great achievements to our credit and that our technology has made unheard-of advances. But that is only one side of the story. The other side is that this society has proved itself incapable of preventing two great wars and many smaller ones. It has not only allowed but actually promoted developments that are leading us toward the suicide of humankind. Never before in our history have we been faced with so much potential for destruction as we are today. That fact points to a horrendous incompetence that no technological perfection can gloss over.

When a society that is affluent enough to afford visits to the moon is unable to face and reduce the danger of total annihilation, then—like it or not—that society will have to accept the label of incompetent. It is incompetent, too, in the face of the environmental degradation that threatens all life. Famine is in store for India and Africa, for all the nonindustrialized nations of the world, but our
only response is a few speeches and empty gestures. We go on merrily in our extravagant ways as if we lacked the intelligence to see the consequences of those ways. That demonstrates a lack of competence. It has shaken the younger generation’s trust in us, and with good reason. And so I feel that in spite of all the merits of our success-oriented society this lack of competence in dealing with our most urgent problems has done much to destroy faith in the structure and effectiveness of the patriarchal, authoritarian order.

Before we take a closer look at the consequences of this crisis I would like to stress here that even in the Western world we have only a partially affluent society. In the United States almost 40 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. There are, in reality, two classes: one that lives in affluence and another whose poverty everyone else would just as soon not acknowledge. In Lincoln’s time the great social distinction was between freedom and slavery; today it is between superfluous affluence and poverty.

Everything I have said here about Homo consumens does not hold true for people living in poverty, fascinated though they may be by the idea that those who enjoy luxury are leading a paradisiacal life. The poor are only extras who help fill up the wide screens the rich look at for amusement. The same is true for minorities; in the United States it is especially true for nonwhites. But above and beyond that it is true throughout the whole world. It is true for those two-thirds of all humanity who have never profited from the patriarchal, authoritarian social order, true for the Indians, the Chinese, the Africans, and so on. If we are to draw an accurate picture of the relationship between authoritarian and nonauthoritarian populations, we have to realize that though the affluent society may continue to dominate in the world today, it is being confronted not only with totally different traditions but also with new forces that we have already begun to feel and will continue to feel.

The Fiasco of Religion

Although most people if asked in a poll would say they believe in God, and though church attendance still remains high and confessions of atheism are relatively rare, it is still perfectly clear that the crisis in patriarchal society has also had a negative effect on religion. Theologians themselves have realized this and have spoken quite openly about the anguish religion as we know it is currently going through. The development began centuries ago, but the closer we come to the present, the greater its rate of acceleration has been.

Because religion fulfills a double function, its collapse leaves us with a double loss. Our religion, based primarily on the Judeo-Christian tradition, provides us with both an explanation of the natural world and moral principles—an ethic. Those two functions have nothing to do with each other, for how you explain the natural world is one thing, and what moral principles and values you have is quite another. But the two functions were not originally separated, and there are a number of reasons why they were not. First of all, the idea that the world was created by a god who incorporated in himself the highest intelligence, wisdom, and power was a plausible, indeed, a rational hypothesis. And even if you are a convinced Darwinist who sees the development of the world and of man as a consequence of natural selection or mutation, you may still feel that the postulation of God the Creator is much easier to understand and accept than the rather complex alternative; for evolutionary theory claims that man in his present form is the product of certain principles that went into effect hundreds of millions of years ago and that are to some degree subject to pure chance or, at best, to the laws of natural selection. Darwin’s explanation of the natural world seems altogether logical and plausible, but despite that it remains alien to our minds.

Man has always had a need, even in his earliest, most primitive stages, to form a picture of the world and of its creation. One version of the creation that goes far back in time claims that human beings were made out of the blood that flowed from someone who had been killed. Not everyone was made of that blood, however. Only the brave were. Cowards and women were made from the flesh of the two legs. That is an ancient version of the theory that Konrad Lorenz has put forward, namely, that human beings have an inborn instinct to kill, a blood lust. It was nice, of course, of the people who believed in the myth to exempt women from that blood lust, but it was not so nice of them then to throw women in with the cowards. Things have not changed much even today. According to the prejudices of patriarchal society, women have less conscience, are more vain and cowardly, and are less realistic than men. Now all those claims are notoriously false. In many cases the shoe could easily be put on the other foot. Most women know what a pathetic figure a man can cut when he is
sick. He is much more given to self-pity and much less secure in himself than a woman. But no one admits that for fear of destroying the myth. We see the same thing happening here that we see in racial stereotypes. What men say about women has no more basis in fact than what the whites say about the blacks. Even Freud claimed that women had less conscience than men. Now I find it hard to imagine how anybody could have less conscience than men. What those claims are, of course, is nothing more than propaganda about the inferiority of an enemy. That kind of propaganda turns up whenever one group dominates another and discourages rebellion by holding the self-confidence of the dominated group down to an absolute minimum.

That is by way of a little footnote to one of the functions of religion I mentioned above, to wit, an explanation of the natural world. Everything went along just fine until Darwin, but what we learned from him was that if we looked at the creation of the world and of man from a rational and scientific point of view we could dispense with the idea of God and explain those phenomena by the laws of evolution. As I said, it is easier for the layman to grasp the idea of God, but for science after Darwin the creation was no longer a mystery. In the light of the theory of evolution, "God" was reduced to a working hypothesis and the story of the creation of the world and of man to a myth, a poem, a symbol, which clearly expressed something but could no longer be regarded as scientific truth.

Once the religious explanation of the natural world lost its power to convince, religion lost one leg, as it were. All that remained for it to stand on was the propagation of moral postulates. "Love thy neighbor," the Old Testament says. "Love the stranger." The New Testament says, "Love your enemies" and "Go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor." How can anyone who takes those instructions seriously be successful in modern society? Anyone who follows those precepts is a fool. He'll fall behind, not get ahead. We preach the moral precepts of the Bible but don't practice them. We run on two separate tracks. Altruism is praised; we're supposed to have love for our neighbors. But at the same time the pressure to succeed keeps us from practicing those virtues.

I have to add a qualifying note here: In my opinion it is altogether possible in our society to be a good Christian or a good Jew, that is, a loving human being, without starving to death. What matters is your level of competence and the courage needed to adhere to the truth and persist in love rather than give yourself up for the sake of your career.

But all that notwithstanding, it remains a fact that Christian or Jewish morality is incompatible with the morality of success, of ruthlessness, of selfishness, of not giving, of not sharing. Since that point will be obvious to anyone who reflects on it, I needn't dwell on it here. Anyway, this double standard in our morality has been described and criticized often. To sum up, then, the "ethic" that dominates in modern capitalism has amputated religion's other leg. Religion no longer functions as a promulgator of values, for people no longer trust it in that role either. God has abdicated both as the creator of the world and as the spokesman for values like love of neighbor and the overcoming of greed. But humanity does not seem either willing or able to do without religion entirely. Man does not live by bread alone. He has to have a vision, a faith, that awakens his interest and elevates him above mere animal existence. A regression to earlier heathenism and worship of idols holds no attraction for modern man, but I think we can say that our century is developing a new religion, one I would like to call the "religion of technology."

There are two particular aspects of this religion I would like to mention here. One is the promise of the Big Rock Candy Mountain, the dream of unlimited and instant gratification. New needs are being produced every minute; there is no end to them; and humankind, like an eternal suckling babe, waits with open mouth, expecting to be fed more and more and more. This is a paradise of total gratification, a paradise of superfluity that makes us lazy and passive. Technology's goal becomes the elimination of effort.

The other aspect of this religion is more complex. Ever since the Renaissance, humanity has concentrated its intellectual efforts on penetrating and understanding nature's secrets. But nature's secrets were, at least to some extent, also the secrets of nature's creator. For four hundred years man has invested his energies in plumbing nature's mysteries so that he will be able to control nature. His most deep-seated motive was to cease being a mere spectator of the natural world and to become able to create that world himself. It is difficult to express precisely what I want to say here, but if I were to state what I mean in its most radical form, I would have to say: Man wanted to become God himself. What God was able to do, man wanted to be able to do, too. I think the spectacle and the enthusiasm we witnessed when the astronauts first set
foot on the moon had the quality of a pagan religious ceremony. That moment represented man's first step on the way to overcoming his human limitations and becoming God. Even Christian newspapers were saying that the conquest of the moon was the greatest thing to happen since the creation of the universe. Now it is a bit imprudent of Christians to say that—at the creation itself—there is another event more important than the Incarnation. But that was all forgotten in the moment when people were themselves witness to the fact of man's stepping outside the laws that had limited him before, overcoming the force of gravity, and setting out on a path into infinity.  

Now you may feel that I'm exaggerating a bit here, but what I want to do is call your attention to tendencies that are still hidden below the surface. Was the hysterically enthusiastic response to the landing on the moon no more than applause for a scientific success? Hardly. There have been far more fantastic scientific achievements that have stirred up not the slightest public interest. What we have here is something altogether new. We are witnessing the emergence of a new form of idolatry. Technology is the new God, or man himself is becoming God, and the astronauts are the high priests of this religion. That is why they draw so much adulation. But no one admits this, because we are, after all, Christians or Jews, or at least not heathens. That is why we have to cover up what we are doing, rationalize it. But behind all the sleight-of-hand a new religion is, I think, taking shape, one in which technology is assuming the role of a Great Mother who will feed all her children and satisfy all their demands. The picture is not as simple as I am painting it here, because there are a number of complex, interlocking motives underlying the new religion. But we can safely say that the new religion has no moral principles to promulgate, except one, which is that we have to do whatever is technologically possible to do. Technological capability has become a moral obligation, has become the very source of our morality.

Dostoevski said that if God is dead then anything is permitted. He assumed that all previous morality had been based on belief in God. But if people no longer believe in God, if God is no longer a reality that forms their thoughts and actions, then we have good reason to ask whether they will not become totally immoral, whether they will not stop looking to any kind of moral principles for guidance. That is a question we have to take seriously, and if we are feeling pessimistic, we may conclude that it is exactly what has happened and that our morality is continuing to decline all the time. There are significant differences between now and earlier times. In 1914, for example, the warring nations adhered to two internationally accepted rules. Civilians were not killed, and no one was tortured. Today it is taken for granted that civilians will be killed in the course of any and all hostilities, because warring parties no longer accept any limitations on their use of force. Then, too, technology cannot make allowances for that kind of differentiation. Technology kills anonymously; we kill by pressing a button. Because we do not see our opponent, we are not moved to sympathy or compassion. And torture is the rule today, not the exception. Everyone tries to deny that, but it is a generally known fact. The use of torture to obtain information is widespread. We would be astonished to know in how many countries of the world torture is used.

Perhaps we needn't say that cruelty is on the increase, but it would be hard to deny that humanity and the moral prohibitions that go with it are declining. That has brought about a great change in the world, but on the other hand we can see that new moral principles are coming to the fore; we find them in the younger generation, for example, in their struggle for peace, for life, against destruction and war. They are not just mouthing empty phrases. Many young people (and not just young ones) are proclaiming their allegiance to other, better values and goals. Millions of people have become sensitive to the destruction of life on so many fronts, to inhuman wars in which there is not even a pretense of self-defense. We see a new morality of love taking shape, too, in opposition to the consumer society. The new morality may have its flaws, but it remains impressive in its protest against empty forms and words. We see evidence of a new morality, too, in the self-sacrifices made in the political realm, in the numerous struggles for liberation and self-determination that are going on today.

Those are encouraging developments, and because of them I feel that Dostoevski was wrong in linking moral principles so closely to a belief in God. Buddhism provides us with a glowing example of how some cultures develop moral principles without any authoritarian or patriarchal underpinnings. Those principles are rooted and flourish, if you will, in a humane soil. That is to say, human beings cannot live, they become confused and unhappy, if they do not acknowledge a principle that they all those
around them look to as a guiding principle for their lives. This principle cannot be forced on them; it has to emerge from them. I cannot go into the many aspects of this question now. All I mean to show, as I mentioned initially, is that people have a deeply rooted need to act morally. Immorality causes them to lose their inner harmony and balance. And it is immorality going under the guise of morality if people are told that they have to kill, that they have to obey, that they should pursue only their own selfish interests, that sympathy will be a hindrance to them, and so forth.

If voices of that kind grow too loud they can drown out a person’s own inner voice, the voice of his humanistic conscience. Then he may get the idea that if God is dead, anything and everything is permitted.

Expanding the Range of Human Growth

The younger generation is playing a central role in the moral crisis we are currently experiencing. I’m thinking in particular of the radicals among our young adults, and when I say “radicals” I don’t mean the ones who call themselves radicals and seem to think they can justify any and all violence by calling it “radical.” Many young people are simply childlike, not radical. Lenin dealt with that subject in his essay on the childhood diseases of Communism. But there are large numbers of young people who are radical not just in their political demands but in another respect that is closely linked to the subject of the last section, that is, to the rejection of authoritarian morality. The rebellion is directed not solely at authority (all revolutions voice a protest against authority) but at the patriarchal principle and the morality rooted in that principle, a morality that calls obedience a virtue and disobedience a sin. A phenomenon of great significance that follows from this is that people develop guilt feelings if they do not do what they are supposed to do. Instead of doing what their own hearts, their own feelings, their own humanity tells them to do, they submit to an authoritarian order that punishes them with guilt if they violate it.

What characterizes a large number of young people and what makes them so likable for so many of the rest of us, myself included, is, I think, that they have freed themselves from the guilt feelings imposed by authoritarian morality. They have, by and large, dis-
alone speak for us. It’s even possible that our words mean nothing at all. However, Freud’s work is not the only reason we have for being suspicious of mere words. We have also had the experience of seeing human dishonesty lead us into wars in which hundreds of millions of people were killed or, for the sake of “honor,” voluntarily marched off to their deaths. All those deaths can be traced back to lies and empty slogans. We have good reason today to be less impressed than ever by what people say. Words and ideas come cheap and can be done up in all kinds of packages. That’s why young people are less inclined to ask, “What did you think about all that?” and ask instead, “What did you do? What were your motives?”

I think this effect of Freud’s work, the introduction of a new honesty into our lives, is of far more importance in the development of the Western world than the “sexual revolution” whose beginnings are usually traced back to him. In a society that is as totally oriented to consumption as ours is, the sexual revolution, if that’s what you want to call it, probably would have come about without Freud. We cannot exhort people to obtain everything they need to satisfy their senses and at the same time urge sexual abstinence on them. In a consumer society sex will inevitably become a consumer article. A number of industries depend on that fact, and a lot of money is spent to maintain the attractiveness of sexuality. That represents a change from earlier times but no revolution. And it would be difficult to lay that change at Freud’s door.

What is both new and positive, however, is that for young people sexuality is no longer burdened with guilt feelings. I’d like to take a minute here to examine the link between sexuality and guilt feelings more closely. If authoritarian ethics declares sexual drives “sinful,” the result for all of us is an inexhaustible source of guilt, and we could say that from our third year on every one of us has a massive bank account of guilt feelings saved up. Because human beings, constituted as they are, cannot help having sexual desires, they also cannot help feeling guilty if those feelings have a stigma attached to them. Restrictions placed on sexuality lead to guilt feelings that are then generally exploited to create and maintain an authoritarian ethic.

The younger generation (and the older one, too, to some extent) finally seems to have rid itself of that kind of guilt. That is no small advance. But if you’ll forgive me for belaboring the obvious, I have to add here that all is not gold that glitters. Because of our consumer orientation, sex is exploited increasingly to disguise a lack of intimacy. We use physical closeness to gloss over the human alienation we feel. Physical intimacy alone cannot create emotional intimacy. Emotional intimacy, a genuine harmony between two people, may well be linked with physical intimacy, may even begin with it, and can be confirmed again and again by it, but those two kinds of intimacy are not identical. At those moments when we lack emotional intimacy we are most likely to substitute physical intimacy for it. And if we are normally constituted both physically and mentally, that is quite easy to do.

The younger generation, as I have said, rejects the patriarchal order and consumer society as well. But it is given to another kind of consumerism, which is exemplified in young people’s use of drugs. Their parents buy cars, clothes, jewelry; the children take drugs. There are many reasons why they reach for drugs and tend to develop an ever greater dependency on them, reasons that demand our careful consideration; but whatever else drug dependency is, it is also an expression of that same lazy, passive Homo consumens that the children criticize in their parents but that they themselves also represent in a different guise. The young people, too, are always waiting for something to come to them from the outside, waiting for the high of drugs, the high of sex, the high of the rock rhythms that hypnotize them, carry them off, sweep them away. Those rhythms do not encourage activity. They transport the young into an orgiastic state, into a state like a drug high, in which they forget themselves and so are profoundly passive. An active human being does not forget himself; he is himself and is constantly becoming himself. He becomes more mature, he becomes more adult, he grows. A passive person is, as I suggested before, an eternal sucking babe. Whatever he consumes is ultimately of little consequence to him. He simply waits with open mouth, as it were, for whatever the bottle offers. Then he is gradually sated without having to do anything himself. None of his psychic powers is called into play, and finally he grows tired and sleepy. The sleep he experiences is often a narcosis, an exhaustion induced by boredom, more than a sleep of healthy regeneration. Once again you may feel that I am exaggerating here, but estimates suggest that more people than we would imagine are having that kind of experience. And the media involved in producing our false needs keep reassuring us that it is our level of consumption that demonstrates the high level of our culture.

The question we have to ask in our society of bad, superfluous
affluence that no one can possibly digest and that contributes nothing to our vitality—the question we have to ask is whether we can still manage, in principle at least, to create a good affluence. Can we somehow make good, truly productive use of the overabundant production we are technologically capable of, a use that serves human beings and their growth? That should be possible if we will understand that what we have to do is encourage and satisfy only those needs that make people more active, livelier, freer, so that they will not be driven by their feelings or simply react to stimuli but will be open and attentive and determined to realize their own potential, to enliven, enrich, and inspire themselves and others. One prerequisite for accomplishing that is, of course, to reorganize not only our work but also our so-called leisure. Our free time is, for the most part, nothing but lazy time. It provides us with an illusion of power because we can bring the world into our living rooms by pressing a button on the TV set or because we can get behind the wheel of a car and fool ourselves into thinking the engine's 100 horsepower is our own. We have truly "free time" only to the extent that we cultivate needs that are rooted in man and that move him to become active. That is why work has to stop being monotonous and boring. And the central problem we face in organizing our work is: How can we make work interesting, exciting, lively?

Here we come up against an even more basic question: What is the point of our work? Is it to increase production and consumption? Or is it to promote the development and growth of human beings? It is usually claimed that the one cannot be separated from the other. What is good for industry is good for people, and vice versa. That sounds like the proclamation of some lovely, preordained harmony, but in fact it is an outright lie. It is easy to demonstrate that many things that were beneficial to industry were bad for people. And that is our dilemma today. If we continue on the path we are on, progress will be achieved only at the expense of human beings. And so we have to make a choice. To put it in biblical language, we have to choose between God and Caesar. That may sound very dramatic, but if we are going to talk seriously about life, then things do get dramatic. What I have in mind here is not only the question of life and death but also whether we will choose the increasing death in the life we see around us or will opt for lives of vitality and activity. The whole point of life

is to become increasingly vital, more full of life. People deceive themselves about that. They live as if they have stopped living or as if they have never begun to live.

Our folk wisdom tells us that everyone over forty is responsible for his own face. That means that our own life histories will reveal whether we have lived our lives rightly or wrongly (not rightly or wrongly in a moral sense but in terms of our own unique being). And the most glowing funeral orations with their lists of achievements cannot gloss over the crucial question that we must not avoid answering: Were we or are we truly alive? Do we live our own lives, or are they lived on someone else's terms? I agree with thinkers like Marx and Disraeli, who were convinced that luxury is no less an evil than poverty. And by luxury they meant what we have been calling superfluous affluence here. But if we want to make genuine abundance our goal instead, we will have to make some fundamental changes in our ways of living and thinking. I am, of course, fully aware of the great difficulties that lie in the way of effecting such changes.

I think that the changes can be effected only if people feel a deep need for more life and less routine, only if they reject boredom and respond to needs that make them more vital and spontaneous, freer and happier. Many nations (mainly the underdeveloped ones) dream that they would be happy if they only had everything the Americans have. But America is where more people than in any other country have learned that all our modern comforts do tend to make us passive, impersonal, and manipulable rather than happy. It is no coincidence that our rebellious youth comes primarily from the middle and upper classes, in which superfluous affluence is most apparent. That kind of affluence may make for happiness in our imaginations, in our fantasies, but it does not make us happy in our heart of hearts.

It seems extremely important to me to grasp clearly a principle that is essential to formulating our strategies in the art of living. We will botch our lives if we pursue conflicting goals and do not realize that they are at odds with each other and are mutually exclusive. You may be familiar with another experiment Pavlov conducted with a dog. The dog had been trained to expect food when he saw a circle and not to expect any when he saw an ellipse. Then, step by step, Pavlov made the shape of the ellipse approach that of the circle, until the two shapes so nearly resembled each
other than the dog could not tell them apart. In this conflict situation, the animal became ill and showed the classical symptoms of neurosis. He became anxious, confused, and insecure.

Human beings too will become psychically ill if they pursue conflicting goals. They lose their equilibrium, their self-confidence, their powers of discrimination. They no longer know what is good for them. The first thing we have to do, then, is to ask ourselves in all honesty what the conflicting goals are that we are pursuing. Why are they incompatible? What damage is the conflict between them causing in us? These questions cannot be answered by speeches and certainly not by propaganda, which does nothing but make fanatics of people. Every single one of us should try to call himself to account and think something along this line: "You will live only a short time. Who are you, and what is it you really want?" If we give ourselves up to the kind of affluence that is ultimately poverty, ultimately misery, we shall be squelching the richness that is ready to unfold and flourish within us; and on our decision for superfluity or abundance, for a good or a bad affluence, depends no more nor less than the future of humankind.

It is hardly surprising that we are devoting more and more attention to the problem of aggression these days. We have experienced wars in the past; we are experiencing them in the present; and we fear the atomic war for which all the major powers of the world are arming themselves. At the same time people feel powerless to change this state of affairs. They see that their governments, which appear to have applied all their wisdom and brought all their goodwill to the issue, have not yet been able even to slow down or stabilize the arms race. So it is quite understandable that people are eager, on the one hand, to know where aggression really comes from but, on the other, are also receptive to theories that say aggression is part of human nature, not something that man creates himself or that his social institutions inevitably produce. That is the position Konrad Lorenz made popular in a book he published some years ago. In On Aggression Lorenz argues that aggression is constantly and spontaneously being created in the human brain, that it is a legacy from our animal ancestors, and that it increases more and more, assuming larger and larger proportions, if there is no release for it. If there is due cause, it will be expressed. But if the provocations are very weak or are missing