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ABSTRACT

This monograph examines the nature of alienation in mass society and mass culture. Conceptually based on the "Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft" paradigm of sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies, discussion traces the concept of alienation as it appears in the philosophies of Hegel, Marx, Kierkegaard, Sartre, and others. Dwight Macdonald's "A Theory of Mass Culture" and Clement Greenberg's insights on "kitsch" are used to explain the pervasive influence of mass culture in modern society and its debilitating effects on high culture. The analysis concludes that society must cushion the impact of dehumanizing technology and its consequences of alienation by redesigning the educational system and introducing new pedagogics. (KS)

ALIENATION, MASS SOCIETY AND MASS CULTURE

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ALIENATION, MASS SOCIETY AND MASS CULTURE

By Hari N. Dam

Ours is a truly anthropocentric age. In no other age has man been so preoccupied with his own condition. Poised precariously over the verge of a nuclear holocaust, modern man finds himself alienated from his own self, from his fellow beings and from the technocratic society he has himself created as a homo faber.

Alienation with its tragic consequences of social and psychological isolation and normative confusion has become a dominant contemporary theme. The wide-spread Weltschmerz among the disaffiliated youth in the sixties has reinforced the validity and relevancy of this theme.

As usual, alienation first engaged the attention of the Teutonic thinkers. Hegel was the first Western scholar who discussed alienation in an epistemological context. Alienation, according to Hegel, is that state of consciousness when it posits itself against the external, phenomenal world. Confronted with external objects, consciousness feels itself estranged and alienated in this otherness. But external objects are "products of abstract mind . . . the entities of thought." Objects which negate consciousness are but projections of consciousness itself, and as consciousness recognizes this, it returns to itself and achieves release from alienation. This is the meaning of Hegel's famous phrase, "negation of the negation," the negation of the external objects that negate consciousness. All phenomena are reified consciousness. As no cognizable objects exist outside consciousness, alienation is

overcome in the dissolution of the subject-object dichotomy and in the return of consciousness to itself.[1]

Karl Marx took issue with Hegel and rejected the latter's attempt to reduce the phenomenal world to "a mere phantasy, a predicate of consciousness." Marx contended that the problem of alienation cannot be solved in the epistemological context. Alienation, according to him, is expressed in work and in the division of labor. The poignant manifestation of alienation is the worker's inability to possess the product of his own labor. Under capitalism labor ceases to be self-realizing, creative activity for the worker. As the worker cannot do what he wants to do, his existence is alienated from his essence: he cannot be what he ought to be.[2]

Labor, in Marx's anthropocentric philosophy, occupies a central position. In work man realizes his own nature, his Gattungswesen; that is, the essence of the human species. Says Marx: "It is just in his work upon the objective world that man really proves himself as a species-being. This production is his active species-life. By means of it nature appears as his work and his reality. The function of labor is, therefore, the objectification of man's species life; for he no

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[1]Karl Marx/Frederick Engels, Collected Works, Vol. III (New York: International Publishers, 1975), pp. 330-335; Shlomo Avineri, The Social and Political Thought of Karl Marx, Paperback (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970). pp. 96-97.

[2]Shlomo Avineri, The Social Political Thought of Karl Marx, p. 97; Marx/Engels, Collected Works, Vol. III, pp. 271-272.

longer reproduces himself merely intellectually, as in his own consciousness, but actively in a real sense, and he sees his own reflection in a world he has constructed."[3]

Under capitalism, Marx contended, labor undergoes a qualitative change; it ceases to be a self-directed activity. Work becomes external to man; it is no more the part of his nature as a species-being. The worker no longer fulfills himself in labor that is imposed on him. He feels himself physically exhausted and mentally and spiritually debased. The worker feels himself at home when he is not working, whereas at work he feels homeless. His labor is no more voluntary; it is forced labor. Marx then added:

> As a result, therefore, man (the worker) only feels himself freely active in his animal functions--eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and in dressing up, etc.; and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. What is animal becomes human and what is human becomes animal.[4]

According to Marx, the animal can produce only in a way which is typical of its species. But man, since he is a self-activating agent, can produce in a variety of ways. Explicating this point, Marx said:

> . . . an animal only produces what it immediately needs for itself or for its young. It produces one-sidedly, whilst man produces universally. It produces only under the dominion of immediate physical need, whilst man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom. An animal produces only itself, while man reproduces the whole of nature. An

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[3]Marx/Engels, Collected Works, Vol. III, p. 277.

[4]Ibid., pp. 274-275.

> animal's product belongs immediately to its physical body, whilst man freely confronts his product. An animal forms objects in accordance with the standard and the need of the species to which it belongs, whilst man knows how to produce in accordance with the standard of every species, and knows how to apply everywhere the inherent standard to the object.[5]

But under the capitalist mode of production, the worker ceases to be a self-activating creative agent. With his spontaneous free activity reduced to the means for survival, he is degraded to the level of animal. He himself becomes a commodity. His only worth lies in his ability to sell himself to a capitalist who hires him to do work for him. The product of his labor becomes "something hostile and alien" to him. According to Marx, the overcoming of alienation in a capitalist society has to reckon with the institution of private ownership in the means of production and must abolish it to restore man as a free, productive species-being.[6] But as we will see later, Marx was wrong in his prescription of the remedy.

In 1887, another German scholar, Ferdinand Tönnies, then an obscure sociology professor, published a treatise titled Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft whose seminal ideas had a great impact on scholars on both sides of the Atlantic. In his work, Tönnies delineated two ideal types of society--Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft and two modes of mentality and behavior in these two ideal types. Gemeinschaft more or less corresponds to pre-industrial, agrarian society and Gesellschaft to

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[5] Ibid., pp. 276-277.

[6] Ibid., pp. 270-282, passim.

our modern industrial or contractual society. Since America is the most developed of all industrial societies, we may take it as a paradigm of the ideally conceived Gesellschaft.[7]

Tönnies' Gemeinschaft-Gesselschaft dichotomy, though an abstract construct, finds its empirical validation in the evolution of society from the agrarian to the industrial stage and provides useful theoretical tools for the study of alienation inherent in the very structure of modern society. The Gemeinschaft form of human association, according to Tönnies, does not come into being through conscious design. An individual finds himself belonging to it as he belongs to his own family. All relationships are spontaneous. In fact, the purest form of Gemeinschaft is within the family, especially the mother-child relationship. The Gemeinschaft is marked by the fixity of norms, values, life goals and status. Here the individual is guided by Wesenwille, the spontaneous will, which does not differentiate between ends and means. In the Gemeinschaft man is not alienated from his work. He does what he wants to do and finds self-fulfillment in his work. The artifacts of the Middle Ages still bear witness to man's spontaneous, creative activity and evoke our admiration and envy. As a homo faber, man was by and large free.[8]

The Gesellschaft, on the other hand, presents a totally different picture. The Gesellschaft is characterized by the fluidity of norms,

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[7]Ferdinand Tönnies, Community and Society (Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft), translated and edited by Charles P. Loomis, Paperback (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), passim; Fritz Pappenheim, The Alienation of Modern Man, Paperback (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1959), pp. 61-81.

[8]Ibid.

values, life goals and status. The individual in the Gesellschaft is guided by Kürwille, the deliberate will, which differentiates between ends and means. In the Gesellschaft an individual takes a job not because it will add to the enrichment of his creative life but because it will bring him an envelope containing a check which he will use to maintain the so-called standard of living. Since work ceases to have any relevance to the individual's inner needs, estrangement between his existence and essence is complete. An alienated worker cannot be what he ought to be.[9]

The Gesellschaft is a society of strangers. In large urban centers, teeming millions lead an atomistic, alienated existence. They are afflicted with a sense of psychic isolation and a lack of belongingness. All relationships tend to be contractual and fragmentary. There are no enduring ties to relieve the burden of isolation.[10]

Critics of the Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft dichotomy point out that inspite of the Gesellschaft surface, the modern society is not so impersonal and atomistic as Tönnies makes it to be. It has countless voluntary organizations, which provide nuclei of shared experience for modern man. But the proponents of Tönnies' theory will contend that the quantity of relationships should not be mistaken for the quality. The very fact that modern man is a great joiner is proof that none of the so-called organizations provides the kind of satisfaction available in a Gemeinschaft unit. In the Gesellschaft the individual

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[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

participates in an organization only with a fragment of his personality. Examples of the fragmentary Gesellschaft relationships are those obtaining between the stockholders of a corporation, between the members of a taxpayers' association or of a civic club. None of these relationships are enduring; they are contractual in nature; they can be terminated at a moment's notice.[11]

We find the echo of the similar sentiments in the writings of Georg Simmel, another German sociologist. "The deepest problems of modern life," wrote Simmel, "arise out of the attempts by the individual to preserve his autonomy and individuality in the face of the overwhelming social forces of a historical heritage, external culture and techniques." Modern city existence is marked by hypertension and intellectuality. City economy is a market economy which produces for unknown customers. There are no personal relationships between producers and consumers. The dominant features of schematized city existence are punctuality, calculability and exactness--the factors which create a milieu of the highest impersonality and personal subjectivity. The "matter of fact" attitude which is the product of the money economy is followed by a blasé attitude--an attitude marked by an incapacity to respond to new sensations with discrimination. To an over-stimulated city man, "no object deserves preference over others"; they are all alike. The hypertension of city life is a real hindrance to sensibility.[12]

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[11] Ibid.

[12] The Sociology of Georg Simmel, translated and edited by Kurt H. Wolff, Paperback (New York: The Free Press, 1964), pp. 409, 411, 413-415.

The city man also develops in his dealings with others formality, reserve and occasional brashness in a desperate attempt to preserve his autonomy. Life in the city is gradually transformed from a "struggle with nature for livelihood into an inter-human struggle for gain." The modern money economy gives man greater freedom and choice but at the same time it also enhances his isolation and rootlessness. Thanks to money, "the common denominator of all values," which "hollows out the core of things," impersonality not only permeates our interpersonal relationships but also our relationships with our objective possessions, which no longer define our identity.[13]

Lastly, Simmel points out, in the city there is a large lag between objective and subjective culture. Due to the minute division of labor in the field of knowledge buttressed by technology, there has been an enormous growth of objective culture. But this hypertrophy of objective culture has resulted in the atrophy of subjective culture. The ordinary man has no grasp of the complex issues of a modern society; his perception of reality is fragmentary.[14]

In his essay, "Der Konflikt der Modernen Kultur," Simmel furnished further insights into the predicament of our age. It is a predicament arising out of the opposition between life and form. The creative force of life when it transcends the animal level and reaches the level of

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[13] Ibid., pp. 420, 414; Joachim Israel, Alienation: From Marx to Modern Sociology (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1971), p. 126.

[14] The Sociology of Georg Simmel, pp. 421-422.

culture finds its expressions in the forms of art, science, religion, law and technology. The forms arising from the flow of life provide the latter with "content and form, freedom and order." In other words, the amorphous life becomes morphous through the forms.[15]

But these forms which are meant to protect and enrich life have dynamics of their own. They are independent of life: they follow their own logic and development. Though they provide the "frameworks of creative life," the forms have nothing to do with the rhythm of life. Life soon surges forward transcending the existing forms. The forms then, following their own logic, become rigid and ossified: they become independent and self-enclosed. The result is a conflict or opposition between on-going life and its crusty forms. When the old forms become too rigid and refractory, the creative life develops new cultural formations which replace the old ones and the conflict for the time being is overcome.[16]

According to Simmel, the opposition between life and forms has reached an unprecedented degree of intensity in our age. We are witnessing not a struggle of the new forms vibrant with life against the decadent old forms but a rebellion against the very principle of form. Traditionalists with their punctilious regard for form are bemoaning the lack of form or style in our time. But Simmel assures us that the new struggle against the forms is pregnant with the promise of a more enriched creative life.[17] This writer is, however, as explained later, skeptical about Simmel's futuristic optimism.

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[15]Georg Simmel, On Individuality and Social Forms, edited by Donald N. Levine (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 375.

[16]Ibid., pp. 375-376.

[17]Ibid., p. 377.

Looking back at the different periods of history, Simmel contends that every age has a dominant or controlling idea. Classical Greece had for its central concept the idea of being; the Middle Ages supplanted it with the idea of God; the Renaissance was preoccupied with the concept of nature; the seventeenth century devoted its energy to the discovery of natural law; the eighteenth century had for its central idea the concept of the individual; the nineteenth century was more or less concerned with the concept of society with the individual as part of it; and our own age is engrossed in the concept of life with its myriad dimensions.[18]

The rebellion against the life-restrictive forms, Simmel points out with many examples, finds expression in modern art, pragmatism, contemporary religion and new sexual morality. This rebellion against the forms, he adds, is a symptom of modern man's fear that his individuality and autonomy are in danger of being destroyed by sterile forms, which are irrelevant to his real self or life. And herein, as we can see, lies the source of estrangement or alienation.[19]

Oswald Spengler, in his celebrated classic, The Decline of the West, defines further the theme of alienation. In his cyclic theory of history, Spengler characterizes the last phase of culture as "civilization," in which all the accomplishments of culture are frozen into rigidity. In the period of civilization men cease to be tied down to any particular region, become highly urbanized and rationalistic, and increasingly

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[18] Ibid., pp. 378-379.

[19] Ibid., pp. 380-392; Pappenheim, The Alienation of Modern Man, p. 24.

callous to the vital urge of life. "The city," says Spengler, "is intellect. The megapolis is 'free' intellect." The city controls the economy "by replacing the primitive values of the land . . . by the absolute idea of money." Money evaluates things not in terms of their intrinsic worth but "with reference to itself." Money becomes a power wholly measurable in intellectual terms. "There is monetary thought, just as there is mathematical or juristic." The city represents "the dictatorship of money."[20] It would be appropriate to point out here that in their analyses of money economy, there is a good deal of affinity between Simmel and Spengler.

The city man, continues Spengler, is an intellectual nomad. He has no home and hearth in the old sense of the words. He is a tenant, a bad occupier, he leads a vagrant life. He moves from shelter to shelter like the hunter or pastor of the prehistoric times. With the enormous growth of the cities teeming with homeless, rootless atomistic people, Spengler predicts there will be a fantastic growth of traffic and communication that will reach "the point of madness."[21]

With Caesarism triumphant in the domain of politics and money dominant in economic life, there develops a cult of childless intelligence. Having children becomes a matter of pro and con and sterility is elevated to the status of a cult. Woman becomes increasingly dominant in economics and politics. She ceases to be a mother and becomes an

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[20]Oswald Spengler, The Decline of the West, Vol. II (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1932), passim: pp. 96-98.

[21]Ibid., pp. 100-101.

intellectual partner. Marriage is used as an artifice for the achievement of mutual understanding. Freed from the urge of blood, marriage becomes as free as intelligence. As the ethic of sterility gathers momentum, cities gradually die of depopulation and the Cultural Cycle comes to an end. According to Spengler, the Western world, alienated from its vital sources, is now passing through the winter of civilization to its ultimate doom.[22] No Caeser, that is, no President or Prime Minister in the modern context, however powerful he may be, can prevent this cyclic doom.

French sociologist Emile Durkheim, influenced by the ideas of his mentor Comte, hailed the division of labor as a unifying and cohesive force in an industrial society. The great civil societies of today, he declared, can maintain themselves in equilibrium only through the division of labor. Comte, he said, was the first sociologist to recognize the division of labor as something more than an economic phenomenon. He discerned in it "the most essential condition of social life," when applied to the totality of human operations. The division of labor with its specialization of tasks, explained Durkheim, is a moral imperative; it contributes to order and harmony by creating conditions for social solidarity.[23]

According to Durkheim, there are two types of solidarity--mechanical and organic. By mechanical solidarity he did not mean solidarity

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[22] Ibid., pp. 103-105.

[23] Emile Durkheim, The Division of Labor in Society, translated by George Simpson (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1960), pp. 62-63.

mechanically and artificially produced. It refers to that sort of solidarity which unifies a people who share a common set of beliefs, values and sentiments. In this kind of solidarity there is no room for the growth of personality. Mechanical solidarity can "grow only in inverse ratio to personality." It reaches its optimal point when all individuality is submerged in the collectivity and the collective conscience completely envelopes the individual conscience. The members of a mechanical solidary group are no more than "social molecules which . . . can act together only in the measure that they have no actions of their own, as the molecules of inorganic bodies. That is why we propose to call this type of solidarity mechanical." This kind of solidarity is similar to "the cohesion which unites the elements of an inanimate body, as opposed to that which makes a unity out of the elements of a living body."[24]

Organic solidarity occurs only in a society with a well-developed division of labor which allows its each member an opportunity to develop his personality through a specialized task. The member has the same kind of relationship to society as each organ has to its organism. The unity of an organism depends on the individuation of its parts. Social solidarity follows the same pattern. The society becomes more solidary and productive as each of its members becomes more autonomous. That is why this kind of solidarity is called organic. In organic solidarity the collective conscience is not as absorbing as it is in mechanical solidarity. It allows a part of the individual conscience to remain open so that

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[24] Ibid., p. 130.

specialization can find an outlet there. Organic solidarity develops a complex system of collective movement which derives its impulse from the matrix of mutual dependency created by the division of labor.[25]

In spite of his commitment to the division of labor as a source of social equilibrium in modern society, the French savant was clear-sighted enough to envisage that excessive specialization might cause psychological isolation and consequent alienation. He agreed with Tönnies that the nexus of complex relationships stemming from over-specialization may lead to relationships which are impersonal in nature. The very division of labor, which produces social equilibrium, can also cause disequilibrium if carried beyond certain points. In Durkheim's terminology, this loss of harmony or equilibrium is called anomie. Anomie is a kind of social pathology which afflicts an individual when he cannot meaningfully relate himself to others. He feels alienated and estranged.[26] By a circuitous path, as we can see, Durkheim came to the same conclusion as Tönnies, Simmel, and later Spengler did.

In our times, Erich Fromm, a naturalized American, has done more than anybody else to bring to the attention of Ivory Tower scholars the problems of alienation that afflict our modern society. The reaction in the beginning was negative. Most of the scholars dismissed the whole concept of alienation as the product of the twisted and murky Teutonic mind, which had no relevance to the consensul American society. Following the turbulent sixties, this supercilious, smug attitude has undergone

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[25] Ibid., p. 131.

[26] Ibid., pp. 353-373.

some transformation. The concept of alienation is now receiving the kind of notice it should deserve in academic circles.

But efforts are still being made by some scholars to dismiss the idea of alienation on the grounds that it has no precise definition.[27] It is a nebulous concept which has no operational validity. They seem to forget, in their zeal for semantic precision, that some of the dominant ideas in the humanities, such as "God," "religion," "civilization," and "culture," etc., have no precise definitions. Each of these concepts has a cluster of meanings and in a single discourse each of them can be used with different connotations, depending on the particular context in which it is used. Even in the social sciences which strives so vainly and pathetically to achieve the exactitude and predictability of the natural sciences, such terms as "public," "public opinion," "crowd," "propaganda" have no precise definitions. It was Aristotle who insisted that the term used in a discourse must have a precise definition. But this Aristotelian concept of "definition" cannot be applied to terms relevant to the human situation because they have myriad meanings and overtones, which cannot be subsumed under a single definition. With this caveat I'll now return to Erich Fromm.

Stressing the point of his departure in his book, The Sane Society, Fromm says: "I have chosen the concept of alienation as the central point from which I am going to develop the analysis of the contemporary social character." Then in a lengthy discussion supported by several

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[27] Vide Richard Schacht, Alienation, Paperback (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1970).

examples, he shows how modern man experiences himself as alien. He says:

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

He points out that quantification, abstraction, and bureaucratization, which are the hallmarks of modern economy, are the major sources of alienation. They reduce men to mere objects or figures and obliterate any frame of reference related to "human dimensions."[28]

Fromm, following Marx, declares that alienation is a universal phenomenon which touches every man in modern society. The blind economic forces govern the life of modern man. He has become their object. He then adds, "Not the working man alone is alienated . . . but everybody is." Explicating further this theme he says:

> Alienation . . . is the sickness of man. It is not a new sickness, since it starts necessarily with the beginning of division of labor, that is, of civilization transcending primitive society; it is mostly developed in the working class yet it is a sickness from which everybody suffers. . . . only the totally alienated man can overcome the alienation--he is forced to overcome his alienation since he cannot live as a totally alienated man and remain sane.[29]

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[28]Erich Fromm, The Sane Society (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), pp. 110-121.

[29]Erich Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962), pp. 59, 48.

Apropos of man's alienation from nature, Fromm explains that man is "part of nature and yet transcends it, being endowed with reason and self-awareness." He points out man's emergence from "a state of oneness with the natural world to an awareness of himself as an entity separate from surrounding nature and man" as part of the process of individuation. One aspect of this individuation is the growing feeling of loneliness on the part of man. He becomes painfully conscious of his own insignificance and helplessness in the scheme of the universe. He also realizes that he is separate from others. How to overcome this alienation from nature and fellow men? Not by regressing to prehuman modality of existence but by developing to the maximal level man's power of reason and love. Fromm says: "Man's task in life is precisely the paradoxical one of realizing his individuality and at the same time transcending it and arriving at the experience of universality. Only the fully developed individual self can drop the ego." Who is a fully developed individual? The man who has not allowed his human qualities of reason and love to be atrophied. Both reason and love presuppose a split between subject and object. But through reason chastened with love, man can distinguish between the world and himself and at the same time grasp it as his own. So also in love, "the 'other' must become a stranger, and in the act of love, the stranger ceases to be a stranger and becomes me."[30] Alienation thus in both cases is overcome.

According to Fromm, one of the most inauthentic ways to overcome alienation is conformity. The alienated person feels an irresistible

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[30] Ibid., pp. 174-175, 178, 57; Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), pp. 24, 29.

urge to be accepted by others. Because he cannot accept what he is, he tries to be what others expect him to be. There is no longer any overt authority to enforce normative compliances; authority in our time is anonymous, it operates through the mechanism of conformity, which impels modern man not "to stick out," not to go against the prevailing values and standards. Fromm describes this surrender to anonymous authority as "alienated conformity."[31]

If we retrace our steps in history, we will find that in the Middle Ages people used to live with their kith and kin in small well-knit communities. Their positions in the social hierarchy were permanently fixed. There was very little vertical mobility. But there was also less anxiety, less failure, less worship of the Bitch Goddess, Success. There were no doubt poverty and drudgery but still people could survive them because within the certain limits of an "organic community" (a term used by F. R. Leavis), "the individual actually had much freedom to articulate his creative impulses in his work and in his emotional life. Although there was no individualism in the modern sense of the unrestricted choice between many possible ways of life . . ., there was a good deal of concrete individualism in real life." Also buttressed by an abiding faith, man could face the vicissitudes of life without becoming neurotic or paranoid.[32]

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[31]Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, pp. 152-155.

[32]Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom, pp. 40-43; for the discussion of the Organic Community as contrasted to our Contractual Community, vide F. R. Leavis and Denys Thompson, Culture and Environment (London: Chatto & Windus, 1964), pp. 87-98.

Man in the Middle Ages was completely unaware of his entity as an individual. Explaining this lack of awareness as an individual, Jacob Burckhardt wrote:

> In the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness--that which was turned within as that which was turned without--lay dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil. The veil was woven of faith, illusion, and childish prepossession, through which the world and history were seen clad in strange hues. Man was conscious of himself only as member of a race, people, party, family or corporation--only through some general category.[33]

But these halcyon days of self-assurance and belongingness come to an end with the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Industrial Revolution, sweeping away, like leaves in autumn wind, all of the traditional norms and values. Man was no more an integral part of a cohesive group. He was suddenly thrown on his own. Laissez faire capitalism, buttressed by a Puritan ethic, encouraged man to be competitive, egotistic, and self-reliant. The eighteenth century liberal philosophers, who were elated to see an end of the ancien régime and its feudal cohesiveness, interpreted this release from the yoke of the group as the dawn of an era of freedom. But euphoria was short-lived. For a great many people, this isolative freedom, which stifled their natural urge to belong, became increasingly burdensome. Alienated men sought to escape the agony of loneliness by embracing mindless conformity and by assiduously cultivating self-negating inauthenticity.[34]

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[33]Jacob Burckhardt, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy (London: Phaidon Press, 1965), p. 81.

[34]Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom, passim; William H. Whyte, Jr., The Organization Man, Paperback (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1957), p. 26.

On the ruins of the Gemeinschaft arose an industrial mass order in which the individual has to submit to the imperatives of aggressive technology. Technology, as Friedrich Georg Juenger so perceptively pointed out several years ago, is per se violent; its modes of operation are pillage and exploitation. It has not only destroyed the umbilical cord between man and nature but also ravaged, pillaged and vandalized nature to satisfy its gargantuan demand. The more it devours, the more it wants: there is no end to its demand. It blackens the sky with smoke, pollutes water and kills animals and plants.[35]

No aspect of modern life can claim immunity from the sovereignty of technology. In its perennial quest for perfection technology refuses to accept the profit motive of business. It can destroy a profitable enterprise or throw hundreds of workers out of employment by its unpredictable inventions. "The economic man," says Juenger, "who buys a technical patent to keep it locked up in his safe is already on the retreat." His delaying tactics only underline his inferiority in a deadly contest with technology. Summing up the all pervasive hegemony of technology in the field of economics, Juenger writes:

> Technology does not work according to economic laws. It is economic life that becomes ever more subservient to technology. We are approaching a point . . . where technological rationalism in production is more important than the profit produced. In other words, technological improvement must go on even if it spells financial loss. This symptom of economic distress is also the sign of growing technical perfection. Technology as a whole has absolutely no interest in dividends and can never develop any. It grows at the expense of economy; it increases

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[35]Friedrich Georg Juenger, The Failure of Technology, Paperback (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1956), pp. 20-25.

> economic emergency; it leads to an economy of deficit which grows the more strikingly obvious, the more triumphantly the perfection of technology progresses.[36]

Technology thrives on the myth that it creates riches or wealth, but the plain fact of the matter is that it consumes more than it produces. Its mode of production rests on the continuous depletion of natural resources. As the resources decrease, the perfection of technology concomitantly increases. More perfect technology only accelerates the process of consumption. And this increased consumption, which is "euphemistically called production" is "a sign not of abundance but of poverty; it is bound up with worry, want, and toil." Technology, Juenger points out, is by definition, "a rationalization of the work process." And rationalization is used "wherever a lack is felt, wherever want is suffered." If we keep in mind that technology in the West is becoming overly dependent on the hitherto untapped, unorganized resources of the underdeveloped world to satisfy its gluttonous demand, only then can we become aware of its all pervasive destructive power. Technology, Juenger concludes, is "a changing, a transmuting, a destructive force," which devours everything that comes under its sway.[37]

Technology, Juenger continues, has created a dead time (clock time), tempus mortuum, to regulate the vital flow of human life. It has enslaved man to the deadly and deadening routine of automatism. It has purged man of all vitality and spontaneity.[38]

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[36] Ibid., pp. 30, 32.

[37] Ibid., pp. 17-18, 22-23, 13, 192.

[38] Ibid., pp. 45-46, 193.

It would be apropos to point out here that both Marx and Fromm, a neo-Marxist, failed to discern that technology is the source of alienation in modern industrial society. Technology, as shown above, has dynamics of its own. It is independent of the socio-politico-economic framework in which it operates. It is of no importance as far as technology is concerned whether a society is capitalistic or communistic, democratic or totalitarian. The communist society is as much subject to its aggressive rationality as the capitalistic society. Modern industrial society is a technocratic society; its distinctive marks are rationalization, centralization, impersonalization, deindividuation, collectivization, quantification, and abstraction and bureaucratization. If these are the symptoms of that pathological human condition called alienation, then the latter is the product of technology.

Concurring with Marx, Fromm believes that alienation in modern society can be overcome by socializing the means of production and accelerating the productivity of technology. Socialism is the proper milieu in which man will be free enough to develop fully the qualities of love and reason. But as Juenger points out, the more perfect technology becomes, the more denatured nature will be, the more dehumanized man will be. As an urbanized Jew living on the periphery of a Gentile world (though his father, it should be noted, adopted Christianity for political reasons), Marx had no first-hand experience of industrial or agrarian life. His ever-faithful sidekick, Engels, furnished him with data about the working class. About the agrarian mode of life (in which Jefferson saw a good deal of merit), Marx covered his colossal ignorance with dogmatic assertions. He declared with a good deal of rhetorical swagger that the

agrarian society is a barbaric society and the peasants are a bunch of idiots. To get out of the "idiocy of rural life," people must accept the imperatives of technology and abolish the private ownership of the means of production. This will lead to the overcoming of alienation and man will be a self-activating, free being again. But the communist utopia, the Soviet Union, built on the above Marxist prescriptions, shows that it has developed all of the traits, rather in a blatantly pronounced degree, which Fromm describes as symptoms of alienation.[39] Socialism, therefore, is no answer to the problems of alienation.

José Ortega y Gasset, in his The Revolt of the Masses, points out the dehumanizing effects of science and technology. The scientific man, according to Ortega, is the archetypal mass man: he is smug and self-satisfied within the narrow confines of his specialty. He dismisses any interest outside his own field as "dilettantism." He is a new kind of barbarian who proclaims with fiendish glee his ignorance of finer and subtler things of life. He is a "learned ignoramus," a philistine in the real sense of the word. In his arrogance he seems to forget that experimental science, the pride of our age, is the product of the intellectually commonplace men. We have, says Ortega, today more specialists, but "much less 'cultured' men than, for example, about 1750." The Spanish philosopher is doubtful if our mass society can produce a man like Einstein, who had to "saturate himself with Kant and Mach before he could reach his own keen synthesis."[40]

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[39]Erich Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion, p. 48; Karl Marx, The Communist Manifesto, Paperback (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1965), p. 22.

[40]José Ortega y Gasset, The Revolt of the Masses, Paperback (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1957), pp. 109-113.

Some prominent thinkers of our time, such as Karl Mannheim, Karl Jaspers, Hannah Arendt, Gabriel Marcel have expressed much concern about the mass society and its corrosive effects on man. Mannheim points out that in mass society there has been an over-emphasis on "functional rationality," that is, on efficiency, which is stifling "substantial rationality," that is, initiative and the capacity for independent judgment. In a functionally rationalized society, the privilege of decision-making is left to the elite at the top while the masses are trained to follow prescribed courses of actions designed to achieve some specific goals. As a result the majority of the populace tend to lose their capacity for independent judgment, and the gulf between the elite and the masses widens. Mannheim fears that "the paralysing effect of functional rationality on the capacity for rational judgment" may make the masses vulnerable to violence in which their repressed impulses may find an outlet.[41]

In a somewhat different vein Karl Jaspers points out the destructive effects of massification on the home and the family. To the mass man, the home is "a mere lair or sleeping place" to which he feels no spiritual attachment. The mass man is no longer "horrified at divorce, at the indulgence of polygamous inclinations, at the procurement of abortion, at homosexuality, and at suicide." This sense of horror protected and

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[41] Karl Mannheim, Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction, Paperback (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1940), pp. 58-61.

buttressed the family in the past. According to Jaspers, mass society is now pervaded by a sort of normlessness, similar to what Durkheim used to call "anomie."[42]

Hannah Arendt stresses the forlornness of the masses. She says, "The masses are obsessed by a desire to escape from reality because in their essential homelessness they can no longer bear its accidental, incomprehensive aspects." The revolt of the masses, she added, was "the result of their atomization, of their loss of social status along with which they lost the whole sector of communal relationships in whose framework common sense makes sense." Then defining the term "masses," she says:

> The term masses applies only where we deal with people who either because of sheer numbers, or indifference, or a combination of both, cannot be integrated into any organization based on common interest, into political parties or municipal governments or professional organizations, or trade unions. Potentially, they exist in every country and form the majority of those large numbers of neutral, politically indifferent people who never join a party and hardly ever go to the polls.

Totalitarian movements, according to Arendt, gather their momentum from these masses who exist outside of society and who, for one reason or another, have developed the appetite for political activity.[43]

The French savant, Gabriel Marcel, bemoans the fact that the mass man is a gadget-oriented being. The more he becomes dependent on gadgets,

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[42]Karl Jaspers, Man in the Modern Age, Paperback (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1957), pp. 59-60.

[43]Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, Paperback (Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., 1967), pp. 352, 311.

the more alienated he becomes from his inner self. The center of gravity of such a man exists outside of him: he projects himself into the various pieces of apparatus which now constitute the essence of his being.[44]

Before proceeding further, it should be made clear for the sake of clarity and coherence that Tönnies' Gesellschaft is the conceptual paradigm of the term "mass society" as used, in different contexts, in the foregoing discussion. Gesellschaft will also serve as a point of reference hereafter in the discourse.

Conformity in mass society has reached the status of a cult. In no other society has conformity been pursued with such religious devotion. Mass man is afraid to be his authentic self. He always tries to live up to the expectations of others. As Sartre said: *"No brimstone is necessary; hell is other people."[45]

Authenticity and spontaneity have been the themes of the existential philosophers from Kierkegaard to Sartre. According to existentialists, in the human situation existence precedes essence whereas in the physical world essence precedes existence. For man existence means continual becoming. A tulip cannot be anything but a tulip. But Man has infinite possibilities. He can be a saint or a sinner: choice is his and his alone. Man, as Sartre says, "is condemned to be free." But in mass society man finds a thousand alibis to shirk this freedom and responsi-

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[44]Gabriel Marcel, Man Against Society, Paperback (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1967), p. 55.

[45]Jean-Paul Sartre, "Huis Clos" in Théatre (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), p. 167.

*"Pas besoin de gril, l'enfer, c'est les Autres."

bility to be what he ought to be. He discovers some ready-made model to conform to. He becomes an inauthentic person, a "salaud" whose self-image is derived from others.[46]

Apotheosis of reason or discursive thought as the supreme controller of life in technological society has lead to the atrophy of other dimensions of the human mind. Man is not only a thinking being but he is also a feeling and willing being. And ultimate problems of life are not amenable to expression through intellectual categories. Intellect as a tool is helpful in solving the problems of the technical world but it is incompetent to deal with the transcendental mysteries that surround the beginning and end of life. Over-rationalistic modern man is incapable of understanding God, because God, as Kierkegaard said, is total subjectivity, who cannot be the object of our thought. God is a mystery to be experienced, not through intellectual categories but through unwavering faith, calm contemplation and sudden flashes of intuition. Institutionalized religion has been of precious little help in enabling modern man to overcome his feelings of alienation from the Godhead. The church under the influence of intellectualism has become so secularized that it is today no more than, as Bernard Bell said, a social club with a cross.[47]

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[46]Jean-Paul Sartre, Being and Nothingness, translated by Hazel E. Barnes, Special Abridged Edition (New York: Citadel Press, 1966), passim; René Marill-Albérès, Jean-Paul Sartre: Philosopher without Faith, Paperback (New York: Wisdom Library, 1961), passim.

[47]Josef Pieper, Leisure: The Basis of Culture, Paperback (New York: The New American Library, n.d.), pp. 24-27; Gabriel Marcel, Man Against Mass Society, pp. 89-94; "Postscript" in A Kierkegaard Anthology, ed. Robert Bretall (New York: The Modern Library, n.d.), pp. 211-231; Bernard Iddings Bell, Crowd Culture, Paperback (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1956), p. 74.

In mass society science and technology have not only routinized most of the jobs which have no relevance to the psychic needs of persons holding these jobs but have also created an overabundance of free time in which alienated men do not know what to do with their leisure. Modern man is faced with a strange predicament--either he must kill leftover time or it will kill him through nausea and boredom. Prior to the rise of capitalism and its emphasis on the work ethic, leisure had been the most productive phase of human life. Greeks and Romans had no words for work--they used to designate it with such negative terms as "a-scolia" or "neg-otium," which mean absence of leisure. The "school" where we pursue intellectual activity is derived from the Greek word, "skole" which means leisure. Leisure presupposes free activity, which very few people, though relieved of work, thanks to automation, are capable of. Leisure, which fails to derive its meaning and worth from spiritual and contemplative life, is "leisure without dignity"--otium sine dignitate--which is empty and hollow and degrading.[48]

Mass culture as peddled by the mass media derives its raison de'être from its power to fill out the empty time of alienated men. Dwight Macdonald describes mass culture as a phenomenon peculiar to modern mass society, a parasitic growth on high culture, and, to a certain extent, a continuation of folk art, which was the culture of the common people in preindustrial society. The precondition of Kitsch, a German term for mass culture, is the availability of a fully matured high

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[48]Josef Pieper, Leisure: The Basis of Culture, pp. 21, 40-41; Friedrich Georg Juenger, The Failure of Technology, pp. 5-7.

culture on which it can, when necessary, quarry on. Kitsch, Macdonald pointed out, "'mines' High Culture* the way improvident frontiersmen mine the soil, extracting its riches and putting nothing back." It is different from folk art in that it is manufactured by technicians hired by business men to exploit the psychic needs of the alienated people by providing an escape from boredom and despair.[49]

The ease of production and the ease of consumption are the two dominant traits of mass culture, Kitsch is produced on an assembly line principle requiring very little of creativity. It follows stereotyped formulas. "Kitsch," Clement Greenberg stated, is "vicarious experience and faked sensations. Kitsch changes according to style, but remains always the same. Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times. Kitsch pretends to demand nothing of its customers except their money--not even their time." The consumption of Kitsch requires no effort. If the mass man does not have the ability to appreciate the subtle irony of Pygmalion, My Fair Lady is there to titillate him by its saccharin music and schmaltzy ending. Again, if the mass man does not have the time and patience to read War and Peace, the Reader Digest is there to abridge it and provide him with an ersatz

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[49]Dwight Macdonald, "A Theory of Mass Culture," in Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America, eds. Bernard Rosenberg and David Manning White (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1967), pp. 59-60; Clement Greenberg, Art and Culture, Paperback (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965), p. 10.

*This writer's note:"High Culture" is a generic term that includes all sorts of cultural objects that are not ephermeral. These objects are enduring; they survive the wear and tear of time and the vagaries of evanescent fads and fashions.

version. In mass culture everything is predigested, simplified, and presented in capsulized form for ready consumption. It benignly spares the mass any special effort.[50]

The desensitizing power of kitsch lies in its overwhelming pervasiveness oozing into every sphere of high culture. As Ortega y Gasset says, mass culture makes "tabula rasa of all classicism." It "crushes beneath it everything that is different, everything that is excellent, individual, qualified and select." It represents "the progressive triumph of the pseudo-intellectual, unqualified and unqualifiable, and, by their very mental texture, disqualified." Since mass culture recognizes "no classical or normative epochs," it behaves like a "spoilt child" with no limit to its caprice.[51]

Mass culture obliterates all lines of distinction and sense of discrimination. The second movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony may be used to sell a detergent or a Picasso painting may coexist with the picture of a voluptuous starlet on the same page of a mass circulation magazine. Describing the aggressive philistinism of mass culture, Macdonald says

> Mass Culture is a dynamic, revolutionary force, breaking down the old barriers of class, tradition, taste, and dissolving all cultural distinctions. It mixes and scrambles everything together, producing what might be called homogenized culture. . . . It thus destroys all

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[50]Clement Greenberg, Art and Culture, p. 10; Dwight Macdonald, "A Theory of Mass Culture," in Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America, pp. 61-62.

[51]José Ortega y Gasset, The Revolt of the Masses, pp. 36, 18, 16, 44, and 58.

> values, since value judgments imply discrimination. Mass Culture is very, very democratic: it absolutely refuses to discriminate against, or between, anything or anybody.[52]

Kitsch also impoverishes the sensibility of the masses by providing a falsified, roseate picture of life and nature. The majority of those who manufacture kitsch are determined counterfeiters, not failed artists. They deliberately create a false dichotomy between appearance and reality. The picture of a sunset in the now defunct Life was always radiantly more beautiful than the real sunset, and the picture of a playmate in the Playboy is always salaciously more alluring than the flesh and blood playmate. It is no wonder that the mass man raised on kitsch tends to be a neurotic who finds it very hard to relate himself to the real world.[53]

As Clement Greenberg points out, mass culture can pose a serious threat to high culture from another direction. Its highly remunerative market is always a source of temptation for gifted artists and writers. Under the pressure of kitsch, some of them may lower the quality of their work even if they do not entirely yield to it. "The net result," Greenberg adds, "is always to the detriment of true culture. . . ."[54]

Since the mass media are the principal vendors of kitsch, their merchandizing role has become a subject of heated controversy among the intellectuals. As usual in a controversial issue like this, the mass

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[52]Dwight Macdonald, "A Theory of Mass Culture," in Mass Culture: The Popular Arts in America, p. 62.

[53]Vide a similar type of discussion in David Holbrook, "Magazines," in Discrimination and Popular Culture, Paperback, ed. Denys Thompson (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 131.

[54]Clement Greenberg, Art and Culture, pp. 11-12.

media have their ardent supporters (whose number is relatively limited and confined to media managers) as well as trenchant critics (whose number is legion). Those who support the mass media on this issue contend that the media should not be blamed for the low quality of their cultural products. They are giving the public what it wants. They predicate this argument on the democratic premise that the public institutions should serve a wide range of interests, not any exclusive minority interest. They also scoff at the pollyannish assumption of the "starry-eyed" liberals that the masses are just yearning for the products of high culture. The critics on the other hand blame the mass media for deliberately lowering the quality of their cultural merchandise to the lowest common denominator (which, in fact, is no denominator at all) in order to make fast bucks. They charge that what the media disseminate is pure tripe and treacle, which will ultimately create a vast philistia teeming with mindless, tasteless morons. In this interminable debate (virtually with no common universe of discourse), there are some optimistic middle-of-the-roaders, who believe that given time, mass culture will improve in quality: It is too early yet to make judgment on it.[55]

To this writer, this kind of logomachic debate seems to be an exercise in futility. Facile arguments about impartiality in serving common public interests, the low level of public taste, and finally about giving the public what it wants--all these have been used ad nauseum by the press lords and their minions to camouflage their none

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[55]See Culture for the Millions, An Anthology, ed. Norman Jacobs (Princeton, N. J.: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1961). The anthology contains a variety of viewpoints about the pros and cons of mass culture.

too noble profit motive. While professing their commitment to the democratic ethos, they also indicate their utter contempt for the intelligence of "demos." Since the mass media are private commercial enterprises, nobody will be foolish enough to deny that they need to make a profit to survive. But how to make a profit is a moot question about which the press lords tend to remain reticent. Arnold J. Toynbee, noted British historian, lugubriously noted in his A Study of History the press lords' "lucrative business of making a profit out of the entertainment of the masses."[56]

Mass media are schizophrenic institutions: they are private commercial enterprises but at the same time they are public institutions. And as public institutions they are sui generis: they are the only enterprises constitutionally protected by the First Amendment. In our free society the inordinate greed for profit must yield, under all circumstances, to the imperatives of public service. The primary role of the media is that of informer and educator, not of entrepreneur, but in an alienated society they cannot be what they ought to be. So they try to cover their inauthenticity by cant and humbug.

The critics of mass culture seem to forget that there can be no authentic culture in a mass society. The alienated mass man is fully aware of the banality and jejuneness of kitsch disseminated by the mass media. That's why television, the most popular of all media, is contumeniously called by him a "boob tube" or an "idiot box." The effort by

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[56]Arnold J. Toynbee, A Study of History, Vol. IV (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 196.

the intellectuals to raise the level of public taste is foredoomed to failure because what the mass man needs is not culture but ceaseless entertainment, which will act as a sort of analgesic to relieve his existential agony.

Is there any way out of this nightmarish situation modern man finds himself immured in? The present writer does not think there is any escape route. "What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" [57]--this Biblical question never assumed such momentous importance as it has today. Since we cannot reverse the process of history and stop the march of technology, the only thing we can do to cushion the impact of mass society (which may end up being what Durkheim called "a disorganized dust of individuals"[58]) is to deliberately and authentically redesign our life-style. For this we will need a new pedagogics. Education has been too securalized to serve human needs. It shall have to be God-centered again. The purposes of education, according to medieval school masters, was to liberate the human mind, to free it from the fetters of profane existence and point out the way towards the transcendental modality of divine life. Education, to be a life-transmuting force, must also achieve a judicious blending of intellection and emotion. Intellect without love is barren, and love without the intellect is mere passion. Loveless intellect has made the society what it is today.

There is every possibility that we may fail in our effort and end tragically. So what? As T. S. Eliot said, "In my end is my beginning."[59]

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[57]St. Matthew, 16:26.

[58]Quoted from Emile Durkheim's Le Suicide in Erich Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 151.

[59]T. S. Eliot, The Complete Poems and Plays (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1952), p. 129. The line is quoted from "East Coker," V.