



Culture of Peace: The Social Character of the Contemporary World

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Abstract

This paper examines the concept of a Culture of Peace in today's world through Erich Fromm's theory of Social Characterology, which helps explain societal barriers to peace. The United Nations defines the Culture of Peace as promoting non-violence and creating societies where peace is the norm. However, Fromm views it as a societal condition in which individuals develop a biophilic (love of life) social character, emphasizing humanistic values like love and reason and meeting essential human needs over materialism, consumerism, and authoritarianism. Additionally, Fromm's theory underscores how societal structures unconsciously shape behavior, guiding people toward peaceful or destructive tendencies. He critiques the materialism of modern society, which alienates individuals and perpetuates violence—an issue that remains highly relevant today. Nonetheless, Fromm believes that achieving peace is attainable by fulfilling fundamental needs such as relatedness, identity, and transcendence and fostering a biophilic mindset, with the family playing a crucial role in shaping a child's character. Thus, Fromm's vision aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), advocating a humanistic transformation that addresses social, economic, and political challenges. For a Culture of Peace to emerge, society must prioritize humanism, reason, and love over materialistic values, embedding peace as the fundamental character of the contemporary world.

Keywords: Culture of Peace, Erich Fromm, Love & Reason, Social Characterology, and The Contemporary World

“To achieve peace, we must discuss it regularly; otherwise, it becomes meaningless.”¹

Introduction

The United Nations defines the culture of peace as a "collection of values, attitudes, behavioral patterns, and lifestyles that reject violence and address the underlying causes of conflicts. It emphasizes resolving issues through dialogue and negotiations, involving individuals, groups, and nations."² In connection with this idea, Boulding stated that the concept of peace culture entails a culture that sustains a creative equilibrium between fostering close connections within a community and acknowledging the need for individual spaces.³ Boulding continues, "Peace culture can be defined as a mosaic of identities, attitudes, values, beliefs, and patterns that lead people to care for one another and the earth itself without the aid of structured power differentials, to deal creatively with their differences, and to share their resources."⁴

Moreover, in his publication "Inter-regional Philosophical Dialogues Critical for Our Future," Macer discusses that the Culture of Peace relies on acknowledging and respecting cultural differences and diversity. He emphasizes the importance of sowing the seeds of peace through education, specifically an education system that fosters values such as tolerance, justice, equality, mutual understanding, love, and peaceful coexistence.⁵ Thus, Rivera pointed out that,

¹ My own quotation of peace.

² United Nations, "Building A Culture of Peace."

<https://internationaldayofpeace.org/culture-of-peace/>

³ Mahnaz Afkhami, *Towards a Compassionate Society*, (USA: Women's Learning Partnership, 2002), 8.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Darryl R.J. Macer and Souria Saad-Zoy, *Asian-Arab Philosophical Dialogues on War and Peace*, (Bangkok: UNESCO 2010), 116.

The Culture of Peace imagined by UNESCO (1995) requires respect for the rights of others rather than the domination of the weak by the strong. It suggests a global identity based on local identities, with global solidarity against common threats to our earth. Nevertheless, a concern for others and the common earth is often subordinated to the concern for one's self and an assertion of self.⁶

Therefore, understanding the essence of societies in balance requires an exploration of cultures of peace: their definition, identification, development by societies and governments, and the advantages of embodying such cultures. Drawing on the UNESCO Constitution's preamble, which asserts that "wars begin in the minds of men" and peace also originates in human consciousness, this statement sparked a new awareness of our capacity for peace and our responsibility to foster it.⁷

Thus, the reflections of Boulding, Macer, and Rivera collectively frame peace as an ongoing effort to create a harmonious global society where diversity is respected and power imbalances are minimized. They suggest that attaining peace, community building, individual autonomy, cultural diversity, education, and global solidarity are the keys because peace is not only the absence of conflict but a dynamic process that requires addressing inequalities, fostering dialogue, and balancing competing interests. Together, these perspectives illustrate a peace culture not just as a utopian ideal but as a practical framework rooted in respect, inclusivity, and responsibility. Peace is built through a mosaic of practices that prioritize shared human dignity, the health of the planet, and cooperation across cultural and individual divides. Thus, there is no doubt that every human in the world wants peace, but peace is not easy to achieve given the complex situations facing the globalized world today.

⁶ Joseph De Rivera, "Assessing the Basis for a Culture of Peace in Contemporary Societies," *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 41, no. 5, (2004), 545-546.

⁷ Lisa Reber-Rider, "Building Cultures of Peace in the World: One Peace Center at a Time," *International Journal on World Peace*, Vol. XXV No. 1 March 2008, 74.

Erich Fromm

Along with my research, I attempted to identify a philosopher who could effectively address the issues raised in this paper. Exploring various approaches, I discovered that Erich Fromm⁸ is one of the most pertinent figures to provide insights into the problem of this paper. Fromm's relevance to this study stems from his analysis in *The Sane Society*, where he delves into the origins of destructiveness and the alienating consequences of contemporary society.⁹ Fromm identifies the condition within modern society, which, according to him, is a significant obstacle preventing the realization of universal peace.¹⁰ Fromm posited that human character developed as a means to fulfill personal needs, diverging from Freud's notion of fixed character. He described five fundamental human needs: relatedness, rootedness, transcendence, sense of identity, and frame of orientation, which will be the solution. Fromm suggested that the lack of these needs could lead to psychological and societal challenges like alienation. He envisioned utopian models of society and religion prioritizing freedom and addressing human needs, thus contributing to the inception of humanistic socialism.¹¹

Fromm's Vision: The Prophetic Concept of Peace

In the work of Erich Fromm entitled "The Prophetic Concept of Peace," Funk, as the executor of Erich Fromm's literary estate, elaborates on the notion that peace encompasses more than the absence of strife; it represents the attainment of true harmony and

⁸ Erich Fromm (1900-1980) was a German-American psychoanalyst associated with the Frankfurt School, who emphasized culture's role in developing personality. He advocated psychoanalysis as a tool for curing cultural problems and thus reducing mental illness. See <https://www.simplypsychology.org/erich-fromm.html>

⁹ Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society. With an introduction by David Ingleby*, (London and New York: Routledge Classic, 2002).

¹⁰ Social psychologist Erich Fromm introduces innovative concepts for restructuring economics, politics, and culture to bolster individual mental well-being and address fundamental human needs for love and freedom. His groundbreaking examination delves into the significant maladies of contemporary society and offers insights on overcoming them. Fromm's primary focus revolves around the analysis of social systems and their effects on the mental health of individuals.

¹¹ Simply Psychology, "Erich Fromm: Theory and Contribution to Psychology," See <https://www.simplypsychology.org/erich-fromm.html>

unity between individuals and nature. This state of "at-onement" with the world and oneself signifies the end of alienation and a return to one's true self.¹² Through peace, individuals can cultivate self-awareness, love, and justice, ultimately achieving a comprehensive understanding of the world through reason and love. This reconciliation undoes the original "sin" and establishes a new paradigm of human individualization and independence.¹³

In addition, Fromm, as early as 1955 in "The Sane Society," expressed his attraction to Messianic visions of universal peace. He envisioned: "Man has to achieve his own salvation, he has to give birth to himself, and at the end of the days, the new harmony, the new peace will be established, the curse pronounced against Adam and Eve will be repealed, as it were, by man's own unfolding in the historical process."¹⁴ Thus, Funk surmises that this messianism is, "the point of departure for such a historical view is man's break with the original unity with nature and his striving for a new unity in reason and love."¹⁵ The statement means that through these human faculties, humanity could hope for a better society. It is an aspiration to build a vision towards a peaceful community.

Therefore, Fromm emphasizes that peace transcends the mere absence of war; it represents harmony and unity among humans, signifying the resolution of separateness and alienation. This notion suggests that achieving peace enables us to enter a new paradise, where we can live harmoniously, seek truth, pursue justice, employ logic for reasoning, and cultivate love.¹⁶ Thus, our longing for a peaceful society, as explored in this paper through the lens of the Culture of Peace, stems from our desire to restore unity among humans and reconnect with nature.

¹² Erich Fromm, "The Concept of Peace" was first published in S. Yamaguchi (Ed.): *Buddhism and Culture. A Festschrift in Honor of D.T. Suzuki*, Kyoto (Norkano Press) 1960, 163-169 and then included in Erich Fromm, *The Dogma of Christ and Other Essays on Religion, Psychology and Culture* (1963a), New York (Holt, Rinehart and Winston) 1963, pp. 203-212. Copyright © 1981 and 2011 by The Literary Estate of Erich Fromm, c/o Dr. Rainer Funk, Ursrainer Ring 24, D-72076 Tuebingen / Germany, 5.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴ Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society. With an introduction by David Ingleby*, p. 228.

¹⁵ Rainer Funk, *The Courage to Be Human with a Postscript by Erich Fromm*, (New York: Continuum, 1982), 63.

¹⁶ Erich Fromm, *The Concept of Peace*, 3.

Fromm's Vision of Unity and Self-Realization

In Fromm's work, peace represents a state where individuals transcend isolation to rediscover unity with nature and with one another, achieving a sense of wholeness and self-realization. This unity, or "at-onement," symbolizes a return to natural harmony, a concept that Fromm relates to the biblical idea of overcoming "original sin." His notion suggests that human disconnection from nature and others is the root cause of suffering, and that peace is achieved by restoring this lost connection.¹⁷

Furthermore, reconciliation is the foundation of a peaceful society. Fromm's notion of reconciliation is foundational to his concept of peace. By fostering unity and dismantling alienation, individuals can cultivate a harmonious society rooted in shared values and mutual respect. This philosophy aligns with broader ideas within the Culture of Peace, where achieving peace requires both social structures and personal transformation to counteract human tendencies toward domination and separation.

Therefore, Fromm's idea of peace is deeply rooted in an aspirational view of human potential, seeing peace as an achievable state through reason, love, and a return to authentic connection with nature and others. His concept reinforces the idea that peace culture is not merely an external condition but a profound internal harmony achievable through growth, justice, and communal well-being.

Breaking the Cycle: Understanding the Culture of Violence

We desire a culture of peace as a response to the persistent culture of violence. Some researchers, adopting a distinct ethnological perspective, argue that violence is inherent to human nature.¹⁸ Conflict is pervasive, existing in individuals, families, communities, and contemporary society, stemming from ongoing disputes. Indeed, the absence of peace has always defined the states of affairs in the world throughout the history of human civilization. War appears to be an inevitable facet of human existence for reasons both obvious and not –

¹⁷ Ibid., 4.

¹⁸ Santiago Genovés, *Social and Cultural Sources of Violence*, in: UNESCO, *From a Culture of Violence to Culture of Peace: Peace and Conflict Issues Series*, (Vendôme: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996), 93-101.

the venomous hatred against the other, the struggle for liberation, or the very desire of the powerful for conquest. War is never spectacular. Violence is ugly. Global conflicts, e.g., the refugee crisis due to the Iraq and Syrian War, the US invasion of Afghanistan, and now, Israel's War on Gaza, manifest that the world has not overcome the problem of bias and prejudice against those who are considered as outsiders.¹⁹

Also, Galtung's theory crucially depends on his definition of violence, which he describes as "the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what is." While this definition aptly applies to explicit forms of violence resulting in physical or mental harm, it necessitates the establishment of benchmarks for what is deemed possible to gauge the extent of violence. While Kühn supported this in his article, he contends that this violence delving into human aggression and destructiveness necessitates a social-psychological investigation, coupled with an exploration of the dynamics surrounding war and peace. He underscores the significance of psychology in providing a framework for comprehending the violence associated with wars.

Similarly, Fromm asked this question in his book, *The Sane Society*: "Are we sane? Why have we created greater material wealth than any other society in the history of the human race? Yet we have managed to kill off millions of our population in an arrangement that we call "war"? Is it sanity or insanity? A few days after the mutual slaughter is over, the enemies of yesterday are our friends, the friends of yesterday are our enemies and again... we begin to paint them in with appropriate colors of black and white."²⁰

Therefore, the tension between the aspiration for a culture of peace and the persistence of a culture of violence situates the discussion within the theoretical perspectives of Galtung, Kühn, and Fromm. The text critically examines the roots of violence, its societal manifestations, and the psychological frameworks necessary to address it. Galtung's theory necessitates the establishment of benchmarks for measuring violence, thus providing a structured way to assess and address it. It also shifts discourse from personal

¹⁹ Christopher Ryan Maboloc, "Structural Injustice and Peace Building in the Bangsamoro," *Social Ethics Society Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Special Issue, February 2024, 38.

²⁰ Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society*, with an introduction by David Ingleby, 4.

aggression to systemic and structural issues, such as inequality and injustice. However, Kühn underscores the need for an interdisciplinary approach, suggesting that understanding violence requires examining individual psyches as well as societal systems. Finally, Fromm's critique provides a moral and existential perspective, questioning not only the occurrence of violence but also the values and logic underpinning contemporary society. Thus, the social character of society needs to be examined because it might cause a culture of violence or a key to the culture of peace.

Deciphering Social Characterology: Erich Fromm's Insights

The term Social Characterology may not be widely known. To give us context, Hirsch defines it as a psychological approach centered on comprehending how childhood experiences shape the development of one's personality.²¹ According to Pacquing, social characterology encompasses the shared traits among individuals in a group or class. This concept elucidates the social behavior or inherent traits characterizing that particular group or class.²² Similarly, Fromm's ideas regarding Social Characterology encompass both a common human potential and an unconscious aspect that can be linked back to the influences of Freud and Marx.²³ Also, Erich Fromm stands out as a rare thinker who sought to integrate the principles of Marx and Freud, resulting in what he called Social Characterology. He encourages us to decipher the language of the unconscious while simultaneously assessing our actions and institutions based on whether they prompt us to awaken and act rationally, and whether they steer us and our society toward communalism rather than tribalism. Even if achieving utopia seems improbable, many of us can enhance our capacities for love and reason. Engaging in a meaningful dialogue with Erich Fromm

²¹ Rebekah Hirsch, "What Is Characterology?" 2008. See <http://chartingthesoul.com/node/47>

²² Ian Raymond B. Pacquing, "Our Social Discontents: Revisiting Fromm's Redemptive Psychoanalytic Critique," *Kritike*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (June 2018), 282. https://www.kritike.org/journal/issue_22/pacquing_june2018.pdf

²³ Erich Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion. My Encounter with Marx and Freud*, (London: Abacus, 1980), 24.

broadens our understanding of available choices, refines our concepts, and enriches our sense of purpose.²⁴

However, Fromm's Social Characterology becomes crucial within specific social systems like in this contemporary world because it serves as a unifying influence on each person. It binds every member of a particular group, community, or society to align their psychic libidinal drives towards a distinct objective, whether it be productivity, creativity, peace, individuality, or alternatively, alienation or violence. Fromm terms this interaction between the economy and libidinal structure as a *social character*. According to Fromm, social characters are defined as:

The function of the social character is to shape the energies of the members of society in such a way that their behavior is not a matter of conscious decision as to whether or not to follow the social pattern, but one of wanting to act as they have to act and at the same time finding gratification in acting according to the requirements of the culture.²⁵

Also, this social character acts as the cohesive and binding element that connects the economic, political, and social dimensions of individuals. Cortinas supports this idea by asserting that social character serves as the adhesive force that fosters identification and unity among group members.²⁶ Concerning what Maccoby claims, he said that the social character incorporates external requirements, channeling human energy towards fulfilling the objectives of a specific social system. He added that,

The concept of social character does not refer to the complete or highly individualized. A unique character

²⁴ Michael Maccoby. The Two Voices of Erich Fromm: The Prophetic and the Analytic. First published in: *Society*, Vol. 32 (No. 5, July-August 1995), 72-82. This article is adapted from a lecture given at the Erich Fromm International Symposium, Washington, DC, May 6, 1994. The following text is taken from the Internet. Copyright © 1995 and 2011 by Michael Maccoby, Ph.D., 4825 Linnean Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008, USA. 13.

²⁵ Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 77.

²⁶ Mauricio Cortina, M.D, *The Greatness and Limitations of Erich Fromm's Humanism*, Contemporary Psychoanalysis, 2015, Vol. 51, No. 3: 388-422, 392.

structure exists in an individual but a "character matrix." Some societies imbibe a peaceful, friendly, cooperative, and unaggressive characterology. In contrast, others are aggressive, destructive, sadistic, and suspicious.²⁷

Therefore, the social character of the contemporary world is very important to explore because the factors that mold society can be the product of diverse attitudes, values, and personalities that lead to a culture of peace or the other way around. Furthermore, Fromm's concept of Social Characterology is central to understanding how individuals' behaviors and values are shaped within specific social systems, particularly in the contemporary world. This concept addresses the unconscious ways people align with societal norms and values, not through deliberate choice but through an ingrained desire to fulfill the demands and expectations of their culture. Fromm describes the social character as the psychic structure within individuals that shapes their motivations and behaviors to align with societal goals, whether they be for productivity, peace, creativity, or, conversely, alienation or violence. This alignment isn't a conscious choice; rather, it reflects a deeper desire to act according to societal expectations and derive fulfillment from it.

Fromm's Social Characterology thus explains how shared norms and values bind individuals to a larger collective identity, directing personal desires to support the social and economic structure in place. Fromm argues that social character is shaped by the economy, as well as by deeper, often subconscious, drives that influence behaviors and values. He links the economic structure of society with libidinal drives (desires, motivations, and passions), demonstrating how the economy does not just influence material conditions but also affects psychological desires and societal norms. For example, in a capitalist economy, social character may emphasize productivity, competitiveness, and individual achievement, while a different economic system might promote collaboration and community well-being.

²⁷ Character Matrix is a syndrome of character traits that have developed as an adaptation to the economic, social, and cultural conditions common to that group. Erich Fromm and Michael Maccoby, *Social Character in a Mexican Village*, (New Brunswick (USA) and London (UK): Transaction Publishers, 1996), 16-17.

Thus, Fromm's Social Characterology provides a framework for understanding how social, economic, and political forces shape individuals' drives and motivations in a way that either aligns with or contradicts a peaceful, cohesive society. In the contemporary world, shifting the social character toward values that support a Culture of Peace requires a fundamental transformation of the economic and cultural factors that currently drive competitive, divisive behaviors.

The Globalized World: The Present Challenges

The contemporary world is an era in philosophy where the focus is the study of the human person, but it also studies globalization where it focuses on five key drivers: economy, political, social/cultural, technological, and environmental. To address the gap in the contemporary world, the UN adopted the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, and one of the 17 SDGs is peace, justice, and strong institutions, which in my mind will be possible if the social character of the society is geared towards these goals.²⁸ Actually, the realization of the 12 SDGs is the way to a culture of peace in the contemporary world.

However, the challenge is the character type of the society that Fromm sees. Fromm observes the society that was fulfilled by the economic demands of the nineteenth-century middle class and twentieth-century advanced capitalist societies. This became the social character that is being supplanted by another one oriented toward money, consumption, and more money (MCM) which integrated into bureaucratic frameworks by conforming to the neoliberalist protocols and regulations.²⁹ That is why Fromm is still relevant because he critiques the consumerism, materialism, and authoritarianism that dwells on the discussions about development, governance, and social justice, in short, the culture of peace. Furthermore, Fromm's ideas within this context are still relevant

²⁸ United Nations, The 17 Goals, see [https://sdgs.un.org/goals#:~:text=Learn%20about%20the%2017%20Sustainable%20Development%20Goals%20\(SDGs\)](https://sdgs.un.org/goals#:~:text=Learn%20about%20the%2017%20Sustainable%20Development%20Goals%20(SDGs))

²⁹ Michael Maccoby, *Erich Fromm*, (Biographical Supplement of the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences: New York, 1980), 215-220. See <https://www.simplypsychology.org/erich-fromm.html>. Someone mentioned that the issue of modernity isn't new, and I responded by saying that's precisely why we need to examine why this old problem persists in our globalized world.

because he saw that there will be hope for the social character to be aligned with peace since we can choose to transition away from capitalism towards a type of socialism or a "sane society" as a prerequisite for individual mental well-being and happiness. This represents a departure from orthodox Freudianism, which posits that a person's fundamental passions arise not from instinctive needs but from the specific conditions of human existence. Fromm perceives the challenges here as an essential element of human development, something that can be surmounted through this developmental process.

The economic, political, and social challenges are crucial in this globalized world's survival because they express confidence in the potential success of our endeavors to have a peaceful community or create an alienated society. To understand where we are going, we need to address the historical conflict, diversity and identity, political instability, and socio-economic disparities, and restore justice. Addressing the challenges we face now requires a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach that involves grassroots participation, inclusive dialogue, conflict-sensitive development, and respect for human rights. Fromm, drawing inspiration from Marx, recognizes that modern world idolatry was deeply ingrained in the mode of production and can only be changed through a complete overhaul of the economic-social and political structure, alongside the spiritual liberation of humanity.³⁰ The approach would be through radical humanism rather than normative humanism. Braune elaborated on Fromm's concept of radical humanism and drew parallels with themes found in the biblical prophets, such as universal peace, harmony, justice, and individual and collective fulfillment. She demonstrates that prophetic humanistic messianism emphasizes the messianic event as the culmination of historical progress rather than a transcendent rupture.³¹

Consequently, the contemporary world must focus on socialism to promote a better human person and to achieve a culture of peace. In this way, it will address the tensions between peace and violence brought to us by modernity. Pekkola shows us that,

³⁰ Erich Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion. My Encounter with Marx and Freud*, (1980), 59.

³¹ Joan Braune, *Erich Fromm's Revolutionary Hope: Prophetic Messianism as a Critical Theory of the Future*, (Rotterdam/Boston/Taipei: Sense Publishers, 2014).

The emphasis on the ambivalent nature of modernity points to the idea of modernization: modernity is a process in a constant state of flux. Experientially, this state is characterized by the sensation of constant change. On the one hand, modernity sets things in motion, opens new realities and vistas, and destroys traditional authorities. On the other hand, it forces us to look at the world cleansed of illusions and compels us to give meaning.³²

She emphasized that modernization created conditions for the emergence of a new kind of subjectivity that emphasizes individual freedom and autonomy. But, Tawney said that in modern society, humanity has allowed itself to become enslaved by things, and economic consideration has overwhelmed human interests and values under capitalism.³³ For Pacquing, "In modernity, we could no longer speak of individuality and subjectivity since the very historical thread that serves as its foundation has now wavered towards accumulation and possession of the capital."³⁴ Sjodin called this "liquid modernity and its credo of consumerism that is difficult, something which, in its turn, may result in a defective understanding of the sources of shame, rooted in marginalization and the inability to take part in the race of consumerism."³⁵ Mumford similarly claimed that *the condition of modern man was one of passivity and quiescence in which all sense of personal creativity, risk-taking, and non-conformity was being expunged*. He explained,

In the end, such a civilization can produce only a mass man: incapable of choice, incapable of spontaneous, self-directed activities: at best patient, docile,

³² Mika Pekkola, *Prophet of Radicalism: Erich Fromm and the Figurative Constitution of the Crisis of Modernity*, (Finland: University of Jyväskylä, 2010), 10.

³³ Laland, Kevin N., and Gillian R. Brown. "The Social Construction of Human Nature." *Oxford Scholarship Online*, 2018, 16.

³⁴ Ian Raymond B. Pacquing, "Our Social Discontents: Revisiting Fromm's Redemptive Psychoanalytic Critique," *Kritike*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (June 2018), 279. https://www.kritike.org/journal/issue_22/pacquing_june2018.pdf

³⁵ Christer Sjodin, "Liquid modernity: a source of shame," *International Forum of Psychoanalysis*, 2013 Vol. 22, No. 3, (2013), 131-132. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0803706X.2013.833023>

disciplined to monotonous work to an almost pathetic degree, but increasingly irresponsible as his choices become fewer and fewer: finally, a creature governed mainly by his conditioned reflexes - the ideal type desired, if never quite achieved, by the advertising agency and the sales organizations of modern business, or by the propaganda office and the planning bureaus of totalitarian and quasi-totalitarian governments... Ultimately, such a society produces only two groups of men: the conditioners and the conditioned: the active and the passive barbarians.³⁶

In other words, the social character of this globalized world needs to be analyzed, whether it is aligned with a culture of peace or violence. Too much materialism will poison society, and even spiritual values have become commodified. The condition of too much materialism presumes sickness, which is implicitly non-statistical but is premised upon each person's alienation from him/herself. The analysis of alienation is Fromm's critique of modernity. Fromm took the idea of Marx regarding 'alienation', and this is the most central ailment of modern society.³⁷

Alienation—or idolatry, as he prefers to call it: the fact that man does not experience himself as the active bearer of his own powers and richness, but as an impoverished 'thing', dependent on powers outside himself, unto whom he has projected his living substance. As a result, we have lost a sense of self, of individual identity.³⁸

So, the outcome of this alienation is neurosis, and it is characterized by the fact that one is fixated on too much *KaPe* (Kapangyarihan/power and Pera/money, etc.), which becomes

³⁶ Laland, Kevin N., and Gillian R. Brown. "The Social Construction of Human Nature." Oxford Scholarship Online, 2018, p. 16. doi:10.1093/OSO/9780198823650.003.0008. Lewis Mumford, *The Conduct of Life*, Harcourt, (Brace & Co. Inc., New York, 1951), 14-16.

³⁷ Ibid.,

³⁸ Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society*, with an introduction by David Ingleby, 121.

dominant and separated from the total personality, thus becoming the ruler of the person. Society has become the object of blind economic forces that rule man's life.³⁹ Like self-serving values on the part of each person; like in business (protectionism cartel/monopoly behavior, tax evasion, and others); in government (graft and corruption, others.), other sectors (dishonesty, lack of concern for the common good, others).

If this is the case, this prevailing condition in this contemporary world is significantly influenced by economic elements, particularly the pervasive materialism that drives certain individuals to become fixated on *KaPe*. This fixation effectively results in individuals being subjugated by a specific facet of their identity. Moreover, it will affect other factors like politics and social/ cultural aspects. For example, one of the problems in the Philippines is poverty. It plays a role in shaping people's preferences during elections (like selecting politicians with money to lead the country), as individuals may prioritize politicians who offer immediate financial gains over those advocating for peace and effective leadership.

So, what happens to peace programs if the leaders that promoted it lose in the election? It will create artificial peace because it will depend on the politicians (if another won during the election) who will implement the program such as a culture of peace. So, the problem is that these circumstances underscore a current state of capitalism that overlooks individual development, with people prioritizing material possessions rather than fostering meaningful connections with others. It is very challenging when the political landscape becomes intertwined with commodification and consumerism—characterized by the cycle of money, commodities, and further accumulation because it fosters a social character leaning toward authoritarianism rather than humanism. They might adopt irrational and apathetic tendencies, sacrificing their individuality and freedom, potentially leading to instances of violence and destruction.

That is why it is essential to uncover the underlying issues affecting present society to comprehend the tensions that contribute to the social structure, which is a culture of violence. Aside from the above-mentioned socio-economic needs that are urgent and must be

³⁹ Erich Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion. My Encounter with Marx and Freud*, Part of the series "Credo Perspectives", planned and edited by Ruth Nanda Anshen (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1962), 30-31.

addressed, it does not dictate our actions. However, to truly understand the fundamental forces and passions within oneself, one must consider the specific conditions and inherent contradictions of our existence. Fromm said,

Man's solution to his physiological needs is, psychologically speaking, utterly simple; the difficulty here is a purely sociological and economic one. Man's solution to his human needs is exceedingly complex, it depends on many factors, and last, but not the least, on the way his society is organized and how this organization determines the human relations within it.⁴⁰

Hence, what constitutes the current challenges regarding the economic, political, and cultural factors are interactions with the world, driven by self-preservation (physiological needs that cannot be postponed) and the sex drive (which consistently provides pleasure and can be delayed), which are not inherent instincts or impulsive reactions but rather products of societal influences that can be directed towards biophilia (love of life).

Are we sane in this capitalist world? In the market enterprise, we act not as humans or brothers and sisters, but we act because we need to act. After all, there is somebody who dictates to us unconsciously to survive dictated by capitalism. We are insane because we don't know where to go, and we follow the dictates of the capitalist. There is a power play between capitalism and individuals, where capitalism manipulates the individual. That is why Fromm is still relevant in this modern world. We all know that all of this is normal. We are not aware that it is only false consciousness, ex. Gadgets, shoes, etc., because it doesn't satisfy us to become who we are. The solution is to know the truth; *awareness* of it could induce change. *Doubt*, *Truth*, and *Humanism* are the guiding principles in "dissecting" pathologies of society. Society demands us to buy things not because we want them but because society is pushing us.

Furthermore, exploring the social character of today's globalized, neoliberal world is essential, as contemporary culture is

⁴⁰ Erich Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion. My Encounter with Marx and Freud*, (London: Abacus, 1980), 66.

molded by diverse and sometimes conflicting values. Neoliberalism's emphasis on competition and consumerism influences social character by fostering individualism, materialism, and a drive for personal achievement. This can result in a culture of alienation and rivalry, undermining collective values like cooperation and empathy that are essential for a Culture of Peace. Therefore, to cultivate peace in today's world, there must be a shift in social character that encourages shared goals, communal responsibility, and sustainable well-being over purely individualistic desires.

Therefore, the contemporary world must focus on socialism to promote a better human person and to achieve a culture of peace. In this way, it will address the tensions between peace and violence brought to us by the globalized world. In other words, the social character of this globalized world needs to be analyzed to determine if it is aligned with a culture of peace or violence. Too much materialism will poison society, and even spiritual values have become commodified. The condition of too much materialism presumes sickness, which is implicitly non-statistical but is premised upon each person's alienation from him/herself. The analysis of alienation is Fromm's critique of modernity. Thus, Fromm perceives that in this contemporary world, conflict may cause an excess of simple stimuli. Fromm writes:

Contemporary life in industrial societies operates almost entirely with such simple stimuli. What is stimulated are drives such as sexual desire, greed, sadism, destructiveness, and narcissism; these stimuli are mediated through movies, television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and the commodity market. On the whole, advertising rests upon the stimulation of socially produced drives. The mechanism is always the same: simple stimulation → immediate and passive response.⁴¹

Thus, these stimuli may be the emergence of neo-liberalism, marked by the blending of economies, cultures, and societies, which

⁴¹ Erich Fromm, *The anatomy of human destructiveness*, (London: Pimlico, 1973), p. 323.

has fundamentally transformed the contemporary world. That is why we need to check the social character of the contemporary world.

Love And Reason: A Call to Action from A Frommian Perspective

To attain peace, we should prioritize building meaningful human connections over material possessions. Fromm strongly argued that social character is the problem but also the key because it forms a cornerstone of character structure and is commonly held among members of a cultural or social community. Rather than merely reflecting statistical norms or traits prevalent among the majority, social character is best comprehended within the framework of socioeconomic arrangements, particularly regarding who possesses the means of production.⁴²

Still, the social character of the contemporary world is complex because certain psychological issues or problems may exist but remain unrecognized or unacknowledged by each member of society. These issues might be perceived as personal shortcomings or challenges, yet they are not necessarily recognized as such due to cultural factors or norms. Fromm's reinterpretation of Freud's notion of the anal character pertains to internal motivations for orderliness, frugality, punctuality, and respect for authority.⁴³ Also, the social character of the contemporary world may result from the shaping of common social libidinal drives shared among all members of a particular group or class. This illustrates how energy is directed and operates as a productive or unproductive force within a specific social order, serving as the conduit for the values of a given society. In essence, Fromm posits that "the social character's function is to mold and channel human energy within a given society for the continued functioning of this society."⁴⁴ It means that the social character of the contemporary world also describes results from society's efforts to fulfill and adapt to their needs.

The need of the contemporary world now is to attain peace, which is the productive type of orientation, and it is the healthiest that

⁴² Michael Maccoby, *Erich Fromm*, (Biographical Supplement of the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences: New York, 1980), 215-220. See <https://www.simplypsychology.org/erich-fromm.html>

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society*, 77.

strikes a harmonious balance. The other orientations represent less healthy ways of coping with such needs. In each case, society overemphasizes one's needs while neglecting others. That is why we need to be conscious of the biophilic (love of life) orientation because it has the potential for peace and pro-social and cooperative behavior. On the one side, the violence is rooted in a necrophilous (love of death) orientation that stemmed from social conditions and political circumstances in history and the present. Fromm describes biophilia as the "syndrome of growth," characterized by a love of life (as opposed to a love of death), a love of humanity (as opposed to narcissism), and independence (as opposed to symbiotic-incestuous fixation).⁴⁵ Furthermore, some are devoted to death, and these are insane, but others are entirely devoted to life, and this strikes them as having accomplished the highest aim of which they are capable.⁴⁶ In numerous instances, both the tendencies towards life (biophilous) and death (necrophilous) are evident, though in different combinations. What's crucial, as is often the case in living systems, is which tendency holds greater sway, thereby influencing human behavior—not merely the total absence or presence of one of these orientations.⁴⁷

Henceforth, Fromm's concept of social character is a psychic reflection of specific political, economic, and social requirements that may be conducive to a productive or non-productive orientation that makes society's inner strivings and sometimes alienates us from the primary potentiality of peace. The point will be that society must be conscious of the technical requirements that will result in a social character orientation. The authoritarian, marketing-oriented, and narcissistic social character might be possible causes of necrophiliac orientation, but on the other hand, there is also the transformative humanism toward a productive orientation as the social character of the contemporary world.

Fromm adds depth to this concept by discussing the family's pivotal role in a child's character formation. Drawing on Freud, he argues that a child's character is heavily influenced by early

⁴⁵ Erich Fromm, *The Heart of Man. Its Genius for Good and Evil*, (New York: Harper Colophon, 1964), 23.

⁴⁶ Rainier Funk, *Erich Fromm: The Heart of Man. Its Genius for Good and Evil*, Tuebingen, Germany: The Literary Estate of Erich Fromm, 2011, Ursrainer Ring 24, D-72076, 16.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

experiences, even though a young child's direct contact with society is minimal. Parents, embodying their own society's values and social character, unconsciously convey these to their children. The family thus acts as a psychological medium through which societal values are imparted. That is why, in the context of educational policy, Milligan advocates for locally developed curricula in the Philippines, crafted by teachers and parents who best understand their students' needs. He emphasizes that such a curriculum should be adapted to address students' specific needs, including their nutritional well-being, ensuring that education is grounded in the real contexts of students' lives.

Moreover, the culture of peace aims to steer our social character towards the productive orientation or syndrome of growth, enabling individuals to foster loving, enriching, and meaningful relationships with others. This echoes Fromm's concept of a biophilic character, which emphasizes a love of life, independence, and the overcoming of narcissism. This culture of peace is a social characteristic of the biophilia's orientation we wish to express, but there's a fear of disapproval among us because some are inclined to be necrophilous. This love of death leads to conflict, emphasizing violence brought by too much materialism, commodification, division, wars, and property disputes throughout the world. Our mindset is heavily influenced by societal expectations, and the societal impact or demands carry significant weight. Failing to conform may result in regression; instead of progressing, individuals might regress over time. In this environment, actions are driven not by a sense of shared humanity but by an unconscious compulsion to survive, dictated by external forces such as poverty, terrorism, personal vendetta, etc.

In addition, we become mere replicas of the ideologies imposed by the system. Ideology encompasses everyday beliefs, habits, and attire, which are molded by the social character of the capitalist world, establishing a normative structure beyond questioning. This normalized pattern evolves into a system, taking on an ideological form and fostering false consciousness. This systemic influence alters our social character, leading to regression and alienation of the individual. Although individuals aspire to a better life, the system limits their choices, turning life into a top-down process where expressing thoughts may not matter to the indifferent capitalist. The only apparent options are either to progress or to regress.

So, the role of reason and love is essential in this study. Fromm's idea of peace goes beyond an absence of external conflict, envisioning an inner transformation fostered through reason and love. Funk elaborates that the Messianic aspect of Fromm's thinking posits these as pathways to a peaceful society. Reason allows individuals to understand and navigate the complexities of life, while love creates bonds that heal alienation and foster compassion and justice. Through these faculties, Fromm believes humanity can re-establish a "new unity," giving birth to a social order grounded in peace and harmony.

Accordingly, we need a social character that is deeply rooted in reason and love, which is marked by care, respect, responsibility, and knowledge.⁴⁸ It will be attainable by delving from the periphery to the core of the present society. If society can love productively, they also love themselves; however, if their capacity for love is directed solely towards others, genuine love is absent. Similarly, reason and intelligence play a crucial role. Intelligence involves penetrating the surface and understanding the use and value of things. Reason, on the other hand, involves delving into the core and engaging existentially. Thus, productive thinking entails seeing the system, understanding its hidden ramifications, and discerning the concealed meanings within the system. The humanistic transformation must focus on the defects and their formative determinants that are typical of a particular social character orientation,⁴⁹ leading to the realization of a culture of peace as the social character of the contemporary world.

Therefore, Fromm's Love and Reason serve as both a personal and societal call to action. He urges individuals to cultivate deep, authentic relationships, develop critical thinking, and resist the alienating forces of consumerism and conformity. By embodying love and reason, individuals can work toward a more humane society that values empathy, ethical responsibility, and social justice. This Frommian perspective emphasizes that true human progress requires not just technical or economic advancements but a transformation in the way we relate to ourselves, others, and the world at large.

⁴⁸ Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD., 1956), 26.

⁴⁹ Rainer Funk, "Humanistic Transformation and the Ego-Oriented Social Character," *Third International Erich Fromm Research Conference* at IPU in Berlin, June 10, 2023.

Humanistic Transformation: An affirmation of the globalized world

To attain peace, Braune elaborated on Fromm's concept of radical humanism and drew parallels with themes found in the biblical prophets, such as universal peace, harmony, justice, and individual and collective fulfillment.⁵⁰ She demonstrates that prophetic humanistic messianism emphasizes the messianic event as the culmination of historical progress rather than a transcendent rupture.⁵¹ While Durkin's analysis often explores how humanism, when radicalized, provides a framework for critiquing alienation and reimagining society in a way that prioritizes human flourishing, dignity, and autonomy. Durkin's scholarship demonstrates the enduring importance of radical humanism as a framework for analyzing and addressing the structural injustices of the modern world while envisioning a more humane and just society.⁵²

But for Fromm to address the challenges of the globalized world, he said that the concept of Humanistic Transformation offers an optimistic vision of humanity's potential within a globalized world. Rooted in his humanistic philosophy, Fromm's ideas advocate for personal and societal growth that centers on human values, self-awareness, and connection to others. In the context of globalization, which often emphasizes economic expansion and competition, Fromm's approach presents a vital counterpoint by affirming values that prioritize human well-being, social responsibility, and global unity. To attain a culture of peace, the social character of the globalized world must be aligned with it.

Funk highlighted that with the theory of social character formation in every individual, Fromm postulates a psychological representation of the requirements of social coexistence in the individual, which is an expression of the primary society of the human being. The social character allows the mental impulses of a society to

⁵⁰ Joan Braune, *Erich Fromm's Revolutionary Hope: Prophetic Messianism as a Critical Theory of the Future*, (Rotterdam/Boston/Taipei: Sense Publishers, 2014).

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Kieran Durkin, *Review Braune, J.: Erich Fromm's Revolutionary Hope: Prophetic Messianism as a Critical Theory of the Future*; *Review Miri, S. J., Lake, R., and Kress, T. M. (Eds): Reclaiming the Sane Society: Essays on Erich Fromm's Thought*, (Tuebingen, Selbstverlag: Marx and Philosophy, Fromm Forum (English Edition – ISBN 1437-1189), 19 / 2015), 70-72.

be explored in detail. With the concept of social character, Fromm does justice to the interaction of cognitive, emotional, and socio-economic conditions and shows that every transformation of human behavior is a change in social character.⁵³

In addition, humanistic transformation is a path to global solidarity. Fromm's vision involves a transformation where individuals are encouraged to cultivate empathy, compassion, and a sense of shared humanity. In a globalized world, where cultural diversity and interconnectedness bring both opportunities and conflicts, his humanistic perspective calls for an ethical shift that embraces all individuals, transcending economic and political divides. This transformation advocates for a culture that values cooperation and social responsibility, fostering global solidarity. It is beyond materialism and alienation. Fromm criticizes materialism and the commodification of human relationships, which are often byproducts of global consumer culture. He argues that true fulfillment arises not from material wealth but from genuine human connections and purposeful living. His emphasis on humanistic values challenges the dominant global narrative of success defined by wealth and consumption, instead encouraging individuals to seek deeper satisfaction through creativity, meaningful work, and relationships. This shift, Fromm suggests, could counteract the alienation that often accompanies the pressures of globalization.

Also, it will reaffirm autonomy and self-realization. Fromm's concept of humanistic transformation emphasizes self-knowledge, independence, and the pursuit of one's authentic self. In a globalized society where social conformity and consumer-driven identities are common, he advocates for individuals to develop a stronger sense of self. This process of self-realization is foundational to achieving personal freedom and collective growth, empowering individuals to act based on personal values rather than external pressures. It will create a culture of peace with empathy. Fromm's humanistic vision aligns with the idea of a Culture of Peace, which emphasizes nonviolence, empathy, and mutual understanding. In a globalized world, where cultural clashes and conflicts can easily escalate, Fromm's perspective underscores the importance of empathy and compassion in reducing hostility. His ideas encourage international

⁵³ Rainer Funk, "Humanistic Transformation and the Ego-Oriented Social Character," 3.

cooperation, cultural understanding, and a moral framework that can address global challenges such as inequality, environmental degradation, and political conflicts.

Furthermore, it will encourage ethical responsibility. Fromm's approach also calls for ethical responsibility on both an individual and societal level. He argues that as humanity becomes more interconnected, there is a growing need for people to act responsibly toward one another and the planet. His humanistic transformation model encourages individuals and institutions to prioritize ethical considerations over profit or power, thus promoting sustainable practices and long-term thinking crucial for addressing global issues like climate change and poverty. This will be effective if it integrates individual and collective well-being. Central to Fromm's vision is the balance between individual fulfillment and collective welfare. He suggests that personal growth should contribute to societal well-being and vice versa. In a globalized world, where individualistic pursuits often overshadow community welfare, his philosophy calls for a harmonized approach where the fulfillment of individual potential supports the common good and collective efforts bolster individual freedom and well-being.

Therefore, the culture of peace must draw from Fromm's concept of humanistic transformation because he offers a transformative framework for approaching globalization in a way that affirms human dignity, compassion, and ethical responsibility. His vision encourages a shift from a materialistic and competitive world order to one that values human connection, empathy, and sustainability. By advocating for a reorientation of global values towards personal growth and social responsibility, Fromm's humanistic transformation becomes an essential blueprint for a more just, peaceful, interconnected world, building bridges and not walls.

Conclusion

The culture of peace, aligned with the United Nations' mission, advances global peace, human rights, and sustainable development by fostering understanding, justice, and conflict resolution. Erich Fromm's insights emphasize the role of societal and familial values in shaping compassionate individuals, underscoring peace education as a transformative tool for nurturing empathy and social responsibility.

Together, these perspectives highlight a culture of peace powerful enough to cultivate a shared humanity in a globalized world. This lays the groundwork for a more equitable, compassionate, and resilient society. By embedding these values in education, societies can nurture a generation prepared to address conflicts constructively, respect diversity, and advocate for justice. A culture of peace is not only an investment in the future well-being of individuals but also a pathway to a sustainable, peaceful world where communities can thrive in harmony and face global challenges together.

Similarly, for the culture of peace to be realized in today's globalized world, it is crucial to shift social character towards a productive orientation that embraces biophilia—love for life and humanity—over necrophilia, or the love of death and destruction. This shift demands a reorientation of societal values from materialism to humanism, where political, economic, and social institutions support individual well-being, justice, and peace. Ultimately, the challenges of the contemporary world—poverty, political instability, social inequities, and the commodification of human values—must be addressed with a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach.

Therefore, Fromm's insights provide a pathway toward building societies that are psychologically, socially, and economically aligned with the culture of peace envisioned by global frameworks like the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A culture of peace can only be achieved with a social character that is aligned with the collective commitment to transforming the underlying social structures and addressing the human needs that foster alienation and violence.

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