

**ERICH FROMM'S CONCEPTION OF MAN:
AN ANALYSIS FROM A PHENOMENOLOGICAL
PERSPECTIVE**

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**ERICH FROMM'S CONCEPTION OF MAN:
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PERSPECTIVE**

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IM Individual Man

UM Universal Man

**KONSEPSI ERICH FROMM TENTANG MANUSIA:
SUATU ANALISIS DARI PERSPEKTIF FENOMENOLOGI**

ABSTRAK

Erich Fromm, seorang ahli psikoanalisis dan ahli etika yang terkenal pada abad ke-20, memperkenalkan sosiologi sejarah dan materialisme sejarah ke dalam domain psikologi, dengan mewujudkan suatu bidang psikoanalisis kemanusiaan yang bertujuan meningkatkan kreativiti manusia dan mencapai kebebasan. Konsepsi beliau tentang “manusia yang menyeluruh dan universal” mewakili sifat asas kemanusiaan dan mempunyai dampak yang mendalam terhadap pemikiran etika beliau. Walaupun terdapat banyak kajian tentang psikoanalisis dan falsafah Fromm, masih terdapat kekurangan dalam kajian secara mendalam mengenai konsepsi manusia beliau dari perspektif fenomenologi. Tesis ini bertujuan mengisi kelompangan tersebut dengan meneroka idea-idea Fromm melalui analisis dari perspektif fenomenologi. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk memberikan penelitian menyeluruh terhadap konsepsi Fromm tentang manusia, meneroka pandangan utama mengenai konsepsi manusia dalam fenomenologi dan menganalisis idea-idea Fromm melalui perspektif fenomenologi. Persoalan kajian yang dikemukakan ialah: pertama, apakah konsepsi Erich Fromm tentang manusia?; kedua, apakah pandangan utama dalam kajian konsepsi manusia dalam bidang fenomenologi?; dan ketiga, bagaimanakah konsepsi Erich Fromm tentang manusia boleh dianalisis melalui perspektif fenomenologi? Kajian ini menggunakan gabungan kajian kepustakaan, analisis teks dan kaedah fenomenologi,

dengan tumpuan utama kepada karya-karya Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre dan Maurice Merleau-Ponty, iaitu empat orang ahli fenomenologi klasik. Karya-karya spesifik Fromm seperti *Man for Himself*, *The Art of Loving* dan *To Have or To Be?* dianalisis melalui perspektif fenomenologi tersebut. Kajian ini menawarkan wawasan baharu tentang konsepsi Fromm mengenai manusia dengan meneliti melalui lensa fenomenologi, memberikan pemahaman yang lebih mendalam tentang pemikiran etika beliau dan implikasinya terhadap perbincangan kontemporari mengenai tabii manusia dan masyarakat.

**ERICH FROMM'S CONCEPTION OF MAN:
AN ANALYSIS FROM A PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

ABSTRACT

Erich Fromm, a renowned psychoanalyst and ethicist of the 20th century, introduced sociology and historical materialism into the domain of psychology, establishing a humanistic psychoanalysis aimed at improving human creativity and achieving freedom. His conception of the “whole and universal man” represents the fundamental nature of humanity and has profound implications for his ethical thought. Despite numerous studies on Fromm’s psychoanalysis and philosophy, there is a lack of in-depth research on his conception of man from a phenomenological perspective. This thesis aims to address this gap by exploring Fromm’s ideas through an analysis from phenomenological perspectives. The primary objectives are to provide a comprehensive examination of Fromm’s conception of man, explore major viewpoints on the conception of man in phenomenology, and analyze Fromm’s ideas through phenomenological perspectives. The key research questions include: firstly, what is Erich Fromm’s conception of man? secondly, what are the major viewpoints on studying the conception of man in the field of phenomenology? and thirdly, how can Erich Fromm’s conception of man be analyzed through phenomenological perspectives? The study employs a combination of library research, textual analysis, and phenomenological methods, primarily drawing from the works of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the four classical

phenomenologists. Specific works of Fromm, including *Man for Himself*, *The Art of Loving*, and *To Have or To Be?* are analyzed through these phenomenological perspectives. The study offers new insights into Fromm's conception of man by examining it through the perspective of phenomenology, providing a deeper understanding of his ethical thought and its implications for contemporary discussions on human nature and society.

CHAPTER 1

PRELIMINARY

1.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to describe the underlying reasoning and methodology that underpins this research effort. It will begin by introducing the research topic, focusing on Erich Fromm background and his discourse in philosophy. The problem statement will then highlight the key issues within this discourse. Additionally, previous, and recent research on this topic will be reviewed to address the unresolved problem: the philosophical impulse for analyzing Fromm's conception of man through a phenomenological perspective. The background discussion and literature review will enable this chapter to define the research questions and articulate the thesis objectives.

1.2 Background of Study

Erich Fromm was a famous psychoanalyst and outstanding ethicist in the 20th century. He creatively introduced sociology and historical materialism into the field of psychology and established humanistic psychoanalytic theory, aiming to improve human creativity and the realization of human freedom. He authored numerous works, including *Escape from Freedom*, *Man for Himself*, *The Art of Loving*, and *To Have or To Be?* among others. Notably, one of his most influential books, *The Art of Loving*, has made a significant impact worldwide. Friedman (2013, p. xxii), who published an important writing about the life of Fromm, says that "Fromm's 1956 volume, *The Art*

of Loving, has sold more than twenty-five million copies globally and is a favorite of my Harvard undergraduates today as it was with my classmates at the University of California half a century ago.” Also, He mentions that the deepest Fromm’s book was *Escape from Freedom*, which was also the best-seller several decades ago (Friedman, 2013, p. xxii).

As a social critic and intellectual, Fromm harbors a profound interest in the existential situation of human beings. Funk (1982, p. 5) says, “In Andersen’s fairy tale ‘The Emperor’s New Clothes’, the child discovers that the emperor’s splendid garments are mere figments of the imagination, that he is, in fact, naked. To take away those garments, to ‘disillusion’ his subjects, to make both emperor and subjects into human beings and to give them the courage to be human—this is the scientific and ethical interest that pervades Erich Fromm’s life and work.” Unique and fascinating viewpoints about human situation are suggested by Fromm, and these bring about deep influence on the popularity and the academia.

Fascism is criticized and the arms race is condemned by him. Even though the world begins to return to prosperity after World War II, he still finds the society, in which the new self-alienation and the disguising authorities fairly prevail, to be a regressing one (Fromm, 2001). He is concerned with people’s mental health as well. He finds the fact that modern man who is influenced by industrialization has the tendency of being addicted to consumption so that people try to regard everything as goods. It seems that knowledge, love, friendship, and virtue may be bought by money. Even though people may feel something they do is caused by their own consciousness,

Fromm still finds that many people cannot control themselves, i.e., many people cannot experience real freedom, and they are escaping from freedom (Fromm, 2001).

Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx influence Fromm. He is not only a Freudian, but also a Marxist. So, some scholars call his theory “Freudo-Marxism” (Burston, 1991). When it comes to psychoanalysis, it is essential to mention some core concepts of that theory. Firstly, motivation, which concerns the motivations behind behavior, is the basic concept when some actions need to be analyzed. Mackay (1989, p. 6) says that “psychoanalytic theory is above all a theory of motivation.” From this view, the action is regarded as something purposive instead of the mechanical product. Though some actions are irrational and incomprehensible, they can be understood as well. There must be some hidden reasons and motives behind the actions which are difficult to analyze from external behavior (Freud, 1961, p. 20-21).¹ In other words, there are some “unconscious” motives and aims behind the ordinary actions. It is a principle that the neurotic symptoms result from meaningful actions rather than the automatic or mechanical behavior of purely physical factors.

Secondly, unconscious processes, which refer to the mechanism of the mind running, are one of the most important concepts in psychoanalysis. Based on the theory of motivation, the unconscious processes are viewed as the hidden mental function (Freud, 1961). From this view, the conscious part of mind is related to the unconscious part of mind. A man’s genuine idea might be hidden in the unconsciousness instead of

¹ All texts in this thesis that refer to Freud are quoted from *The Standard Edition of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, published by The Hogarth Press, and the corresponding page number of the in-text citation is the actual page number in the complete works.

the consciousness. What he thinks and feels consciously may be rather different from what he thinks and feels unconsciously. And there are some unconscious conflicts behind the consciousness. These conflicts, which involve different unconscious motives, may be the origin of some psychological problems. The irrational symptoms result from these conflicts. So, motivation and the unconscious process are core concepts of psychoanalysis.

Compared with Freud, Erich Fromm improves the concept of the unconscious and establishes the concept of “social unconscious”, which refers to the repressed domain of the majority that live in a capitalist society² (Fromm, 1950). Thus, he underscores the necessity of establishing a humanistic democratic socialism, which may deal with some social issues caused by capitalism. In such a humanistic society, the human person would be regarded as the end instead of the means, and this person would be his or her own conductor.

Moreover, establishing the concept of social character, Fromm emphasized that it is important to observe the specific social relations of a human person’s life if someone wants to understand humanity. Meanwhile, he deems that humans are the social beings whose lives are shaped by their social structure and culture (Fromm, 1963). In fact, the reason why Fromm’s theory is unique is that he develops a kind of mind theory which is combined with sociology, and especially a viewpoint of Marxist sociology.

Fromm seems to have a rationalist approach, yet his philosophical leanings were

² Even though there is a term “collective unconscious” which was raised by Carl. G. Jung, it is rather different from “social unconscious”. The former refers to the remains in the human conscious, which ancient civilization and ancestors left after many years, as the universal part of human psyche. The *Archetype* is related to the collective unconscious. Jung (1969, p. 30) said, “Archetypes are complexes of experience that come upon us like fate, and their effects are felt in our most personal life.”

profoundly shaped by the tenets of prophetic Judaism, the principles of Christian mysticism, and the teachings of Zen Buddhism. Due to his Judaic background, he is fond of reading the Bible and some classic Christian volumes, especially the writings of Meister Johannes Eckhart. He believes that the human person should live via coupling religion and morality.³ He also stresses the importance of rebelling against idolatry, and he supports Eckhart's understanding of God. He believes that people may experience the X experience and release the repressed part of consciousness.⁴ This is a kind of theoretical mysticism. So, some scholars not only regard him as a Marxist, but also as a mystic (Merkur, 2010).

In fact, as a professional scholar, Fromm focuses on several areas. His volumes deal with psychoanalysis, ethics, and mysticism. Even though there are many studies on Fromm's humanism, it is still not enough for scholars to be concerned with Fromm's conception of man, especially through the analysis of phenomenological approach. When it comes to the fulfillment of man by Fromm, it is not only the characteristics of the unconscious which represent human's real selves and universal values, but also a kind of relatively excellent state in which one can develop his own self. Fromm states that the unconscious represents universal man, the complete man,

³ Erich Fromm redefined religion as a collectively shared system of thought and action that provides individuals with a frame of orientation and an object of devotion, rather than a system involving the concept of God or idols. He opposed the worship of ancestors, nations, idols, classes or parties, money, or success, as these objects, when treated as a form of religion, may impede human growth. Instead, he emphasized the importance of a religion that has the potential to unleash human power and facilitate personal growth.

⁴ X experience is a nontheistic religious experience, which refers to a way of experiencing life and the corresponding internal feelings. Fromm (1986, p. 47) objected to the conceptualization of experience which resulted from industrial society and authoritative religion. He cannot find an applicable term to express the experience which referred to unfolding human power when he discussed some psychological problems about religion, so he deemed that it was preferable to speak of X experience in the book *You Shall Be as Gods*.

rooted in the Cosmos; it represents the plant within him, the animal within him, the spirit within him; it represents his past dating back to the dawn of human existence, and it represents his future leading up to the day when man will have become fully human, and when nature will be humanized as man will be “naturalized” (Fromm, 2009).

It is criticized by Fromm that man experiences things or the other through the way of “conceptualization” or “having.” Instead, it is proposed by Fromm that man experiences things or the other through the way of “being.” In *Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism*, it is mentioned by Fromm that conventional rationalistic belief—knowledge is the intellectual and theoretical knowledge—is unsound, and affective knowledge and affective experience can bring knowledge as well (Fromm, 2013). It seems there are some hints, which are similar from phenomenological approaches in understanding of knowledge, because phenomenology means a kind of study of phenomena and set out to explore the epistemological approach, compared with Scientific Realism⁵, in terms of relationship between subjectivity and objectivity. Fromm suggests that his views are aligned with an approach to understanding knowledge that goes beyond mere intellectual comprehension (Fromm, 2009). He emphasizes that the process of uncovering the unconscious involves a series of increasingly profound experiences that transcend theoretical and intellectual

⁵ Scientific Realism is the view that our best scientific theories and models provide an accurate description of both observable and unobservable aspects of the world, and that the entities and processes described by these theories objectively exist. It involves a positive epistemic attitude of believing in the claims and postulated entities put forth by our most successful sciences. This realist position has metaphysical implications about the nature of reality, and semantic implications about how theoretical terms refer to real entities. Scientific Realism is contrasted with various anti-realist views collectively known as scientific antirealism (Chakravartty, 2017).

knowledge (Fromm, 2009).

He is concerned about the importance of so-called experiential knowledge, which is expected to transcend subject-object split knowledge and is compared with theoretical or intellectual knowledge. Improving subject-object split knowledge is also the theme of phenomenology, as dictum demonstrated by Husserl, “to the things themselves”. It represents a call to revisit the perceptual world which exists prior to and serves as the necessary foundation for any form of scientific conceptualization or expression (Zahavi, 2019, p. 65). It also aims at allowing a pure, unworldly entity to shape the fullness and tangible reality of the world, even though the focus of phenomenology on the significance of firsthand experience should not be mistaken for the traditional (transcendental) idealist endeavor to isolate consciousness from the external environment. So, through the comparison between Fromm’s sayings about transcendence of subject-object split knowledge and phenomenologists’ demonstration about calling for revisit the perceptual world, it seems that there are some relationships between Fromm’s theories and phenomenology. These possible links between them not only serve to start some research on comparison between Fromm’s theories and phenomenology but also offer the possibility of research on Fromm’s some kind of conception through phenomenological approaches.

In the 20th century, phenomenology gradually became a set of well-known and important theories with corresponding approaches as the branch of philosophy. It stemmed from Husserl’s contributions on novel methods of philosophy, which did not rely on the assumptions of the natural sciences or on psychological explanations but

focused directly on experience itself. Husserl was concerned with capturing the structure of consciousness from a first-person perspective, which he saw as the key to understanding knowledge, language, and value. Phenomenology's role is to explore and clarify central philosophical inquiries about the existence and essence of reality. Yet, Husserl deems that such an examination cannot be conducted with the necessary thoroughness if one uncritically adopts the metaphysical and epistemological presuppositions that underpin human everyday experience, and which are tacitly and unreflectively endorsed by the empirical sciences (Zahavi, 2003). The fundamental belief that Husserl criticizes is the implicit belief in the existence of reality independent from mind, experience, or theory. This belief, which is called as natural attitude by Husserl, is supposed to prevail in positive sciences and daily pre-theoretical life and to be considered as the unacceptable assumption by phenomenologists. This assumption is supposed to be necessary to be tested thoroughly, so that the related metaphysical or scientific prejudices can be investigated further. Then, a well-known dictum of phenomenology just appears, "to the things themselves," which means the exploration towards the "givenness" and "appearance" of reality, i.e., the approach in which the givenness of reality brings to us in experience (Zahavi, 2003). As Zahavi (2003, p. 45) says, "We should, in other words, not let preconceived theories form our experience, but let our experience determine our theories."

Through this way of investigation in terms of appearance of reality, there are some novel tools and approaches that are developed by phenomenologists, such as "epoché," which means a procedure of modification of "natural attitude" (Hopp, 2020). Besides

this tool, there is also an approach of suspending our acceptance of the “natural attitude” and bracket its validity. After Husserl’s work on this exploration, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and other phenomenologists did more studies involved in this field and made more contributions to it. Thus, with the development of related theories, this field has been an important branch of contemporary philosophy and has played a crucial role with sustainable development in philosophy.

Phenomenology not only refers to the existence of “givenness” or “appearance” of reality but also focuses on the role of the body and the existence of humanity. For example, in *Being and Nothingness*, there is a philosophical inquiry that is made by Sartre about the problem of the existence of the others, and the investigation progresses with a coordinated effort to fuse the body into the framework of the For-itself, ending with a captivating depiction of tangible interactions with others—a depiction that is richly and variously represented in Sartre’s literary works (Macann, 1993). Meanwhile, in Ponty’s works, *The Structure of Behaviour* and *The Phenomenology of Perception* both depend on an extensive critical review of the dominant psychological theories of human existence for their insights, *The Visible and the Invisible* signifies a clear shift in approach in at least one distinct way; it largely sets aside the empirical results of the human sciences and undertakes its philosophical questioning directly—or as directly as possible for a philosophy intent on examining the unexamined, contemplating the unconsidered, articulating the ineffable, and, in short, engaging in the intricate circumlocution of language to convey that which inherently precedes and thus

underpins language itself (Macann, 1993). Through Ponty's work on this field, there is gradually development of the phenomenological investigation of the body. As mentioned by Zahavi (2003, p. 85), this inquiry set out to "understand to what extent our experience of the world, our experience of self, and our experience of others are formed by and influenced by our embodiment." Phenomenologists also re-evaluate and scrutinize certain distinctions that originally delineate the mind-body issue. The concept of embodiment, or the idea of embodied mind or a minded body, is intended to supplant the conventional concepts of mind and body, both viewed as secondary constructs and theoretical abstractions (Zahavi, 2003). By providing a perspective on human existence that sees individuals as embodied beings deeply embedded in social and cultural contexts, phenomenology not only explores and clarifies a conceptual framework commonly employed by most scientific fields but also makes significant contributions to diverse disciplines within the social sciences and humanities, including anthropology, sociology, psychology, literary studies, education, and more.

Given that phenomenology has been applied for various studies, it also made some progress in the field of ethics. For example, there is some research on the relationship between value-perception, valuable objects, and values through an analysis from phenomenological perspective (Kreidl, 2012). Also, there are some arguments concerning discussion on ethics as the first philosophy among phenomenologists, especially Levinas (Bergo, 2012). While many well-regarded phenomenologists, including Husserl and Sartre, have paid attention to the phenomenon of value, it is Max Scheler who places this phenomenon at the heart of

his phenomenological inquiry. However, one of main parts of Fromm's contribution is concerned about ethics. There are some issues about this field which are discussed by Fromm, such as authoritarian ethics vs. humanistic ethics, subjectivistic vs. objectivistic ethics, and "to be" vs. "to have." There are some studies on Fromm's ethical theories, such as *The Courage To Be Human* and *The Radical Humanism of Erich Fromm*. As mentioned above, there are some hints in Fromm's theories, which might be implicitly connected to some viewpoints of phenomenology. It just so happens that phenomenology digs deeply into the field of ethics. Consequently, this opens up the possibility of employing the phenomenological approach to the study of Fromm's ethics. There are limited research findings that apply the phenomenological method to the examination of Fromm's work, leaving ample room for exploration in applying this methodology to the field.

The reason it is necessary to examine Fromm's conception of man through this method is that his understanding of the human being touches on key issues such as the relationship between the mind and the world, the connection between the conscious and the unconscious, and the interaction between the individual and society—topics that are all addressed by phenomenology. Additionally, the concept of the human being has always been central to Fromm's ethical thought, as he consistently emphasized human development and improvement. He also frequently elaborated on the idea of "the whole and universal man." Therefore, this research aims to explore Fromm's conception of man through a phenomenological analysis.

1.3 Problem Statement

When it comes to the conception of man, it is necessary to shortly review the history about philosophical viewpoints towards humanity, it is rather common for many philosophers to suggest that there are some universal factors behind humanity. Around the sixth century BCE, Pythagoras, one of the significant Presocratic philosophers, proposed that the soul is immortal and can transmigrate from one body to another after the original body dies. According to his teachings, the soul can inhabit not only a human body but also those of animals or plants. Pythagoras once discouraged a man from whipping a puppy, claiming that he recognized in its whimper the voice of a deceased friend (Laertius, 1972). It seems that the immortal and constantly reincarnated soul is the nature of man for the ancient Pythagorean school.

Moreover, Plato's philosophic viewpoints on the soul also presuppose that there is a transcendent soul beyond the body (Plato, 1993). From this view, the soul loses original wisdom once entering the body, unless it endeavors to detach from the body which brings contamination to it before (Plato, 1993). Thus, man's universality is hidden in the afterlife, in which the soul would return to an ideal world and regain wisdom. However, Marx, whose philosophy is grounded in materialism, argues that "the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each single individual; in its reality, it is the ensemble of social relations" (Karl, 1975). He posits that human nature is shaped by specific social conditions and emerges from human social activities (Karl, 1975).

Human nature is not simply an abstract concept but rather the concrete and

tangible ensemble of social relations. This perspective is rooted in historical materialism. In short, there are many ideas and viewpoints toward the nature of man, and towards the discussion of how it comes and works. These viewpoints can be concluded as the essentialism in terms of human nature, which commonly refers to some universal characteristics and factors that are behind humanity and can be interpreted. Fromm seems one of essentialists as well. Fromm (2013b, p. 34) says:

“The unconscious is the whole man—minus that part of man which corresponds to his society. Consciousness represents social man; the accidental limitations set by the historical situation into which an individual is thrown. Unconsciousness represents universal man, the whole man, rooted in the Cosmos; it represents the plant in him, the animal in him, the spirit in him; it represents his past down to the dawn of human existence, and it represents his future to the day when man will have become fully human, and when nature will be humanized as man will be ‘naturalized’.”

For Fromm, it seems that there are some homogeneous and universal factors which drive man to think and act through some ways; the individuals could find the common parts in their minds, which represent the universal values and universal existence. It seems that those values are the objective standards of how one thinks and acts—This is a kind of moral realism, which refers to recognition of the objective and general morals that can be applied for each person and each situation. Meanwhile, it seems for Fromm that there are some common characteristics and contents which are distributed in each one, then those components are the special existence which represents man’s potentiality towards the supreme good. In other words, Fromm seems to suggest a point that universal man (UM) is the culmination and the absolute being instead of individual man (IM); universal man seems “a priori” existence which transcends different space, time and culture, instead individual man seems a particular existence

which represents unfreedom, insufficient knowledge, unmatured character, and unhealthy society. For Fromm, universal man is not only like a seed which is rooted in each one, but also like thriving towering trees which symbolizes totally developed man and the wholly uncovered unconsciousness. At the time when one achieves universal man, as Fromm says above, man will be naturalized, and nature will be humanized. However, it needs to mention what matters is whether there is any inconsistency in the concept of man and whether the universal man is the persuasible entity in terms of metaphysics of humanity.

Meanwhile, Fromm seems to make a prerequisite that moral facts are the natural facts, and moral properties are the natural properties, because Fromm's ethics is based on psychoanalysis, and he emphasizes the importance of working of unconsciousness behind one's behaviors. In *Fear of Freedom (Escape from Freedom)*, three psychological mechanisms which make one escape from freedom are suggested by Fromm (2001, p. 122). These are "fusing oneself into authoritarianism," "destructiveness" and "automaton conformity." Through the analysis of psychological facts and related properties, moral facts emerge, and related moral principles seem to be established. This approach in terms of basing morals on natural facts is moral naturalism. Especially the universal man, this concept seems to be deduced by his moral naturalism and become a fundamental factor of his entire theory.

Moreover, there is an interesting saying by Fromm (1997, p. 136) that, "I believe that man can visualize the experience of the whole universal man only by realizing his individuality and never by trying to reduce himself to an abstract, common

denominator. 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." It is noteworthy that "to reduce himself to an abstract, common denominator" and "to visualize the experience of the whole universal man" appear to suggest that there are some abstract concepts and categories through which one interprets experiences and perceives them as the only reality. Consequently, one may fall into a sort of trap composed of these abstract concepts, creating a net that ensnares individuals as they experience things. In *Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism*, Fromm (2013, p. 38-39) says:

"Discovering one's unconscious is, precisely, not an intellectual act, but an affective experience, which can hardly be put into words, if at all. This does not mean that thinking and speculation may not precede the act of discovery; but the act of discovery itself is always a total experience."

It appears that the pure intellectual act is secondary to total experience for Fromm. Applying concepts and categories through logic to thinking about things is a key characteristic in intellectual act, while applying emotion and feeling through the non-rational way to perceive things is the corresponding characteristic in non-intellectual act. Among traditional philosophers, there are both those who emphasize a rationalist approach to cognition and those who emphasize a non-rational approach to cognition. For approaches of phenomenology, there are some ways of exploration about knowledge which different traditional rationalist methods. In those approaches, experience plays a crucial role in studies of phenomenology. There is even a saying that "phenomenology is the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view" (Smith, 2013). As mentioned before, because both of

consciousness and experience are crucial concepts in Fromm's theories and related discussions on conception of man, there is the possibility to exploration on his ideas through an analysis of phenomenological perspectives.

During the early 1900s, Edmund Husserl spearheaded the phenomenological movement, seeking to establish a novel philosophical methodology that would facilitate the direct examination and depiction of phenomena precisely as they manifest within the realm of human experience. Central to phenomenology is the notion that our knowledge of the world commences with our immediate experiences. Typically, these experiences comprise our own observations, sensations, or thoughts. Therefore, phenomenology proposes initiating inquiry from a first-person viewpoint, with the intention of uncovering the phenomenality or way of appearing of things and events in our direct experience. The process of phenomenological reduction, also known as epoché or bracketing, is central to the phenomenological method. Its aim is to allow for the description and observation of experiences free from pre-existing understandings and judgments. By temporarily suspending these, we can better describe human experiences with greater objectivity. Husserl (2014, p. 34-35) says,

“Judging rationally or scientifically about matters...means orienting oneself to the things themselves, or, more precisely, it means returning from talk and opinions to the things themselves, questioning them as they are themselves given, and setting aside all prejudices alien to them.”

In phenomenology, experience is the experience of things. It aims at elimination of dividing the world into phenomenal domain and essential domain and aims at exploring the ways in which things appear to us. It seems that there are some hints in which the expression of man by Fromm, as mentioned above. So, when it comes to the

way of experiencing universal and whole man for an individual, there is the demand to exploring whether there is a similar way of perceiving and recognizing the special experience as the universal and whole man from phenomenology. In short, the explanation concerning several crucial problems is shown above. Next, I would like to explain the importance of exploring these, and the consequences of not further discussing the problems.

Firstly, exploring Erich Fromm's view of man represents a key gap in current research. While many scholars have studied Fromm's political ideas, psychological theories, and ethical thinking, his basic understanding of what it means to be human has not been thoroughly examined. This gap is important because Fromm's concept of human nature forms the foundation of his entire humanistic philosophy. Fromm's concept of man is not just one part of his thinking—it is the starting point from which all his other ideas develop. His understanding of the human condition—how we exist between biological needs and self-awareness, between instinct and freedom—provides the necessary basis for his criticism of modern society, his theory of character types, and his vision of human growth. Without clearly understanding how Fromm sees human nature, many of his important insights remain unclear or disconnected. Additionally, Fromm's concept of man addresses key questions about human existence: What is freedom? Why do people feel alienated? How do we find meaning? How do we form genuine connections with others? His unique blend of psychoanalytic, Marxist, and existentialist viewpoints offers a valuable approach to these basic human questions. By examining how Fromm dialectically understands the complex duality of

human existence—as beings simultaneously shaped by historical and socioeconomic forces while maintaining the inherent capacity for self-determination and transcendence beyond these conditioning factors—we gain insight into his nuanced view of human potential for authentic freedom despite structural constraints. Also, we gain access to ideas that remain highly relevant for today’s problems of social division, technology-related alienation, and psychological distress.

Secondly, a thorough examination of Fromm’s conception of man helps us more accurately position his contributions within the broader history of philosophy and better uncover the theoretical value of his work. Fromm operates as a philosophical synthesizer, drawing from diverse intellectual traditions and thinkers such as Immanuel Kant, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and various religious and existentialist thinkers, weaving these influences into a coherent and distinctive philosophical perspective. This synthetic approach is particularly evident in how Fromm combines Kant’s emphasis on human autonomy and dignity with Marx’s focus on social determinants of consciousness. Unlike Kant, who grounded human freedom in abstract rationality, Fromm anchors it in the concrete historical and social conditions of human existence. Yet unlike orthodox Marxists, he maintains a robust conception of human nature that transcends mere economic determinism. This creative integration represents not merely a combination of ideas but a genuine philosophical innovation that addresses limitations in both traditions. Similarly, Fromm’s reinterpretation of Freudian psychoanalysis through a social perspective demonstrates how his conception of man transforms the theories he engages with. Where Freud emphasized

biological drives, Fromm shifted focus to the social character and relational needs of humans. This transformation wasn't simply a modification but a fundamental rethinking of human psychology that opened new avenues for understanding alienation and mental health in social contexts.

By carefully analyzing these synthetic achievements in Fromm's anthropology, we gain deeper insight into his unique philosophical contribution. Each act of synthesis in Fromm's work represents a creative response to theoretical problems within the traditions he engages in, offering solutions that neither tradition could provide independently. His conception of man as both socially embedded and capable of transcendence, as biologically constrained yet fundamentally oriented toward freedom, resolves tensions that remained unaddressed in his philosophical predecessors. Furthermore, understanding these synthetic elements helps explain why Fromm's thought defies simple categorization. He is neither purely a psychoanalyst nor strictly a Marxist, neither exclusively an existentialist nor merely a social theorist. His distinctive philosophical identity emerges precisely from his ability to integrate these perspectives through his nuanced conception of human nature, making his contribution to the history of philosophy both unique and valuable.

Thirdly, studying Fromm's conception of man may bring about some novel ideas to dealing with some contemporary philosophical and ethical issues, and there may be some applicable aspects of Fromm's theories. For instance, in contemporary ethics, the virtue theory has been thriving again, some principles of psychological mechanism and ethical foundations behind the concept of universal and whole man may give some

aids in enrichment of the virtue theory—A common critique of virtue ethics is its lack of moral guidance for individuals seeking to understand their ethical duties. Perhaps, related viewpoints may bring about some useful and valuable approaches and ideas in terms of solving the dichotomies of virtue theory. Moreover, there are some ethical problems in daily life. For example, many contemporary people hold a hedonistic view of morality, believing that people who do evil seem happy, so why must they themselves be moral? Hursthouse (1987, p. 231) mentions a similar common point that,

“One very important question it raises is whether morality, or moral judgements, provide reasons for everyone for acting. If some action is wrong, ought not to be done (because, say, it is dishonest or unjust), does this mean that everyone has a reason not to do it, or is it open to the powerful to say truly that there is no reason for them to refrain?”

This is a complex issue, as debates surrounding it have continued for years, and it remains a contentious topic in daily life. Perhaps, there are some valuable approaches and ways of thinking in conception of man about solving the problem. Finally, there is a demand to analyzing Fromm’s conception of man through phenomenological perspectives because there is an obvious possibility to utilizing this method in terms of studying Erich Fromm’s theories as mentioned before. The way of phenomenological may bring some novel founds and viewpoints which is concerned about Fromm’s ideas about man and related issues. There is lack of studies through this method to analyzing Fromm’s ideas or his conception of man. This can be regarded as a gap in this field so that this thesis may dig it deeply and bring some valuable outcomes. However, as many studies about some philosopher’s major conception, it is common to review related history of viewpoints toward the conception made by previous philosophers. This is because there may be some valuable points in previous

ideas and attitudes among phenomenologists towards conception of man and there is a demand for concluding them. Then, this can be helpful for utilizing the method of phenomenology into studies of Fromm, and this can bring some basic information and data before analyzing his ideas. Besides this reason, it is necessary to explore whether there is any similarity or difference between Fromm's viewpoints towards the conception of man and the ones among phenomenologists. After comparing those points, it can provide a series of historical tracks in terms of related ideas so that facilitating to put entire study into better phenomenological perspectives.

In summary, the study of Erich Fromm's conception of man represents a significant undertaking with far-reaching implications for contemporary philosophy and ethics. This research addresses a critical gap in Fromm scholarship, as his fundamental understanding of human nature—despite being the cornerstone of his entire humanistic philosophy—has not received the systematic examination it deserves. Fromm's anthropology serves as the essential foundation from which his critiques of modern society, character theory, and vision of human development logically emerge. Without grasping his conception of man, many of his most valuable insights remain disconnected or insufficiently contextualized. Furthermore, examining Fromm's unique philosophical synthesis reveals his innovative integration of diverse traditions—from Kant's emphasis on human dignity to Marx's social determinism and Freud's psychological insights—into a coherent perspective that transcends the limitations of each. This philosophical innovation explains why Fromm defies simple categorization and highlights his distinctive contribution to intellectual history.

Perhaps most importantly, Fromm's understanding of human nature offers valuable resources for addressing contemporary challenges, from enriching virtue ethics with psychological mechanisms for character development to providing frameworks for understanding modern alienation and technology-related disconnection. His approach to fundamental questions about human existence—freedom, meaning, authentic connection—remains remarkably relevant for navigating today's ethical landscape. By analyzing his conception of man, particularly through underutilized phenomenological perspectives, this research not only illuminates Fromm's significant contribution but also uncovers practical wisdom for addressing the complex human challenges of our time.

1.4 Research Questions

This study is concerned about several crucial problems in terms of Fromm's conception of man. I want to reclaim the following research questions:

1. What is Erich Fromm's conception of man?
2. What are major viewpoints of studying conception of man in field of phenomenology?
3. How Erich Fromm's conception of man can be analyzed through phenomenological perspectives?

1.5 Research Objectives

With the research questions mentioned above, this study, therefore, aims at the following objectives.

1. To examine comprehensively Fromm's conception of man.
2. To explore major viewpoints on the conception of man in phenomenology.
3. To analyze Fromm's ideas through phenomenological perspectives.

1.6 Literature Review

In this literature review, the thesis will outline existing research in several key areas relevant to Erich Fromm's work. This review will discuss studies on Fromm's psychoanalytic and ethical theories, with a particular focus on the influence of Freud and Karl Marx on his thoughts. In addition, the thesis examines research on virtue ethics and metaethics related to Fromm's ideas, illustrating how scholars have positioned his theories within these broader ethical frameworks. Finally, the thesis will summarize the literature on the development of phenomenology and discuss its relevance to Fromm's theoretical contributions. Through this review, I aim to synthesize scholarly discussions on these topics, highlight intersections and developments in research, and thereby deepen the understanding of Fromm's intellectual legacy.

1.6.1 Erich Fromm's Psychoanalysis and Ethical Theories

There are so many studies on Fromm's psychoanalysis and philosophy, but there is insufficient study on his concept of man in philosophy, especially through an analysis from phenomenological perspectives. The thesis will look back at some critical volumes and papers involving Fromm in psychoanalysis and ethical theories. These critical writings will be selected necessarily, because the number of studies on Fromm is so large and it is unwieldy and difficult to collect all texts about this subject. Thus, the thesis will look back at some critical texts below.

In 1961, John H. Schaar, who published *Escape From Authority*, is a harsh critic of the philosophical grounds behind Fromm's ethics and psychoanalysis. Although he acknowledges Fromm's contributions to humanistic ethics and social psychology, he deems that there are some fatal contradictions in Fromm's theory. On the concept of man, Schaar (1961, p. 64-65) criticizes Fromm's essentialist view of the self as having a loophole in that there is no so-called authentic or eternal self, and that the human self is shaped by a particular society. Schaar also points out that Fromm's own suggestion that people are shaped by society, but on the other hand, that there is some kind of eternal self that transcends time, is apparently contradictory in Fromm's discourse about the whole and universal man. This critique holds significance for the present thesis, and the thesis will discuss this subject in the following chapters.

Besides the ones who criticize Fromm, it is necessary to mention Funk, who is Fromm's lifetime academic assistant and heir to Fromm's posthumous manuscript, wrote a comprehensive introduction to Fromm's scholarly thought in 1982, *The*