In Escape from Freedom, Erich From argues that the rise of fascism in Europe (the U.S. and Japan) in the first half of the Twentieth century, and the potential for fascism beyond, even in liberal democracies can be understood through an analysis of the ways in which the transformation of Western society from feudalism to capitalism created the conditions for the emergence of a certain type of person, with specific personality (character or psychological) traits, what he calls the authoritarian personality The authoritarian personality, Fromm is susceptible to fascism, a right wing populist movement driven by an ideology that took power in Germany and Italy in the 30s and 40s.

From adopts a social psychological approach as his means of analyzing this transformation of Western society. Fromm was not only a social theorist but a psychoanalyst who early was committed to a Freudian paradigm for understanding and analyzing social phenomena. In 1936 he explained the emergence of the authoritarian personality in Freudian terms and within the family structure. Early in Escape from Freedom, Fromm explains the difference between the Freudian approach and the social psychological approach that he adopts. The main difference he argues is that Freudian approach to understanding the relationship between human beings and society is fixed.[[1]](#footnote-2) On the othere hand, Fromm argues his approach is dialectical and dynamic[[2]](#footnote-3). That is social psychological approach assumes a relationship between history, social forces and human beings**. Fromm argues that human beings can act individually and collectively to change the world in which they live, and create the conditions necessary for a fully human life. But to Fromm that while human beings have agency they are primarily social selves and the character traits of persons is a reflection of the social world in which they live.**

From argues that the transformation of western society from feudalism to capitalism was two sided in relation. The Reformation[[3]](#footnote-4), the political revolutions[[4]](#footnote-5), the industrial revolution/science and technology,[[5]](#footnote-6) the economic revolution,[[6]](#footnote-7) created what is called the individual, a person free from political oppression, free to before God, free from domination by nature, free from the constraints of the feudal economy, free from the strict social hierarchy of the feudal system. And also free to act within this new social world. Free to establish a personal relationship with God, free to shape the world through the new political system, free to pursue one's own interests economically, free to dominate nature through science and technology, and free to advance in status and esteem.

The other side of this transformation, according to Fromm was that it left this individual, isolated, anxious, and powerless. While the Reformation freed the individual from the power of the Catholic Church and created the possibility of a personal relationship with God, its emphasis on original sin, salvation through faith and predestination put the redemption of each person in God's hand, and left the individual powerless. The result was anxiety, each would say, "I am free, but I am alone." "How do I know that I am saved? Is there a way for me to know?" And their answer was, success in worldly activity could or be an indicator that one had been predestined, chosen for salvation. This began the activity toward the goal of being successful.[[7]](#footnote-8) Not successful in the sense of accumulating wealth for wealth's sake, but the accumulation of wealth as an indication of one's salvation. In other words, one's powerlessness in this new personal and free relationship with God created an intolerable anxiety, and powerless, so that one submitted oneself to constant the constant frantic activity of accumulation.

The Reformation for Fromm serves as an early example of the consequences of the transformation from feudalism to modernity, but also is a crucial aspect of the historical transformation of Western culture and the emergence of the authoritarian personality. The progressive development of human freedom and its two sides; freedom from external force which allows the newly emerging individual freedom to shape their own lives, but alone, anxious, powerless and ultimately seeking to escape freedom.

1. See Choi's explanation during meeting [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Calvin's comment during discussio [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Reformation [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. , [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism [↑](#footnote-ref-8)