

Is man dead?

The real Dhamma-ending age
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The real danger of our time is that humans have become robots.

The German sociologist and psychoanalyst Erich Fromm (1900-1980) claimed that during industrialization in the 19th century, God was declared dead, “inhumanity” meant cruelty, and the inherent danger was that people would become slaves.

However, in the 20th century, the problem changed: alienated from a sense of self, people had lost the ability to love and reason for themselves. Not only was “God” dead, but “man” effectively died, too. “Inhumanity” came to mean lacking humanity. People, Fromm advised, were in danger of becoming like robots.

Alienation

He attributed this sense of alienation to the emergence of Western **capitalist** societies and believed that a state’s social, economic, and political factors intersect to produce a “social character” common to all its citizens. In the industrial age, as capitalism increased its global dominance, states encouraged people to become competitive, exploitative, authoritarian, aggressive, and individualist.

In the 20th century, by contrast, individuals were repositioned by capitalist states to become cooperative **consumers**, with standardized tastes, who could be manipulated by the anonymous authority of public opinion and the market. Technology ensured that work became more routine and boring. Fromm advised that unless people “get out of the rut” they are in and reclaim their humanity, they will go mad trying to live a meaningless, robotic life.

Dehumanization

By the 21st century, the 20th-century **dehumanization** process only worsened. The **class** system in capitalist societies only became more real as humans are measured by their worth and price-tagged like goods, and the family system weakened or simply fell apart. The **nuclear family** became more common; even then, only when the marriage was successful. Hence, we also see the rise of the **single-parent family**. Essentially, people have become less human and more **asura**, measuring, exploitative, inhuman.

What we understand to be the “**Dhamma-ending age**” does not only refer to the disappearance of the Buddha’s teaching, but rather a rejection or distortion of it. **Religion** is merely a means for its leaders and teachers to invest themselves with amoral authority, power and wealth. This explains why monastics and priests, for example, shamelessly break rules and commit crimes without compunction.

Buddhism—the immeasurables

Along with this, there is the dehumanization process: people became commodities with a price-tag, and are classed accordingly. Only a return to the Buddha's teaching of the **immeasurables**—love, compassion, joy and peace—will bring back our humanity.

Reading: "The Sociology Book," DK Penguin Random House, 2015:188.

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[an occasional re-look at the Buddha's Example and Teachings]

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