



## Personal Accounts and Papers on Therapeutic Technique

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Erich Fromm is remembered for many things: as the author of *The Art of Loving* and *To Have Or to Be?*; as a social psychologist and explorer of the authoritarian character; as a humanist, psychologist of religion, and student of the nature of aggression; and as a member of the Frankfurt School, a lively interpreter of Karl Marx, and a socialist with humanist leanings. Far less is known about another Fromm—the practicing psychoanalyst, the therapeutic teacher, and the clinical supervisor.

The objective of this book (*The Clinical Erich Fromm. Personal Accounts and Papers on Therapeutic Technique*) is to introduce Fromm as a practicing psychoanalyst and to familiarize readers with his therapeutic “technique.” As such, this book seeks to explore answers to a series of important questions: What were the therapeutic goals that Fromm set himself? How did he shape the therapeutic relationship? What pathways to the unconscious did he favor? How did Fromm choose to work with transference and counter-transference, defense and resistance? What role did he see the psychoanalyst’s own personality as playing in therapy, and where did he stand on the issues of analytic neutrality and abstinence? When and in what ways did Fromm use interpretation? How much truth, and how much directness, did he think his patients could tolerate? Which kind of therapeutic setting did he prefer? What did Fromm consider of primary importance in the therapeutic process? And how did he conceive of the connection between social reality, mental images and irrational forces?

In deciding to proceed with this book, two

considerations were uppermost in my mind. One is the almost complete lack of awareness of Fromm’s therapeutic approach. This is hardly surprising, given that Fromm himself hardly published anything on the subject of technique and—correctly in my opinion—refrained from creating a school of his own.

A number of attempts by Fromm to formulate his psychoanalytic “technique” were broken off. To be sure, he did clarify his theory of psychoanalysis in terms of numerous case histories; but not one of these derives from his own work with patients. In 1965, Fromm applied for a grant so that he could embark on a four-volume “systematic work,” as he called it, on humanist psychoanalysis, which was to contain a chapter entitled “Psychoanalytic Technique.” By 1973 his labors had reached a point where he could publish *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, the first volume of the projected work. In a letter to Professor Kalinkowitz dated July 20, 1973, Fromm announced that the second volume would deal with psychoanalytic technique, but instead he began to write *To Have Or to Be?* And when finally, in 1978, Fromm wanted to edit the transcripts of one of his clinical seminars, he was forced to stop because of his declining health. To this end, the handful of Fromm’s mostly posthumous writings on psychoanalytic “technique” at the end of the book.

But there is another consideration that led me to publish this volume. Almost thirty years after Fromm’s death, the ranks of those who knew him personally or through their psychoanalytic training are sadly thinning. So it seemed timely to ask for their impressions, insights, and



memories. I was grateful to receive the contributions now gathered in this book. They are of value in every way. I have elected to supplement them with several earlier reports, obituaries, and memoirs, mostly taken from the pages of *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*—the mouthpiece of the New York-based William Alanson White Institute, of which Fromm was a cofounder. The journal has rendered outstanding service in keeping Fromm’s therapeutic legacy alive and well in our time. I wish to thank that Institute for letting me reproduce the aforementioned texts.

The book is divided into four parts. As indicated above Fromm published very little about his particular therapeutic “technique” and how he related to his patients therapeutically. Part One of this book consists of two clinical papers from his literary estate: “Being *Centrally* Related to the Patient” and “Factors Leading to Patient’s Change in Analytic Treatment,” both of which were published posthumously. Part Two through Four present the views of Fromm’s pupils. Indeed, all of the contributors to this book have personally experienced Erich Fromm in a variety of contexts and in a host of ways. Some underwent therapy with Fromm, or were trained by him; some asked Fromm to supervise their clinical work; some knew him through his academic lectures and clinical seminars; still others knew him not only as students and trainees, but as a colleague and personal friend. The encounters with Fromm described by the contributors are surprisingly varied: some contributors recall their meeting with Fromm in idealized ways; others still feel like students of a Zen master who disciplined them. All the contributors, however, recognized Fromm as an outstanding human being and psychoanalyst—as a therapist who has an uncanny gift for engaging the other directly and immediately, and with enormous presence.

In Part Two, the contributors explore the encounter with Fromm from the perspective of the relationship process. The direct, face-to-face mode of encounter sought and favored by Fromm in every kind of relationship prompted the contributors to consider two questions: first, what was unique to Fromm’s approach; and se-

cond, to relate Fromm’s understanding of the face-to-face encounter with how he actually practiced therapy. It quickly becomes evident that Fromm’s therapeutic approach diverged from the general run of traditional psychoanalytic technique.

In Part Three, contributors introduce readers to Fromm’s supervisory style and objectives, drawing on actual experiences of supervision with Fromm. These accounts, some of them highly detailed, give a vivid sense of how direct Fromm could be in sizing up the patients before him, including their unconscious aspirations, and how quickly Fromm saw through the deceptive maneuvers patients used to stave off their core feeling of isolation and impotence. At the same time, Fromm could be equally unsparing—though not without empathy—in his dealings with therapists. He quickly sensed in them a dread of their patients. Fromm confronts therapists when he feels they are reduced to the role of an accomplice, either because they have not yet managed to tap into the healing powers of those they seek to help, or are not yet sufficiently aware of their own role and needs in the therapeutic process.

Part Four considers Fromm from a more personal perspective. Contributors recall not just the training analyst, the supervisor and the therapist, but also what Fromm was actually like in the flesh. Idiosyncrasies and biographic details have the power to illuminate what was exceptional in Fromm’s way of doing therapy. At the same time, these personal accounts of Fromm strengthen the impression that such exceptionalism is not to be sought in a “technique,” at least to the extent that a technique can be copied and applied as a routine. Rather, for Fromm the issue is to ensure that practicing psychoanalysts have personalities that have been given an exceptional shaping: that is to say, the ability to directly encounter whatever is destructive, sick, or productive in one’s patients depends on whether therapists are willing, and able, to directly encounter these selfsame dimensions in themselves. Success here presupposes daily self-analysis, which Fromm always sought to practice.



**The Clinical Erich Fromm**  
**Personal Accounts and Papers on Therapeutic Technique**  
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**Contents**

*Roger Frie*: Foreword  
*Rainer Funk*: Introduction

**PART I: ERICH FROMM ON THERAPEUTIC PRACTICE**

*Erich Fromm*: Being *Centrally* Related to the Patient  
*Erich Fromm*: Factors Leading to Patient's Change in Analytic Treatment

**PART II: RELATIONSHIP AS DIRECT MEETING**

*Rainer Funk*: Direct Meeting  
*Marianne Horney Eckardt*: From Couch to Chair  
*David E. Schecter*: Awakening the Patient  
*Dale H. Ortmeier*: Conveying Hope to the Patient  
*Harold B. Davis*: Directness in Therapy

**PART III: ERICH FROMM'S THERAPEUTIC PRACTICE  
IN THE MIRROR OF SUPERVISION**

*Ruth M. Lesser*: "There Is Nothing Polite in Anybody's Unconscious" (Preprint in this issue  
of *Fromm Forum*)  
*Robert U. Akeret*: "What Have You Learned about Yourself from Your Patient?"  
*George D. Goldman*: "What Is this Patient Really After?"  
*Arthur H. Feiner*: "Now, Look here..."

**PART IV: REMINISCENCES OF ERICH FROMM—  
PSYCHOANALYST AND PERSON**

*Anna Gourevitch*: Elation and Fortification  
*Ralph M. Crowley*: Psychoanalysis: An Adventure in Learning to Think Critically  
*Edward S. Tauber*: Words are Ways  
*Jay S. Kwawer*: His Main Interest: The Human Passions  
*Bernard Landis*: When You Hear the Word, the Reality Is Lost  
*Michael Maccoby*: Fromm Didn't Want to Be a Frommian  
*Jorge Silva García*: His Way to Clarity and Humaneness  
*Salvador Millán and Sonia Gojman de Millán*: His Deeply Inspirational Presence and  
Thoughtfulness  
*Gérard D. Khoury*: A Crucial Encounter  
*Leonard C. Feldstein*: Fromm's Genius Was in His Actual Presence

References  
About the Contributors  
Acknowledgements