



WAW

NEWSLETTER

B. Landis:

Although I have known Erich since 1964—as a participant in two psychoanalytic case seminars he conducted; as a co-activist in SANE opposing nuclear bomb testing; briefly as an analysand; through correspondence; and as a colleague in teaching a seminar one summer in Switzerland, I cannot say that I know a great deal about his life. One reason has to do with geography; when I first knew him, he was commuting from Mexico where he then lived, and later he moved to Locarno, Switzerland. A more basic reason is that Erich has always been a rather private person.

In the summer of 1974, I organized a psychology course in Locarno and brought a class of 22 students from the Purchase Campus of the State University of New York to Switzerland, to teach—with Erich—an intensive three-week seminar on current trends in psychoanalysis. Erich

looked forward to the seminar. He wanted very much to know what students were thinking about, their degree of awareness, and their aspirations. Erich, who was very well-known in Locarno, arranged for us to meet in the spacious council room of the new, modern town hall. We sat around two large tables, arranged like a T, and conducted seminars from 9:00 a.m. to noon and 3:00 to 5:30, five days a week. Erich conducted either a morning or an afternoon seminar.

On the afternoon of our arrival in Locarno, my wife, Erica, and I went to our hotel, and were happy to find we had a large corner room, with much light, grand views of Lake Locarno and the gardens bordering it, plus—unexpectedly—a good work desk and a handsome dressing table. On thanking the hotel manager he told us that Dr. Fromm had called him weeks ago to arrange for that particular room for us and that he'd requested specially those additional pieces of furniture.

We went to greet Erich and Annis in their apartment which had large picture windows overlooking the Lake, flooding the rooms with light. Large bouquets of country flowers were bright colored accents. Annis said she went frequently to the local market for the fresh flowers they loved. I recall Erich's collection of baroque music records. I was impressed that the furnishings could be so unobtrusive and yet provide a commodious setting for people.

It would seem that the amount of destructiveness to be found in individuals is proportionate to the amount to which expansiveness of life is curtailed. By this we do not refer to individual frustrations of this or that instinctive desire, but to the thwarting of the whole of life, the blockage of spontaneity of the growth and expression of man's sensuous, emotional, and intellectual capacities. The more the drive towards life is thwarted, the stronger is the drive toward destruction; the more life is realized, the less is the strength of destructiveness. Destructiveness is the outcome of un-lived life.

ESCAPE FROM FREEDOM

I recall Erich's congenial study more distinctly. It was a small room, perhaps 10 x 12, with a wide window band across an entire wall. Books lined most of two walls, with room for two colorful nature posters tacked on. Erich sat at a comfortable desk chair in front of an attractive small wooden desk, with another similar chair at the side. Manuscripts and open books abounded and the room looked thoroughly worked in.



As we sat down in the living room that first night to discuss the seminar, *Erich* took our requests for drinks and went into the kitchen to mix them. I remember being slightly taken aback since my experience of *Erich* had largely been of him as the teacher, hands folded, in front of the seminar table, or in the study of his Riverside Drive apartment, where his sister-in-law would bring us tea. To see *Erich* mixing drinks was novel, and I must have commented because I recall Annis answering that he also mixed a good salad dressing to accompany dinner.

Modern systems theory, *Erich* said, provides a valid basis for conceptualizing significant change and cure. One has to think in terms of an entire system and the principles governing change. For personal growth, one's entire psychological organization and its functions — thinking, feeling, volition, acting — must be changed in an integrated way to permit an authentic transformation of character. In this context, everything that furthers the growth and structure of a system is rational; thus, good conditions for development are rational, while poor conditions that break

"Erich Fromm annoyed me. He was an iconoclast. As a student, I was looking for structure, stability, and status. Erich's jibes at the formalisms of psychoanalysis and its pretentiousness riled me. When I first met him, his books ESCAPE FROM FREEDOM and MAN FOR HIMSELF had already established him as an important original contributor. He had written the definitive work on the authoritarian character. And yet, as soon as he would establish a fact, he would turn around and question the assumptions. You had to learn to think with Erich Fromm. I took his dream course three times. He also wrote THE SANE SOCIETY, THE FORGOTTEN LANGUAGE, THE ART OF LOVING, PSYCHOANALYSIS AND RELIGION, and a number of other works. He was my most stimulating and thought-providing instructor and supervisor. However, once, when he supervised a case of mine, I asked if he would like to hear an audiotape of one of the sessions, an innovation at that time. He was interested, even excited, at the prospect. But after a few minutes of listening to the tape, he fell asleep. On another day, I tried another tape. He again fell asleep. I didn't try again. (Erich later told me that I had misinterpreted this matter, that when he was deep in thought, he would put his head back and close his eyes.)"

Schimel, J.L., *Psychoanalytic Training*,
Career Directions, 1980

To the students' surprise, *Erich* opened the first seminar not by discussing psychoanalysis but by describing the area and nearby Ascona. He detailed the walks they might take, listing inexpensive places to eat and boat rides they might enjoy. He was full of vitality and obviously happy to be teaching young people again and he established an atmosphere of kindness and intellectual abundance, always inviting, even urging students to raise issues and responding to them in an affirming manner. He started his formal presentation with a discussion of the historical background of psychoanalysis. He referred mainly to Freud's work, then Adler's and Jung's. He then reviewed *Sullivan* and *Laing*. Subsequently he developed his concept of social character and went on, in later seminars, to raise the question: is classical psychoanalysis enough? It is adequate for symptomatic relief, he said, but certainly not sufficient for the characterological problems people suffer today. *Erich* said that the major issue that now challenges psychoanalysis pertains to a vague malaise, an uneasiness in society, and growing detachment—essentially a schizoid condition for which traditional psychoanalysis is not enough; small improvements will have no real impact.

down the system are irrational. One must go beyond traditional analysis and affectively change one's actions as well as broaden awareness. "One doesn't get well by reading prescriptions." Awareness alone will not be effective. *Erich* argued against the danger of being overly interested in oneself, and said that normal healthy living requires that the person be related to the world in a broad, interested way. With respect to psychotherapeutic work, the emphasis must be as much on stimulating new discoveries and interests as on analyzing pathological patterns. In going beyond traditional analysis, the analyst should inquire with the patient: how does he enrich his life? What are the patient's unique attributes that he can explore, develop and enjoy?

This activated much discussion and students asked how to pursue this goal. *Erich* replied that "One has to learn to think critically, otherwise one is victim to what everyone else tells him." He described a very close relationship between critical thought and mental health, and spoke about "reading serious books seriously, which takes discipline."

Among the authors and books *Erich* recommended were: the writings of Meister Eckhardt, The Old Testament, espe-



they don't know when the decisive moments are. This is because the decisive events are fractionated. They come in steps."

"Therapy is based not on affection and niceness; they don't do much. Instead it's best to show concentration, attention, sympathy, concern and honesty—without wanting anything in return."

"Psychoanalysis is a method of critical thought. Though history is written by the victors, the human race remembers those who tell the truth."

During the midday break, students either picnicked by a nearby river or snacked at the hotel pool or else continued the seminar discussions at lunch in outdoor cafes. The atmosphere was active. *Erich* participated in the spirit of things, and one evening arranged a surprise party for the students. He showed a constant interest in their having an enjoyable time. The party took place at the spacious new home of Dr. Luban, a Swiss physician specializing in psychosomatic medicine whom *Erich* was supervising in Locarno. By this time, *Erich* was spending all of his time in research and writing — he had recently completed *THE ANATOMY OF HUMAN DESTRUCTIVENESS*, and was writing *TO HAVE OR TO BE*. Dr. Luban was his only supervisor; *Erich* had no patients in therapy at

Most people are quite ready to denounce faith in man's improvement as unrealistic, but they do not recognize that despair is often just as unrealistic. The statement, "Human nature is evil," is not a bit more realistic than the statement, "Human nature is good." But the first statement is much easier to make; anyone who wants to prove man's evilness finds followers most readily, for he offers everybody an alibi for his own sins — and seemingly risks nothing. Yet, the spreading of irrational despair is in itself destructive, as all untruth is; it discourages and confuses. Preaching irrational faith or announcing false Messiahs is hardly less destructive; it seduces and then paralyzes.

THE ANATOMY OF HUMAN DESTRUCTIVENESS

that time. The party had a distinctively Swiss flavor, the foremost choral group of the region had been invited and sang folk songs for the students, who responded by singing American folk songs. Dr. Luban had provided a magnificent buffet and opened his house completely to the students who were amused by the posters of rock stars in the children's rooms. Students who had been attending seminars very casually dressed came spruced up in crisp jeans. The men surrendered their

In the 19th century the problem was that *God is dead*; in the 20th century the problem is that *man is dead*. In the 19th century inhumanity meant cruelty; in the 20th century it means schizoid self-alienation. The danger of the past was that men became slaves. The danger of the future is that men may become robots. True enough, robots do not rebel. But given man's nature, robots cannot live and remain sane. They become "Golems," They will destroy their world and themselves because they cannot stand any longer the boredom of a meaningless life.

THE SANE SOCIETY

worn tee shirts for dress shirts set off colorful bandanas instead of neckties, and the women looked equally bright. It was the first, but not the last time I saw *Erich* at a party; there were, in fact, two more to come. The second was a rousing return party the students gave for *Erich*, at a lively Locarno cafe-bar. They had chipped in enough money to cover two cases of wine which soon ran out. *Erich*, in great spirits, kept buying more wine and encouraging the singers and guitarists to keep it up. One young woman, inhibited about drinking wine, thawed to *Erich's* encouragement to drink with the rest; she was delighted at the attention and teasing she received.

The third party was a farewell dinner for *Erich* and Annis, again given by the students in the dining room of their lodgings. They had carefully prepared the party, and it was buoyant and affectionate with an awareness that a rich experience was drawing to a close. As his good-bye message, *Erich* had told the expectant group at the final seminar the Talmudic farewell: "Be brave, and let us be brave together." They had wanted to thank him with a remembrance and selected a beautiful plant and ceramic planter. On the day Erica and I said goodbye at the bright and flower-filled apartment, I noticed the plant was on *Erich's* desk. —*Bernard Landis, Ph.D.*