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The Two Voices of Erich Fromm: The Prophetic and the Analytic

Michael Maccoby

First published in: *Society*, Vol. 32 (No. 5, July-Aug. 1995), pp. 72-82. This article is adapted from a lecture given at the Erich Fromm International Symposium, Washington, DC, May 6 1994. The following text is taken from the Internet.

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Erich Fromm's contribution to our knowledge of individual and social behavior has neither been fully appreciated nor developed. Fromm's most popular books which expand our understanding of both love and destructiveness have, to a large extent, been assimilated into that body of knowledge which forms the foundation of intellectual thinking in Europe and the United States. Although he introduced many American intellectuals of the 40s and 50s to the relevance of psychoanalysis to understanding 20th century social pathology, typical intellectuals of today think of Fromm, if at all, as a critic of the mass consumer society. A smaller number recognize the contribution he made in *Escape from Freedom* to understanding the psychic appeal of fascism, an understanding relevant to current events in Russia and the Balkans. But relatively few appreciate his most valuable and original legacy: understanding human character in relation to society.

Why has Fromm's work been so neglected? To start with, his ability to write directly to a large general audience as in *The Art of Loving*, which was a best seller in the late 50s, made him suspect to the academic Mandarins whose criteria for profundity includes incomprehensibility to the uninitiated. In fact, Fromm provoked defensiveness and even a kind of antipathy from academics he termed alienated and psychoanalysts he criticized as bureaucratic in their technique and poorly educated in the humanities and social sciences. Furthermore, Fromm would not fit himself into a neat intellectual category.

Although he fully acknowledged his debt to Freud, he relentlessly criticized the limitations and contradictions in Freud's theories. Although he explored the influence of culture on character development, he strongly differentiated himself from „culturalists“ such as Sullivan, Horney and Margaret Mead who described culture in terms of behavior patterns and did not analyze socio-economic factors. Although Fromm agreed with Marx's analysis of social change and shared his messianic view of history, he was also a deeply religious non-theist who drew his concept of human development from the Jewish bible, Zen Buddhism, and Christian mysticism. Although he shared, to a large extent, their critique of capitalism, Fromm was rejected by the psychoanalytic left. His former colleagues at the Frankfort School, particularly Herbert Marcuse, dismissed him as a conformist unwilling to support the radical action necessary to change society. Inevitably, experts in one or another social science or version of psychotherapy were put off by Fromm's unlikely mix of Freud, Marx and religious mysticism. For example, although Erik Erikson told me he had learned a great deal reading *Escape from Freedom*, he was not prepared to accede to the demand of *The Sane Society* to accept communitarian socialism as the prescription for social well being and healthy character development.

My purpose is not to defend Fromm from his critics. Like any major thinker, Fromm's views changed over time and there are, as I shall



describe, contradictions in his views and limitations in his approach, especially his psychoanalytic technique. Rather, I shall try to describe and clarify what I hear as the two dominant voices in Fromm's work, the analytic and the prophetic. William James wrote that theory, like music, expresses the composer's personality, and both of these voices came from deep inside of Fromm. I believe that by scoring them separately so to speak, they can be better understood and most important, usefully developed. When Fromm is most convincing, the two voices harmonize. When he is least convincing, the prophetic drowns out the analytic.

My analysis of these two voices is based not only on my reading of Fromm, but also hearing them directly when I worked with him in the 60s.

My Experience with Fromm

In the summer of 1960, when I drove from Cambridge, Massachusetts to Cuernavaca, Mexico with my wife, Sandylee, it was to enter into an eight year apprenticeship to Fromm. That June, I had received a doctorate from Harvard in Social Relations, combining clinical and cognitive psychology with sociology and anthropology. I had decided that my next step should be psychoanalytic training, since psychoanalytic investigation seemed the best way to further my understanding of human motivation. In seeking psychoanalytic education, I considered the Boston Institute where I had helped Ives Hendrick with his research, and I talked with Erik Erikson about working with him at Austen Riggs. Both were encouraging. However, David Riesman, who had been analyzed by Fromm and who I had worked with as a teaching assistant, reported that Fromm was looking for a research assistant in Mexico and suggested that we meet. The reason I decided to study with Fromm was the appeal of both voices, the analytic and the prophetic. Fromm defined the meaning of human development in a way that appealed to me emotionally as well as intellectually. It seemed to me that Fromm's call to create a sane society was urgently required by a world teetering on the edge of nuclear war. World War II and the

holocaust was a recent and searing memory. Fromm's analysis of human destructiveness provided some understanding of behavior that seemed incomprehensible and inhuman. I hoped that through my personal psychoanalysis, Fromm would help me to develop not only my capability as a researcher, but also my capacity for love and reason.

I should note here that when I told Grete Bibring of the Boston Psychoanalytic Institute that I was considering training with Fromm, she said „you will probably get along very well together, but he will never analyze the transference.“ To a large extent, she was correct, for reasons I shall describe.

Before leaving for Mexico, I joined Fromm, David Riesman and others in founding The Committee of Correspondence and writing for its newsletter arguing for arms control and improved relations with the Soviet Union.

Fromm accepted me as an apprentice. He needed someone with training in research design, statistics, and projective testing to work with him on the sociopsychanalytic study of a Mexican village, and in return for my assistance, he agreed to admit me to the Mexican Psychoanalytic Institute and to be my training analyst. He also made it clear that my personal goals for analysis and my political engagement were important in his decision to work with me. During the next eight years, I was Fromm's research assistant, analyst, supervisee, and collaborator, culminating in 1970 with the publication of our book, *Social Character in a Mexican Village*.

I agreed to Fromm's condition of apprenticeship, that I first learn his theory and work with it, before criticizing it, as he expected I would someday do. He said that he hoped I would be able to express this theory in my own words and expand it, and this has been my goal.

The Two Voices

During the time I was in analysis with him, Fromm's technique changed from one that was extremely influenced by his then recent exploration into Zen Buddhism with D. T. Suzuki to one which emphasized a more systematic investigation into the patient's character and psyche. At



times, he experimented with technique using the active methods pioneered by Sandor Ferenczi, including relaxation exercises and suggestion about associating to a theme. He also tried techniques used by Wilhelm Reich to attack character armor. While his shifting of analytic approach complicated his attempts to describe his practice, this does not fully explain his dissatisfaction with the drafts he wrote on technique. I believe that what blocked his writing on technique and also limited his effectiveness as an analyst was the inability to always harmonize the analytic and prophetic voices. This disharmony resulted in a confusion concerning the goals and methods of psychoanalysis.

At its purist, Fromm's analytic voice was exploratory, experimental, and skeptical. It asked for evidence and questioned conclusions drawn too quickly. His prophetic voice was urgent, impatient, and judgmental. It contrasted reality with a demanding ideal of spiritual development. It condemned rather than analyzed evil. At times, Fromm the analyst was transformed into Fromm the rabbi or Zen master who responded to the student's inauthentic behavior not by analysis, but with disgust or the verbal equivalent of cracking him over the head with a stick.

At his most analytic, Fromm conceived of psychoanalysis as a method to help suffering people to liberate themselves from crippling fear and to realize more of their creative potential. In this mode, he emphasized the importance of psychoanalytic diagnosis at the start of treatment, and he was realistic about the patient's prognosis and limitations.

At his most prophetic, Erich Fromm's mission was to bring about a messianic age of peace and human solidarity, and he used psychoanalysis as a spiritual discipline for himself and his disciples. He viewed neurotic symptoms as a partial rejection of oppressive or alienating authority. The psychoanalyst's role was to help give birth to the revolutionary within the neurotic.

Fromm's inconsistent approach to therapy expressed the contradiction between his theory of social character and his ideal of the productive character which became increasingly mystical. I shall return to this point that the disciplines of therapeutic psychoanalysis and spiritual de-

velopment, while they share elements in common, are essentially different, and that Fromm sometimes confused the two.

Fromm believed that his most original ideas were the theory of social character, the interpretive questionnaire as a method of studying character, and the theory of destructiveness. He described each of these in his analytic voice. In two major studies, one of German workers and employees in 1930 and the other of Mexican villagers in the 1960s, Fromm tested and developed the theory and methods of social character research.

He continually elaborated his theory of destructiveness. The socio-psychoanalytic analysis of sadomasochism and malignant destructiveness was well-tested both clinically and in the social character research. The more controversial and less well studied theory of necrophilia, defined as the love of death, decay and rigid order which he first described in his 1964 book *The Heart of Man*, expressed the prophetic view of evil and was contrasted to his concept of biophilia, love of life, which at the extreme, expressed being vs. having and the driving force of mystical development.

The Two Voices in Fromm's Approach to Character and Society

To appreciate Fromm's approach to clinical diagnosis, his theory of character must first be understood. While Freud's libido theory with its analogy of forces and cathexes corresponds to a late 19th century view of physics, Fromm's theory of character development is fully consistent with modern evolutionary biology. Humans are distinguished from other animals by a larger neocortex with fewer instincts. Character is the relatively permanent way in which human drives for survival and self-expression are structured in the socialization process. Thus character substitutes for or shapes human instinct. But human survival is not merely a matter of physical survival. Man does not live by bread alone. We are social animals who must relate to others, and we are spiritual animals who must infuse our lives with meaning in order to function. Our brains need to operate in the past, present, and future simultaneously. Without a sense of hope,



they turn off. To survive in the early years, we require caring adults. To learn to master the environment, control our fears and passions and live in harmony with others, we need teachers. To give meaning to our lives, we must acquire a sense of identity and rootedness. Religions both sacred and secular (including tribalism and nationalism), with objects of devotion, guiding myths and rituals, serve this function.

We not only must live our lives, but also solve the contradictions stemming from our existence, the animal and human needs, physical survival and emotional sanity. Fromm said that given our contradictory tendencies and awareness of our mortality, the question of why people remain sane is perhaps more difficult to answer than the question of why they become insane.

Character is a solution to those contradictions. It is like a complex computer program that takes the place of what is to a greater extent hard-wired in other animals. Biological research indicates we are closer to other animals than we like to believe, and this, perhaps, is what keeps many of us sane. We imitate and identify with those most like ourselves. We can use the culture, or more precisely the social character as an off-the-shelf solution to the problems of existence.

Although other animals also develop cultures to transmit patterns of behavior between the generations, human culture is more complex and varied. With our large neocortex, we are able to learn and change. Although we share almost 99 percent of our genetic material with chimpanzees, the other one percent allows us to choose between either becoming more uniquely and fully human or regressing to tribalism and/or psychopathology. Fromm termed the striving to become more fully human as „progressive,“ and he believed the great monotheistic humanistic religions and Buddhism, which is non-theist, shared the goal of directing people to a solution of achieving unity with nature through individuation, love of the stranger, and reverence for life. This solution increases our consciousness and strengthens community, while the regressive solutions result in either individual psychopathology (symbiosis, narcissism and destructiveness) or group narcissism and hostility

to people outside the tribe.

Speaking in his analytic voice, Fromm describes the social character as the cement that holds society together. It is what adapts humans to their environment in such a way that they want to do what they need to do to keep a particular society functioning. In this sense, some emotionally disturbed persons have failed to develop the social character; their emotions do not support adaptive behavior.

Or the social character of some disturbed people might clash with the environment, because it is adapted to a disappearing world. In this situation, the social character is transformed from social cement to social dynamite. Thus, in *Escape from Freedom*, Fromm describes how the lower-middle class German suffered a sense of powerlessness and meaninglessness in the 1920's. Hoarding, dutiful, conservative, and hardworking emotional attitudes no longer guaranteed prosperity. The harsh conditions imposed by the Treaty of Versailles after World War I caused runaway inflation that destroyed savings, while money was being made by wild speculation. The humiliation of the Kaiser by the allies was felt as a personal indignity and loss of meaning. The flaunting of a sexual freedom and burlesque of authority in the Weimar republic aroused indignation and anger which Hitler was able to manipulate in forging an ideology, a new religion, which blended the desire for revenge, the focussing of hatred on the Jews as scapegoats, with inspiring hopes to create a great new civilization.

Analytically speaking, normality and mental health require that the child develop a social character in order to gain the competencies required for survival in a society. This is consistent with C.G. Jung's view that only through adaptation to a culture could a person begin to achieve individuation. However, speaking in the prophetic voice, Fromm questioned whether adaptation produced healthy people.

If the society is itself not healthy, then to be normal is to acquire a „culturally patterned defect,“ in effect to be sick. The neurotic who will not adapt may be healthier than one who is adapted. What does healthy mean for Fromm? In *The Sane Society*, he writes that

„Mental health, in the humanistic sense, is



characterized by the ability to love and to create, by the emergence from the incestuous ties to family and nature, by a sense of identity based on one's experience of self as the subject and agent of one's powers, by the grasp of reality inside and outside of ourselves - that is, by the development of objectivity and reason. The aim of life is to live it intensely, to be fully born, to be fully awake. To emerge from the ideas of infantile grandiosity into the conviction of one's real though limited strength: to be able to accept the paradox that everyone of us is the most important thing there is in the universe - and at the same time no more important than a fly or a blade of grass." (Fromm, 1955, p. 68)

With this definition, has any society ever produced many healthy people? Can any society, other than the messianic vision of the prophet Isaiah, achieve sanity?

The model of a sane society Fromm proposes is communitarian socialism. He quotes a description of Boimondeau, a cooperative watch factory in France as an ideal. According to this account, workers balanced work and education, collective and individual development. But when I tried to find out what happened to Boimondeau, I learned that the factory did not survive in the competitive marketplace. Like many other promising and shortlived cooperative enterprises, Boimondeau depended on an exceptional leader who left. This communitarian ideal remains theoretical. It is not a convincing solution.

Marketing Man

Is Fromm correct that modern industrial society forms an alienated social character? Is the prototypic modern individual a person who adapts to the market economy by making him/herself into a saleable commodity, thus becoming detached from authentic emotions and convictions? Is the modern person's goal nothing more elevated than success in the career market and the pleasure of continual consumption: having vs being? Does health require us to transform society and

transcend the social character?

I have used Fromm's method of social character investigation, the interpretive questionnaire, in rural and urban Mexico, the U.S., U.K, and Sweden. In all of these societies, there are significant variations in social character. Overall, the more that people leave village life and adapt to industrial society, the more abstract their language becomes, the more detached they are from direct emotion, and authentic relationships, and to some degree, dreams and the inner life. I say „to some degree“, because villagers are extremely conformist and fear even perceiving anything that is new and different. Just as the urban individual steeped in book learning loses the peasant's reliance on keen observation, so the industrial person's detachment and abstract thinking also allows greater flexibility, willingness to adapt to the new. Furthermore, rural people are more likely to fear the stranger and distrust those who do not share blood ties.

Within industrial society, the factory and construction workers and engineers I have interviewed market their skills, not their pleasing personalities. Recently, advances in production technology require both increased technical skill and greater cooperation with others at work, but the latter is a matter of listening to others and solving problems together, not selling oneself. Bureaucratic middle managers and professionals are the ones most forced to market themselves, and their overadaptation can cause symptoms of depression and self-disgust. These are also the people who are most likely to be victims of corporate „downsizing“ due to the drive for continual innovation and productivity caused by frantic global competition. While the most educated and technically competent are swept up in this vortex, people in rural villages and ghettos of prosperous cities struggle on the margins of the economy, within a hopeless culture of escapism and violence.

The description by Fromm and other intellectuals of the 50s (e.g. C. Wright Mills & William H. Whyte) of a complacent, conformist marketing society seems benign in the light of the last 30 years. They were writing during a brief historical period when U.S. industry controlled international markets and companies could afford to be stable bureaucracies, stocked



with middle managers.

Fromm uses the marketing character as a basis for his prophetic denunciation of modern society, but the question remains of how healthy any society can be and which societies allow the greatest opportunity for healthy development. Children have no alternative but to adapt to the family which is the major carrier of social character. Those with healthier families or exceptional genes may adapt with greater resiliency and independence as compared to those with less healthy families. What would it mean to transcend the social character?

The Productive Ideal

Fromm's model of the healthy individual who transcends and transforms society is the „productive character,“ the individuated person who loves and creates. Unlike his other character types - receptive, hoarding, exploitative and marketing - the productive character lacks clinical or historical grounding. It is a questionable ideal.

In our study of Mexican villagers, Fromm and I searched for the productive character, but did not find one. The closest we came were independent farmers who were more productive and loving than the average. In my studies of workers, engineers and managers. I have also found people who are more active and creative than the average, but they do not fit Fromm's description of the productive character. Furthermore, most of the more productive professionals are not loving. (Einstein is an example of an extremely productive thinker who was not loving.) Productiveness in work does not necessarily imply productiveness in caring about other people.

In *Social Character in a Mexican Village*, Fromm and I ended up contrasting productive and unproductive aspects of the social character. The productive peasant shares many of the adaptive independent, hoarding, family-oriented traits of the dominant social character, but is more individuated, more innovative and hard working while less suspicious and fatalistic. The productive peasant is more likely to relate to children in terms of furthering their develop-

ment rather than, as is the more common pattern, demanding strict obedience. However, this is far from Fromm's ideal of the productive person whose aim is to live life intensely, „to be fully born, to be fully awake.“ The more productive peasant must still adapt to a mode of work that requires hoarding traits common to peasants throughout the world.

In his earlier writing, inasmuch as Fromm describes a real life productive character, it is an unnamed creative artist. In later works, examples of productiveness are Zen masters and Master Eckhart, a medieval Christian mystic. In his search for the productive ideal, Fromm's prophetic voice suppresses his analysis of social character. The artist has been a romantic model for bourgeois society: the individual who resists pressures to conform and succeeds in setting his or her own terms of self expression which are ultimately accepted and appreciated by society. The artist shows qualities of craftsmanship, creativity, independence, and determination. However, many productive artists are not loving people (e.g. Monet, Picasso), and Fromm does not describe a single creative artist who fits his ideal. Furthermore, the very few artists who make a living from their work today are caught up in a marketing web of art dealers, changing fashion and intellectualized hype.

In terms of social character, the religious masters cited by Fromm should be viewed within the context of feudal society. Zen masters are unchallenged authorities who rule monasteries and dominate the emotional life of their disciples. Eckhart was head of German Dominicans, and his vow of celibacy freed him from the demands of family. Fromm himself was attracted to a semi feudal role as head of the Mexican Institute of Psychoanalysis during the 50s and 60s. There he personally analyzed the first generation of analysts, and was the unchallenged arbiter of disagreements among members of the society.

These feudal models will not inspire the children of the information age. To develop the modern social character in a productive direction, it is first essential to understand its positive potential.



The Two Voices in Fromm's Approach to Clinical Work

In his analytic voice, Fromm criticized Freud's patriarchal attitude as limiting the development of psychoanalysis as a science. He criticized Freud's use of the couch and the routine of analysis as bureaucratizing psychoanalysis. In contrast, Fromm attempted to create what he called a more „humanistic“ face-to-face encounter. Here the analytic and prophetic voices sometimes harmonized and sometimes were discordant.

Fromm's psychoanalytic technique was essentially different from Freud's psychic archeology. Like Ferenczi, Fromm emphasized the importance of experience rather than interpretation, and he believed the analyst must understand the patient by empathy as well as intellect, with the heart as well as the head. But unlike Ferenczi, he was not searching for childhood traumas, but rather present-day passions. Memory might serve to illuminate a pattern of behavior from childhood such as betrayal of one's ideals to gain approval from authorities. Fromm believed that what blocked development was not our memories but our choices, our irrational attempts to solve the human condition through such mechanisms as sadism, regression to the womb, or narcissistic invulnerability. His goal was not to heal a psychic wound, but to liberate, so that the patient could become free to make better choices.

Fromm believed that the psychoanalyst should be active and penetrating, bringing the session to life by demonstrating his own urgency to understand and grasp life fully. Here the prophetic voice sometimes over-whelmed analysis. Fromm became like a religious master who un-masks illusion and thus expands the limits of the social filter, dissolving resistances. By experiencing and confessing to one's unconscious impulses, the patient would gain the energy and strength to change his or her life, and to develop human capabilities for love and reason to the fullest. This is an unproven theory, and in practice, Fromm's technique sometimes resulted in a very different outcome.

Although Fromm's thesis shares Freud's conviction that the truth will set man free, it

moves in a different direction from Freud's emphasis on psychoanalysis as a process that patiently uncovers and interprets resistance in order to regain lost memories. Both Freud and Fromm define psychoanalysis as the art of making the unconscious conscious; both recognize that we resist knowing the truth and that resistances must be overcome. But their views of resistance are somewhat different. For Fromm, repression is a constantly recurring process. One resists perceiving and knowing out of fear of seeing more than society allows or because the truth would force one to experience one's irrationality or powerlessness. The pattern of repression set in childhood is like the refusal to see that the emperor has no clothes. The analyst is the fearless master who has gone further and deeper beyond convention and into his own irrationality. His attitude models productiveness and mature spontaneity, free of illusion. In contrast, Freud defines resistance more narrowly. Repressed, unconscious wishes to maintain infantile sexual fantasies, and the childhood fear of being punished (castration) because of one's libidinal impulses, act as resistances to memory. These repressions bind energy into neurotic patterns.

For Freud, the key to analyzing and overcoming resistance is transference. The patient directs or transfers desire and fear onto the analyst who becomes a substitute for figures of the past. Resistance will be overcome only if the „acting out“ within analysis is interpreted and transformed into emotionally charged memory which can be „worked through“ and reintegrated into a more mature psyche. The working through frees the blocked energy of repressed wishes and defenses. It allows the patient to give up infantile objects and desires and discover better ways to satisfy needs. In this framework, if the analyst dramatically unmasks truth, this may strengthen the transference resistance, either because the patient denies unbearable feelings or adopts another defense, such as passive acceptance. Overcoming this resistance requires patiently analyzing the various forms it takes.

Fromm proposes a broader concept of transference. The analyst represents infantile authority: the mother who solves all of life's problems or the father who is never satisfied with his



son's achievement. Instead of facing reality independently, the patient continues to transfer interpersonal struggles and wishes. While this aspect of transference is not contradictory to Freud's views (in *The Future Of An Illusion*, he describes religion in these terms), Fromm's approach in fact tended to strengthen this type of transference and with it the patient's resistance to remembering. He would focus on feelings about the analyst in the here and now and the function they served. His urgency of getting to the truth short circuited the process of working through the transferential feelings and their origins.

Although Fromm criticized Freud as too much the bourgeois patriarch and showed how this limited his insights, Freud's approach to technique can be more democratic than Fromm's, especially if the Freudian analyst does not force fit the patient into a formula. To be sure, Freud advocated rules in the doctor-patient relationship, in part to protect himself. These are followed bureaucratically by many analysts. An example is that the patient lies on a couch and cannot see the analyst. Freud did not like to be stared at all day. However, Fromm's piercing blue eyes could and sometimes did freeze the patient, and his intensity which could make one feel more alive could also provoke defensive reactions. Freud did not describe the analyst as guru or model, and his own self-analysis showed him as all too human. He saw the analyst as a professional with technical training who, in addition, should have a radical love of truth, a broad education in the arts and sciences, and knowledge of his own unconscious. The goal for analysis was not to become a productive person, but to be liberated from crippling neurosis.

Freud cautioned against expecting too much from a neurotic who has been cured. In his prophetic voice, Fromm suggested that neurotics are humanly healthier than those with the dominant social character or socially patterned defect who have adapted to a sick society and are alienated from themselves. The Frommian neurosis as described in *The Sane Society*, results from incomplete rebellion against constricting authority and lack of confidence or courage to follow one's insights, to take one's dreams seri-

ously.

A number of narcissistic patients with grandiose ideals for themselves and society were attracted to Fromm's therapy. But the Frommian approach both increased transference resistances and the patient's sense of guilt about unworthiness, unproductiveness, and dependency. Patients compared themselves to the „productive“ analyst, and instead of remembering and experiencing childlike drives, humiliations, rages, and fears as a means to mastering them and losing the need for narcissistic solutions, they attempted to resolve conflicts by becoming ideal persons, like the master. In so doing, patients fearing disapproval by the master, again submitted to authority and repressed sexual or angry impulses directed against the parent. Frommian disciples identified with the master and self-righteously directed anger and contempt at others who were not good Frommians. This became a pattern among Fromm's disciples at the Mexican Institute.

Thus, Fromm's humanistic voice which sought to correct the more impersonal, obsessional and dogmatic approach of the early Freudians was never fully heard. The analyst-religious master's prescription for productive development blocked patients from discovering their own avenues for development.

The Productive Ideal and Religious Conversion

In his later works, the models of productiveness became more and more religious, closer to Zen enlightenment or the ideal of non-deistic cosmic unity than to the psychoanalytic aim of lifting infantile repressions and expanding the realm of ego in place of id. William James' observations, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), can help us to view Fromm from the perspective of religious thinking. James writes that both Buddhism and Christianity are religions of deliverance which preach that „man must die to an unreal life before he can be born into the real life“ (p. 165). He also proposes that the full significance of these religions appeals to a particular type of person who may develop an approach to life similar to Fromm's productive ideal.



James described and contrasted three personality types. The „healthy minded“ are those with a „harmonious“ personality. They tend to be upbeat and adapted to society. James used the term *healthy* in a rather ironic way. The healthy minded avoid or repress unpleasant perceptions. They have little tolerance for the second type, the „morbid minded“ who always see the downside of life. Acutely sensitive to painful realities, the morbid minded must struggle with depression and despair. A third type, which is closer to the morbid-minded, suffer from a „discordant“ personality. They struggle with two selves, ideal and actual. Like Saint Augustine and other religious figures, they search restlessly for „the truth“ until through self-analysis and religious discipline, they are reborn with „a new zest which adds itself like a gift to life, and takes the form either of lyrical enchantment or of appeal to earnestness and heroism.“ The result of being reborn is similar to Fromm’s ideal.

Fromm had this type of discordant personality; he told me that he continually struggled with irrational impulses. Like Augustine’s wrestling with his sins and temptations, Fromm used analysis of both himself and his disciples to increase awareness of the split between ideal and actual selves, to experience regressive drives and to frustrate rather than repress them, while at the same time strengthening productive needs.

Like Saint Augustine, Fromm came to believe that health as defined by the productive character is not gained merely by insight or even experiencing what has been repressed. This definition of health requires spiritual development achieved through a courageous practice of life that frustrates greed and overcomes egoism through meditation and service.

Fromm was deeply religious but did not believe in God. Yet, one can argue that his concept of the cosmos, like that of Spinoza, is a non-anthropomorphic view of God, consistent with Jewish tradition. (When I said this to him, he did not object but said that the only absolutely essential commandment for a Jew was that which forbids all idolatry.) In *You Shall Be As Gods*, he describes the Bible as evolving the concept of God from a tribal deity to the unknowable God of Moses and the prophets. This God who cannot be made into an idol of any

kind first establishes the law and then demands that the people transform themselves according to a messianic vision of harmony and justice. Fromm was attracted to Buddhism, because it did not require belief in God but was based on a rational analysis of overcoming pain and suffering by living a good life. Yet, the appeal of the Jewish tradition, especially chasidism with its animation and joyful music continually called him back. (He often hummed chasidic music, interspersed with Beethoven and other German classics.)

Perhaps, the most important aspect of religion for Fromm personally was the *hope* it offered. He was not a Christian, because he did not find hope in a life to come. Hope was to be found in two ways. One was the coming of the messianic age, which according to Jewish tradition could happen anytime the world was ready. The other source of hope was a mystical unity with the cosmos, a transcendence of life that would overcome the fear of death.

If one does not believe in an afterlife or reincarnation, there are two main ways to grapple with the fear of death. One is regression to the „oceanic feeling“ of infantile pre-conscious unity with the mother. This is the appeal of alcohol and drugs. The other is to overcome one’s egoism and experience the mystical sense of fully awakened, life loving unity with nature. In this regard, Fromm practiced Zen meditation, and, in his 70s, he showed me how he also „practiced“ dying, by lying on the floor and pretending to give up the ghost while feeling this oneness.

The source of Fromm’s prophetic voice was his search for hope, not only for himself but for humanity. In his 50s, when he wrote *The Sane Society*, hope sprang mainly from his messianic drive to save the world, and this was also the reason why he so admired Karl Marx. In this context, the productive orientation is that of the messianic revolutionary.

In his late years, although Fromm did not lose his messianic hope, he became increasingly disappointed with the revolutionaries of the 60s, the failure of Eugene McCarthy to lead a movement with him in the U.S. and the decline of Marxist humanism in Eastern Europe. In his final work, *To Have Or to Be?*, his hope shifted,



and the model of the productive person became less the messianic revolutionary and more the biophilic mystic.

The Analytic Voice

For Fromm to write a book on technique that truly harmonized the two voices, he would have had to describe a systematic approach to understanding a patient. He would have had to critique Freud's papers on technique in the careful way he analyzed Freud's theory of aggression in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*. If he had attempted this, he might have recognized what was valuable in Freud's strategy, and he might have developed a more differentiated approach to therapy and analysis. Even then, I believe he would still have had difficulty in resolving the contradiction between his discussion of analysis as a more democratic, humanistic encounter and his attitude of the omniscient master. In my experience, Fromm was penetrating and compassionate but not particularly empathic. Indeed, while his writings on humanistic analysis leave the impression that a loving, productive analyst will be able to know patients from the inside by empathizing or listening to them in a way a Zen master listens to all of nature, his practice was to use the interview and sometimes projective tests as x-rays of the psyche.

When Fromm focussed on concrete cases as a teacher, he was closer to Freud, minus libido theory, than to either Ferenczi or Zen Buddhism. He was at his most analytic when he interpreted social character from an interview or questionnaire and when he described psychoanalytic diagnosis. I refer to notes from a seminar on diagnosis he gave in 1963 to our class at the Mexican Institute.

The analyst should determine first, the symptoms, goals and pathology of the patient. What is the type and the degree of pathology, e.g. regressive symbiosis, narcissism, and/or destructiveness? Fromm advised that most conflicts presented by the patient are screens. The analyst cannot help the patient decide whether or not to get divorced or leave a job. These hide the deeper conflicts, which Fromm sometimes called

the secret plot. An example is Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*: the modern alienated man who claims he wants to be free and express himself but really wants to satisfy all his greedy impulses and then complains that he has no self, that he is nothing and nobody.

The prognosis is better if the patient's goal is to achieve health in terms of increased capability for freedom and loving relationships, rather than getting help to solve a specific problem which may be merely a symptom of the failure to maintain the cover story.

Second, the analyst should determine the strength of the resistance. He suggested a test of telling the patient something which appears repressed, indicated by a slip of the tongue, a contradiction, or a dream. If there is a positive reaction, the prognosis is better. If there is anger or the patient doesn't hear, the prognosis is very bad. Fromm considered a sense of humor the best indication of a positive prognosis. Lack of it was an indication of „grave narcissism“. Humor is the emotional side of reason, the emotional sense of reality. Fromm himself had a keen sense of humor with a taste for the sardonic. He loved good jokes.

Third, the capacity for insight is another indication of good or bad prognosis. The analyst should make small tests, such as „You complain about your wife. Perhaps you are afraid of her.“ It is a bad sign if the patient either denies an interpretation too quickly or submissively agrees to everything the analyst suggests.

Fourth, what is the degree of vital energy? Is the patient capable of waking up? A person can be quite crazy, yet have the vitality essential for transformation.

At this time, Fromm was no longer claiming that neurotics were healthier than normal people. However, he did maintain that some patients with a severe psychopathology had a better prognosis than those with milder pathology. The key diagnostic factor was the patient's creative potential or ability to struggle against the pathology.

Fifth, has the patient shown responsibility and activity during his or her life? Fromm contrasted obsessive responsibility with the ability to respond to challenges. If the patient always escapes with a magical, irresponsible flight,



analysis is not impossible, but extremely difficult.

Sixth, is there a sense of integrity? This refers to the difference between a neurotic and psychopathic personality. Does the patient accept a truth once experienced? Or is there a quality of bad faith, wiggling away from inconvenient truths, a bad sign for prognosis.

Fromm advised using the first hour to ask why the patient had come and to ask for a history, noting what was said, what was left out, and the feelings associated with events. He suggested asking for two or three dreams, especially dreams that are repeated and three memories of infancy (a technique first suggested by A. Adler). In the second hour, he advised testing resistance and insight, then writing out a summary of the diagnosis and a prediction of how long treatment should take.

In the middle 60s, Fromm began to send me his own patients for Rorschach tests which he believed helped significantly in providing a better diagnosis, including both psychopathology and the strength of biophilic tendencies. In the later 60s, Fromm emphasized the need for the analyst to understand patients within their particular cultural context. Our intensive study of Mexican social character revealed the importance of culture, class, and mode of production on the formation of emotional attitudes. (e.g. the role of the mother in Mexican culture). Fromm came to believe that 50 percent of an individual's behavior resulted from social character, 25 percent from constitutional or genetic factors and only 25 percent from early experiences. This implied different expectations and approaches with different social character types. For example, middle class Mexican patients tended to be in awe of authority and needed encouragement to express critical views, while patients from the same class in the U.S. are skeptical about authority in general. In Mexico, the analyst needs first to overcome the fear of authority, while in the U.S., it may be necessary to demonstrate that rational authority can exist.

Fromm was impressed by the evidence of psychological well being from the orphanage, *Our Little Brothers and Sisters (Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos)*, founded by Father William Wasson in 1955 in Cuernavaca. In a study I directed with a group of Mexican analysts, we

found that orphans who had suffered extreme psychic trauma became productive, remarkably happy children after an average of two years in an environment which balanced security, taking responsibility, sharing, and educational opportunity. Father Wasson guaranteed that the children would never have to leave their new family. (Incidentally, he made a rule that he would take all siblings from a family, but would not accept a child if the mother was living, since in that case, the Mexican child would never fully join the new family. This was not the case for the father.) He preached that dwelling on one's misfortunes made one forever a self-pitying victim. Children were encouraged to take advantage of their opportunities for learning and to help each other. Everyone shared in the work, including farming. For Fromm, the positive results achieved at the orphanage reinforced his view that a good community can transform emotionally damaged people. He contrasted the orphanage to psychotherapies which by focusing on childhood hurts and traumas, strengthened narcissistic self preoccupation and resulted in a chronic feeling of resentment and entitlement.

In our discussions together during the late 60s as we wrote *Social Character in a Mexican Village*, we agreed that severe emotional disorders were not cured solely by analysis. This is especially true if the patient comes from a culture of poverty and hopelessness. Without a sense of possibility, the patient lacks the self confidence and hope to face crippling feelings and impulses. Even for some patients from more advantaged backgrounds, a strategy of psychoanalysis should focus on understanding and encouraging the patient to strengthen creative potentials before probing for pathology.

Fromm's Contribution

Fromm's contribution to psychoanalysis and social science remains to be developed further. He provides us with theory and methods to understand health and illness as concepts that do not refer to the individual alone, but also to the relationships of the individual to others and to social institutions. „I am myself and my circum-



stances,“ Fromm would quote Ortega y Gasset. „And if I do not save my circumstances, I cannot save myself.“

To take Fromm seriously, to enter into a dialogue with him is to accept the challenge of taking responsibility of who I want to be as opposed to what I want to have. But it also means examining his assumptions about human nature, what it is possible for people to achieve, and what are the best ways to achieve our goals.

Both Fromm’s sane society and psychoanalytic technique are founded on questionable assumptions about human nature. Isaiah Berlin in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* has criticized utopian philosophers from Plato to Marx for believing that ‘virtue is knowledge’, that to know what is truly good for oneself and others is enough to cause rational behavior. Berlin points out that good values such as equality and freedom, or Christian love and republican vigilance against oppression, may be incompatible. Furthermore, different groups have different ways of structuring human needs. He writes:

„Perhaps, the best that one can do is to try to promote some kind of equilibrium, necessarily unstable, between the different aspirations of differing groups of human beings - at the very least to prevent them from attempting to exterminate each other, and, so far as possible, to prevent them from hurting each other - and to promote the maximum practical degree of sympathy and understanding, never likely to be complete, between them.“ Berlin goes on to say that „Immanuel Kant, a man very remote from irrationalism, once observed that ‘Out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made.’ And for that reason no perfect solution is, not merely in practice, but in principle, possible in human affairs, and any determined effort to produce it is likely to lead to suffering, disillusionment and failure.“ (pp.47-48)

Speaking in his prophetic voice, Fromm underestimated the need for individuals to adapt to a society before attempting to transform it. The work of Jean Piaget describes the stages of moral development and the social interaction essential to achieve them. It is through institu-

tions such as family and schools, and organizations (political, legal and economic) that we create health, wealth, and good relationships. In an increasingly complex, technology based society, improving these institutions and organizations requires expert knowledge combined with pragmatic idealism and supportive colleagues. It can be slow and arduous work. There will always be conflicts of different interests that must be negotiated. There is no dramatic cultural transformation that will dissolve psychopathology, create harmony, and make a society sane.

This is not a program to inspire the young who carry banners in parades. Nor will it sell many books. I was once interviewed by a French journalist who said, „Dr Maccoby, If I understand you correctly, you are saying that with great dedication and courage, one can succeed in taking small steps to improve the world. That view will appeal to no one, neither those on the left or the right.“ Yet, in practice, productive hope is generated when people work together to protect civilization and to push forward the envelope of their culture, even a little bit. They are the responsible parents, dedicated teachers, community volunteers, union organizers, idealistic researchers and environmental activists. Perhaps there are no sane societies, but there are saner societies or sane enough societies that allow individuals to join together to develop themselves and their culture.

To conclude these observations on Fromm’s two voices, there are perhaps relatively few discordant personalities, in James’ sense, who like Fromm are drawn to religious conversion and mystical unity. But there are many of the would-be healthy minded who feel confused about life, who are not sick but who seek happiness in the wrong places and yearn for deeper understanding of themselves. The liberation of women, economic and emotional, from male domination makes it essential that people learn to love, otherwise the family is likely to disintegrate. For the children of the post modern world, especially those who have already achieved the material goals of the 18th century Enlightenment, Fromm can be a guide who integrates the humanistic lessons of religion, literature, and philosophy with the discoveries of psychoanalysis. Even when he speaks in his analytic voice, the



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prophetic demands are not silent. He directs us to learn the language of the unconscious and at the same time evaluate our actions and institutions in terms of whether or not they stimulate us to wake up and act according to reason, whether or not they move us and our culture toward community rather than tribalism. Even if one does not believe it is possible to create utopia, it is possible for many of us to develop our productive capabilities of love and reason. By engaging in a serious dialogue with Erich Fromm, we expand our awareness of the choices, sharpen our concepts and deepen our sense of meaning.

As a student of Fromm, I believe the task remains of integrating the analytic and the prophetic voices, the understanding of what is and what can be with a compelling vision of what

ought to be in order to create a better life and a more humane world.

Reading suggested by the author

Erich Fromm:

Escape From Freedom. New York: Rinehart: 1941.

The Sane Society. New York: Rinehart, 1955.

You Shall Be As Gods. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966.

The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness. New York: Harper and Row, 1970.

To Have Or To Be? New York: Harper and Row, 1976.

Fromm, Erich, and Michael Maccoby, Social Character in a Mexican Village. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: 1970.

Maccoby, Michael, The Gamesman. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976.