

CHAPTER 90

THE ROLE OF
IMMEDIATE EXPERIENCE
FOR DYNAMIC PSYCHIATRY
A. The Sense of Immediacy in Fromm's
Conceptions

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS SECTION is to present and explore the role of immediate experience, interpreted by some as the mystical trend in Fromm's humanistic psychoanalytic orientation. There is no question that the mystical trend in philosophy has always been important for Fromm's theoretical position as well as for his therapeutic activities. I would like to examine Fromm's present views with this perspective in mind.

Fromm has experienced a change in himself since approximately 1954, and this change has affected his conception of psychoanalysis and his way of doing therapy. He sees the change in himself as qualitative, whereas I see it as quantitative. Different perspectives, how-

ever, have not led to significant discrepancies in the end product. To contrast his present position with his previous one, he has now a more focused and more maturely developed conviction concerning what he considers the essence of psychoanalysis—that psychoanalysis shall penetrate as deeply and as speedily as possible to the very core of the patient's life, to locate his tenaciously held, unreal, unconscious solution to his separateness, to waste no time on the consequences of his problem and on his adjustments, but to force him to face his resistances and give no quarter. This process is carried out in a setting where the analyst is his full self with the patient. The analyst is not waiting, figuring things out, cau-



tiously weighing what the patient can tolerate because, Fromm regretfully asserts, most delays are in the service of the therapist's anxiety anyway. The therapist should reveal, by his own genuine interest, dedication, openness, and true participation, that there is an urgency to grasp life, to live, to search, and to dare uncertainty. Fromm rejects the notion that the analyst must be the passive one. This does not discard the precious ability to listen with all one's powers, but passivity can be exploitive when it merely serves to disguise the analyst's own unaliveness.

Fromm's conception of the analyst's role is not something to be prescribed nor to be acquired but something *to be*. Here we are entering what has been called the mystical tradition. Admittedly, a simple, uncontroversial definition of mysticism is extremely difficult, because the concept refers primarily to man's way of grasping nature as a total experience. Mystical experience consists in experiencing the "here and now" in its immediacy where rational, objective, discursive elements are subordinated to intuitive, nondiscursive, non-analytic elements. Mysticism, however, does not repudiate the unconscious cognitive components in the total perceptive encounter with reality. It is opposed to the process whereby one simply uses reason to the exclusion of the other qualities in man's total self which participate in understanding what goes on around him. Mysticism attempts to avoid duality. It seeks the experience of oneness. Mysticism is realistic, involving the totality of the person's encounter with the world, although certain traditions in mysticism are far removed from this description. These traditions advocate quietism, self-abnegation, and denial of reason and the senses. They are designed to cut one off from the world. But, as Inge indicated in his Bampton Lectures at Oxford in 1899, mysticism need not even be theologically oriented; it is a philosophical position that historically appears on the scene as an expression of man's deep opposition to dogma and ritualization. Fromm feels that one of the most serious dangers to the very life of psychoanalysis is the growing dogma and ritual. Furthermore, Inge goes on, to document the fact that his

study of the lives of the great mystics clearly showed that these men were preponderantly active, dedicated, effective people. They were not withdrawn, self-absorbed dreamers. It is certainly evident that Zen Buddhism also is neither quietistic, supernatural, nor given to vagaries, but is alive, earthy, and realistic in its profound simplicity. It is these very qualities which make for Fromm's deep sympathy for Zen Buddhism.

Perhaps there are some who believe that Fromm's position is nonscientific, that he has great intuitive gifts but that he has been veering away from scientific methodology. He is admittedly a critical thinker; he has always regarded expertness, craftsmanship, and skill as essential requirements of the therapist. Still one could say that, despite his rational powers and his advocacy of expertness, craftsmanship, and skill, his outlook is not necessarily in the tradition of science, because all these qualities may actually be part of the artist's equipment. I believe the answer lies in discerning where Fromm has concentrated his major attention.

In the technical sense, that is, in the treatment situation, Fromm's methods are rigorous, penetrating, searching, and critical. This we may aptly label as scientific behavior. In contrast to Sullivan, whose major interest was in process, Fromm has not been occupied in this direction, but he does not repudiate or discredit the study of process. In the big picture, however, his interest is metaphysical. Fromm attacks the tendency to divorce one's reason from one's total self. He believes that to neglect the other avenues of man's experience leads one to construct a lifeless facsimile of reality.

Before expanding on Fromm's analytic philosophy I would like to make a general statement about his concept of man, a concept which he has entertained from his earliest years in psychoanalysis. It is the view that man must be at the center of his own life. He must make himself the most serious object of his experience. Although it could have been inferred that Fromm considered man responsible for his life, today his position on this point is explicit and unshakeable. He holds that man can be saved only by himself and through no other agency.

Nor can he rely on idolatry, no matter how well disguised, whether it be in God, the experts, mother, or any of the cultural obeisances organized around security, or, for that matter, any ideological or emotional devices which tempt, dissuade, or relieve him from this obligation to himself. Man is responsible for his own life.

By this, one may be led to suspect that there is no place for therapeutic intervention. To indicate that man is responsible for himself, however, does not mean that some other agency may not facilitate the process of dealing with oneself. It means that no one can take over the life of some one else. Obviously, the role of therapy is designed to illuminate the problem of man, to create a climate whereby man comes into closer touch with himself and with reality.

What is the aim of analysis, or more precisely, what is the core problem in analysis? In principle, the aim of analysis is to understand the nature of man in health and in illness. To answer this question, we could ask a further question—what are the peculiarities of human existence? Are there peculiarities of human existence which separate man from the rest of the animal kingdom? Fromm sees man's basic problem as an existential one which can be expressed as follows: Man is part of nature, but he transcends nature because of the fact of his self-awareness, his imaginative capacities, and his reason. The fact of his being a part of nature but still transcending nature results in a basic existential dichotomy. He is no longer like the rest of the animal world in its harmonious integration with nature. Where animals rely, so to speak, on complex instinctual patterns for living, man is unable to do so. He is separated from nature by the aforementioned attributes, and therefore life poses a question for him, namely, how to live. This is a question which he can never escape. What does this self-awareness, imaginative capacity, and reason do to man? In the first place it gives him a strong sense of feeling alone. The whole world is, so to speak, an object to him. Therefore he feels powerless and lost. It is as if he could say, "Here I am and there is the world, and I am alone." Because this feeling

of aloneness is unbearable, he is forced to relate himself. Now the success and degree of his relatedness will determine whether he dies or whether he becomes psychotic, neurotic, or healthy. In other words, man has certain needs which stem from the conditions of his existence. Thus, to understand man, one must analyze what these needs are which arise out of human existence.

Fromm has discussed these particular needs very carefully in Chap. III of *The Sane Society*, that is, that man has to relate; that man has to be creative, otherwise he becomes destructive; that man has to have some rootedness, but that this rootedness must resolve regressive incestuous choice; that man must develop his individuality in contrast to being the unidentifiable conformist; and that man must develop his reason in order to deal with the puzzling contradictory phenomena which surround him and which he must attempt to grasp realistically. In Fromm's analytic position the problem of relatedness is crucial. The relatedness has to be such that one maintains one's separateness and integrity and this is actually done in love. All other types of relatedness do not permit the maintenance of one's separateness. In the sadomasochistic solution there is a symbiotic type of relatedness in which one invades the other person's life or is invaded by someone else. Thus symbiosis satisfies the need for relatedness but violates the need for separateness and freedom.

Growth for the individual, then, consists in his developing an active, responsive way of life where the many uncertainties which exist in life can be faced and dealt with. It is true that man's birth forces him to be dependent and that this dependence in a realistic sense operates for a relatively long time, certainly at least in comparison to what one sees in the animal kingdom. The individual is confronted, however, with a choice to live or to die. There are in every person the contradictory tendencies to move on, to stay where one is, and to return to safety and certainty. We still do not understand altogether what determines the choice of living or dying. Constitutional factors, Fromm believes, may have a strong bearing on the outcome. Social and environmental factors are



also of great importance. In other words, the significant people in our life undoubtedly modify the growing picture of man. But Fromm has tended more recently to lay much less stress on the effects of other individuals on the patient. He has come to this position through his clinical experience because he has observed that, to put it in the simple extreme, some individuals, growing up in what seem to be very favorable circumstances, develop crippling difficulties in living, whereas others, growing up in quite adverse circumstances, may approach life with a sense of courage and integrity. An emphasis on the responsibility of others to the patient is often wittingly and unwittingly utilized by the patient to disown responsibility for his own life. Furthermore, Fromm believes that the therapist can easily luxuriate in the misleading and inappropriate role of the one ideal parent figure.

Fromm describes loosely two categories of patients. There are those who have significant difficulty with functioning, who are overwhelmed by symptoms and for whom relief is essential to make them a going concern. In this category the goals of therapy are often modest. In the second category, perhaps a much more preponderant one for many of us, there are those who formulate their illness in terms of unaliveness or lack of well-being. This lack of well-being may be in several areas of living. Yet these people manage, in some way, with their compromises and evasions. Fromm has been primarily concerned with this latter category, and his writings dealing with the achievement of productive orientation are aimed particularly in this direction. It is as if these people are not fully alive, as if their total personalities were not functioning. They are not fully responsive and not fully aware.

Fromm has written nothing explicit on the technique of therapy. I believe that there is an explanation for this which is rooted in Fromm's whole approach to human beings. It is not so much that he believes there is no science to the therapeutic enterprise but rather that much of what transpires is extremely difficult to formulate, and that the many indefinable nuances of the analytic situation have so far not lent themselves to explicit verbaliza-

tion. There is no doubt, however, that he regards the doctor-patient relationship as crucial to whatever can occur in the therapeutic enterprise. He is of the opinion that one must be aware of the limitless indefinable qualities of the other person. It is somewhat similar to an artistic experience. This experience, however, is supposed not to be contaminated by parataxic distortions where we need something from the patient, whether it is that he get well or whatever. He approaches the patient with his eyes open, with his heart open, with his whole self. In this way there is the experience of being united, and yet one has one's separateness. It is an attitude of "I am," not "I have." In the "I am" attitude there is nothing to lose, so there is nothing to fear. In the "I have" attitude, I hold on and am anxious because I can lose something. By being one's full self before the patient, one is less likely to need the patient in any restricted sense.

What I have described I consider to be the mystical aspect of Fromm's engagement in the analytic atmosphere. It is the sense of the whole self being used, being fully aware, fully alert. He does not use his mind as something separate from his total self. He is not figuring things out. He uses, so to speak, his scientific eye to know what is going on, to keep a perspective, but he helps the person to emerge by his own aliveness, by his own daring to know and to feel. He believes it is imperative that the patient be confronted as early as possible with the fact of the patient's decision to live or to die. There should be a feeling of urgency to live. The analyst has to identify carefully the point in his life at which the patient is stuck in a rut, and he must differentiate between the secondary consequences of the basic difficulties so that he does not grapple with the consequences of a problem but rather with the problem itself. He sees the individual as involved in what amounts to a religious dedication to resolve the feeling of separateness or aloneness. The patient himself may not be aware of the intensity and importance of the particular pattern of resolution through which he is living. The analyst must grasp this motif and bring it fully and richly to the patient's attention. These false solutions to the life



problem may consist in the desire to be at mother's breast, at mother's hand, on mother's lap, or under mother's protection, or to submit to father's command. These false solutions must be brought powerfully into focus because they prevent any real relatedness to the world, to people, to work, and to love. All life's energy is centered around nourishing the false solutions—all activity is organized to foster the idolatrous goals. The therapist must himself strive to achieve the very goals that represent the highest potential for himself. Only if the analyst sets himself the task of being fully responsive and aware can he genuinely face the patient's false solutions constructively, unhy-pocritically, and hopefully.

Fromm realizes he is talking about an ideal for himself and for all of us. He knows that we all fall short, but that does not mean that we become cynics, that we take the easy path.

If we have no responsibility to live, we cannot deal with the lives of others.

A comment on the word "religious" is indicated. I use the word to connote the timeless, tenacious, all-consuming quality of every man's attempted solution to separateness. Furthermore, the word "religion" implies, if I understand Fromm correctly, a universal unconscious concern that we have with the question of our own existence. This concern with our own existence need not be explicit. The great world religions represent and express man's public concern with his existence.

The main strength of Fromm's whole position, as I see it, is that he is able to respond fully to the totality of the person before him and that he can convey important human truths to the patient; in other words, that he can transmit to his patient a vision of what life could be.