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Erich Fromm: Clinician and Social Philosopher¹

IN THIS PRESENTATION, I WISH to delineate what I see as Erich Fromm's radical contribution to understanding man—the human animal who, by the nature of his existence, must make decisions and the choice whether to be genuinely alive or to stagnate. By combining a clinical wisdom secured through almost 50 years of intensive psychoanalytic experience with a life-long devotion to humanistic studies, Fromm (1947) has fashioned a conceptual formulation of man's nature which is unique and classical in its vigor and simplicity.

The major thrust of Fromm's theoretical view of man is that man must transform his life experience to bring himself into life—that adaptive modifications of personality are, in truth, not sufficient to accomplish this serious task. Although not clearly acknowledged, man's search for relatedness and identity comprises the bed-rock of human existence. The biological condition of man provides inadequate instinctive determination for this search. The evolutionary emergence of the specifically human phenomenon, self-awareness, forces on man an awesome sense of separateness. Man is inescapably compelled to find a solution to the central question posed by life—that is, how to transcend his separateness and relate himself to his world. Fromm delineates two contrasting modes of relatedness: regression to earlier and often archaic forms of relatedness, or to hope-oriented, affirmative responses in the direction of becoming fully human through developing one's creativity, productivity, and ability to love. Each of us has the potential for the most archaic as well as the most progressive solutions.

The different solutions man finds to this human condition are

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the many expressions of human nature. The essence of man's nature is not identical with any of these solutions but consists in the *existential* contradiction in man's biological constitution. This contradiction, which in itself is not a moral issue, is common to all men, biologically as well as psychologically. It gives rise to certain imperative needs: there is a need for the experience of identity together with a need for a frame of orientation, a picture of his world and of his society in which he can locate himself and which makes sense of his life.

Character structure, in the dynamic sense, serves this purpose. It is not innate as far as its contents are concerned, but is nevertheless determined by man's biological needs (which are by no means only instinctual) and by the conditions of nature under which he has to survive. In "Man For Himself", Fromm (1947) has delineated a set of character orientations which stress the processes of socialization and the character structure. He describes the Productive Orientation and the four forms of Unproductive Orientation: the *receptive*, the *exploitative*, the *hoarding*, and the *marketing* types of orientation. Obviously, these forms of orientation need not occur in pure culture, nor does one orientation per force exclude the penetrance of the productive orientation.

The Receptive Orientation

In the receptive orientation, the prevailing trend is characterized by the search for support from outside sources. These persons must derive satisfactions, affirmation, affection and knowledge of the world through the mediation of others. They are for the most part unmindful of their minimal contribution to the experience of loving since their goal is that of being loved. They tend to panicky feelings when they are not demonstrably supported by the love, guidance, and decision-making of others. The sense of emptiness can be staved off so long as they are steadily supplied by outside agencies. Their loyalty and gratitude are evident yet are contaminated by fears of loss, so that the inner conviction of integrity is shaky. By their dependence on authorities for advice of every kind, they entitle themselves to disown making the crucial decisions for which only they alone can be responsible. As Fromm indicates, however, these persons show warmth, friendliness and helpfulness; they can enjoy life. They are not lacking in optimism but their

security is easily undermined when they are deprived of outside nurturing.

The Exploitative Orientation

In the exploitative orientation, Fromm sees a similarity with and difference from the receptive orientation. The similarity is that neither orientation assumes an inner enrichment; the difference is that the receptive person is always waiting for “gifts” from others while the exploitative person “succeeds” only when he can grab off, either literally or by some stratagem, something that belongs to another. The exploitative persons are not necessarily untalented but they prefer what someone else has. They are often only attracted to persons who are attached to someone else. Stealing ideas, plagiarism, envy and jealousy comprise leading trends in their orientation. Not infrequently their conquests, whether material or spiritual, are soon indifferently discarded. Hostility and manipulation color their attack on life.

The Hoarding Orientation

In the hoarding orientation, there is little faith in the value of anything new that can be gotten from the outside world. Saving, collecting and hoarding are the central security devices of these persons. Parting with things and with money can elicit intense distress. Miserliness comprises the world of their feelings and thoughts. If they become involved in loving, they convert the loved one into a possession. It is not obvious to the outside observer that a real person is actually being loved by a hoarder. Their expression of loving is sentimental and remote—suggesting an affect belonging to long ago and far away. Their thinking can be accurate and reliable but uncreative and unimaginative, therefore nothing productive seems to issue out of the efforts. It is as if originality would be an exsanguinating experience. The classically described orderliness, cleanliness and pedantry protect against intrusion by the threatening outside world. These persons are constantly fearing starvation and thus deprive themselves and others of all forms of giving. They have no faith in “the self-replenishing function of all living substance and that activity and the use of one’s powers increase strength while stagnation paralyzes; to them, death and destruction have more reality than life and growth.”



The Marketing Orientation

The marketing orientation, the dominant orientation in the modern era, requires for its understanding a grasp of the economic function of the market in modern society since the market place is not only analogous to this character orientation but forms the basis and main condition for the development of this orientation in modern man. "The (modern) market concept of value, the emphasis on exchange value rather than on use value has led to a similar concept of value with regard to people and particularly to oneself. The character orientation which is rooted in the experience of oneself as a commodity and of one's value as exchange value (Fromm) calls the marketing orientation." Persons and commodities are offered for sale. Skill and certain other human qualities are prerequisites for success yet the merchandising of personality plays the more decisive role. The insecurity fostered by such a value system is overwhelming, when the vicissitudes of the market place determine man's worth. As Fromm (1947) states, "The mature and productive individual derives his feeling of identity from the experience of himself as the agent who is one with his powers." Since man, in the marketing orientation, must encounter his own powers as commodities alienated from himself, his identity and self-esteem cease to exist. He can only find self-acceptance when the opinion of him by others is affirmative. In this mode all of us become commodities. All modes of human experience, feeling and thinking become degraded. The capacity for speedy mental adaptation to a given situation is more highly prized than the capacity for reason and understanding.

The character of human relationships become trivialized and superficial. One may hope to overcome this state by discovering depth and intensity of feeling in individual love. Here Fromm's comment is: "... love for one person and love for one's neighbor are indivisible; in any given culture, love relationships are only a more intense expression of the relatedness to man prevalent in that culture."

Fromm has not only not neglected to pay serious attention to the impact of the social conditions on human experience, but has striven to decipher the powerful consequences of the interaction. In our volume, "In the Name of Life", essays in honor of Erich Fromm, Landis and I (1971) have discussed this topic as follows:

In his studies of the ways in which society affects the answers man finds to the questions posed by life, Fromm has described in considerable detail how social patterns may bend man against his real human interests. He observed how significant characteristics and behavior patterns of major importance to a nation or class cluster to form what he called 'the social character'. Internalized and shared by most of the members of society, the social character—whose positive and negative aspects depend upon the particular society—shapes action and thought so that people want to do what they have to do to perpetuate the particular society or class. In addition, social character structure not only enables man to make quasi-automatic responses rooted in his own character system, but also permits him to feel satisfaction through acting in accordance with his particular character structure.

Through the medium of social character, human energy in its general form is transformed into the specific activity patterns that a particular society needs for its functioning. In this way society both furthers and obstructs human development. As Fromm sees it, the social conditions obstructing human development are neither accidental nor the result of the ill-will or stupidity of certain individuals. They have their own laws, and major social change is possible only by the combination of two factors: new socio-economic conditions that permit it and increased awareness in a large part of the population that makes it possible to undertake the necessary changes.

A cornerstone of Fromm's sense of man and the human condition is that man is responsible for himself, for his life and that he must grow to accept, respect and treasure that responsibility. For Fromm this view has become axiomatic. There is both truth and beauty in this view. It favors maturation; it guards against idolatry. As Fromm has pointed out, idolatry today is not the worship of wooden idols. It is the projection onto God, to leaders, to parents and inanimate things the responsibility for our lives. It is an expression of disowning ourselves. Fromm implies that the sense of responsibility shall reside in the anatomy of the self. This is the aim of emancipation. Psychoanalysis aims at aiding the individual to free himself, to break with his idols, to actualize his identity. The struggle to achieve this freedom is one of the most awesome struggles. Fromm believes our efforts are not radical enough. This he says with religious conviction, yet Fromm is not using the word 'religious' conventionally. By religious, he means a deep-rooted devotion to life.

This brings me to an aspect of Fromm's writings, which, I believe, has created for some an unfortunate misunderstanding of his theoretical and therapeutic position. Those who have carefully fol-

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lowed his contributions will not be so easily put off by his method and style of exposition. It is clear that he has been profoundly influenced by the great wisdom of the Old Testament, the Gospels, Spinoza, Bachofen, Meister Eckhardt, Shakespeare, Goethe, Schiller, the Oedipus Trilogy, and Kafka. The profound human truths and insights of the past have a bearing on man today and hopefully for years to come. That wisdom is not dead. When skillfully understood and when introduced to broaden and deepen the richness of the human struggle for growth, one can feel reassured that the wisdom of mankind did not emerge *de novo*—just another technological advance. This evolution of thought has covered many years and is a monument which should not be carelessly razed to the ground. To respect the past can affirm the possibility of what can be discovered in the present. It does not disrespect what we discover today. Fromm as clinician and scholar, as you must see, recognizes that the past can be viable in the immediacy of the here and now. His contributions are not judgments handed down from on high; they acknowledge the durable heritage of some of the best minds of the past.

Fromm's style, as therapist, contains a healthy impatience. The sense of immediacy is central to Fromm's conception of what must obtain in the therapeutic transaction. Needless to say, he knows how to listen. He can appraise intuitively how fast to move. He has confidence in himself and has faith in his patient's desire to learn the truth notwithstanding resistances and transference distortions. That such a demanding attitude could prove unduly burdensome to the patient needs no emphasis. Yet it is not the result of naivete or misguided benevolence. The assumption arises out of a faith in man. Unfortunately, faith in man is often dismissed on "scientific grounds", as if faith has to be objectively arrived at; a subjective commitment is allegedly only evidence of wishful thinking. The nature of what is truly objective is often not clearly appreciated nor respected by the very persons who demand it the loudest. The obdurate insistence on objectivity is often a cloak for cynicism which is quite different from healthy skepticism. Skepticism reflects a tolerance for uncertainty and is quite different from the inexpensive luxury of cynicism. Faith does not deny skepticism.

How does Fromm define the character traits or human attributes which favor a productive outcome in psychoanalysis? 1. The patient has somewhere in himself to have a concern for discovery.

Living is a complex art and demands a lifelong serious effort. Because we are alive in a literal sense does not affirm aliveness. To make the point by exaggeration: persons in coma can often be kept alive for years. This concern for discovery must be genuine and serious. 2. 'Serious' means joyful commitment—not grim, long-suffering demonstrations of dutifulness. 3. There must be a level of intelligence so that what is thought and felt has some chance of making inner sense—and so that the subtle nuances of the human condition can be acknowledged. 4. A final ingredient is the capacity for tolerating uncertainty. This capacity is already an indication of some involvement with reality and can foster the chance of further discovery. Fromm approaches the human being with the faith that man can inherently grasp reality, that the illusions created by man can be penetrated. Despite the fact that the commitment to understanding one's life is the most challenging and central aim of existence, it can be achieved. One does not need supernatural powers and endowment to accomplish the task.

I would like now to supplement what I have said so far with a brief overview of several themes that will extend and perhaps clarify Fromm's contributions. In addition, I am permitting myself this opportunity to incorporate some of my own thinking which has been stimulated by Fromm:

On Mysticism

On Narcissism

On Destructiveness

On Self-Awareness and Dreaming

On Body Sensing

On Mysticism

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, nonanalytic elements. Mysticism, however, does not repudiate the unconscious cognitive components in the total percep-

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tive 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 negative traditions 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. (Tauber, 1959)

On Narcissism

In the historical perspective of psychoanalytic thought, the word 'narcissism' was the term used to describe a phenomenon associated with infants and with psychotic individuals. The term has survived for making handy distinction between grossly psychotic and neurotic processes. Its application to infants is not necessarily accurate; it fails to distinguish the healthy from the disordered aspects of infant development. The term is also misleading because, as Fromm uses it, and I'm sure as do others, an individual can be seriously narcissistic and still not be classified as psychotic, provided his behavior does not offend society nor require excessive intervention by others including the law. From Fromm's viewpoint narcissism is a crucial problem of man. It plays havoc throughout the lives of all of us in varying degree. In the extreme sense, narcissism can be characterized as an extraordinarily subjective approach to existence. The individual measures everything in terms of his own body, his own feelings, his own attitudes. The outside world has, in

truth, very little meaning for him. Input from the outside world is exclusivistically experienced as being highly flattering and adoring or deeply wounding. The wounds may be minimal, obscure slights, yet are exaggeratedly and strangely disturbing; insults are not forgotten. The character development is revengeful. The difficulty in therapy can be extraordinarily challenging, requiring great expertise and stability on the part of the therapist. One might ask the question: Since the narcissist is so absorbed in himself, and since the outside world is lacking in substance, and unworthy of serious recognition, how is it that he is so vulnerable? Is this not a strange paradox? The narcissistic individual does not sense his attitude as irrational. What he sees in himself is not so different from the way he regards others. Through his sense of superiority, his objections to others are to him evidence of his greater refinement, accuracy and validity. When others flatter and adore him, he easily comes to doubt the authenticity of the other person's evaluations, but it is so pleasant that the immediacy of the experience is acceptable—what happens later may change all that and often does. If there is no ready acknowledgement by others, there is little effort on his part to explore the possibility of friendship. Perhaps one can say that the outside world has no obvious attraction unless it can be manipulated, which will often eventuate in disdain for the persons who engage him. In Fromm's clinical experience, narcissism is one of the most serious obstacles to healthy integration and maturation. Fromm regards narcissism as the antithesis of love. The capacity for love can only flourish to the degree to which the narcissistic components of the personality diminish.

Destructiveness

Over the years, Fromm became increasingly drawn to a more precise examination of the nature of aggression. Where do the various forms of aggression fit within the framework of his characterology? On the positive side, he sees man's lifestyle and set as potentially productive wherein the individual is fully alive, creative, able to love and to reason; on the negative side, he postulates four different forms of unproductive orientation discussed above: the receptive, the exploitative, the hoarding, and the marketing personalities. He describes the nature of sado-masochism as an aspect of the unproductive personality wherein power over others and submission to others constitute a way of life. He classifies sadism

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and destructiveness as predominantly trends against humanness. Of the two, destructiveness is the most ominous form of aggression, the malignant form of aggression.

Benign aggression is seen as biologically determined, phylogenetically programmed and shared with the animal kingdom. Benign aggression (or fleeing) is in the service of survival, and it is elicited when danger to the organism is encountered. When the threat is over, the attack subsides, i.e., it is context limited.

Malignant aggression is another matter. As Fromm puts it, "Malignant aggression, i.e., destructiveness or cruelty is specific to the human species and is virtually absent in most mammals. It is not phylogenetically programmed and not biologically adaptive; it has no purpose and its satisfaction is lustful." He convincingly disposes of traditional instinctual drive and learning theories and impressively documents his position from a variety of sources and from his own clinical experience. As he sees it, the affinity for cruelty and death which are character-rooted passions is based on the existential need of having a sense of potency and purpose to exist. When an affirmative set toward one's life cannot be achieved through creating and loving, one is drawn to resolve all doubts and to transcend the intolerable feelings of powerlessness, emptiness and insignificance by destroying life; feelings and acts of destructiveness repair the hopelessness and deadness, and in extreme circumstances elicit ecstasy and exaltation.

A profound appreciation of the nature of destructiveness and the pathways it follows is crucial for a realistic approach to therapy. Terence, a Greek slave, quoted by Cicero, wrote: "Homo sum; humani nihil a me alienum puto—I am a man, nothing human is alien to me." But for those of us who study man and have elected to be entrusted with caring for him, it is not enough that we acknowledge what is human in man, in ourselves, but also what is inhuman, unalive. There must be a commitment to foster aliveness, tempered by realism.

Self-Awareness and Dreaming

Certainly the emergence and development in man of self-awareness seems to be one of the marvels of mankind. Whether this capacity is present in the rest of the animal kingdom—at least to some degree—is difficult to judge at the present state of our

knowledge. One may not be far wrong to call self-awareness an attribute unique to homo sapiens. Self-awareness operates in wakefulness and also in sleep; however, in the latter organismic state its characteristics are quite different, and seem to perform different functions. For us in psychiatry and psychology, self-awareness in sleep—namely, dreaming—has been central to our efforts to discover paradoxically what is out of awareness. We will acknowledge that there is wisdom in the dream—that we are often so much wiser about ourselves and others than when we are awake. Once the messages of the dream are deciphered, revelations about our lives and lifestyles, which escape us in wakefulness, are brought to our attention. The evolution of the capacity to dream is still poorly understood. It is equally true that much about dream mechanisms escapes us still, despite much valuable research conducted during the past 25 years. But the capacity to dream is one of the products of human evolution. The dream is a repository of unconscious wisdom which curiously means little to the dreamer during sleep or wakefulness. It would seem that we need someone else to bring to cognizance what we say by our dreams. This effortless inadvertant product of sleep, which belongs just to the dreamer, is a human mystery, if for no other reason than that another person often better holds the key to its richness. I cannot seriously believe that the suppressive and repressive effects of resistance fully account for the camouflaging symbolism of the dream nor for the process of memory decay to which the dream is subject.

I see the dream as a product of human evolution serving to bring man to man. There is the dreamer and the interpreter. The state of potential connectedness is assured through this strange quirk of evolution. By dreaming we discover the reality of human interchange and identify ourselves through this modality. Can one say that self-awareness posited in the dream process during sleep, and only successfully interpretable by another, is the result of natural selection? I am suggesting that the dream forges the link connecting man to man—which in turn partially assuages the terror of the unacknowledged sense of separateness that inheres in the evolution of the human condition.

Body Sensing

Coming into authentic touch with our feelings, with sensing our bodies, particularly in motion, has interested Fromm for many

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years. Although psychoanalysis has been interested in the meaning of gesture and in discovering what man says to the world by his facial expressions and his mode of bodily movements, the emphasis has been alerting the patient as to how he comes across. That is valuable but it is not sufficient. An individual must participate in discovering for himself what his body is saying. There have been schools of body analysis originating in Europe and, of course, in the Orient; Tai Chi and Yoga are well known in teaching persons to get into touch with their bodies, to learn to feel and increase self-awareness. In watching the infant and growing child, one is struck by the plasticity of bodily movement. It would seem that this innate capacity that we all begin with is but short-lived, perhaps lost to recognition before we can appreciate the natural simple beauty of motion. In its place there develops an indifference to this inner experience; a subtle numbness replaces the early aliveness. Fromm finds that an essential part of getting in touch with life is getting in touch with one's body. The sense of the body must be constantly renewed. It is part of being human.

It is clear that Fromm has attempted to assess the human, spiritual and bodily characteristics of man, to bring them strongly to our attention. The wisdom of today and the wisdom of the past can guide us to take seriously this responsibility to ourselves to be fully alive.

It is not clear why this sensori-motor plasticity is lost so early. It can be taught again, i.e., it can be reawakened again. But how it gets lost is not understood. The infant touches himself, explores himself and feels his body through contact with the mothering ones. No doubt, how those experiences develop must be crucial for shaping the outcome of human self-confidence and facilitating self-awareness. Yet that is not enough. As Fromm indicates, one must carry on alone. One cannot leave unfinished one's responsibility to stay related to one's body. Fromm implies that to relate fully to someone else's body, one must be in touch with one's own body. This is similar to the view that one must be able to stand alone in order to relate fully to others. By the paradox of establishing one's identity, one is open to others—to relate productively.

I cannot leave this topic without speculating further concerning the development of sensori-motor awareness. Is it possible that its continued preservation from the earliest years could have a beneficent influence obviating perverse sadistic and masochistic trends in

the setting of lust? In this connection, several years ago I wrote: "I have gained the impression that the body envelope, the skin and muscles of persons involved in sado-masochistic behavior, are in some sense benumbed; that these individuals have had relatively little convincing touching and embracing experience in the early years, and that their threshold for feelings is elevated. The masochistic pattern reflects that more or less directly, while the sadistic pattern serves to break through the projected numbness of the other. Psychologically these persons are exaggeratedly concerned with feelings of cowardliness and with the need to prove to themselves that they can tolerate pain, and they are equally curious to search out and test those qualities in the other . . . in the extreme they cannot face themselves until they establish that they can sustain great torment." (Tauber, 1975)

In conclusion, "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." (Tauber, 1959)

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