



Sullivan and Fromm

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In the late 1920's, psychoanalysts began to concern themselves with character analysis, and a few years later some analysts became interested in the study of comparative cultures and in the application of the findings of modern anthropology to the study of the development of human personality. Fromm and Sullivan became outstanding contributors in both of these fields, and each has his own unique contribution to the subjects.

Fromm is a social psychologist, trained in the classical Freudian school of psychoanalysis, while Sullivan was a psychiatrist with a background in American psychiatry under William Alanson White and Adolf Meyer. Although well-versed in the theories and practices of psychoanalysis, Sullivan did not have direct contact with any of the European schools of analysis. About 1934, Sullivan and Fromm met for the first time, and for several years thereafter there was working collaboration between them at the Washington School of Psychiatry and the William Alanson White Institute. They held certain concepts in common, but each preserved his own particular approach to the problems. The work of each supplements the other, and their basic assumptions about human beings are similar. The chief area which they share in common is the interest in the impact of cultural pressures on personality development. The chief area of difference is in theories about the self.

Early in his career as a psychiatrist, Sullivan became interested in what goes on between people, especially in the areas of interaction, which seemed to create difficulties in living. This early interest, growing out of clinical observa-

tion, became further stimulated and its scope enlarged through his growing interest in the findings of cultural anthropology, especially as demonstrated in the work of Ruth Benedict and Edward Sapir.

By 1925, Sullivan was already laying the foundations of his future work in his study of schizophrenia. His first important deviation from the Freudian thinking of that time was his discovery that schizophrenics, who were supposedly narcissistic and incapable of any emotional attachment to other people, were not only capable of such attachment when the right situation (in terms of their problems) presented itself, but that such attachments not only showed more irrational features than most transferences, i.e., were more genuinely transferences from the past, but also demonstrated a more sensitive reaction to the kind of person the analyst actually was. These facts led Sullivan to his thinking about what irrational attitudes toward another person do to the relationship, on the one hand, and what the impact of actual attitudes of the participant observer is, on the other hand. Out of these observations gradually developed his theory of interpersonal relations, which he considered far from complete at the time of his death.

... Fromm holds many basic ideas in common with Sullivan. However, the fact that his early analytic training was in the classical Freudian school has led him to re-evaluate more directly Freudian concepts in the light of modern anthropology and the social sciences than did Sullivan. Also, he has written more specifically about Western culture than Sullivan did. As a



social psychologist, he first took issue with Freud about man's relation to his society. He pointed out that, according to Freud's theory, society is a police force created to control man's instincts of sex and destructiveness and that this theory led to the conclusion that man becomes more frustrated the more civilized he becomes. According to Fromm's view—on the contrary—man is the least instinct-ridden of all the animals; he has fewer preformed ways of reacting at birth than any other creature; he literally has to be taught how to live. It follows that most of his drives are actually created by his society; therefore, society not only curbs some needs, but also creates new needs. He sees, for example, the lust for power and the craving for submission as drives created by the social order. In his gradual evolution from his animal past, man has created his society and has in turn been created by it. In other words, man has a dynamic relation to society, changing the course of history, while being changed by it. The course of Western man's evolution has been in the direction of becoming more and more an individual. This has brought him new problems. He can no longer rely on static forms of behavior—he must learn to think. He becomes aware of his powerlessness in a cosmic setting: he becomes conscious that he must die; he feels more alone. On the other hand, he has become more free and can develop his powers more and more, resulting in greater mastery over nature. His own creations, machines and the like, have separated him more and more from his earlier contacts with nature. Loneliness and a feeling of alienation are becoming his fate in the Western culture. According to Fromm, man is constantly tempted, therefore, to go back to some form of relatedness to his fellows, even at the price of giving up some of his individuality. One sees it on a national scale in the attraction there is to submission to authoritarian powers.

On the personal level one sees clinically various forms of neurotic symbiosis, such as a relationship to a „magic helper“ or a relationship in which one exploits the other. Or one may even observe relationships in which the participants are seemingly held together by mutual hate and where causing suffering, and submitting to suffering, seem preferable to being alone.

None of these symbioses can be called love; they are, rather, attempts at flight from aloneness.

In *Man for Himself*, Fromm has re-evaluated some of the Freudian concepts in terms of environmental influences and interpersonal relations. Especially significant is his description of character types. Here, the oral receptive, oral sadistic, and anal personalities described by Freud and Abraham are presented in terms of interaction with the parental figures. Fromm calls these three types, respectively, the receptive, exploitative, and hoarding orientations and explains them in terms of the type of early home situation. In brief, the receptive personality develops in a home where one has reason to expect to receive, a home characterized by a desire to give on the part of the parents. The exploitative type develops in a home where things are not freely given, but can be got by taking or manipulating. The hoarding type develops in a home environment where there is poverty of emotion; one not only does not receive freely, but there is little to get by manipulation. Therefore, the child learns to hang on to what he has because there may not be any more.

Fromm points out that these characteristics do not necessarily develop at different periods in early childhood, as Freud's classification implies—i.e., according to Freud, the anal character develops out of the anal stage, the oral character out of the oral stage—but signs of the hoarding personality, for example, may appear before the anal stage, because a mother, who later will be strict and unloving in anal training, already shows a rigid ungenerousness in her earliest relation to the infant. All of these types have been deprived of some basic loving acceptance.

Fromm has added a fourth nonproductive type, „the marketing personality.“ He finds this personality especially a product of capitalistic cultures. This term characterizes a person whose value of himself is entirely determined by the value placed upon him by others. Therefore, he tries to make himself into whatever the people in the immediate situation desire. He cultivates traits which increase his sales value and tends to deny aspects of himself which are not useful in this connection.



Fromm has not only re-evaluated the Freudian character type in terms of cultural and environmental influences, he has also clarified some other analytic concepts. I especially refer to his discussion of rational and irrational authority, and of selfishness and self-love. He has pointed out that there are two types of authority. Genuine authority is based on competence. A person is an authority because he knows something the other does not know. In the course of imparting his knowledge to the other, his position of superiority diminishes as the listener or pupil also becomes competent. This, ideally, is the type of authority the analyst should have in his relationship to the analysand, and the parent to the child. In successful therapy, therefore, the analyst should in time lose his authoritative power, and the end goal should be one of equality between analyst and patient. Irrational authority is something quite different. It is not based on competence, but on the need for power. Its aim is not to free the subjects, but to keep them subservient. This is the nature of authoritarian power.

In discussing selfishness and self-love, Fromm clarifies the position of narcissism. Originally, as it was defined, it was called self-love, but it is clearly a defense against self-hate and, as such, is not love at all, but could be called selfishness. Real self-love is based on self-esteem and enriches the possessor. Far from preventing his giving love to others, it increases his capacity to love in general. Genuine self-love would be an attribute of a mature person, while the usually accepted concept of self-love, i.e., narcissism, is based on low self-esteem and is always a product of neurotic difficulty.

Thus far, there is no actual disagreement between the thinking of Fromm and Sullivan, although they have different interests and, therefore, stress different aspects of the personality. The great point of disagreement is made especially clear in Fromm's most recent work. It has to do with the concept of a self. Sullivan, who conceives of the personality as developed through interaction with others, does not admit of the existence of a unique individual self; in fact, he calls such an idea a delusion. According to Fromm, Sullivan's view is based on the social character of our time, which he terms an alien-

ated character in which adjustment and cooperation have taken the place of genuine relatedness, and the human personality is seen as entirely a product of interaction with external forces. Fromm's assumption is that the specific conditions of human existence lead to certain basic human needs (as contrasted with the animal), such as the need to be related to others, to be looted, to transcend, to have a sense of self and a frame of orientation, and that, when a society is so organized as to deny the expression of these needs, man is frustrated and cannot express his true potentialities. Obviously, some societies are more frustrating than others. Man's problem lies in the degree of alienation of the self forced upon him by his particular society, rather than in the vicissitudes of his libido as presented by Freud.

Sullivan presents the struggle and dilemma of man in his attempt to fit into our specific society, defined as an alienated society by Fromm. He does not attempt to postulate what man might become in other circumstances. He observes him in this struggle. Because this is the field of his observation, he has only vague things to say about maturity (which he considers a rare phenomenon, at least in the experience of a psychiatrist). He has practically nothing to say about mature love. He does define what passes for love at the juvenile and preadolescent levels. Fromm, on the other hand, is much more concerned with the problem of maturity and with the ways in which man may succeed in transcending his culture. He defines maturity as the capacity for love and productive work, and he has much to say about them.

Even with this point of difference, it seems to me that the thinking of the two men can supplement each other. That is, through Sullivan's approach the person can learn of the forces which are molding him, often against his best interests, while Fromm's approach offers a constructive frame of orientation for future growth and a stimulus to transcend culture in search of what is good for man.

In short, neither denies the importance of instinctual drives, but each believes they are relatively weak in the human and are not the usual cause of neurotic difficulty. Fromm's idea of the goal of therapy is somewhat more far-



reaching than anything Sullivan has stated on the subject. According to Fromm, the goal of therapy is the transformation of the personality. This is achieved when the therapist succeeds in breaking through the defense systems and reaching the true core of the individual. In other words, one has exposed the true self. To roughly contrast the difference in therapeutic approach between Sullivan's methods and Fromm's, I would say that Sullivan concerns himself more with helping the patient to see how his defense machinery (security operations)

works to the detriment of effective living, while Fromm attempts to cut through the defenses to communicate with the underlying constructive forces, leaving the security operations to fall by the wayside.

The contributions of Sullivan and Fromm have come to be called the „cultural school,“ because of the great emphasis of both on the interpersonal factors in personality formation and personal difficulties and the relative lack of emphasis on the more biologic drives as dynamic factors.