

ipt. kept in Fromm's Legacy

Freud, Fromm and the Pathology of Normalcy: Clinical, Social and Historical Perspectives

by Daniel Burston, Ph.D., and Sharna Olfman, Ph.D.

Though Fromm is usually labelled a "neo-Freudian", this name is misleading if it blinds us to the differences between him, Karen Horney, Clara Thompson and Harry Stack Sullivan. In some ways, the neo-Freudian Fromm resembled least was Sullivan, who had made consensual validation the chief or defining criterion of mental health. In fairness to Sullivan, most clinicians endorse his approach, and not Fromm's. After all, laymen and specialists alike gauge the sanity of someone's thought processes by the degree of consensual validation that attaches to their content, and the adequacy or intelligibility of their underlying process, so far as we can apprehend it. This is simply standard procedure, and many of the diagnostic instruments and protocols of the mental health professions are merely refined and systematic extensions of these common sense assumptions.

Nevertheless, Fromm objected to this approach to mental health, and did not hesitate to say so. In The Sane Society, Fromm declared:

... It is naively assumed that the fact that the majority of people share certain ideas or feelings





**proves the validity of these ideas or feelings.
Nothing is further from the truth. Consensual
validation as such has no bearing whatsoever on
mental health . . . The fact that millions of people
share the same vices does not make these vices
virtues, and the fact that they share so many
errors does not make the errors to be truths
(Fromm, 1955, p. 23).**

Having said that, however, Fromm hastened to add that consensually validated "errors" and "vices" do confer certain rewards, namely, that those who share in them are subject to less inner conflict and misery than their overtly neurotic counterparts. In order to distinguish this phenomenon from the more visible and disconcerting varieties of neurotic disturbance, Fromm gave it a special name, calling it a "socially patterned defect". This term was first introduced in Escape From Freedom (Fromm, 1941), in connection with the worship of irrational authority that characterizes the psychology of fascism. Here Fromm proposed the controversial idea that many neurotics are maladjusted because they do not share the socially patterned defects that are characteristic of the majority of "normal" people who comprise their society. This claim in turn implies that in any society, a certain percentage of highly conflicted overtly maladjusted people are more more healthy in some sense than the average person, even if they suffer much, much more. Fromm then went on to deduce that neurotic suffering of this kind should not be attributed to an ostensible lack of "normalcy", but a failure of individuation, an ability to live soundly against the prevailing mentality of the age.



In his next book, Man For Himself, published in 1947, Fromm developed his ideas about socially patterned defects further, albeit this time in connection with the way market-forces erode the sense of identity and personal agency in capitalist democracies. In The Sane Society, cited a moment ago, Fromm took this line of reasoning further still, though he now replaced the term "socially patterned defect" with a more colorful and arresting phrase, "the pathology of normalcy". I will not repeat his arguments in detail. I will simply note that, as the phrase implies, Fromm did not find the notions of pathology and normality to be mutually exclusive, as common usage (and Sullivanian psychiatry) suggests they are. In Fromm's estimation, those who share in the "pathology of normalcy" characteristic of their milieu are generally rewarded for doing so, partly by the absence of painful inner conflicts they might otherwise encounter, and partly by the degree of practical success and recognition they are likely to achieve if they play by prevailing rules of the game. Neurotics, by contrast, are often *penalized* for their personal idiosyncrasies, partly because they don't fit in, and partly because -- for that very reason -- they are subject to an inordinate degree of anxiety, insecurity and self-doubt, in addition to whatever unresolved baggage they carry along with them as a result of genuine developmental arrest (Fromm, 1944).

Having said that, however, there is one trait or feature that neurotics and normals share that is worth reflecting on. For lack of a better term, we may call it an aversion or *hostility to truth*. There are notable differences in the forms this attitude emerges, however. A neurotic's rationalizations and defenses may be totally transparent to an outsider, because they reflect a relatively rare intrapsychic constellation, sociologically speaking. And because the patient must explore and understand the meaning of his



symptoms in order to get well, eventually, these avoidance mechanisms can be confronted clinically, once the therapeutic alliance has been joined, and real therapy is underway.

By contrast, the indifference or hostility to truth bred by conformist psychology has a much lower degree of social visibility because it is socially shared and reinforced (Fromm, 1973, p. 396). Here resistance to insight and change are not the product of individual or purely intrapsychic defenses, but of shared perspectives and definitions of reality that are anchored firmly in one's sense of corporate identity, which Fromm called *social filters*. The result of this process -- a constriction or distortion of consciousness -- resembles repression as we encounter it clinically, but for obvious reasons, it cannot be addressed in the same way.

Moreover, and more to the point, really, the absence of consciously experienced suffering vouchsafed to the more conformist majority deprives them of any tangible incentive to change, and to see through those features of collective ideology that mask or distort existential actualities. This situation is pithily summed up in Fromm's oft repeated aphorism that, for the majority of people in society: "... most of what is real is not conscious, and most of what is conscious is not real" (Fromm, 1975, p. 403).

Fromm's claim that for the average person, most of what is real is not conscious, and most of what is conscious, unreal, is bound to strike the majority of people in any society -- including most of its clinicians -- as extravagant, if not slightly deranged. For if the majority of people thought that the majority of their counterparts were defective or impaired in some vital capacity, such as a desire or willingness to apprehend the truth, all trust in consensual systems of belief, and the rituals of daily interaction, would break down, with disastrous results. Clinical experience indicates



that even relatively normal individuals who experience a precipitous breakdown of "basic trust" in their environment are subject to anxious, depressive or frankly paranoid reactions.

That being so, what prompted Fromm to espouse this stark and disturbing viewpoint? And what are its implications for therapy, if any? Before addressing these questions, it may be useful to point out that any perplexity or alarm we might feel in response to Fromm's arguments about everyday false-consciousness diminishes somewhat when we realize the basic idea is not original to Fromm. In fact, it is indelibly inscribed in both the Prophetic and Platonic traditions, and forms an integral part of our Western cultural heritage. In The Legacy of Erich Fromm, I have argued this point at length, and noted the many vivid antecedents to Fromm's arguments in the history of Western thought (Burston, 1991).

I will not repeat those arguments now. Suffice it to say that many elements of the Platonic tradition are also present in the sociological reflections of Sigmund Freud, and accordingly, that there are noteworthy points of convergence between Freud and Fromm on this score. I lay particular emphasis on this point because my primary objective is to elucidate the differences between them. But I will paint a far more effective contrast in their essential similarities are born in mind.

To begin with, like Fromm, Freud did not confuse consensus with truth, or even with mental health, for that matter. Though some of us may find it strange, Freud often remarked that many people who are healthy (i.e. happy and symptom free) are completely worthless, from a human or cultural point of view, while many neurotics, despite their intense suffering and psychological disabilities, have ennobling qualities and insights into reality that are rare or exceptional in the common run of humanity.



Another closely related point was Freud's firm belief that the average human being is as allergic to truth as his neurotic counterpart. He was particularly emphatic on this point in The Future of An Illusion (Freud, 1927) and again in Moses and Monotheism (Freud, 1939). Even before these books were published, Freud gave a very clear indication of his leanings on this point in Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego (Freud, 1921). Here Freud stated that the average individual's loyalties to social and political institutions like the state, the Church and the military are based on idealizing transferences toward their leadership, which presumably have a homo-erotic basis. According to Freud then, in society as we know it, normal men create the institutions that regulate their lives by sublimating homosexual libido in ways that call forth altruism and obedience from those in the ranks, but at the expense of their capacity to apprehend the truth about their leaders, who are generally out for their own advantage, despite their noble rhetoric. Significantly, women do not even enter into Freud's analysis at the sociological level, though we gather elsewhere that they have a supposedly feebler disposition to truth than the average man for supposedly constitutional reasons.

Of course, Fromm did not share Freud's astonishing phallocentrism. Nor did he lend much credence to the role which sublimated homoerotic tendencies play in Freud's cultural *Weltanschauung*. But deep as these differences are, the fundamental difference between Freud and Fromm stems from another source. Like Plato long before, Freud attributed the indifference or hostility to truth that characterizes the vast majority to a basic fault of human nature, which only rare and resolute natures can overcome. Fromm, by contrast, attributed this phenomenon to social and cultural processes that prevent the full and spontaneous development of



our critical faculties. On reflection, Freud's attitudes bear a strong resemblance to the ideas of Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche and Gustav Le Bon, whose aristocratic elitism and pessimism about politics harken back to sentiments expressed in Plato's Republic and Laws. Thanks to Henri Ellenberger, Paul Roazen and others, we now know that Freud read and appreciated these earlier authors (e.g. Ellenberger, 1970; Roazen, 1986). Fromm, by contrast, was rooted in the tradition of socialist humanism, and was more optimistic about human nature. Though his remarks about contemporary capitalism could be scathing, in the final analysis, he had more faith in politics to effect change through rational planning and discussion than Freud did.

I should hasten to add that the the point of these comparisons is not to establish that Fromm's line of theorizing is superior to Freud's. Whether that (or the reverse) is true depends entirely on your point of view. What I ~~am~~ trying establish however, and what is more frequently forgotten, particularly by Freud zealots, is that as disturbing or critical as Fromm's ideas may appear at first, there is ample precedent for this kind of thing in classical Freudianism. Indeed, if we take Freud at face value, Fromm's formulations regarding the shortcomings of the normal person sometimes seem quite tame by comparison.

Clinicians who have forgotten or minimized this dimension of Freud, including many ego psychologists, self psychologists and object relations theorists, have lost something central to his whole intellectual orientation. But they are not entirely to blame for interpreting him this way, as critics like Russell Jacoby insist (Jacoby, 1975; Jacoby, 1983). In fact, Freud himself must shoulder much of the blame for this sad state of affairs, because his various formulations on the relationship between normality



and mental health are riddled with ambiguity, and often lend themselves to being interpreted in terms which make adjustment to prevailing conditions of life the main criteria for mental well being. A good example of this is Freud's dictum that the aim of analytic therapy is to replace neurotic misery with everyday unhappiness. The presumption here appears to be that human beings are fated to be chronically unhappy, but that the quality and intensity of everyday unhappiness is bearable, if only just.

In response to this assessment, Fromm would have countered that the aim of analytic therapy is to restore the individual's capacity to live fully and authentically, from the core of their being, and to tolerate the suffering and emotional isolation that comes from experiencing and relating to the world in ways that are different from those of the majority. Meanwhile, for most of us, presumably, the range and limits that society imposes on the experience of affect, and of insight into our social surroundings, create the tepid boredom, the chronic frustration and the puzzling sense of aimlessness that constitute "everyday unhappiness" for so many people.

Another important difference between Freud and Fromm transcends the scope of clinical concerns. It has to do with the sources of conflict in society that engender conflict in individuals. It also has to do with the impact of economic factors on collective psychology, and the sharp and seldom remarked upon contrast between Freud's predominantly *quantitative* approach to the problem of repression historically, and Fromm's predominantly *qualitative* approach to the same issues.

According to Freud, in Civilization and Its Discontents, all societies are torn by an intractable conflict between the explosive libidinous and aggressive impulses that exist within its individual members, and countervailing collective requirements for the creation of solidary social



onds, through the secondary transformation of the libido by sublimation and reaction-formations. Unfortunately, thought Freud, as our sexual energies become more constrained and desexualized in the service of solidarity -- as we become, in effect, more civilized -- we rebel at our loss of primitive self-expression. The resulting hostility to culture necessitates the emergence of powerful elites to curb, contain and coerce the mob, and to furnish them with "ego ideals" that inspire identification, idealization, and call forth acts of service and long suffering. It also requires that collective resentment be displaced onto external scapegoats, so that the ruling elite will not become the target of the larger collective's burgeoning aggression (Freud, 1930).

The upshot of this line of reasoning is that as things get better, they also, inevitably, get worse, because with the ever increasing domestication of the libido required by the advance of culture -- which favors the proliferation of science and technology -- the resulting tensions between social groups that follows as a consequence acts to widen and deepen the scope of human destructiveness, increasing the likelihood of genocide and ultimate self-extinction. The whole process is a vicious circle. And in keeping with this grim historicism, Freud's claim that the majority of people inhabit a quasi-hypnoid state in relation to their political, military and religious leadership -- whether true or not, really -- is an act of devastating and commendable frankness. It suggests that our sense of belonging to specific groups, and our identifications with their claims to truth, are fuelled by the same infantile fixations that give rise to lively disturbances of "reality testing" in our interpersonal worlds and in the clinical situation.



Despite its deeply pessimistic coloration, Freud's analysis of our civilized malaise occupies an important place in the history of ideas. Leaving its clinical ramifications to one side, it represents a critical response to the philosophy of the Enlightenment, and to the progressivist optimism of the nineteenth century. Granted, Freud believed in progress. But it is progress with a price tag; progress at the expense of physical and emotional fulfillment, at the expense of equality and peace. Furthermore, in Freud's estimation, appreciable gains in solidarity *within* a given group are inevitably compensated for by increasing hostility to outsiders, who bear the brunt of the group's displaced hostility to "culture", i.e. the ruling elite. This is a blow to Enlightenment optimism. The most advanced representatives of the Enlightenment believed that the dissemination of reason through science, technology and universal education, would eventually liberate humanity from want and superstition, and thereby create the climate necessary for a universal world order based on peace, justice and human equality -- a secularized version of the Messianic age.

Freud had no patience for this kind of nonsense. In contrast to the belief in progress that the nineteenth century embraced and espoused, for the most part, Freud, following Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Le Bon, declared that the limits of human rationality are reached the moment we enter the political arena -- that there, instinct and irrationality are destined to prevail, despite our best intentions and most elaborate plans and safeguards.

Finally, Freud regarded our basic inner conflicts, or the conflicts between groups of instincts, and between the individual and society, as givens, or universals which only vary in intensity, and not in kind. The repression and sublimation of Eros -- and the corresponding efflux of



resentiment among the masses -- increase cumulatively in quantitative terms as history unfolds, but are not subject to any *qualitative* change or variation, as the cultural/interpersonal school of analysts later insisted.

As Erich Fromm noted in the early 1930's, the belief in a timeless, unchanging unconscious mind, whose core constructs are inscribed deep in racial memory enabled Freud to project the psychological structure of his own milieu backwards to prehistoric times, showing a naive indifference to the vast changes that social, technological and economic changes have wrought on human nature since then. The most striking example of this tendency of Freud's was his attempt to universalize -- indeed, ontologize -- the Oedipus complex, and render it culture constitutive, by tracing the basic co-ordinates of contemporary kinship and political systems, and the roots of religious belief, back to hypothetical events in the "primal horde" (e.g. Fromm, 1932).

Unfortunately, it is not possible now to review all of Fromm's early rejoinders to Freud, or explain how they foreshadow his later work. Suffice it to say that between 1929 and 1934 Fromm wrote several germinal papers on psychoanalytic social psychology within a more or less orthodox framework. But having studied Marx and Weber, he was already keenly aware that trying to explain a state of affairs that is prevalent in one's own society by reference to imagined events in remote prehistory -- as Freud did with the Oedipus complex -- is a dubious and ethnocentric undertaking, no matter how eloquently or persuasively you appear to carry it off (e.g. Fromm, 1932).

The year 1935 was marked by the appearance of a landmark paper entitled "The Social Limitations of Psychoanalytic Therapy". Like all of Fromm's early papers, it was characterized by a densely woven



counterpoint between clinical and sociological concerns. However, this paper had a new urgency that reflected Fromm's deepening disenchantment with the constraints and limitations of classical Freudianism. Fromm focused specifically on Freud's clinical posture and directives, and argued that analytic neutrality -- as Freud evidently conceived it -- is frequently a cover-up for the analyst's unconscious sadism or indifference to the patient.

Furthermore, Fromm charged that patients invariably discern the analyst's real feelings and attitudes beneath their surface neutrality -- whether consciously, or otherwise -- and that this frequently results in the reactivation or intensification of old traumas, not their careful and methodical resolution, as Freud had hoped. The clinical orientations of Groddeck and Ferenczi, Fromm added, point the way beyond the austere strictures of classical theory toward a radical and humanistic therapeutic practice.

This paper is interesting for a number of reasons. To begin with, from a historical perspective, Fromm's critique of Freud, and his glowing remarks on Ferenczi, are remarkably similar to the contemporaneous work of Glaswegian psychiatrist Ian Suttie, an early figure at the Tavistock, and author of The Origins of Love and Hate (Suttie, 1935). Both Fromm and Suttie reproached Freud for being excessively imbued with a patriarchal spirit, and allowing his healing discoveries to be shackled by them.

Moreover, though Fromm had not yet coined the phrase "the pathology of normalcy", the obvious and direct implication of his whole line of analysis is that Freud's bourgeois, patriarchal attitudes were the product of a socially patterned defect that Freud shared with the majority of his middle-class contemporaries, whose pejorative assessment of neurotic



suffering he only partially transcended. (Ferenczi's influence is patent here). To be sure, this was not the only time Fromm said so. Later, in Sigmund Freud's Mission, he voiced a very similar objection in connection with Freud's psychology of women (Fromm, 1959).

In any case, from 1935 onwards, we see a dramatic shift in Fromm's manner of theorizing. Having dropped the libido theory, Fromm now focused increasingly on what he called "existential needs" that are rooted in the conditions of human existence, and not in specific tissue needs or somatic drives. Fromm now insisted that the core conflict between the individual and society was not the repression or sublimation of the instincts per se, but how a given society meets or disappoints the individual's need for self-actualization and core to core relatedness to other people. From this point of view, a society could be substantially lacking in sexual repression -- like Aldous Huxley's Brave New World -- and still be profoundly deranged. By redefining the source and the nature of the needs that safeguard and threaten our sanity and well-being, Fromm transposed Freud's notion of "the pathology of civilized communities" into an entirely different key.

Moreover, observing developments around him, Fromm saw no real reason to posit a strong or significant correlation between the repression or sublimation of Eros and the advance of technology per se. This marks another significant break with Freud. Remember that Freud imagined that all cultural and technological achievement -- and he scorned to differentiate between the two -- is based on the repression or transformation of the libido, and therefore that progress is contingent on the dampening of sexual appetites and self-expression.



This kind of theorizing may sound quaint, or even a little bizarre to contemporary ears, but it was perfectly intelligible in Victorian times. After all, the industrial and scientific revolutions that began in the late seventeenth century, which brought the bourgeoisie to power, seemed to climax in an atmosphere of unprecedented prudishness and sexual privation -- particularly for the middle class, whose strength was steadily increasing, relative to the aristocracy. Meanwhile, Victorian adventurers and ethnographers were journeying to exotic archipelagos and remote African highlands, where they encountered tribal societies whose sexual life was comparatively free and unrestrained. At the time, the inference seemed obvious -- progress, prudishness and continence go hand in hand.

Unfortunately, Freud and his contemporaries were mistaken on this point. As any competent historian can tell you, a general relaxation of sexual mores set in soon after the First World War, and continued during the pre- and post- Second World War era, barring a brief interlude in the 1950's. With the advent of AIDS, and of the religious right, this progressive relaxation of sexual behavior may change or reverse itself, in time. But no one can deny that during this period of history, the development of technology accelerated at an unprecedented rate. Moreover, the relaxation of sexual constraints did not result in more peaceful world, as Freudian theory would have predicted. On the contrary, it was a time of unprecedented slaughter and brutality on a global scale. Whatever developments may await us in future, these facts speak strongly against Freud's historicism, and the argument that history represents some inexorable and unified historical progression that necessitates the repression or domestication of Eros, and a corollary intensification of aggression as a result.



In retrospect, Fromm's reflections on clinical constructs and historical trends leave us with some intriguing questions. One objection raised by clinically minded critics is that his tendency to regard neurosis as being symptomatic of health, so to speak, gives many neurotics an ersatz sense of identity as misunderstood heroes or geniuses; an illusion they use to rationalize their insistent anger and their persistent neediness. Obviously, there is merit to these objections, and so Fromm redressed the initial one-sidedness of his earlier pronouncements by emphasizing that a neurotic may also be in conflict with society because he or she is *less* healthy than the average person (Fromm, 1964).

The problem with this important caveat is that it leaves us, theoretically, with two classes of neurotic individuals; one group who are insufficiently individuated to throw off the shackles of convention, and express their opposition constructively, and another, even more damaged variety who are more alienated than the average person, and incapable of joining the mainstream as a consequence. For the latter group, achieving a "normal" level of functioning would presumably be a big step forward, and a valid therapeutic objective. (Or at any rate, so it would seem).

Intuitively, and at first sight, these distinctions seem to make a lot of sense, but by and large, Fromm said very little about how to discriminate between these different types of neurotic disturbance, and many clinicians would no doubt object that some people appear to combine aspects of both types simultaneously.¹ Moreover, to the best of my knowledge, Fromm said

¹ Michael Maccoby informs me that Fromm did in fact provide clear clinical criteria for distinguishing between healthier-than-normal and less-healthy-than-normal neurotics in a workshop in Mexico in (year, place, context). However, the fact that remarks were never published, and that Fromm apparently saw no need to publicize them, remains something of a mystery, as does the hypothetical distinction between neurotic and existential suffering.



nothing about how to distinguish between genuine, existential suffering from neurotic misery, either in qualitative or quantitative terms. In the absence of clear cut theoretical guidelines, some clinicians may still feel that they can make reliable discriminations of this kind on a clinical-experiential basis. But sometimes the two are very, very hard to disentangle, even on a purely experiential level.

Another serious problem is raised by Fromm's critique of Freud. Fromm argued that Freud was deeply affected by the socially patterned defects that prevailed in his socio-cultural milieu. And in retrospect, no doubt, most of us agree that Fromm's criticisms were right on target. Still, if this was true of Freud, it stands to reason that this same criticism applies with equal justice to the majority of less visionary people who make up the majority of practicing analysts -- and indeed, potentially, all mental health practitioners. For if we really take the idea of socially patterned defects seriously, we can not exclude their effects on the majority of "normal" psychotherapists *apriori*, unless we wish to maintain -- against all the evidence of experience, and against common sense -- that the training or selection of psychotherapists somehow makes them privileged or exempt, a society apart from society, or that our own society is somehow unblemished or unaffected by these deformations of consciousness.

Obviously, this is a sobering prospect. Nowadays, many analytically oriented psychotherapists feel quite comfortable condemning Freud's incorrigible sexism, or his cold, pedagogical posture as a clinician -- though when Fromm began writing about these topics, doing so was considered an act of betrayal, if not slightly bizarre. Still, even now, few psychotherapists relish the idea that they are somehow implicated in perpetuating a status quo that precludes the full emergence of their client's critical faculties, or



the unfolding of their humanistic conscience. We tend to think of the present naively, as a definitive transcendence of the past, and often forget that those who seek therapy nowadays, like those who provide it, still live in a global context of poverty, oppression, exploitation and genocide, to which all must adapt willy nilly -- often at the expense of objectivity and compassion. And whether we are aware of it or not, many of us simply prefer to think that *that* sort of thing only happened before, in the bad old days, that we have outgrown all that now, etc., etc.

In short, inasmuch as they assimilate it at all, most psychotherapists tend to appropriate Fromm's ideas on the pathology of normalcy as a way of dwelling on the defects of previous generations of therapists, by way of illustrating to themselves what wonderful, unbiased, progressive people they are. The idea that our own society, though quite different from Freud's -- and from Fromm's, needless to say -- has an equally pervasive tendency to shape and distort awareness, and to blunt the deep and differentiated experience of feelings and ideas that the majority would deem "inappropriate", infantile or paranoid -- this is not an idea that appeals to the vast majority of psychotherapists. Yet this *is* the upshot of Fromm's theorizing. It is also the reason why Fromm repeatedly emphasized that unless psychoanalysts face the socially patterned defects characteristic of their own society, psychoanalysis would succumb to bureaucratic routinization, and eventually dwindle or perish due to irrelevance and/or widespread lack of credibility (Fromm, 1970).

Meanwhile, as Paul Roazen reminds us, psychoanalysis is alive and growing in Paris and Buenos Aires, and throughout much of Latin America. Perhaps its status there is due to the fact that many of its Parisian and Latin American practitioners refused to treat psychoanalysis as a mere



clinical speciality divorced from culture and politics. Indeed, many analysts there were recruited from the ranks of people who were actively involved in the struggle for social justice -- as were many of their socialist counterparts in Vienna and Berlin, back in the movement's early days (Jacoby, 1983).

Whether or not the current decline of psychoanalysis in the U.S.A. is attributable to the causes Fromm adduced is debatable, however. After all, other, economic causes may be at work, including the rise of competing therapies, the revival of biological psychiatry, and the decline of a stable, leisured middle-class. But this last possibility, which looms large in my mind, prompts further reflection. Fromm addressed the "pathology of normalcy" in Fascist Europe and post-War America. While he noted the differences between these societies -- the former being excessively patriarchal, the latter inimical to old-fashioned patriarchalism -- the common feature they shared was the way in which the average person's capacity to reason and respond compassionately to life was eroded by consensus and convention, and by the desire to promote personal security or success at the expense of recognizing and acting on the truth.

In fairness to Fromm's critics, some positive developments have occurred since he wrote about these things. The civil rights, feminist and environmental movements, which address socially patterned defects like racism, sexism and environmental degradation have made their way into the mainstream, albeit against considerable resistance, and with debatable effectiveness in many instances. Moreover, the Cold War is over, diminishing the likelihood of nuclear holocaust, at least in the short term.

Even so, in the broad sweep of history, these apparent gains may be comparatively short lived. If we take Fromm seriously, we must do for our



time what he did for his, recognizing that Fromm wrote in a period when the middle-class, which furnishes the majority of analytic clients, enjoyed greater stability and prosperity than it does at present, or is likely to any time in the foreseeable future. Indeed, with the increasing proletarianization of younger professionals and academics, and increasing alienation and insecurity due to new technology, downsizing and competition, it is possible that we are witnessing the end of middle class affluence as Fromm, for example, knew it .

The causes and consequences of this process are too numerous and complex to enumerate here. But one is that, like their working-class counterparts of days gone by, both spouses in middle-class marriages must now work in order to pay the bills. It is not a question of having a choice. And characteristically, their careers require more time and energy than they did in days gone by. Indeed, by and large, people have to train and work longer to achieve less and less than they did twenty or thirty years ago. The combination of stress, insecurity and erratic parenting that results from these new economic trends and pressures is inimical to the development of intimacy, and injures parents and children alike, even when the damage is offset somewhat by relative affluence for more fortunate people, or rationalized by such disgusting euphemisms as "quality time" (see, e.g. LaBier, 1986).

There is a grim irony in all of this, of course. Technology was originally conceived of as a labor saving device -- and in theory, perhaps, it still is. In practice, however, the proliferation of new technologies tends to result in joblessness for many, and in *too much* work for those who have it. Another consequence of rapid technological development are the progressive decline of historical mindedness, of genuine literacy, and of



what Erik Erikson termed "transgenerational identification". In traditional societies, the pace of technological change was slow, enabling younger people to identify with the attitudes and experiences of their elders. Now, however, each emergent revolution in society's infrastructure renders it increasingly difficult for the young to empathize in a meaningful way with the experience of their predecessors, as the parameters and proverbial rules of the game shift rapidly to respond to new social and technical realities. Apart from fostering the disintegration of intergenerational ties, this results in an increasingly anxious eye to the future, and an impoverished sense of the past, which stands in marked contrast to the attitudes and sensibilities of previous ages, and contributes appreciably to what Fromm termed the 'marketing character', who lacks a strong sense of rootedness (Burston, 1991). It also contributes to an overall decline in literacy, which is increasingly becoming the domain of academic specialists. And as literacy and historical mindedness evaporate, "entertainment", with its standardized and homogenized perspectives on reality, jumps into fill the gap.

The decline in real literacy -- as opposed to "computer literacy", or mere escapist reading -- is fostered, in turn, by the time and effort it takes to continuously recalibrate one's skills and attitudes to adapt to shifting market forces. Who has time to read -- I mean *really* read -- a book, to meditate on it, allowing the author's ideas and experiences to penetrate into the deeper recesses of one's soul? Leaving vexing economic issues like third-party payment and 'managed care' to one side, can psychoanalysis survive in a society bereft of leisure, literacy, and a sense of connectedness with the past? Not bloody likely . . . And because they lag behind the United States in the decline of leisure and literacy, Europe and Latin



America will probably be a more hospitable environment for psychoanalysis in the future.

As unfortunate and unpromising as these developments are for the future of psychoanalysis, there are other, more serious possibilities to ponder. The galloping resurgence of fascism around the world is an ominous backdrop to these domestic developments in the United States. If past history is any guide, the current dislocation and immiseration of the middle-class will probably lead to increasing political polarization, with an increasingly angry and militant right-wing eventually leaping into the vacuum created by the disintegrating center. Who says that it can't happen here? Or that if it does not, that we can surmount or even survive the damage to the biosphere that would inevitably result from a confrontation with nuclear fascism abroad. Even if we avert planetary death, life as we know it will change forever, and an increasingly totalitarian political culture would almost inevitably emerge, albeit one that may pay lip service to the liberal and emancipatory ideals of days-gone-by as a rhetorical justification for its repressive practices.

One need not subscribe to Freud's philosophy of history to appreciate the element of truth it contains. If Marx tended to celebrate the liberating potentialities unleashed by new technologies, Freud drew our attention to the price we pay for "progress". While there are always grounds for hope, optimism, in the conventional sense, may actually be detrimental to our collective interests, if it prevents us from seeing the writing on the wall. This attitude of sober realism -- which is not despair, but an unflinching assessment of global actualities -- is especially apparent in the later Fromm, whose message reached fewer people, because of his decline in popularity after 1968.



Unfortunately, despite (or because of) Erich Fromm's many best-sellers, Fromm bashing was a popular pastime among the liberal and left-wing intelligentsia during the late sixties and seventies -- so much so, in fact, that nowadays, his ideas are hardly remembered or discussed much anymore. Despite his prescient critiques of Freud's sexism and authoritarianism, Fromm has acquired the reputation of being a pedant, a popularizer, and a fashioner of trite, homiletic platitudes who was secretly impervious (if not actually hostile) to the deeper implications of Freudian theory. Fromm's work is not beyond criticism or reproach, of course, but most of the fashionable indictments that have shaped the current public perception of him, such as it is, suffer from an excess of polemical zeal, and a lack of genuine historical understanding. In truth, the real reason he is ignored nowadays is that Fromm at this best was too provocative and disturbing to be readily assimilated into the analytic mainstream.

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