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Erich Fromm (1900 - 1989) Revisited
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The Art of Being

by Erich Fromm

Foreward by Rainer Funk

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The Revision of Psychoanalysis

by Erich Fromm

hardcover, \$28.95

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Erich Fromm was born at the beginning of the 20th Century and died eight decades later. The William Alanson White Institute-- of which he was a co-founder--honored him in a memorial issue of contemporary Psychoanalysis (Vol.17, no.4, October 1981). Included in the Memorial Publication was a Dedication, tributes and commentaries in which he was praised for his indomitable humanism and his faith in man's inherent capability of self-determination. Reference was also made to his eloquence as a speaker, teacher and writer in his quest for reason, love and dedication to life. At the same time questions were raised about his not addressing himself to particular clinical issues, technical aspects of treatment and case presentations. Fromm's books for the better part avoided technical and standard analytic terms.

For the record, Fromm was a member of the Berlin Psychoanalytic as well as of the Freudian Psychoanalytic Society. For the first ten years of his professional life he was an orthodox Freudian analyst. As time went on he modified his views, but was never happy with a particular label.



The Art of Being combined with the powerful Revision of Psychoanalysis were posthumously published in the United States in 1992. The material was selected and thoughtfully edited by Rainer Funk.

Fromm's psychoanalytic metamorphosis is specifically recorded in Revision of Psychoanalysis. It contains a long-awaited account of his way of understanding and practicing psychoanalysis according to his editor, Rainer Funk. The book contains significant unpublished material of Fromm's "Humanistic and Dialectic Revision of Psychoanalysis" which, according to Funk, was conceived by Fromm between 1968 and 1970. He also states that Fromm wanted to write a systematic and comprehensive work of psychoanalysis against the background of his clinical experiences as practicing psychoanalyst, teacher and supervisor. Included in his project were also the publication of case histories. He worked for years on this project but eventually dropped it. In the long run he did not publish in his lifetime his categorical rejection of Freudian psychoanalysis. Fromm lived under the illusion that he remained a Freudian throughout his life. In his book The Crisis of Psychoanalysis, published ten years before his death, Fromm was already involved with his own revision of Freud's point of view.

On the jacket of Revision of Psychoanalysis we are told that it was Fromm's conviction that psychoanalysis needs to retain Freud's essential insight into the Unconscious while replacing his mechanistic-materialistic philosophy with a humanistic one. This is in contrast to previously published material.



Fromm outright rejected Freudian theory step by step and aligned himself with a total turnaround in stating that the depth of his novel point of view led him to "the most fundamental point of a revision in the transformation of the whole analytic situation." IN the same spirit he addresses himself to his "psychoanalytic approach." He makes the amazing statement about his psychoanalytic stance that "I am not the founder of a school, but rather a psychoanalyst who has attempted to further Freud's theory by making certain revisions" (page 9, Revision).

It is obvious that the evidence presented in the book contradicts Fromm's statement. In the chapter "Aspects in the Realm of Therapeutic Practice" (page 70), and other statements point to a radical break with Freud and Freudian psychoanalysis, rather than replacing Freud's mechanistic-materialistic philosophy. Fromm must have known that the construct of the Unconscious existed prior to Freud, which did not diminish Freud's genius. The material presented in the book makes it clear that Fromm was not merely a psychoanalyst who did his best to "further Freud's theory." His radical revision of psychoanalysis clearly pulled the rug out from Freudian theory.

Fromm's new construct of psychoanalysis in his final statement points to a basic rejection of Freudian analysis. There is an irony in the fact that in the face of well documented evidence about Freud not having been a Freudian in his clinical work. This awareness does not in any way diminish Freud's stature. It only implies that Freud as a clinician was not acting



as a mechanistic, materialistic practitioner. In the chapter "The Revision of Psychoanalytic Practice" (page 70) Fromm states: "In the writings of Sullivan, Laing, myself and others, the most fundamental point of a revision is the transformation of the whole analytic situation from one in which a detached observer studies an object to one of interpersonal communication."

Fromm continues with the powerful statement that the clinical ambience demands a distinct resonance between patient and analyst. Such a situation can only function if analyst and patient respond to one another. Fromm adds that the analyst's participation cannot be merely cerebral. He further adds that the analyst must give up the illusion that he is "well" and the patient is "sick." The emphasis here is akin to Sullivan in that Fromm believes that analyst and patient are both more human than anything else. The experiences of even the sickest patient must strike a chord in the analyst that evokes imagery of one kind or another. The analyst must also permit himself to be vulnerable and not hide behind the role of an expert professional who knows the answers. The patient's confidence rests on the fact that he and the analyst are engaged in a common task. What matters is that the patient's experience evoke a resonance in the analyst in response to the patient's experience.

Fromm is also of the opinion that the significance accorded to childhood in the analytic process requires revision. He comments that classical analysis is prone to see the present



predominantly as a repetition of the past. Freud assumed that the transference phenomenon is capable of a "new edition" pertaining to the repressed memory of the original infantile experience. The notion is that analytic therapy brings the infantile conflict into consciousness. It was then assumed that a reconstructed knowledge would have curative impact. Fromm comments that the shared rapport of the patient's experience and the analysts response to his own experience do not exclusively center on the patient's problems. It is a setting in which both parties learn something about each other.

Fromm also considers it necessary to modify the significance of childhood in the therapeutic setting. He refers to classic psychoanalysis as being prone to view the present merely as a repetition of the past. The focus of classical therapy is to bring infantile conflict into awareness. Freud thought that there is an infantile amnesia which can be brought to light by the phenomenon of transference. The Freudian assumption believes that the very insight how he came to be the way he is today. Fromm points to the illusion of a direct "why and because" pattern. He states categorically that reconstructed knowledge has no curative effect and nothing but the intellectual acceptance of real or alleged theories. He believes that this assumption centers on the power of suggestion, akin to exorcising the devil, which may conceivably produce a "cure" albeit not an analytic one.



This phenomenon may in classical therapy deteriorate into a mere probing into a patient's past without leading to the experience of uncovering the presence. Fromm states that psychoanalytic therapy leads into a "cul de sac" when its primary quest is historical research into early childhood as an end in itself. The compulsive prescription to put the spotlight on the past as an "open sesame" of finding the core of the patient's problems leads to over-simplification. It also ignores the fact of significant experiences within one's lifespan rather than a number of sundry entities such as: castration fear, seduction fear, parental fear and so on. There are some patients who can be more fearful of their respective analysts than of a figure from their past.

Fromm refers to traditional psychonalysis as a "cerebralization of effective experience." Freud's intention was to break through conscious thought processes and arrive at the core experience, the raw, unrationalized, illogical feelings and visions behind the smoothness of everyday thought.

Fromm also rejects a nuclear concept of psychoanalysis-- that is the libido theory--which obfuscates many other phenomena. For instance, every creative thinker can only think in terms of the thought patterns and categories of the prevailing models of culture. Often his most original thoughts cannot be articulated.



Freud, deeply imbued with the philosophy of bourgeois materialism, found it unthinkable to assume that a psychic force should motivate man, unless it was also being simultaneously a physiological force. It follows that Freud's historical significance transcended his emphasis on the effects of repressing sexual striving. This was a bold thesis at the time, but it would never have led to Freud's worldwide impact which was based on dispelling the conventional view that man's thinking and his being were of one piece.

Fromm believed that there is a widespread assumption that daily life should not offer conflicts, difficult choices, painful decisions and so forth. Human existence has its share of ambiguity, its painful side of decisions, its manifestation of loneliness and related existential complexities. There is a utopia of "the right thing" which has a simple button in contrast to an unwavering 'elan vital.' The way it is, only robots are free of conflicts. Similar thoughts have been expressed by Sullivan who speaks of people who are obnoxiously normal. Roy Grinker coined the term "hemoclits" for people who make ideal astronauts, soldiers and so forth.

In contrast to Freud, Fromm believes that people do not turn infrequently to psychoanalysts for assistance in the conflict between the demands of conscience and those of self-interest; instead they look for an antidote against the widespread difficulties of living. There is a potential danger in seeking a shoulder



to cry on as if looking for a benign parental figure. Fromm views the classic analyst as adhering to Freud's basic assumption that all neurosis is anchored in the unfortunate experience of early childhood. Thus the alleged need for a strong authority in a transferenceal playback with the patient is designed to give the patient inner strength and concomitant independence. In Fromm's mind transference is one of the most powerful strivings in man, capable of leading to idolatry. The danger lies in the temptation of transforming a person, an institution, or an idea into an absolute idol, submission to which leads to the illusion of certainty.

Another concern raised by Fromm refers to the "basic rule," telling a patient whatever comes to mind without any censoring. We are told that there is no such thing as "salvation by talking." The process of growing and becoming independent requires effort and willingness to experience pain, anxiety and anguish.

Fromm's concern about traditional psychoanalysis is most cogently presented in the "cerebralization" of affective experience. He believes that the original goal in Psychoanalysis has withered away and become an ideology. Psychoanalysis has become a kind of historical research into the development of an individual, heavily overloaded with theoretical explanation and constructions. The analyst has a number of theoretical assumptions and he uses the patient's associations as documentary proofs for the correctness of his theories. In this frame of reference Fromm is in tune



with present day rejections of the overkill pertaining to the specific role of causality in psychoanalysis.

Fromm's objection is to the notion of curing by explanation. He believes that what was meant to be an experiential method has been transformed into an intellectual search.

The Art of Being was not prepared for publication by Fromm himself. The present work was posthumously arranged by Reiner Funk. He supplemented some material and worked out a position of the text and selected the chapter headings. The book was written in German and translated.

We are told by Fromm that a person is analyzed for a considerable time and takes this or that factor as the cause of a particular neurosis, such a patient will easily accept the explanation and also relinquish the symptom on the basis of faith. Fromm considers such a "cure" to be akin to a placebo whereby a patient is unaware whether he was given a particular medicine or a plain sugar pill.

Fromm had strong objections to the notion of being a Frommian. He also opposed establishing a new school of psychoanalysis during his lifetime or after his demise. He rejected the formation of specific schools of psychoanalysis as a detriment to the field since schools are subject to political interests. He was of the opinion that the emphasis of unifying dogmas was detrimental to the development of psychoanalysis. It was his opinion that the "school" and its approbation has devastating



effects on its members. He speaks of a process of being properly "ordained" which gives many the necessary support to feel competent in their task without any longer having to make efforts in learning. He specifically states that what holds true for the orthodox school holds true from his own observations for all the other schools as well.

Fromm reminds us that there are people who may suffer because they cannot tolerate a disturbed and disturbing society. This is in contrast to people who have a craving to keep up with a warped society.

In some respects Fromm was prophetic in his distress about an "insane society." We are witnessing in Europe, South Africa, and many other parts of the world a savage destructiveness in the name of overt ethnocentricity. Our society is not in good shape. The way things are, we have to keep our human dignity and close ranks in our own analytic domain. Erich Fromm had integrity in his concept of psychoanalysis as transcending our therapeutic stance. As analysts we are not merely healers. Our primary task is to genuinely respect the individuality of our patients above and beyond our theoretical expertise. We need to detach ourselves from professional elitism. As experts we have the mandate to learn from our own and our patient's errors. Each patient is a novel experience which challenges our existing personal repertory.



Fromm's message deserves to be listened to without emulating his model of psychoanalysis. He enlarged the boundaries of psychoanalysis in transcending our role as only healers of neurosis. Today we see a smaller percentage of bona fide neurotic patients. Our current referrals tend to have an increasing share of borderline and other above average troubled patients. It stands to reason that we put our best professional skill forward regardless of whether the patient is within neurotic boundaries or is more deeply troubled. According to Fromm we are not exclusively healers of neurosis. We need a broader platform, including variations on a basic theme; as analysts who need to learn from our patients, above and beyond our psychoanalytic credo.

The posthumous publications of Fromm reveal his fundamental break with Freudian psychoanalysis in a radical revision of the entire classical analytic situation. He rejects the Freudian detached observational field in favor of an interpersonal point of view. Erich Fromm, particularly in Revision of Psychoanalysis unfolds as a clinician in a novel key.



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