

To Mrs Erich Fromm
from
Ralph M Crowley

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ERICH FROMM'S MOST IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION to my personal and professional life was involving me in being a citizen of the world, a member of the wider and more universal human community, as he was. This he did for me through his writing, through the many courses I took with him as a graduate psychoanalyst, through my association with him on the faculty of the William Alanson White Institute when he was chairman, and through a year of personal supervision with him in 1946–1947. Just as he was student of the human condition all of his life, so I have found my satisfaction in so being.

My acquaintance with Erich was through his first work translated into English, *Escape from Freedom*, a poor translation for the German title, *Furcht vor Freiheit*, which means *fear* of freedom, which the book is really about. Clara Thompson had recommended this book to me. Much of what I had learned about people was in general and theoretical terms; this volume and Fromm's *Man for Himself* were most useful in helping me to put his ideas in formulations for patients which surprised them and helped them grow. His discussion of character types and their origin and function made much more sense to me than the Freudian accounts of character.

When Fromm and Horney were teaching together in the newly formed Association for the Advancement of Psychoanalysis, of

which I was a member, it seemed we were on the way to a new national psychoanalytic organization which would not embody the rigidities in training inherent in the institutes of the American Psychoanalytic Association. I found it sad when Horney felt that because Fromm was a Ph.D., the same credit could not be given students for clinical case seminars with him as that given for courses taught by M.D.'s. This silliness ended the usefulness for me of the Association, but not of Fromm, because shortly after, he joined the faculty of the New York extension of the Washington School of Psychiatry, soon to become the William Alanson White Institute, of which he was to be one of the founders. During this interim period the Navy stationed me in New York making it possible for me to take my first course with Fromm in 1943-4 on Character Formation, helping me to consolidate what I learned from reading.

After the Navy when I joined the faculty of the White Institute, and Fromm became the chairman of the faculty. Faculty meetings were always stimulating; Fromm never let boring trivialities interfere with policy issues, the human issues of learning psychoanalysis. During his regime, the Institute began the fourth low cost psychoanalytic clinic in the United States. Fromm believed intensely in the value of psychoanalysis for everyone, rich or poor, sick or so-called well, functioning or non-functioning. So he promoted this activity at our Institute. After a committee of the faculty approved the plan, the faculty authorized the clinic's beginning on February 8, 1948. The clinic's primary purpose was service to the community; a secondary purpose was to provide opportunities for research into problems of long term psychoanalysis; and thirdly to facilitate the training of psychoanalysts. Fromm recommended a clinic policy in which certain applicants would be given priority in terms of our ability to provide treatment. That policy was embodied in a faculty motion that "The main criterion in selecting patients should be therapeutic worthwhileness, with an attempt to get a cross-sectional group, except for some preference given to people dealing with children." Typical of Fromm, he wished that priority also be given to low-paid professional people, such as students, graduate workers, teachers, social workers, clergymen, and those in artistic and creative fields; his aim was to increase their social usefulness, as well as their personal well being. Here Fromm clearly showed his ideas as to who in society were most socially valuable to him. The faculty voted



against this criterion. We were in no position to determine who were most socially valuable to society.

The other issue for which I remember Fromm most vividly was that of training Ph.D.'s. He regarded psychoanalysis, as did Freud, as far broader than a medical specialty. He believed that the White Institute should train psychologists, as well as other Ph.D.'s as The Institute has done. In 1948 the faculty voted to begin training Ph.D.'s, which it has continued since.

I have never understood why, if the Institute trained psychologists, why not social workers, who were recognized in the 50's as having more clinical training, and more experience with patients than psychologists had.

During his sojourn at White, I took advantage of his being there by having a year of supervision with him. Many have commented that he never wrote specifically on how to do psychoanalysis. Neither did Sullivan, both realized that it cannot be done. All that can be done in a book is to lay down general principles. It is different in supervision. In that relationship I learned from Fromm his ways of implementing his principles, his philosophy, and his view of human nature, which was well in advance of his time. He was most specific in supervision, never presuming that the supervisee could say or do exactly what he would have done, but offering very specific ideas of what might be said or done.

For example, with my patient he was most alert to the patient's problem of needing to be in control and thereby controlling others. His advice was a frontal attack on her defense of needing to control. He also called attention to a fault of mine in which I did her thinking for her; that is, I worked overtime trying to think what was wrong with her, when I should have been turning that job over to her. I was preventing her from even thinking that there was anything wrong with her. I fit into her idea that nothing was wrong with her, and that I, as her psychoanalyst, was no good, a pattern manifested in relation to most of the significant people in her life. These themes were repeated throughout the year's supervision, and how Fromm ever stood my not dealing with them more assertively than I did, I shall never know.

At one point he advised my telling the patient in response to her saying that she had learned nothing new, "Yes, you are quite right; you have learned nothing new. Tell me, do you want to learn some-



thing?’ He continually emphasized in this supervision and the courses I took with him that curiosity, a high level of theoretical interest, was essential to becoming a psychoanalyst. The other thing that he emphasized was the ability of the psychoanalyst to arouse this curiosity, often latent in people, by saying something in such a way as to surprise the patient.

He believed that it was part of the psychoanalyst’s job to be able to see, from what the patient reported, that which the patient did not see, but was in the patient’s mind. From Sullivan one learned something that might superficially seem to be the opposite. That is, one was not to assume anything without finding out what the patient was thinking or feeling. In my experience, both Fromm and Sullivan are right. One can know from what a patient is saying, more than the patient realizes he has expressed or exposed. On the other hand, it is also true, that words, especially with obsessives and schizophrenics more often obscure than enlighten. It was Fromm-Reichmann’s genius, like Fromm, to be able to see through (*diagnose* is the Greek word) to what such patients are communicating.

Fromm felt that psychoanalysis was an adventure in learning to think critically. In no way did he believe that critical thinking was opposed to awareness of one’s feelings, to what one enjoys nor to what pleases one, to what one likes or dislikes.

With my patient Fromm continually stressed that the patient was not really touched by anything; that she did not see any good coming out of psychoanalysis; that she did not know whether she wanted to be psychoanalyzed; and he questioned whether she seriously considered making any changes in herself, out of her need for maintaining her life as safe and comfortable.

In regard to one dream interpretation, Fromm advised my saying this:

I was thinking more about your dream and here is what I think it says, something more than you let yourself know, or say in any other way. You know yourself better and more thoroughly than you think. This dream is an unconscious insight into your life; that is, your life consists in settling down in a secure and safe place; you have the idea there are exits, but when we come to examine these, they turn out to be illusory exits, that is, only places to look out. By looking out, you get the illusion of having some other life than you have, but you don’t really have that. You are uncomfortable but safe—safe even with some luxury—the Venetian blinds. But there is no real way out just the illusion of getting out from being able to look out, from being able to fantasy what the outside world looks like. Your affairs are like look-



ing through a window; they don't come to anything much. Your life is like that in an air raid shelter, safe, uncomfortable, but with some comfort and no real way out.

In my correspondence with him, he became concerned in the early 60's that the Institute was no longer interested in what he had to teach; that he was not being represented in the curriculum. Where he got this from I do not know, because as far as I know the Institute has always held his contributions in high esteem and has always seen to it that they were taught one way or another. His views and his writings were and are a dynamic intellectual force in our century. It was a great privilege to be as closely related to this man as I was. There is no way I can forget him or what he taught. He was dedicated to mankind.—RALPH M. CROWLEY, M.D., NEW YORK, NEW YORK.

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