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Robert B. Ewen

AN INTRODUCTION TO
**THEORIES
OF
PERSONALITY**
Fourth Edition

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6



ERICH FROMM
The Escape from Freedom



From 1941 to 1943, Karen Horney's American Institute for Psychoanalysis proceeded in an amicable fashion. In April of 1943, however, yet another furor shook the psychiatric community. Her institute summarily withdrew Erich Fromm's privilege to conduct training analyses because he lacked a medical degree, and it was feared that his presence would jeopardize plans to develop a relationship with the New York Medical College (Perry, 1982).

Some colleagues thought it unfair that Fromm should have to suffer the same kind of arbitrary expulsion that Horney herself had encountered previously. In any case, Fromm recovered quite well from this painful professional setback: he went on to become a renowned figure in the realm of personality theory.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Erich Fromm was born on March 23, 1900, in Frankfurt, Germany. He was the only child of parents he describes as very neurotic; his father was a wine merchant. Fromm's childhood included a strong Jewish influence, but he eventually rejected organized religion at the age of twenty-six because "I just didn't want to participate in any division of the human race, whether religious or political" (Fromm, 1962b; see also Fromm, cited by Evans, 1966, p. 56).

Unlike Freud, Jung, Adler, and Horney, Fromm had no medical training. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Heidelberg in 1922, and later studied at the internationally renowned Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute. As with Adler, the ravages of World War I came as a profound shock and influenced Fromm toward socialism. Fromm married Frieda Reichmann in 1926, a noted psychoanalyst in her own right and the therapist of Joanne Greenberg ("Hannah Green"), author of the well-known autobiographical novel *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*. The marriage ultimately ended in divorce. Fromm married Henny Garland in 1944 and, after her death, Annis Freeman in 1953.

Fromm visited the Chicago Psychoanalytic Institute in 1933 as guest lecturer, and emigrated to the United States one year later. His first book, the landmark *Escape From Freedom*, appeared in 1941 (1941/1965). Because it departed from standard Freudian theory by stressing the effect of social factors on personality, Fromm was summarily dropped as a direct member of



the International Psychoanalytic Association (Roazen, 1973, p. 12). He also suffered the aforementioned split with Horney at about this time.

In 1945, Fromm joined the prestigious William Alanson White Institute of Psychiatry. He also taught at Columbia University, Bennington College, Yale University, Michigan State University, New York University, and the New School for Social Research. Fromm maintained an active interest in social problems and political philosophy, helping to organize SANE (the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy) in 1957. His published works include some twenty volumes, many of which have proved popular with the general public.

Fromm served as professor of psychiatry at the National University in Mexico for 16 years. He died of a heart attack at his home in Muralto, Switzerland, on March 18, 1980.

THE BASIC NATURE OF HUMAN BEINGS

As with Horney, Fromm's theory of personality is an admixture of Freudian and Adlerian constructs. However, Fromm devotes considerably more attention to the role of societal forces. His work strongly reflects the theories of Karl Marx, whom he regards as an even more profound thinker than Freud. (See for example Fromm, 1961; 1962a; 1970/1971a.)

Organic versus Nonorganic Drives: Isolation and Contradiction

To Fromm (1955/1976b, p. 30), "man [is] an anomaly, . . . the freak of the universe." Our fundamental motive is self-preservation, so we are inextricably tied to nature and the animal kingdom by our **organic (instinctual) drives**: hunger, thirst, sex, and defense through fight or flight. Yet our superior intellect also sets us apart from nature, producing a sense of isolation and anxiety not found in lower organisms.

Human behavior cannot simply follow some preordained instinctual course, for we possess such unique characteristics as self-awareness, reason, and imagination. Instead, we must struggle to ascertain the reasons for our existence and create our own place in the world. We must confront the distinctively human problems of boredom and discontentment. And we must face the threatening realization that death will deprive us of sufficient time to fulfill our potentials, so that "it is the tragic fate of most individuals to die before they are [truly] born" (Fromm, 1955/1976b, p. 32; see also Fromm, 1964/1971b, pp. 147–148; 1968/1974b, p. 62; 1973, pp. 4–8, 72–73, 225–226; 1947/1976a, pp. 48–58, 98).

To Fromm, then, innate instincts are only part of the motivational story. In marked contrast to lower organisms, many crucial human motives consist of learned **nonorganic drives** (or **character-rooted passions**).



Nonorganic Drives

Since our nonorganic drives are not instinctual, they are difficult to satisfy. We have no innate program that ensures their fulfillment; so it is all too easy to opt instead for goals that are more alluring, but that ultimately result in unhappiness—or even in psychopathology.

The Need for Others. Because of our painful and uniquely human feelings of isolation, and because we are woefully weak in comparison with the vast forces of nature, we must cooperate with others in order to survive.¹ “*Man’s biological weakness is the condition of human culture. . . . Man is primarily a social being . . . [and] individual psychology is fundamentally social psychology*” (Fromm, 1941/1965, pp. 48, 317–318; see also Fromm, 1976c, pp. 104–105).

The best way to secure firm social roots in the world is through the development of mature **love**, which resembles the Adlerian construct of social interest. The art of loving involves a genuine caring for and giving to others, an objective and accurate knowledge as to their true feelings and wishes, a respect for their right to develop in their own particular way, and a sense of responsibility toward all humanity:

Love is not primarily a relationship to a specific person; it is . . . an *orientation of character* which determines the relatedness of a person to the world as a whole. . . . If I truly love one person I love all persons, I love the world, I love life. (Fromm, 1956/1974a, pp. 38–39. See also Fromm, 1956/1974a, pp. 18–25; 1968/1974b, pp. 81–83; 1947/1976a, pp. 104–107, 134; 1955/1976b, p. 38; 1976c, p. 103.)

Every human being has the capacity for love, but fulfilling this potential is extremely difficult. We all begin life as wholly self-centered infants, unable even to differentiate between ourselves and others (“primary **narcissism**,” as in Freudian theory). Pathogenic experiences during subsequent years can all too easily cause us to revert to this immature state (“secondary narcissism”). The resulting behavior is like that of an author who meets a friend and talks incessantly about himself for some time, only to conclude with: “Let us now talk about *you*. How did you like my latest book?” (Fromm, 1964/1971b, p. 81. See also Fromm, 1964/1971b, pp. 71–116; 1973, pp. 201–202; 1947/1976a, pp. 132–137; 1955/1976b, pp. 39–41; 1980, pp. 43–54).

Primary narcissism is not without some value, for we would be unlikely to survive the challenges of life if we regarded ourselves as totally unimportant. As a result, most of us remain at least somewhat narcissistic

¹Fromm originally distinguished between the human needs for “relatedness” to others and “rootedness” in the world, but the distinction between these similar terms is not emphasized in his later works. (See for example Fromm, 1973; 1955/1976b, pp. 35–61; 1976c.)



(Fromm, cited by Evans, 1966. p. 69). Nevertheless, perhaps the most important of all human goals is to overcome and minimize this innate tendency. An exaggerated self-interest rules out a true concern for others, and this has disastrous consequences. For the only way to obtain some measure of reassuring social rootedness, yet still preserve the integrity of one's own personality, is by relating to others with mature and genuine love.

Transcendence. Unlike other species, human beings are not satisfied with the role of creature. We need to **transcend** the helpless animal state and exert a significant effect on our environment, and Fromm (like Adler and Horney) believes that we have an innate tendency to achieve such superiority in constructive ways. "Strivings for happiness and health . . . are part of the natural equipment of man. . . . All organisms have an inherent tendency to actualize their specific potentialities" (Fromm, 1947/1976a, pp. vii, 29; see also Fromm, 1973, pp. 235–237; 1955/1976b, pp. 41–42).

Here again, fulfilling our positive potentials is no easy task. In addition to a phylogenetically programmed impulse to preserve ourselves against threat by attacking (**benign aggression**), we also possess the secondary capacity for nonorganically motivated destructiveness that serves no rational defensive purpose (**malignant aggression**). If one's normal development should be blocked, as for example by pathogenic parental behaviors, transcendence may well be sought through malignant aggression instead of healthy creativity:

The more the drive toward life is thwarted, the stronger is the drive toward destruction; the more life is realized, the less is the strength of destructiveness. *Destructiveness is the outcome of unlived life.* (Fromm, 1941/1965, p. 207. See also Fromm, 1964/1971b, pp. 35–69; 1973; 1947/1976a, p. 218.)

Identity. Lower animals have no sense of **identity**, but humans need to feel: "I am I" (Fromm, 1955/1976b, pp. 62–64). In addition to relating to others, therefore, the growing child must learn to surrender its primary ties with the parents and accept its separateness from other organisms.

As with the other nonorganic drives, identity is not easily achieved. Life has many dangers, and it is tempting to gain some measure of safety by becoming symbiotically involved with an all-powerful protector. Even the growing child's so-called Oedipal strivings are due solely to this desire for security:

[The maturing individual is] more aware than the infant of the dangers and risks of life; he knows of the natural and social forces he cannot control, the accidents he cannot foresee, the sickness and death he cannot elude. What could be more natural, under the circumstances, than man's frantic longing for a power which gives him certainty, protection, and love? . . . Thus he is torn between two tendencies since the moment of his birth: one, to emerge to the light and the other to regress to the womb; one for adventure and the other for certainty; one for the risk of independence and the other for protection and dependence.



(Fromm, 1964/1971b, pp. 120–121. See also Fromm, 1941/1965, pp. 208–230; 1950/1967, pp. 76–80; 1973, pp. 358–362; 1947/1976a pp. 43–44, 159–161; 1955/1976b, pp. 44–47; 1980, pp. 27–38.)

Thus the desire to be an independent individual conflicts with the wish to escape from this threatening freedom. Dependence is undeniably alluring, since it offers protection from the dangers of nature and society. But it is also unhealthy, since it precludes the development of the needed sense of identity. To Fromm, therefore, people are not truly fulfilled as cogs in a machine—even so elegant a one as our modern technological society.

Frames of Orientation. Like Jung, Fromm concludes that life must have a sense of meaning and purpose. We all need a personal philosophy that establishes our values and goals in life, guides our behavior, and delineates our place in the world (a **frame of orientation**, or **frame of devotion**). “‘Man does not live by bread alone.’ . . . [He needs] an answer to the human quest for meaning, and to [the] attempt to make sense of his own existence” (Fromm, 1947/1976a, pp. 55–56; see also Fromm, 1950/1967, pp. 25–26; 1968/1974b, pp. 65–70; 1973, pp. 230–231; 1955/1976b, pp. 64–66; 1976c, pp. 135–139).

Primarily healthy frames of orientation emphasize love, competence, productivity, reason, and the love of life (**biophilia**). But the need for a unifying personal philosophy is so powerful that even an irrational framework, appropriately rationalized, is preferable to none at all. (This is why people can so easily fall under the spell of a warmonger, dictator, or religious zealot.) Among the irrational and unhealthy frames of orientation are the love of death (**necrophilia**), destruction, power, wealth, symbiotic dependence, and narcissism. In addition, healthy and unhealthy frames of orientation may blend together in varying degrees. Thus a biophilic and loving person may also be somewhat narcissistic or power-oriented, or a conscious and charitable frame of orientation may conceal one that is unconscious and rapacious. Yet regardless of the form, “we do not find any culture in which there does not exist [some] frame of orientation. Or any individual either” (Fromm, 1973, p. 230).

THE STRUCTURE OF PERSONALITY

For the most part, Fromm devotes relatively little attention to the structure of personality. He initially accepted the concept of a potentially cruel and relentless superego, characterized this aspect as paternalistic, and added the notion of a maternal conscience that is unquestioningly accepting and tolerant. However, his ultimate conclusion is that psychology is better off “free from the restrictive influence of the libido theory, and particularly the concepts of *id*, *ego*, and *superego*” (Fromm, 1973, p. 84; see also Fromm, 1956/1974a, pp. 33–38; 1947/1976a, pp. 145–175; 1955/1976b, pp. 50–51).



Mechanisms of Defense and Escape

Fromm does regard unconscious processes as extremely important. He also emphasizes such defense mechanisms as projection, reaction formation, rationalization, regression, identification with the aggressor, fantasy, and repression.

A person, even if he is subjectively sincere, may frequently be driven unconsciously by a motive that is different from the one he believes himself to be driven by. . . . Freud's revolution was to make us recognize the unconscious aspect of man's mind and the energy which man uses to repress the awareness of undesirable desires. He showed that good intentions mean nothing if they cover up the unconscious intentions; he unmasked "honest" dishonesty by demonstrating that it is not enough to have "meant" well *consciously*. . . . [Therefore,] only a psychology which utilizes the concept of unconscious forces can penetrate the confusing rationalizations we are confronted with in analyzing either an individual or a culture. (Fromm, 1941/1965, pp. 85, 158; 1973, p. 79. See also Fromm, 1950/1967, pp. 58–59, 74–75; 1947/1976a, pp. 228–230; 1980, pp. 23–26.)

The most likely subjects of repression are such unpleasant passions and beliefs as destructiveness, necrophilia, hate, envy, hypocrisy, revenge, and the fear of death. As in Jungian theory, however, even positive characteristics may be repressed if they threaten to contradict one's frames of orientation (Fromm, 1941/1965, p. 229 n. 14).

Fromm also describes three other devices that we use to alleviate the painful human condition of isolation, and to escape the threatening freedom from preordained instinctual behaviors. One such **mechanism of escape** is **authoritarianism**, a symbiotic emotional attachment to another individual. This mechanism consists of two opposing tendencies: an admiration for authority and desire to submit to powerful others ("masochism"), together with a wish to be the authority and dominate other people ("sadism"). Examples include marriages characterized by excessive submission and domination, often with both partners reflecting both tendencies at different times, and fanatical followers of tyrants such as Hitler. **Malignant aggression** is also an escape mechanism, one that seeks to eliminate external threats rather than incorporate them. The most common mechanism of escape in our modern society is **automaton conformity**, a chameleonlike immersion in a socially acceptable role. Automaton conformity is also essentially undesirable because it conflicts with the need for identity—and because whole societies as well as individuals can be "sick," making the common mode of behavior pathological. (See Fromm, 1941/1965, pp. 163–230; 1964/1971b, pp. 117–134; 1955/1976b, pp. 21–28.)

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONALITY

Unlike Freud, Fromm does not posit any specific developmental stages. He also departs from standard psychoanalysis by arguing that personality can



■ CAPSULE SUMMARY

Some Important Frommian Terminology

Authoritarianism	A symbiotic, nonproductive frame of orientation that involves powerful desires for both submission (masochism) and domination (sadism). One of the three mechanisms of escape.
Automaton conformity	Total immersion in a socially acceptable role, at the cost of one's need for identity. One of the three mechanisms of escape.
Benign aggression	An organic, healthy drive to defend oneself against threat by attacking.
Biophilia	Love of life; a productive frame of orientation.
Exploitative orientation	A nonproductive frame of orientation that attributes all good to sources outside oneself, and seeks to take it by force or cunning.
Frame of orientation (frame of devotion)	A set of principles or personal philosophy that gives meaning to one's life, establishes one's values and goals, and delineates one's place in the world; a nonorganic drive. May be productive and rational, nonproductive and irrational, or a combination thereof.
Hoarding orientation	A nonproductive frame of orientation that involves miserliness, compulsive orderliness, obstinacy, and little faith in external rewards. Similar to the Freudian anal character, but without the sexual implications.
Identity	A sense of oneself as a distinct and separate entity; a nonorganic drive.
Love	A genuine sense of responsibility toward humanity that includes giving, caring, a knowledge of how others feel, and a respect for their right to develop in their own way. Similar to Adler's concept of social interest.
Malignant aggression (destructiveness)	Destructive behavior that serves no rational defensive purpose; a nonorganic drive. One of the three mechanisms of escape.
Marketing orientation	A nonproductive frame of orientation wherein one characterizes oneself as a commodity, and seeks the best "rate of exchange" by becoming what others want one to be.
Mechanism of escape	An essentially undesirable method for resolving threatening feelings of isolation and freedom; similar to nonproductive orientation. Includes authoritarianism, automaton conformity, and destructiveness.
Narcissism	An innate tendency toward self-centeredness ("primary narcissism"), which may become a nonproductive frame of orientation later in life ("secondary narcissism"). Similar to Freud's use of the term, but without the sexual implications.

continued



Capsule Summary, continued

Necrophilia	Love of death; the most pathological and dangerous of all the nonproductive frames of orientation. Often occurs in combination with narcissism and malignant aggression.
Nonorganic drive (character-rooted passion)	A noninstinctual, learned motive. Includes such needs as relatedness, transcendence, identity, and the need for a frame of orientation.
Nonproductive orientation	A frame of orientation that is undesirable because it involves the surrender of one's innate potentials for healthy growth and self-realization.
Organic drive (instinctual drive)	An instinctual, biological motive. Includes hunger, thirst, sex, and defense through fight (benign aggression) or flight.
Productive orientation	A healthy frame of orientation that involves the fulfillment of one's positive innate potentials. Characterized by love, biophilia, work that benefits oneself and others, and rational thought. Similar to the Freudian genital character, but without the sexual implications.
Receptive orientation	A nonproductive frame of orientation that attributes all good to sources outside oneself, and seeks to obtain it by being loved and cared for. Similar to the Freudian oral character, but without the sexual implications.
Relatedness, rootedness	Terms sometimes used by Fromm to refer to the nonorganic drive for interpersonal relationships, which results from the feelings of isolation and physical weakness of the human species.
Symbiotic orientation	A nonproductive frame of orientation that involves intense emotional ties with another individual, at the cost of one's need for identity.
Symbolic language	A mode of expression wherein one entity stands for another; found in dreams, fairy tales, and myths.
Transcendence (effectiveness)	Rising above the helpless animal state, and exerting a significant effect on one's environment; a nonorganic drive. Healthy transcendence is characterized by creativity and love, while pathological transcendence includes hate and malignant aggression. Similar to Adler's concept of striving for superiority.

continue to develop during adulthood, although external influences must be quite intense to affect an older and less impressionable individual (Fromm, 1973, p. 370; 1976c, p. 106). Fromm does share Freud's belief as to the existence of childhood sexuality, however. And he agrees that personality is primarily determined during the early years of life, with the unusually long period of human dependency serving as a powerful lesson about the need to relate to others.

Fromm has relatively little to say about personality development. The growing child slowly learns to distinguish between "I" and "not-I" through



its contacts with the environment, notably those involving the all-important parents. This increasing sense of identity and separation from the parents is essential to healthy development, but it also intensifies the child's feelings of isolation and doubts about its true place in the universe. The freedom to do what one wishes is accompanied not only by freedom from the hindrance of authority, but also from the comforts of security and protection. Thus, as humanity has gained greater independence throughout the course of history, we have also become more isolated and anxious. "When one has become an individual, one stands alone and faces the world in all its perilous and overpowering aspects" (Fromm, 1941/1965, p. 45).

If the child's belief in its own ability keeps pace with the increasing feelings of isolation, anxiety is minimal and personality development proceeds normally. Such positive growth is facilitated by parents who are biophilous, warm, affectionate, and nonthreatening. But if the sense of self-reliance should be damaged by pathogenic parental behaviors, the child is likely to sacrifice its innate healthy potentials and seek to escape from the threatening human state of isolation in misguided ways. For example, authoritarian parents may use the child to fulfill their own frustrated ambition for professional success, or to enjoy a sense of personal power. Such parents may well repress their true intentions (and lack of love) by stressing their concern for the child and lavishing it with attention, advice, or gifts—everything but genuine warmth, and the right to be independent:

The child is put into a golden cage, it can have everything provided it does not want to leave the cage. The result of this is often a profound fear of love on the part of the child when he grows up, as "love" to him implies being caught and blocked in his own quest for freedom. (Fromm, 1941/1965, p. 168. See also Fromm, 1941/1965, pp. 216–217, 268; 1956/1974a, pp. 51–52; 1947/1976a, pp. 136, 157–158.)

Other pathogenic parental behaviors include pessimism, joylessness, narcissism, necrophilia, and physical abuse. To Fromm, such forms of maltreatment are so prevalent that "one must believe that loving parents are the exception, rather than the rule" (1976c, p. 45).

Character Typology

The healthy personality is typified by biophilia, love, creativity, and reason. These characteristics comprise the **productive** frame of orientation (Fromm, 1964/1971b; 1947/1976a, pp. 89–113). This personality type corresponds roughly to the Freudian genital character, albeit without the sexual implications. That is, it results from social and environmental influences (such as parental behaviors), rather than from libidinal instincts.

As we have seen, the undesirable or **nonproductive** frames of orientation include symbiotic attachments, narcissism, necrophilia, compulsive strivings for power or wealth, and the mechanisms of escape (authoritar-



ianism, automaton conformity, and destructiveness). In addition, Fromm (1947/1976a, pp. 70–89) has described four other nonproductive orientations. The **receptive** orientation is similar to the oral-dependent character in Freudian theory (again, without the sexual implications), and to Horney's conception of "moving toward people." This type believes that the source of everything desirable is external, and consistently seeks to be loved and nurtured by others. The person with an **exploitative** orientation also regards the source of all good as external, but strives to obtain it through force or cunning. Such individuals resemble the Freudian oral-sadistic character (Fromm, 1973, p. 80), and Horney's construct of "moving against people." The **hoarding** orientation is denoted by miserliness, compulsive orderliness, and obstinacy, and resembles the Freudian anal character and Horney's "moving away from people." Like Adler's (1927/1957, p. 181) description of people who are determined to guard their wretched treasures, "the hoarding character experiences himself like a beleaguered fortress; he must prevent anything from going out and save what is inside" (Fromm, 1973, p. 293). The **marketing** orientation does not correspond to any of the Freudian character types, though it bears some similarities to the overdeveloped persona in Jungian theory. Marketing types regard themselves as commodities and try to fashion a salable exterior, one that will be coveted on the social market. While some social expertise and polish is desirable, these individuals tend to repress their own needs for identity and self-realization in order to become what others want them to be.

More recently, Fromm (1973, pp. 294–296) has also referred to a "bureaucratic character." In this nonproductive orientation, an individual is controlled from above in a power structure while having authority over one or more subordinates. Often, such people use red tape as an expression of sadistic power and hostility. Thus a clerk may welcome the opportunity to infuriate others by shutting the customer's window at the prescribed time of 5:30 P.M. exactly, forcing one or two people who have been waiting in line for some time to depart empty-handed.

Fromm (1976c) also emphasizes the differences between the nonproductive "having" orientation, and the productive characteristics of "being." "Having" is an amalgam of the hoarding and marketing orientations and tends to result in greed, with one's personality defined by such formulas as "I am [i.e., exist] because I have X" or "I am = what I have and what I consume." Contrariwise, "being" is denoted by a spontaneous and creative state of existence that is independent of one's possessions. Fortunately, "having" is learned and thus evitable, though a society based on maximum production and consumption may well find it advantageous to teach that greed is innate. (See Fromm, 1976c, pp. 7, 27, 77, 112.)

Fromm cautions that the various nonproductive orientations vary in degree as well as type, since they may blend with the productive orientation (or with each other). For example, a receptive person may be polite and adaptable (more productive) or spineless and unprincipled (more nonproductive). Or a hoarding type may be practical and economical (more



productive) or unimaginative and stingy (more nonproductive). (See Fromm, 1947/1976a, pp. 118–122.)

FURTHER APPLICATIONS OF FROMMIAN THEORY

Dream Interpretation

Like Freud, Fromm regards dreams as the royal road to the unconscious. He concludes that dream interpretation is probably the most important and revealing technique in psychotherapy, although he by no means restricts its use to this realm. The language of dreams is one that we are all advised to learn, for “[as] the Talmud says, ‘dreams which are not interpreted are like letters which have not been opened.’ . . . [Dreams] are important communications from ourselves to ourselves” (Fromm, 1951/1957, p. 10; see also Fromm, cited by Evans, 1966, p. 36).

The Purpose of Dreams. Fromm agrees with Freud that dreams can serve the purpose of wish-fulfillment, that they are invariably triggered by day’s residues, and that threatening truths may be concealed in various ways. For example, a young lawyer was criticized at work by a superior, but consciously dismissed this incident as trivial. That night, he dreamed of riding a white charger before a cadre of cheering soldiers. Thus he alleviated his fears of failure and restored his self-esteem, which had in fact been shaken by the events of the preceding day. The dream fulfilled these wishes in an irrational and disguised manner, similar to military daydreams he had sought comfort from as a child when rejected and taunted by his peers (Fromm, 1951/1957, pp. 150–157).

Fromm also shares Jung’s belief that dreams can have obvious and undisguised meanings, and that they need not necessarily involve childhood conflicts. A dream may express current anxieties and misgivings, as when a man who is unconsciously afraid of domination by females dreams of being murdered by a woman. Alternatively, a dream may serve some teleological or problem-solving function. A writer was offered a tempting position that would compromise his integrity for a great deal of money. He resolved this dilemma by dreaming that two opportunists advised him to drive up a peak, whereupon he was killed in a crash and awoke in terror—a clear indication that accepting the job would destroy him psychologically. Similarly, the discoverer of the Benzene ring first visualized the correct chemical structure in a dream of snakes biting each others’ tails.

Dreams may also afford accurate and crucial insights about oneself or others. For example, frequent dreams of corpses and skulls suggest an unconscious necrophilous orientation. Or one may meet supposedly kind and generous persons during waking hours, unconsciously sense that they are not nearly so wonderful as everyone believes, dream of them as cruel or dishonest,



and subsequently find that they have proved guilty of embezzlement or ruthlessness. Thus we are able to heed in our dreams important stimuli that were perceived only subliminally during the day. "*We are not only less reasonable and less decent in our dreams but . . . also more intelligent, wiser, and capable of better judgment when we are asleep than when we are awake*" (Fromm, 1951/1957, p. 33; see also Fromm, 1951/1957, pp. 36–45; 1964/1971b, pp. 42, 127–128; 1947/1976a, pp. 168–169; 1980, pp. 100–101).

Regardless of its specific content, every dream is a deliberate creation of the dreamer. "Whatever the role we play in the dream, *we* are the author, it is *our* dream, *we* have invented the plot" (Fromm, 1951/1957, p. 4). Nor is a dream ever unimportant, although its true significance may be concealed by a trivial façade. Thus a young woman once claimed that a dream of hers was meaningless because it consisted only of serving her husband a dish of strawberries, whereupon he pointed out with a laugh: "You seem to forget that strawberries are the one fruit which I do not eat" (Fromm, 1951/1957, p. 149; see also p. 24). Whether this dream expresses a severe marital conflict or only mild annoyance is not clear; but, like all dreams, it deals with issues of demonstrable importance.

Dream Symbols. Fromm agrees that dreams are expressed in **symbolic language**, an important mode of communication also found in fairy tales and myths. Unlike Freud, however, Fromm regards many dream symbols as asexual. For example, a person who feels lost and confused may dream of arriving at the outskirts of a city where the streets are empty, the surroundings are unfamiliar, and there is no transportation to where the dreamer wishes to go. Or, since symbolic language has its own syntax and can be quite unrealistic, the dreamer may depict a cowardly human being in the form of a chicken. (See Fromm, 1951/1957, pp. 11–23, 28.)

Some dream symbols have universal meanings because they are intrinsically related to what they represent, such as the power and vitality of fire, the slow and steady quality of moving water, and the security of a valley enclosed by mountains. In contrast to Jungian archetypes, universal symbols result from these intrinsic meanings rather than from racial inheritances (Fromm, 1951/1957, p. 18). Other dream elements possess only an accidental, learned relationship to the concepts that they express. For example, the street or city where one falls in love is likely to symbolize happiness, whereas the identical scene may represent sorrow to an individual who suffered a painful parting in that location. Thus the meaning of accidental symbols must be supplied by the dreamer, and Fromm (like Freud) makes use of free association to bring information to consciousness.

The Dreams of Freud and Jung. Interpreting one's own dreams is no easy task, and Fromm argues that even Freud and Jung showed a tendency to shy away from threatening truths. Thus Freud once dreamed of having written a botanical monograph, with each copy containing a dried specimen of the



plant in question. Based on extensive free associations, Freud interpreted this dream as an expression of pride in his professional achievements. However, Fromm concludes that the dream actually reflects profound self-reproach over Freud's puritanical and lifeless treatment of sexuality. "He has dried the flower, made sex and love the object of scientific inspection and speculation, rather than leave it alive" (Fromm, 1951/1957, p. 93).

Jung once dreamed of killing someone named Siegfried with a rifle, became horror-stricken, and awakened with the thought that he must kill himself unless he could understand the dream. He eventually decided that he had symbolically murdered the hero within himself, thereby expressing a sense of humility. Fromm suggests that Jung was at this time angry with his esteemed mentor Freud, even to the extent of harboring powerful unconscious death wishes (which Freud had in fact commented upon, but which Jung indignantly denied). Therefore, the dream-victim was actually Freud himself, with Jung unable to recognize the truth because he was intensely repressing a rather necrophilous orientation. "The slight change from *Sigmund* to *Siegfried* was enough to enable a man whose greatest skill was the interpretation of dreams, to hide the real meaning of this dream from himself" (Fromm, 1964/1971b, p. 44; see also Fromm, 1951/1957, pp. 47–108; 1980, pp. 73–89).

Psychopathology

In essence, Fromm accepts Freud's definition of mental health as the capacity for love and productive work. He also agrees that psychopathology represents a difference in degree, rather than in kind:

The phenomena which we observe in the neurotic person are in principle not different from those we find in the normal. They are only more accentuated, clear-cut, and frequently more accessible to the awareness of the neurotic person than they are in the normal. . . . (Fromm, 1941/1965, p. 159; see also p. 46.)

Causes of Neurosis. In addition to the aforementioned pathogenic parental behaviors, Fromm stresses that neurosis is often caused by the culture in which one lives. He argues that society seeks to make people *wish* to do what they *have* to do, which presents "a difficult problem: *How to break a person's will without his being aware of it?* Yet by a complicated process of indoctrination, rewards, punishments, and fitting ideology, [society] solves this task by and large so well that most people believe they are following their own will and are unaware that their will itself is conditioned and manipulated" (Fromm, 1976c, p. 78; see also p. 133). Thus we are pressured into automaton conformity by the very society we have created to serve our ends.

To make matters worse, we are constantly bombarded by a huge variety of pathogenic stimuli. These include the "rationalizing lies" used by modern advertising that play upon our sexual desires, threaten us with social



ostracism unless we use the appropriate deodorants, promise revolutionary changes in our love life if we purchase a particular brand of toothpaste, or urge us to buy products simply because they are endorsed by famous or attractive individuals. “All these methods are essentially irrational; they have nothing to do with the qualities of the merchandise, and they smother and kill the critical capacities of the customer like an opiate or outright hypnosis” (Fromm, 1951/1957, p. 35; 1941/1965, p. 149; 1976c, p. 188).

Also adding to our sense of alienation and insignificance are elected politicians whom one hardly ever sees in person, and who cunningly hide their true intentions behind jargonistic double-talk; huge bureaucracies and businesses that regard individual customers as unimportant; repetitive jobs that transform workers into machinelike cogs, and eliminate the pride of producing a complete product; vast and overcrowded cities; conflicting societal prescriptions that advise us to be self-centered winners on the one hand, and charitably selfless on the other; and the ominous threat of nuclear war. And since parents serve as “*the psychological agent[s] of society*,” we are all exposed to these influences (at least indirectly) from the moment of birth. In fact, “the real problem of mental life is not why some people become insane, but rather why most avoid insanity” (Fromm, 1941/1965, p. 315; 1955/1976b, p. 34; see also Fromm, 1947/1976a, p. 132; 1981).

Dynamics of Neurosis. According to Fromm, neurosis always consists of a conflict between two opposing forces. It occurs when our healthy innate drives toward self-realization and independence are blocked by parental or societal influences. The individual may then opt for narcissism instead of love, malignant aggression instead of transcendence, symbiotic dependence instead of identity and independence, or any of the other nonproductive frames of orientation. Thus the goal of the psychologist is not to define and treat a set of symptoms, but to understand the neurotic character and the resulting difficulties in living. (See Fromm, 1941/1965, pp. 162, 176, 201; 1950/1967, p. 65; 1947/1976a, p. 222.)

Psychotherapy and Social Reform

Fromm accepts many of the tenets and procedures of Freudian psychoanalysis, including the need to bring unconscious material to consciousness, free association, resistance, transference, countertransference, working through, and the importance of dream interpretation. He also shares Freud’s belief that psychoanalysis is not suitable for everyone, nor can it guarantee improvement. Fromm prefers to dispense with transference neurosis, however, and to have the patient perceive the analyst as a rational authority and genuine human being. He favors the Adlerian technique of early recollections, and he shares Horney’s view that insights must be achieved on both an intellectual and emotional level in order to be effective. In particular, analytic therapy strives to help the patient replace the chosen nonproductive frame(s) of orientation with the productive orientation, as by abandoning



narcissism in favor of love. (See Fromm, 1950/1967, p. 84; 1973, pp. 205–207; 1947/1976a, p. 225; 1976c, pp. 31, 169–170; Fromm, cited by Evans, 1976, pp. 30–55, 82).

For the most part, Fromm's psychological prescriptions refer to society in general rather than to the individual. He warns that the diminishing worldwide supply of food, the environmental deterioration resulting from such influences as the automobile and pesticides, and the proliferation of nuclear weapons have brought us to a crisis that threatens the very survival of our species:

Some 10–20 million people are starving to death annually now. . . . [while] population growth increases the probability of a lethal worldwide plague and of a thermonuclear war. . . . [Thus] for the first time in history, the *physical survival of the human race depends on a radical change of the human heart*. . . . [a] change [that] is the only alternative to economic catastrophe. . . . [Yet] we go on plundering the raw materials of the earth, poisoning the earth, and preparing nuclear war. We hesitate not at all leaving our own descendants this plundered earth as their heritage. (Fromm, 1976c, pp. 10, 164, 166, 189.)

To Fromm, the only alternative to disaster is a radical remodeling of society. Most importantly, unlimited growth must be replaced by selective, planned expansion. We must abandon the “having” orientation that is characterized by conspicuous and excessive consumption, such as the purchase of an oversized new car every year. In its place we must substitute the “being” orientation, which minimizes the importance of material possessions and emphasizes the goal of consumption based on actual necessity.

Fromm also recommends that the “brainwashing” techniques of modern industrial and political advertising be prohibited, so that we can wean ourselves from such propaganda and learn to make better use of our powers of reason. Consumer strikes should be used to impress our will on industry, since a boycott of (say) private automobiles by even 20 percent of the buying public would have a profound impact. The reestablishment of the town meeting would enable people to exert a more meaningful effect on the process of government. Education should enable students to fulfill their innate potentials and experience what they learn, rather than merely memorizing a vast number of unrelated facts. The gap between rich and poor nations must be closed by appropriate foreign aid, so as to decrease the probability of epidemics and nuclear wars instigated by the “have-nots.” A guaranteed annual income must be established, ensuring everyone of the right to subsist. Women must be freed from patriarchal domination. Movies should foster pride in the whole human race, rather than one particular national or ethnic group. A Supreme Cultural Council, neither elected by popular vote nor appointed by the government, should be established to advise both political leaders and the citizenry. Finally, atomic disarmament is essential (Fromm, 1976c, pp. 173–196; see also Fromm, 1941/1965, p. 273; 1964/1971b, p. 112 n. 14; 1968/1974b, pp. 119–120; 1955/1976b, pp. 291–298; 1981).



Fromm recognizes that many individuals may be too accustomed to our present society to accept such drastic alterations, even at the cost of possible future catastrophes. Nor is he optimistic about the possibility that academic psychology will provide effective answers, concluding that researchers all too often prefer to deal with problems that are insignificant but capable of rigorous measurement. Yet despite the difficulties and limited chances of success, Fromm argues that the attempt to change must be made:

If a sick person has even the barest chance for survival, no responsible physician will say “Let’s give up the effort,” or will use only palliatives. On the contrary, everything conceivable is done to save the sick person’s life. Certainly, a sick society cannot expect anything less. (Fromm, 1976c, p. 197; see also Fromm, 1976c, p. 11; Fromm, cited by Evans, 1966, p. 74, 84.)

Religion

Fromm regards religion as one of the various possible frames of orientation. As would be expected from his definition of love, he differs from Freud by praising “loving thy neighbor as thyself” as the most important standard for living (Fromm, 1950/1967, p. 84). However, Fromm also cautions that religion may well have harmful effects. Misguided and dated principles, such as prohibitions against birth control, may stifle healthy personal growth and development. Or religious tenets may be used in the service of destruction and warfare. In particular, Fromm criticizes the concept of “original sin” as typical of the authoritarian and undesirable aspects of religion. He also objects to the divisiveness that results from the existence of many different religions, preferring to emphasize the commonness of all humanity. (See Fromm, 1941/1965, pp. 81–122, 193, 271; 1950/1967; 1947/1976a, pp. 23–24; 1976c, pp. 41–44, 79.)

Literature and Mythology

In addition to dreams, Fromm devotes considerable attention to the symbolic nature of literature and mythology. For example, the myth of Jonah symbolizes the futility of trying to escape from one’s obligations to others. It also illustrates how neurotic defenses like seclusiveness, denoted by being thrown into the ocean and swallowed by the whale, exceed their original function and become extremely self-destructive. Little Red Riding Hood symbolically describes a young girl facing the problem of sexuality and the issue of male-female conflicts, with the heroine’s red cap representing menstruation and men depicted in the form of dangerous wolves. And Walt Disney’s Mickey Mouse serves a psychological function by enabling people who suffer from feelings of insignificance to identify with a small, persecuted entity who overcomes a powerful and hostile enemy. (See Fromm, 1951/1957, pp. 20–23, 195–263; 1941/1965, pp. 153–154; 1947/1976a, pp. 104–105, 171–175.)



EVALUATION

Criticisms and Controversies

Not surprisingly, Fromm's sweeping recommendations for social reform have proved to be highly controversial. His socialistic approach is unacceptable to those who believe that capitalism, with its faults, is still the best method for meeting the needs of the people. Some of his proposals are vague and lacking in detail, while others would be extremely difficult to implement (as he himself concedes). Furthermore, many modern psychologists regard Fromm's ideas as little more than unsupported philosophical speculations. His writings lack the quantitative analyses commonly expected of a scientist (especially one who proposes such profound social changes). In contrast to Freud, it is even difficult to detect much correspondence between Fromm's conclusions and evidence from his psychoanalytic practice. This absence of hard data gives his books a distinctly sermonic tone, which he justifies with the subjective argument that he finds in psychology that which proves him to be right (Fromm, cited by Evans, 1966, p. 80).

Some noted philosophers have seriously questioned Fromm's interpretation of Marxist socialism as humanistic. Unlike Freud, Fromm does not always clarify the relationships among terms used in his earlier works and those in his later writings. Fromm's theory has generated little empirical research. And while he does at times cite such predecessors as Jung and Adler, he often appears to ignore important similarities between their constructs and his own.

Contributions

Fromm's warnings about the dangers of abusing our environment, world famine, and nuclear war are timely and important. He has made major contributions to our understanding of dream interpretation, and of freedom and totalitarianism. His inclusion of organic drives appears superior to Adler's rejection of innate determinants of behavior, while his view of feminine equality accords more closely with modern opinion than that of Freud. Fromm's emphasis on narcissism also seems well justified when applied to our affluent, "spoiled" society. And as a colleague of such noted psychologists as Horney and Sullivan, Fromm has exerted some influence on theories other than his own.

Like Horney, Fromm does not pretend to offer a complete theory of personality. But Horney's crucial insights into neurotic behavior make her writings of considerable value to psychology, while Fromm's sweeping yet unsubstantiated social criticisms would seem to belong more in the realm of philosophy. Psychologists and personality theorists are expected to follow a more scientific course, where recommendations are clearly linked to clinical and/or research data. By devoting so much of his attention to apparently unsupported speculations, Fromm himself has limited the impact of his work on modern psychological thought.



Suggested Reading

Among Fromm's many titles, two stand out: *Escape From Freedom* (1941/1965), which has been praised as a landmark in psychological, political, and philosophical thought, and his classic work on dream interpretation, *The Forgotten Language* (1951/1957). *The Art of Loving* (1956/1974a) has also achieved wide popularity, while *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973) offers interesting insights into this important area.

SUMMARY

1. THE BASIC NATURE OF HUMAN BEINGS. Fromm emphasizes the conflict between our innate, organic animal side and the uniquely human characteristics of self-awareness, reason, and imagination. He also stresses the importance of such nonorganic drives as the need for others, transcendence, identity, and frames of orientation. Fromm is optimistic about human nature, but he is more pessimistic than Horney about our secondary capacity for learned pathological behavior. Nonorganic drives are difficult to satisfy, since there is no innate program that ensures their fulfillment. Thus love may surrender to narcissism, transcendence to destructiveness, and identity to dependence.
2. THE STRUCTURE OF PERSONALITY. Fromm accepts the importance of unconscious processes, repression, and defense mechanisms. But he rejects the Freudian constructs of id, ego, and superego, nor does he favor any alternative structural model. He does posit three mechanisms that we use to escape the threatening freedom from preordained instinctual behaviors: a symbiotic emotional attachment to another person (authoritarianism), eliminating external threats (malignant aggression), and a chameleonlike immersion in a socially acceptable role (automaton conformity).
3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF PERSONALITY. Fromm concludes that personality may continue to develop into adulthood, but he posits no specific developmental stages. He warns against such pathogenic parental behaviors as necrophilia, narcissism, pessimism, and lack of warmth. He also devotes considerable attention to such character types or frames of orientation as receptive, exploitative, and hoarding (which correspond roughly to the Freudian oral-dependent, oral-sadistic, and anal character, albeit without the sexual implications), bureaucratic, and "having." All of these are nonproductive frames of orientation. In contrast, the healthy productive orientation stresses biophilia, love, and reason.
4. FURTHER APPLICATIONS. Fromm is noted for his major work on dream interpretation, *The Forgotten Language*. He argues that dreams may well be relatively obvious as well as disguised, and that we are often wiser and more reasonable in our dreams than when we are awake. Fromm is also a social philosopher who offers numerous criticisms of our hypocritical, alienating, and destructive



society. He therefore proposes sweeping (and highly controversial) changes in the basic structure of society.

5. EVALUATION. Fromm's radical and sermonistic proposals for social change strike many modern observers as unscientific and excessive. Yet his works have also been praised as landmarks in psychological, political, and philosophical thought, and it is by no means clear that his recommendations can be safely ignored.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Fromm argues that "destructiveness is the outcome of unlived life." Freud contends that destructiveness occurs because we fail to sublimate our illicit instincts. Since both theorists agree that we are destructive, why is this theoretical difference important?
2. According to Adler, it is all too possible to deny our predisposition for social interest and become neurotically self-centered. Fromm argues that we must overcome our innate narcissistic tendencies in order to develop healthy and mature love. Does the difference in terminology between Adler and Fromm reflect important theoretical differences?
3. Explain how each of the following is related to Fromm's conception of "escape from freedom:" (a) The conflict between the healthy need for identity and the desire for a powerful protector. (b) A growing child gets increasing freedom to do what he or she wants, which involves both freedom from the hindrance of parental authority and freedom from the comforts of security and protection. (c) Unlike lower animals, humans have nonorganic drives. (d) The case history described in the Appendix, Chapter 5, question 4b.
4. Give a real-life example of a child who grows up with a profound fear of being loved. Why might this happen?
5. Give an example from your own life, from the life of someone you know well, or from fiction to illustrate: (a) the receptive orientation. (b) the exploitative orientation. (c) the hoarding orientation. (d) the productive orientation.
6. A young woman dreams that she is having breakfast with her husband and hands him the comics section of the newspaper. To her, this seems meaningless and unimportant. How would Fromm interpret this dream?
7. Fromm takes a negative view of many aspects of our society, including: (a) advertising by businesses and politicians; (b) politicians; (c) inadequate foreign aid; (d) the lack of a guaranteed annual income; (e) the existence of so many different religions; (f) the threat of nuclear war; (g) plundering our environment and poisoning the earth. Do you agree or disagree? Why?



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