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FROMM, ERICH 215

#### FROMM, ERICH

Erich Fromm, psychoanalyst, has developed his widely read ideas on man and society by integrating psychoanalysis with the humanistic tradition in philosophy, social science, and religion. Throughout his career, he has also been concerned with translating theory into practice as a psychoanalyst, social scientist, and political activist in the prophetic mode. Born in Frankfurt, Germany, on March 23, 1900, he studied psychology, sociology, and philosophy at the universities of Frankfort and Heidelberg, receiving his PH.D. from Frankfort in 1922, and was trained in psychoanalysis at the Berlin Institute. In 1932 he published his first articles on social character, proposing the integration of Freud's theory of character with Marx's theory of social forces, thus explaining how people develop the motivation required by a particular economic system and why they are attracted to particular ideas, ideals, and ideologies.

From 1928 to 1938 Fromm was associated with the Institute for Social Research, first at the University of Frankfort, then at its residence in exile, Columbia University. In 1934 Fromm emigrated to the United States to escape the Nazis and lectured at the New School for Social Research, Yale University, Columbia University, and Bennington College. He later served as chairman of the faculty of the William Alanson White Institute of Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis, and Psychology, which trains psychologists as well as psychiatrists in psychoanalysis.

Fromm first gained a large general readership with *Escape From Freedom* (1941), which explained man's unconscious fear of freedom



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## 216 FROMM, ERICH

and the appeal of authoritarian political systems. This book influenced generations of college students and helped to shape intellectual consciousness in America. He became identified as a leading neo-Freudian, together with Karen Horney and Harry Stack Sullivan. Fromm has written that although the three differ considerably among themselves, they share an emphasis on social and cultural factors and a critical attitude to Freud's theory of the primacy of the sexual instinct.

In 1951 Fromm became a professor at the National University of Mexico, where he founded the Mexican Institute of Psychoanalysis. His main reason for moving to Mexico was his response to a group of socially committed psychiatrists who sought psychoanalytic training from him. For the next twenty years, he spent most of his time in Mexico, traveling regularly to the United States to lecture and give seminars. In 1971 he moved to Switzerland where he has continued research and writing.

Over the years Fromm has developed several key themes, progressively elaborating and refining his ideas. His work may be grouped into four general areas. The first is social character, probably his most original concept, which relates the psychoanalytic theory of dynamic motivation to socioeconomic factors. The second is his revision of Freud's theory of psychoanalysis and psychopathology, with particular attention to the issues of aggression and destructiveness. The third includes his critique of industrial society. The fourth is his analysis of religion and its relation to human development.

Social character. Fromm builds his theory on Freud's concept of the dynamic nature of character traits. Character structure explains actions, thoughts, and ideas; it determines what motivates the individual, what he finds most satisfying or frustrating. Although Fromm accepts Freud's clinical description of character orientations—e.g., the anal or the oral-receptive character, he rejects libido theory as explaining character development.

Fromm holds that, although physiological needs must be satisfied, they are not the basic inner forces that determine man's actions, feelings, and thoughts. He wrote:

Only by considering the specific conditions of human existence, and its inherent contradictions, can we understand the basic human forces and passions. Man 1s a "freak of nature"; lacking the instinctive equipment which regulates the life of all animals, but gifted instead with reason, imagination and self-awareness; life becomes for him a problem which must be solved. He has to relate himself to others, to find a new rootedness to replace those roots in nature which other animals have; he must acquire a sense of identity (self) and a system of orientation and an object of devotion. (1955a, p. 379)

Character, for Fromm, is the equivalent of the animal's instinctive determinism, which humans have lost. It is the (relatively permanent) way in which human energy is channeled and structured in the process of assimilation and socialization, to satisfy needs for physical survival -the need to acquire and assimilate things, and for emotional survival—the need to be emotionally related to others for defense, work, material possessions, sexual satisfaction, play, the upbringing of the young, and the transmission of knowledge.

The social character is the nucleus of the character structure and is shared by most members of a culture or a social group. It is not a statistical measure or the traits shared by a majority; rather, it is a functional concept to be understood in relationship to the socioeconomic system, particularly the dominant methods of production. According to Fromm, it is the function of the social character to shape the energies of the members of the society in such a way that their behavior is not a matter of conscious decision whether or not to follow the social pattern, but one of wanting to act as they have to act and at the same time finding gratification in acting according to the requirements of the culture. In other words, the concept of social character describes the molding and channeling of human energy within a society for the purpose of the continued functioning of this society.

For Fromm the family is the "psychic agency of society," the institution with the function of transmitting the requirements of society to the growing child.

As an example of social character, Fromm (1951) has revised Freud's concept of the anal character, which he calls the "hoarding orientation." This syndrome of traits includes inner drives for orderliness, saving, punctuality, and respect for authority that meet the economic needs of the middle class in the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century in advanced capitalistic societies, this social character is being replaced by another type oriented to consumption and to fitting into bureaucratic structures through easy adaptation to their rules and regulations. Such a "marketing personality," accord-



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# ing to Fromm, reduces the capacity for genuine and profound feeling and thought.

The concept of social character helps explain social conflict as well as adaptation. As conditions change, a social character may no longer fit, and the resulting resentment and frustration transform social cement into an explosive force. Moreover, Fromm holds, social needs can, and often do, conflict with needs stemming from the nature of man and its inherent need for love, human solidarity, and the development of reason and creative talents. Fromm has maintained that insofar as a given society does not satisfy these human needs it will cause a "socially patterned defect."

Fromm first experimented with a new method of studying social character in 1931 at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfort. His immediate interest was knowing how many German workers and employees were reliable fighters against Nazism. In their political opinions respondents were all anti-Nazis. However, a different picture emerged when Fromm and his co-workers distinguished opinions from convictions rooted in the character structure. Their main interest was not social character in its broad sense, but that aspect most relevant to the Nazi challenge: the authoritarian as against the democratic character. To explore character, Fromm developed an interpretive questionnaire using open-ended questions. These were analyzed and coded as a psychoanalyst examines a patient's communications, seeking the unconscious or unintended meanings that reveal character structure.

That study was never published, but the concept of the authoritarian personality was later made the basis of a study carried out by Theodor W. Adorno and his colleagues (1950) that was influential in social research. In Fromm's point of view, that study did not sufficiently distinguish between convictions rooted in the sadomasochistic authoritarian character and conventional conservative or ethnocentric ideology rooted in a different character structure.

In Mexico, with the collaboration of his students, Fromm initiated a study of social character using a more developed version of the interpretive questionnaire (Fromm & Maccoby 1970). All the adults and half the children in a rural village were interviewed. The researchers explored relationships between character structure and such socioeconomic factors as work, methods of farming, and family relationships. Fromm and Maccoby concluded the

analysis of the data by describing a process of "social selection" by which certain character types, in this case the more entrepreneurial, "productive-exploitive" villagers, were better adapted to modern agriculture and the developing capitalistic society; their ascendency to power, however, was at the expense of other character types less able to adapt. The result was the emergence of negative character traits and behavior (including alcoholism and violence) in those whose character did not fit. The village study also included experiments in change that demonstrated the importance of taking account of character. This methodology was later used in a study of corporate managers in the United States (Maccoby 1976).

Psychoanalysis and psychopathology. Much of Fromm's professional life has been devoted to the clinical practice of psychoanalysis and the supervision of psychoanalysts. A gifted clinician and teacher, he has inspired generations of students with his combination of penetrating understanding of the unconscious, demystification of concepts, and tough-minded compassion. Fromm stresses the importance of understanding the patient's experience and of using language that expresses experience. He demonstrates this approach to dream interpretation in The Forgotten Language (1951), where he describes analysis as liberating creativity and critical knowledge about self and others as well as uncovering psychopathology.

Fromm's relationship to Freud and his work is complex. For ten years he practiced as an orthodox Freudian and was a member of the International Psychoanalytic Association. His criticism of Freud includes both Freud's theory and his tendency to turn psychoanalysis into a semipolitical movement demanding ideological purity (1959). However, Fromm's aim in both his teaching and his critique of psychoanalytic theory has been to preserve and develop what he considers to be the essential elements in Freud's discoveries: the art of making the unconscious conscious and the science of the irrational. Despite his critique of Freud, he believes that many of Freud's orthodox followers have diluted the more critical elements of psychoanalysis, transforming the radical exploration of the unconscious into an overly cognitive "ego psychology."

Fromm (1970) criticizes Freud's model of man as overly determined by his social views, including his belief in patriarchy and his bourgeois view of man as basically egoistic. Because

# FROMM, ERICH 217



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## 218 FROMM, ERICH

he limited his criticism of social norms to the area of sexuality, Freud was handicapped in developing the full implication of his discoveries. In reexamining the case history of "Little Hans," Fromm argues that Freud's model of man caused him to misinterpret clinical evidence, and especially to underestimate the importance of the child's pre-Oedipal relationship to the mother. Fromm's view of personality was influenced by Johann J. Bachofen's nineteenth-century work on mother right and the war between the sexes (1849). Unlike Freud, Fromm sees mature love as requiring equality between the sexes.

In rejecting Freud's instinct theories, Fromm conceives of psychopathology as rooted in character. In *Escape from Freedom* he describes sadism and masochism as outcomes of a basic need for relatedness, "springing from the inability to bear the isolation and weakness of one's own self. I suggest calling the aim which is at the basis of both sadism and masochism: *symbiosis*... People are not sadistic or masochistic, but there is a constant oscillation between the active and the passive side of the symbiotic complex... In both cases individuality and freedom are lost" (1941, pp. 158–159).

For Fromm, man's inability to endure feelings of powerlessness, uncertainty, and separateness lead to psychopathology. In *The Heart* of *Man* (1964), he describes the three main pathological forces of the psyche. Two of them, incestuous fixation and narcissism, are elaborations of Freudian concepts, though presented in a new context of relatedness. The third, *necrophilia*, is Fromm's own discovery, elaborated in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973).

In contrast to Freud's view, presented in his later years, that man's destructiveness is innate and rooted in a death instinct necessarily directed either against the self or against others, Fromm sees destructiveness as a result of unfavorable conditions in the child's development leading to sadism or necrophilia. Sadism is the passion for total control over a living being, including the desire to hurt and torture. Necrophilia is the malignant form of the character structure of which Freud's anal character is the more benign form. It is the ultimate perversion, just as its opposite, biophilia or love of life, represents the orientation to unification and integrated growth: "Necrophilia in the characterological sense can be described as the passionate attraction to all that is dead, decayed, putrid, sickly; it is the passion to transform that

which is alive into something unalive; to destroy for the sake of destruction; the exclusive interest in all that is purely mechanical. It is the passion to tear apart living structures" (1973, p. 332; italics in original).

For Fromm, mental health is rooted in biophilous development and a productive orientation. Few people are pure necrophiles or biophiles: "The pure necrophile is insane; the pure biophile is saintly. Most people are a particular blend of the necrophilous and biophilous orientations, and what matters is which of the two trends is dominant" (1964, p. 48).

Critique of industrial society. Fromm evaluates society according to whether or not its institutions stimulate healthy character development. From this point of view the normal is not the ideal, since normality may describe a social character with pathological elements. In a number of his books, especially *The Sane Society* (1955b), Fromm analyzes modern industrial society-both its capitalistic and socialistic versions, and concludes that bureaucratic-mechanistic institutions cause dehumanization and alienation from self.

For Fromm the total practice of life—at work, in the family, as a citizen, and in cultural activity—influences character development. Human development requires above all a society that satisfies needs for security, justice, and freedom—freedom not only from exploitation and tyranny, but freedom also to participate actively and responsibly, to create and construct.

In 1959 Fromm wrote a manifesto for the Socialist party of the United States, and in 1965 he edited a collection of papers by sociologists and philosophers on socialist humanism. Here and in his essay on Marx (1961a), Fromm sees "authentic Marxism" as "perhaps the strongest spiritual movement of a broad, nontheistic nature in nineteenth-century Europe." He views Marx as a humanist whose ideal was "a man productively related to other men and to nature, who would respond to the world in an alive manner, and who would be rich not because he had much but because he was much" (1965, p. ix). He believes that Marx's concept of man and society has been misinterpreted both by those who felt threatened by his program, and by many socialists, led by those in the Soviet Union, who believed that his goal was exclusively material affluence for all and that Marxism differed from capitalism only in its methods, which were economically more efficient and could be initiated by the working class. Fromm's view of



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Marx has been endorsed by a group of eastern European philosophers, especially in Yugoslavia, with whom he has been in correspondence.

Along with criticizing the industrial-bureaucratic systems in both the West and the Communist world, Fromm has been active as a leader of the peace movement. In the early 1960s he spoke out for arms control and disarmament and opposed the war in Vietnam. An advocate of détente, he disagrees with the cold war view of the Soviets as a revolutionary society, arguing that since Stalin the Russians have been supporters of the status quo. In May Man Prevail? (1961b), he debated the leading American theorists of military and foreign policy, challenging their view of human motivation and their understanding of social change:

Our present thinking is a symptom of a deep-seated, though unconscious defeatism, of a lack of faith in the very values which we proclaim. We only cover up this defeatism by concentrating on the evil of communism and by promoting hate. If we continue with our policy of the deterrent and with our unholy alliances with dictatorial states in the name of freedom, we shall defeat the very values we hope to defend. We shall lose our freedom and probably also our lives. (1961b, p. 252)

Fromm has been criticized (Schaar 1961) as a utopian whose view of human nature is overly benign and who does not take sufficient account of the realities of power. In fact, while optimistic about human nature and its capacity for creative growth, Fromm, as much or more than any other psychologist of his time, focuses on destructiveness and the potential for ending human life on this planet. Although his concept of health is demanding and his view of the good society seems sketchy at times, Fromm supports positive moves in the direction of health and sanity, particularly reforms in work and education that stimulate active participation. However, he believes that today, in an age of nuclear weapons and dehumanizing bureaucratic organizations, the danger of destruction from detached and overintellectualized leaders is great. Preserving the world will ultimately require radical changes in the social system to increase economic democracy and affirm a human ideal based on "being" rather than "having."

**Religion.** As a youth Fromm was a devout Orthodox Jew. When he gave up religious ritual and practice in his late twenties, he did not lose his faith in the truth of religious teachings about the nature of man. Unlike Freud, who saw

#### FROMM, ERICH 219

religion only as an illusion, a wish for an allpowerful protecting father, Fromm (1950) distinguishes between the authoritarian, infantalizing and the humanistic, liberating aspects of religion. Fromm's view of human development is essentially that of the great humanistic religions: to overcome greed, hate, arrogance, and egocentrism; to develop a strong, courageous, and compassionate heart; to experience the fullest truth, including one's deepest despair, in order to love life more fully.

He wrote:

Mental health, in the humanistic sense, is characterized by the ability to love and to create, by the emergence from the incestuous ties to family and nature, by a sense of identity based on one's experience of self as the subject and agent of one's powers, by the grasp of reality inside and outside of ourselves-that is, by the development of objectivity and reason. The aim of life is to live it intensely, to be fully born, to be fully awake. To emerge from the ideas of infantile grandiosity into the conviction of one's real though limited strength; to be able to accept the paradox that everyone of us is the most important thing there is in the universe-and at the same time no more important than a fly or a blade of grass. (1955b, p. 203)

In You Shall Be as Gods (1966), he interprets the development of Biblical concepts as a struggle toward humanistic awakening and the overcoming of idolatry. In an open letter to humanistic Christians (1975), he wrote:

Idolatry is not the worship of certain gods instead of others, or of one God instead of many. It is a human attitude, that of the reification of all that is alive. It is a man's submission to things, his selfnegation as a living, open, ego-transcending being. . . . The modern concept of alienation expresses the same idea as the traditional concept of idolatry. The alienated man bows down to the work of his own hands and the circumstances of his own doing. . . . Today's idols are the objects of a systematically cultivated greed: for money, power, lust, glory, food and drink. Man worships the means and ends of this greed: production, consumption, military might, business, the state. The stronger he makes his idol, the poorer he becomes, the emptier he feels. Instead of joy he seeks thrills, instead of life, he loves a mechanized world of gadgets, instead of growth he seeks wealth, instead of being he is interested in having and using.

Fromm believes that these religious statements are truths that would be experienced by anyone who challenged illusions and was willing



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#### 220

to face the roots of his anxiety, depression, and hopelessness. For him the ideal of liberation, of being rather than having as expressed in the Old Testament prophets, in Master Eckhardt, in Zen Buddhism, and in the humanist philosophers, points to a development of character and practice of life that is not only more humanly rewarding but is also the only direction toward human survival in a world of limited resources and unlimited possibilities of destruction.

#### MICHAEL MACCOBY

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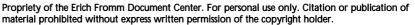
DAVID L. SILLS EDITOR

volume 18

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THE FREE PRESS A Division of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. NEW YORK

Collier Macmillan Publishers





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> > COLLIER MACMILLAN CANADA, LTD

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER 77-72778

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

PRINTING NUMBER 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

ISBN: 0-02-895690-7