



SOCIAL CHARACTER vs. THE PRODUCTIVE IDEAL: THE CONTRIBUTION AND CONTRADICTION IN FROMM'S VIEW OF MAN

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The work of anyone who has advanced social knowledge should be analyzed in terms not only of its contribution, but its limitations and contradictions. It is inevitable that experience, personality, and culture will influence a writer's thought, that his view of man will express social, political, and personal beliefs that may distort his perception and understanding.

One of Erich Fromm's contributions has been to analyze critically contradictions in Freud's theory, contrasting bourgeois patriarchal moralism with radical demystification. Fromm's own work can in turn be clarified by focusing on a contradiction between his generative theory of social character which is grounded in observation and historical analysis versus his idealistic concept of the "productive" individual.

Fromm's contribution has been to deepen our understanding of the relationship between society and human motivation, passions, and ideals. Using theory and new methods of socio-psychological investigation, he has brought psychoanalysis into the economy, even into the workplace.

Fromm has been criticized as utopian¹ and conformist.² Neither criticism stands up, but both respond to the contradiction in Fromm's theory, which also influences his approach to psychotherapy and character change. Fromm is hopeful about humanity, but not optimistic nor utopian. He writes about human potential for growth and development, but as much as any modern thinker, he recognizes, analyzes, and grapples with the destructive human tendencies. Nor is he conformist. By exploring relationships between destructiveness and social conditions, he directs us to those social arrangements – conditions of work, technology – that must be changed to further positive human development.

The definition of that positive development is the problematic element that contradicts the historical, empirical, and dialectical strengths of Fromm's social character theory. Fromm confuses ideal qualities such as love and reason with an ideal type that is vague and formulated differently from his other social character types. This contradicts the methodology of social character theory which, starting with ideal types drawn from clinical and historical study, goes on to describe character on the basis of interview and anthropological study, and relates it to concrete social arrange-



ments. It also undermines the strategic implications of social character theory for progressive change: that positive character must develop from potentialities within the social character, and that this process requires changes in society. Fromm constructed an ideal of the productive individual uprooted from the social character of today and concretely represented by Zen Buddhist masters or religious mystics within a feudal tradition. In so doing, he also moves his clinical approach away from Freud's more democratic theory of analysis as participative study to a more traditional relationship of master and apprentice or disciple.

In this essay, I first outline Fromm's theory of social character, its contribution to knowledge, and its relationship to the work of Freud and Marx. I then discuss the problem of Fromm's productive character and its influence on his psychotherapy and approach to social change.

In his early work, Fromm follows Freudian theory. He writes of the "character matrix common to all members of the group"³ as "the drive structure, the libidinous and larger unconscious attitude of a group."⁴ In *Escape From Freedom*, he differentiates himself from Freud.⁵ In this book, he abandons libido theory and first employs the concept of the social character in describing the historical change from feudalism to capitalism and the psychology of the Nazi triumph. In later works, he studies the social character of both industrial and rural peasant societies. The final definition of social character involves an interrelationship of the social and psychological.

The concept of social character does not refer to the complete or highly individualized, in fact, unique character as it exists in an individual, but to a character matrix, *a syndrome of character traits which has developed as an adaptation to the economic, social, and cultural conditions common to that group*. There are, of course, deviants in a group whose character is entirely different from that of the majority. But the common character traits are so important because the fact that they are common to most members has the result that group behavior – action, thought, and feeling – is motivated by those traits which are shared.⁶

Of course, Fromm did not invent the concept of group or national character. At least from the time of the Bible, where God destroys Sodom and Gomorrah because the people are brutal, historians have described character traits common to a population. David Hume, in the 18th century, wrote that different reasons are assigned for national character: physical causes such as climate and moral causes including "all circumstances, which are fitted to work on the mind as motives or reasons, and which render a peculiar set of manners habitual to us. Of this kind are, the nature of government, the revolutions of public affairs, the plenty or penury in which the people live, the situation of the nation with regard to its neighbors and such like matters." Exploring both physical and moral causes, Tocqueville in *Democracy In America* describes the social character of a young nation, built on ideals of equality and the quest for perfectability, and rooted in the independence of farmers, craftsmen, and



small businessmen. Writing as a social historian with the focus on modes of production as formative of shared traits and attitudes, Marx describes the different French social classes in *The 18th Brumaire Of Louis Bonaparte*, particularly the lack of cooperation and class consciousness of the peasant: "Their mode of production isolates them, instead of bringing them into mutual contact. . . . Among the peasantry therefore there can be no diversity of development, no differentiation of talents, no wealth of social relationships."

Building on this tradition, Fromm employs Freud's dynamic theory of character as the core of emotional attitudes that direct and energize behavior. Following Marx, Fromm conceives of "social character" as formed by, and adaptive to, the mode of production shared by a group or class. The social character is a concept connecting the economic base or mode of production with the ideals of a group or nation. He postulates that these traits are transmitted by the family, which molds the child's character in the early years of life. Fromm's further contribution is to employ survey methodology, interpretive questionnaires, and projective techniques to sample and systematically study social character.⁸

There were difficulties for Fromm in attempting to integrate Freudian and Marxian ideas. By employing Freud to explain social character, Fromm gained a new dimension of theory, but also problems that he never fully solved. Freud's dynamic theory explains the passionate or energizing core of character, such as "anal" hoarding traits formed in early childhood that cause a tendency to compulsive obstinacy, orderliness, and frugality that resist rational change. According to Freud, these traits are "reaction formations" to prohibitions against childish enjoyment of a natural anal erotic pleasure.

Freud's theory also provides Fromm with a framework to explain character development, from infantile fixations to maturity, that implies freedom to know oneself and act purposefully. Fromm believes Freudian theory explains why people "*want* to do what they *have* to do" to keep society functioning. It also explains why people may not adapt to radical changes in social conditions, because of a "character lag." Character, in the psychoanalytic sense, is the structure of drives or passions, often unconscious, that determines what most satisfies or frustrates an individual. A system of emotionally charged attitudes formed in childhood will be changed with great difficulty, if at all. Religious conversion, thought reform, and psychoanalysis all boast some success at changing character, but documented examples are rare and open to question. Changes in behavior produced by strong incentives or fear do not prove that character has changed.

There were two related problems for Fromm in accepting Freud's theory of character which developed out of a combination of clinical practice and a reductionistic attempt to explain human motivation in terms of physiological mechanisms. First, because it is based on clinical experience, the theory emphasizes pathological traits, and the normal social character is not infantile or neurotic. Fromm solves this problem by enlarging the



Freudian character syndrome and describing positive aspects of these traits. However, Fromm still uses terms with negative and infantile connotations, like “hoarding,” that suggest social character is extremely resistant to change, like the fixations of neurotic patients. In fact, Fromm’s investigations of social character in Germany and Mexico indicate that in many, if not the majority, of the people studied, social character traits can be oriented either positively or negatively by situational factors, including leadership. For example, in Mexico, independent, frugal farmers can cooperate with each other in buying and selling provided they feel protected from cheating. Without good leadership, they tend toward a stubborn, distrustful individualism which weakens their economic power vis-a-vis suppliers and middle-men. If each social character is conceived in terms of potentiality, then the quality of leadership and historical circumstances can be understood in terms of what traits and orientation to life they bring out in people.

A second problem for Fromm is libidinal theory. Although Fromm accepts Freud’s clinical descriptions, and, as I have suggested, may be over-influenced by them, he believes that character is formed by society, particularly the family, which attempts to adapt the child. After his earliest papers, he abandoned libido theory. Studies by anthropologists and other psychoanalysts also challenge a mechanistic libido theory, by showing that the total culture, including folklore, ritual, and most particularly the modes of work determines social character.⁹ Infantile experience with breast feeding, toilet training, etc., which from the Freudian view should to a large degree determine fixations (Freud always leaves open the possibility of strong genetic influences), do not prove decisive. It is likely that certain groups or cultures tend to emphasize child rearing practices that determine a direction for pathology in extreme cases. Thus, a cultural value of order and cleanliness might influence some parents toward strict toilet training, and in some cases cause obsessive disorders. But such behaviors do not explain the social character. What might be crucial is the emphasis on controlling behavior that is rooted in the economic system and transmitted by parents to children.

Beyond anthropological evidence, Fromm fundamentally rejects Freud’s social-historical view of man. To be sure, Freud was complex, subtle, ambiguous, and constantly revising his theory. There is a significant and profound change in his view of man before and after the first World War, but it remained reductionistic. In 1900, Freud’s view of man is that the pleasure principle is controlled by the reality principle, a “reality-testing” ego, which looks out for the individual’s interest in terms of balancing self-preservation with pleasure through libidinal “investments.” Illness can be caused either by a faulty sense of reality or overcontrol of passions. Freud’s view of healthy functioning becomes a combination of fine tuning and intelligent investment policy. It is a theory in tune with the physiology of the time and with the bourgeois concept of reality.

After World War I, Freud in *Beyond The Pleasure Principle* (1919), and especially in *Civilization And Its Discontents* (1930), proposed a somewhat



different view of man based on a revision of instinct theory. Now, according to Freud, love (*eros*) and destructiveness are both deep-rooted, equally powerful biological instincts. Destructiveness, either directed against the self or expressed aggressively, can be controlled and neutralized only by love. Although Freud indicates society must strengthen *eros*, he does not say how this can be achieved.

Although he agrees with Freud that only the development of love can save man from self-destruction, Fromm rejects both versions of Freud's view of man. He revises the psychoanalytic theory of character in line with humanistic philosophy, particularly Spinoza's concept of active versus passive passion, and Marx's concept of alienation. For Marx and Fromm, capitalism has alienated man from productive or self-active passions. Fromm, like the Marx of *The Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844), secularizes the prophetic view, that through idolatry, man loses his true self which should be related to the world creatively and harmoniously. By choosing power and money as idols, man sacrifices his potential for love. According to Fromm, although man is by nature aggressive in defense of vital interests, destructiveness is not biologically rooted, but rather is a pathological result of unfavorable, life-denying experiences which may be caused by the economic system.¹⁰ Those people who are unloved or exploited are likely to develop destructive (sadistic or necrophilic) attitudes. According to Fromm, man's primary potential is life-affirming; destructiveness is pathological.

In order to explain the Freudian syndromes in terms of this view of man and to relate them to socio-economic factors, Fromm proposes an existential theory of character based on human necessities and variations in modes of meeting them. Although physiological needs are fundamental, there are different modes of satisfying them. Man develops modes of assimilation and relatedness which determine his actions, feelings and thoughts. He writes:

Only by considering the specific conditions of human existence, and its inherent contradictions, can we understand the basic human forces and passions. Man is 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.¹¹

Character, for Fromm, becomes 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 up-bringing of the young, and the transmission of knowledge).



This theory does not reject the motivating force of either economic interest or eros. Both are seen as formed and directed by the social character which changes historically. The modes of assimilation and relatedness determine what satisfies the individual at work, what he seeks in love. The struggle between love and destructiveness; which for Freud is internal and biological, or Fromm is essentially determined by social organization and leadership.

In terms of this view of man, the social character itself may be alienating, since needs for survival and sanity can conflict with needs stemming from the nature of man with its inherent need for 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.”

In terms of this theory, the social character is not a statistical measure of the traits shared by a majority; rather, it is a functional concept to be understood in relationship to the socio-economic system, particularly the dominant methods of production. 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.

As an example of social character, Fromm revises Freud's concept of the anal character, which he now calls the “hoarding orientation.”¹² 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. He cites examples of hoarding characters from history and literature. 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,” according to Fromm, reduces the capacity for genuine and profound feeling and thought. In *The Sane Society*, he provides examples of marketing man and his alienation from his potentialities.

Given his revised view of man, Fromm appears to limit the theoretical potential by holding on to reductionistic Freudian categories. The “hoarding” term is too narrow and negative, too much like the “anal” character, to describe the active and creative traits of craftsmen and entrepreneurs, even with the modification of “productive” versus “unproductive” hoarding. Furthermore, the category “hoarding,” with its infantile implications, is different from “marketing” which, more in line with Fromm's socio-psychological theory, is a dominant mode of relatedness formed by the economic system without particular relationship to infantile experience. But this problem can be resolved through the empirical study of social character as a basis for reformulating the ideal types. In our study of Mex-



ican villagers, Fromm and I started with concepts like hoarding, receptive, and exploitative, but we found they were not sufficiently explanatory. We applied these types as a means of constructing new social character types which could then be related to different socio-economic subsystems that had formed social character: independent peasant, plantation peon, entrepreneur. With more socio-psychological categories, we could distinguish the different values, religious orientation, and ideals of each type and better understand the positive and negative traits in each type. In the process, we are also able to deepen understanding of the original character types. (I used this same method in studying the social character of corporate managers.¹³) This approach results in describing social character types in a way that explains social conflict as well as adaptation. As conditions change, a social character may no longer fit the economic system or may lose its sense of security. The resulting resentment and frustration can transform social cement into an explosive force.

Fromm is at his most persuasive when he integrates psychoanalytic concepts (including ideal types) with historical and sociological analysis including a survey methodology to develop a rich description of a concrete, historically based social character, as in *Escape From Freedom*¹⁴. Describing the social character of the German lower middle class which found Hitler's ideology so appealing, he notes "... their love of the strong, hatred of the weak, their pettiness, hostility, thriftiness with feelings as well as with money. Their outlook on life was narrow, they suspected and hated the stranger, and they were curious and envious of their acquaintances, rationalizing their envy as moral indignation; their whole life was based on the principle of scarcity – economically as well as psychologically."

As long as the authority of the monarchy was undisputed, wrote Fromm, by leaning on it and identifying with it, a member of the lower middle class gained a feeling of security and narcissistic pride that motivated disciplined hard work. The authority of religion and traditional morality, and the stability of the family, together assured the individual that he belonged to a solid social and cultural system in which he had a definite place. World War I and its aftermath destroyed the sense of meaning and security. Inflation wiped out savings. The defeat in war and the fall of the monarchy destroyed feelings of security and importance through identification with authority causing a sense of powerlessness and resentment, deep desires for submission to a new authority, and domination over those who were weaker. Implied in this analysis is the possibility that other conditions, even a type of leader different from Hitler, might have brought out more positive traits of hard work, thriftiness, and pride in the social character of this class without appealing to destructiveness.

How does Fromm conceive of positive character development? Here his combination of Freudian and humanistic-existential thinking results in the theoretical confusion. Freud's ideal, at least for men, is the genital personality who has overcome infantile fixations to oral and anal gratification, and who has resolved the Oedipal conflict by identifying with the father



and giving up the mother. Eros, liberated from guilt and oriented to procreation, dominates destructiveness. Freud says little more about his positive concept of a healthy individual, except by implication. His ideal is consciousness and independence, facing truth without illusion or the need for comforting myths: "Where id was, there shall ego be." Freud does not expect anyone to dissolve character traits formed in childhood. Even in the most creative leaders, he sees narcissistic attitudes. In the solid craftsman, he finds the obsessive traits of the anal character. He believes that character will always limit consciousness and spontaneity.

In their view of development as overcoming childhood modes, both Freud and Fromm are in sharp distinction to Marcuse (*Eros and Civilization*) who conceives of "free" infantile sexuality as a revolutionary force against a society which subjugates play and enjoyment to "the performance principle." It is true that Marcuse, like Fromm, shares Freud's view that eros must be strengthened to save humanity from destruction. But their views of how to achieve this differ radically. From the Freudian psychoanalytic point of view, Marcuse's sexual revolutionary would be, in fact, an infantile personality, dependent, narcissistic, and ultimately made powerless not by society but by his enslavement to his needs. The behavior of the "new left" Marcusians in the 1960s appears to confirm the Freudian view shared by Fromm that infantile sexual acting out leads to ineffectiveness.

Fromm does not present a worked-out developmental theory of his own. Although he rejects libido theory, he accepts Freud's developmental *dimensions*, interpreting them from the viewpoint of the humanistic philosophical tradition. He believes that Freud has uncovered the roots of irrationality and pathology: incestuous fixation, narcissistic isolation, and destructiveness. These Fromm describes as opposites and irrational resistances to a syndrome of consciousness and human growth: independence, love of the stranger, and love of life.¹⁵ But he does not describe stages or a process of development. Fromm's ideal type of the "productive" person includes overcoming of infantile attitudes, but he goes further than Freud to present an ideal character that has reached a higher mode of relatedness, without narcissistic or obsessive residues. In describing such a character, Fromm seems to forget his theory of social character. Here is the contradiction.

Unlike the other "ideal types," Fromm's productive character is disembodied, without clinical or historical grounding. Furthermore, the concept is confused with the "productive orientation" which describes the positive version of a "real" social character.¹⁶ In early works (*Escape From Freedom, Man for Himself*), when productiveness is presented as more than an abstract ideal of creativity and spontaneity, it is illustrated by the image of the creative artist. In later works, real-life models of productiveness are Zen masters and Christian mystics.¹⁷ (The one exception is Karl Marx, seen by Fromm as a modern prophet.) From the point of view of an historically rooted theory of social character, what are we to make of these models?



The creative artist has been a productive ideal in many societies, although not in all. As a model, it is limited, because it requires uncommon talents that most people lack. In modern times, many creative artists have had to maintain their motivation in the face of rejection and disinterest and have shown qualities of dedication and independence. However, many productive artists have not been loving people, and Fromm does not describe a single creative artist. As for the religious masters cited by Fromm, their mode of relatedness appears deeply rooted in feudal society. Zen masters are unquestioned authorities who rule monasteries and dominate the emotional lives of their disciples. Christian mystics are also masters, and their vow of celibacy frees them from the demands of a family. Today, in an age of anti-authoritarian, group-oriented production, Fromm's productive models appear elitist and misleading. They do not persuade or inspire the more productive examples of the modern social character who are more flexible and participative, oriented to a world of science and technology rather than the mystical life.¹⁸

Fromm's view of the productive person also influences his approach to psychotherapy (which I write about from eight years experience of training analysis and supervision with him). Fromm criticizes Freud's patriarchal attitude as limiting the development of psychoanalysis as a science,¹⁹ and in his revision of the case of Little Hans, he shows how Freud distorts evidence to fit his preconceptions.²⁰ He criticizes Freud's use of the psychoanalytic couch and the routine of analysis as bureaucratizing psychoanalysis. In contrast, Fromm attempts to create a more humanistic encounter. His emphasis is that the therapist or psychoanalyst must be active and penetrating and has a responsibility to bring the session to life by demonstrating his own urgency to understand and grasp life fully.²¹ He is close to a humanistic version of a religious master who unmasks illusion, expands the limits of the social filter, and overcomes resistance.

Although this approach shares Freud's conviction that the truth will set man free, it moves in a different direction from Freud's emphasis on psychoanalysis as a process that patiently uncovers and interprets resistance. Both Freud and Fromm define psychoanalysis as the art of making the unconscious conscious; both recognize that we resist knowing the truth and that resistances must be overcome.²² But their views of resistance are somewhat different. For Fromm, repression is a constantly recurring process. One resists knowing out of fear of seeing more than society allows or because the truth would force one to experience one's irrationality or powerlessness. The pattern of repression set in childhood is like the refusal to see that the emperor has no clothes. The analyst is the master who has gone further and deeper beyond convention and into his own irrationality. His attitude models productiveness and mature spontaneity, free of illusion.²³ In contrast, Freud sees resistance more narrowly. Repressed, unconscious wishes to maintain infantile sexual fantasies, and the childhood fear of being punished (castration) because of one's libidinal impulses, act as resistances to memory and cure for neurosis.



The key concept of resistance for Freud is transference. The patient directs or transfers desire and fear onto the analyst who becomes a substitute for figures of the past. Resistance will be overcome only if the “acting-out” of impulse is interpreted and transformed into emotionally charged memory which can be “worked through” and reintegrated into a more mature psyche. In this framework, the analyst cannot dramatically unmask truth without strengthening resistances which date from the past. Overcoming resistance requires patiently understanding the various forms it takes. In contrast, Fromm focuses on a broader concept of transference. The analyst represents infantile authority: the mother who loves unconditionally or the father who is never satisfied with one’s achievement. Instead of facing reality independently, the patient continues to transfer interpersonal struggles and wishes. While this aspect of transference is not contradictory to Freud’s views (in *The Future Of An Illusion*, he describes religion in these terms), Fromm’s approach in fact tends to strengthen this type of transference and with it the resistance to remembering.

Although Fromm has criticized Freud as too much the bourgeois patriarch and shows how this limited his insights, Freud’s theory of psychoanalysis, including interpretations, is potentially more democratic than the Frommian. To be sure, he advocated rigid rules in the doctor-patient relationship, in part to protect himself. An example is that the patient lies on a couch and cannot see the analyst. Freud states that he does not like to be stared at all day. But Freud does not describe the analyst as guru or model, and his own self-analysis shows him as all too human. He sees the analyst as a professional with technical training who, in addition, requires a radical love of truth, a broad education in the arts and sciences, and knowledge of his own unconscious. (Although a physician himself, Freud believed that gifted individuals from other disciplines should be trained as psychoanalysts.) The goal for analysis is not to become a productive person, but to be liberated from crippling neurosis. Freud cautions against expecting too much from a neurotic who has been cured. In contrast, Fromm suggests that many neurotics are humanly healthier than those with the dominant social character or socially patterned defect, who, adapted to a sick society, are alienated from themselves. Their neurosis is the result of incomplete rebellion against constricting authority and lack of confidence or courage to follow their insights, to take their dreams seriously.

For a patient with repressed infantile impulses and grandiose ideals, such a therapy can both increase transference resistances and a sense of guilt about one’s unworthiness, one’s unproductiveness, and dependency. Instead of remembering and experiencing childlike drives, humiliations, rages, and fears as a means to mastering them, the patient attempts to resolve his conflicts by becoming an ideal person, like the master. In so doing, he may again submit to authority and repress sexual or angry impulses directed against the parent. As a result, some Frommian patients identify with the master and self-righteously direct their irrational feelings at others.



Why does Fromm not see the contradiction in his theory? We can speculate in two directions. First, Fromm personally was repelled by the modern character, so different from his own. A person of deep feeling and integrity, he was disgusted by the shallowness and expediency of marketing man. Although he notes the positive traits of fairness and flexibility, he does not even try to describe “productive” examples of marketing man.

Second, although he renounced orthodox Judaism in his early 20s, he remained a deeply religious non-deist with a strong messianic impulse. He believed that the humanistic religious attitude of respect for life and rejection of all forms of ideology was essential for full human development. In an age of nuclear weapons, he felt that this attitude was necessary to save the human race from destroying itself. The contradiction in his theory can be seen as an expression of his contempt for the new character and affirmation of the messianic tradition. Fromm expresses a prophetic sense of urgency, but the promise that anyone can change his attitude, choose life and “being” over “having,” belies the evidence of social character analysis.

Fromm’s version of psychoanalysis offers an ideal consistent with the humanistic philosophical tradition: moral, life-loving, unalienated, and free of illusion. This ideal, based on a view of man and his potentialities, provides a standard to evaluate society and social character. But it is useful only in its relationship to specific character types with an understanding of the process of development required and the relevant social forces. When applied to the neurotic patient seeking help to function in society, paradoxically it becomes a resistance to understanding and overcoming repressed infantile fixations and to gaining relative freedom. Thus, Fromm’s emphasis on the productive ideal distorts his potential contribution to psychoanalytic theory.

Fromm’s contribution is to combine psychoanalysis with the systematic study of social factors that influence character and symptoms. This is expressed not only in the study of social character, but also in his revision of Freud’s interpretation of dreams.²⁴ For Freud, dreams express repressed infantile wishes and fears. Fromm accepts this discovery, but adds that dreams may also express a clearer insight into reality than one recognizes during the waking day. In dreams, the language of symbolism may describe a sense of self-betrayal and alienation that is made unconscious by fear, the need to conform, and the social filter. The implication in Fromm’s emphasis is that the analyst must understand the patient’s social reality as well as his personality in order to interpret the dream.

Fromm also raises critical questions about symptoms of anxiety, anger, and depression. Are these symptoms rooted in a neurotic personality *or* are they reactions to a stressful, alienating environment? Is the patient suffering because unconsciously he is fixated in childhood *or* is he experiencing guilt because he has betrayed himself and his deepest ideals that support a sense of integrity and dignity? Is there an interrelationship between neurosis and environment?

By situating the patient in the world of work and love and exploring



positive values as well as irrational strivings, Fromm broadens the therapeutic project. He provides a framework for differentiating psychotherapy for the neurotic from psychoanalytically oriented education for those with a relatively healthy social character. Symptoms rooted in childhood fixations will only be alleviated by exploring childhood memories. Symptoms caused by unconscious self-betrayal will be alleviated only by facing the truth, a change of heart, repentance, and restitution. He also focuses attention on symptoms caused by the environment – home, workplace, political pressures – which will be alleviated only by changing the environment and, in many cases, developing consciousness and creating new knowledge concerning both self and positive alternatives.

When they are questioned about symptoms, factory workers recognize the difference between neurotic problems requiring psychotherapy (alcoholism, unprovoked violence) and reactions to unfavourable social conditions (stress).²⁵ These conditions prevent workers from exercising their capabilities for independent thought and creative activity. Such conditions may result from domination by those in power who use workers without regard to their human needs. But this is not always the case. Because of unconscious attitudes and feelings, workers may resist changes that promise to improve their condition. In considering approaches to improvement, Fromm's theory of social character applied to the study of adaptation to work is essential to understanding these resistances. For example, in the Mexican village Fromm and I studied, receptive villagers, descendants of plantation peons, were psychologically ill-equipped to take advantage of ejido land they received after the Mexican revolution of 1910-20. In this case, where conditions were favorable for productive development, education, including participation in analyzing the fearful, submissive social character, helped to create awareness of resistance to change and to stimulate more productive, independent behavior.²⁶

A similar approach combining participative study and new opportunities was also employed in projects sponsored by unions and management to improve the quality of working life in factories in the U.S. and the U.K.²⁷ Workers gained a say in organizing work and defining management roles. By studying social character through interviews and questionnaires, different character types were distinguished in terms of the personal values they brought to work. This understanding revealed different attitudes toward change, based on different values, and aided the participants in their projects to improve work so as to satisfy different types of workers.

Studies sponsored by the Harvard Project on Technology, Work, and Character have included not only workers but also managers, bureaucrats, and political leaders.²⁸ These empirical studies have taken Fromm's ideal types as tools to construct new and more useful ideal types. In each case, the social character types constructed include both negative and positive potentialities. While the positive traits are in Fromm's sense more productive – i.e., independent, caring – they remain embedded and limited by a particular social character syndrome. Fromm's productive character does not



describe the positive traits of the social characters who exist in the world today. His abstract religious-mystical ideal can deflect them from their productive development which must be described in terms of their attitudes, language, and experience, and in relationship to the technology and organization of our time.

NOTES

- 1 John H. Schaar, *Escape From Authority: The Perspectives of Erich Fromm* (New York, 1967).
- 2 Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston, 1955).
- 3 Erich Fromm, *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis* (1930), (New York, 1970).
- 4 *Ibid.* (1932).
- 5 (New York, 1941).
- 6 Erich Fromm and Michael Maccoby, *Social Character in a Mexican Village* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1970).
- 7 David Hume, "Of Natural Character," *The Enlightenment*, Peter Gay, ed. (New York, 1973).
- 8 Fromm's first such study in 1930 studied the social character of German employees and workers in relationship to their political ideology.
- 9 Erich H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York, 1963).
- 10 Erich Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (New York, 1973).
- 11 Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society* (New York, 1962), p. 379.
- 12 Erich Fromm, *Man for Himself* (New York, 1947).
- 13 Michael Maccoby, *The Gamesman: The New Corporate Leaders* (New York, 1976).
- 14 (New York, 1941).
- 15 Erich Fromm, *The Heart of Man: Its Genius for Good and Evil* (New York, 1964).
- 16 There are, of course, two different meanings of "ideal type." One is M. Weber's composite prototype which, as in the case of receptive, hoarding, etc., can be drawn from clinical, historical, anthropological, sociological or psychological study and modified by new observations. The other is an ideal like the productive character, which for Fromm represents a higher level and an ideal for human development.
- 17 Erich Fromm, *To Have Or To Be?* (New York, 1976).
- 18 For examples, cf. Michael Maccoby, *The Leader: A New Face for American Management* (New York, 1981).
- 19 Erich Fromm, *Sigmund Freud's Mission* (New York, 1972).
- 20 Fromm, *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis*, *op. cit.*
- 21 Fromm never published the lectures on technique given at the Mexican Institute of Psychoanalysis. But E. Tauber describes this approach to analysis in S. Arietti (ed.), *Handbook of Psychiatry* (New York).
- 22 Both emphasize truth as something hidden, to be uncovered by psychoanalysis. This contrasts to another view that knowledge must be created by an active social process which develops language and new concepts.
- 23 Erich Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (New York, 1950).
- 24 Erich Fromm, *The Forgotten Language: An Introduction to the Understanding of Dreams, Fairy Tales, and Myths* (New York, 1962).



- 25 Michael Maccoby, "Work and Human Development," *Professional Psychology*, Vol. 11, No. 3, June, 1980.
- 26 Fromm and Maccoby, *op. cit.*
- 27 Maccoby, *The Leader, op. cit.*
- 28 Maccoby, *ibid.*; *The Gamesman, op. cit.*

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