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## **The Role of Hope in Psychoanalysis: Erich Fromm's View of Psychoanalysis and Religion**

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As psychoanalysis struggles to redefine itself, a confusion of tongues cramps the dialogue. Post-modern, deconstructionist and constructionist theories question whether truth even exists, much less whether it can set humankind free, however one wants to interpret “freedom.” The Freudian legacy already modified and revised from within psychoanalysis is aggressively challenged from outside. Richard A. Shweder summarized the attack on Freud (*New York Times* op-ed, Dec. 15, 1995.)

Here is the short version of the enemies list. Sociobiologists don't like Freud because they think family members have no sexual interest in one another. Cognitive scientists don't like Freud because they think the “unconscious mind” is a rapidly firing network of widely distributed neurons, with no mind of its own. Behavioral geneticists don't like Freud because they really think biology is destiny and that early childhood experience has very little to do with your life.

Postmodernists don't like Freud because they think that interpretation is merely free association, while Freud believed that by studying free association he might uncover the true meaning of a “text.” Feminists don't like Freud because they think he discounted reports of sexual abuse, disparaged the female body and collaborated with his buddies against his female clients. They think Freud was a patriarch.

Even academic psychologist and philosophers of science don't like Freud. The academic psychologists think that the study of the mind has nothing to do with sex, religion, literature, mythology or the history of civilizations, while Freud,

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bless his heart, made those topics the core of his curriculum. And the philosophers of science come in two kinds: those who think Freud's tenets are untestable and hence unworthy of scientific consideration, and those who think his tenets are testable and have been shown to be false.

For the most part, these enemies which also include fundamentalists do not exempt psychoanalytic revisionists from their attacks. Furthermore, psychoanalysis cannot escape the economic currents buffeting the health care professions. The shift to managed care combined with demands of patients and insurance companies for a quick fix threaten the future of psychoanalysis as a treatment.

In a time of far reaching change, psychoanalysis is challenged to respond. To ignore this challenge while focussing solely on what happens between the four walls of the consulting room is to be in denial, while missing an opportunity to develop psychoanalytic understanding. To accept the challenge is to be willing to reconsider basic existential issues of belief, meaning and human development in the light of both social change and discoveries in biology and anthropology.

Throughout his working life Erich Fromm addressed these issues. While recognizing Freud's contribution to understanding the unconscious, Fromm criticized Freud's patriarchal distortions and mechanistic theory. As an alternative, Fromm attempted to integrate psychoanalysis with the humanistic philosophical and religious tradition.

In this paper I explore Fromm's concept of hope, both what it offers to psychoanalysis and its limitations. Fromm's work provides a way of thinking about hope that elucidates its meaning and function and also demonstrates the value of Fromm's contribution to understanding the social challenges of our time.

## **Defining Hope**

What is hope? The simplest definition is the expectation of some future good. Hope in this sense is a necessity not only for happiness but for any productive functioning. The emotional aspect of hope seems deeply rooted in our animal nature. The barking dog is animated by expectation of food and love. Diamond (1992) points out that we humans share 98.5 percent of our



genetic material with chimpanzees. Observations of these animals shows a more developed hopefulness, as chimps plan for adventures in food gathering and sexual gratification. David Ingvar (1985), a neurophysiologist at the University of Lund states that human and perhaps chimp thinking is at the same time, in the past, present and future. His studies using PET scans show that an individual's brain turns off when there is no sense of a positive future, no hope. In a lecture on hope to the American Psychiatric Association, Karl Menninger (1959) cited the work of Curt Richter suggesting that when animals were placed in a hopeless situation, sudden death resulted.

We can neither plan nor solve problems without hope. People who face a dead end need to spark a facsimile of hope. Some retreat from life and seek hope where they can, for example in compulsive gambling or in a lottery ticket. Hope of a sort can come from denying unpleasant reality and escaping to a wishful future. But even such irrational hope can become habit-forming, because it allows people to function, at least for a while.

Hope can either be dynamic and stimulate purposeful action, or it can be passive wish fulfillment. While there is some overlap between the concepts of hope and optimism, the latter describes a way of viewing things, seeing the glass as half full rather than half empty. To some degree, optimism or pessimism can be based on objective analysis. The future can look bleak or rosy. But there is usually a temperamental quality to these perceptions. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James distinguished between healthy-minded and morbid-minded views of life. While morbid-minded people are prone to depression, James believed that they see the world more objectively than do the healthy-minded who tend to ignore the unpleasant realities that surround us. Hope is a motivator, and one can be hopeful, but not particularly optimistic. At the end of his life, Fromm became rather pessimistic about the future of civilization, but he was always hopeful that individuals could make a difference and that humankind could become more fully human. We give up when we lose hope, not when we lose optimism.



## Fromm's View of Human Needs

In contrast to the cognitive view of hope as planning or the temperamental view of hope as optimism, Fromm presents an existential and experiential concept of hope. Before describing this concept, we need to review Fromm's theory of existential needs and how it differs from Freudian theory. While Freud believed there were universal human conflicts rooted in a psychosexual developmental process, Fromm proposes universal existential needs. For Freud, unless the Oedipal conflict is resolved, the patient can not hope to move forward. Fromm viewed internal conflicts from a socio-economic, cultural and existential frame of reference. The Oedipal conflict might express resistance to authority, a clash of values, a struggle for self affirmation and individuation. From a Frommian perspective, it seems to me that the Oedipal conflict is a profound expression of Western individualism and generational conflict which has little or no meaning in that part of Asia influenced by Confucian values of family solidarity and benevolent paternal leadership. In the East, the struggle for individuation, when it occurs, is directed against a whole system of obligations rather than against an individual authority figure. Westerners, including psychoanalysts, tend to assume that by breaking the bonds of dependency and by aggressively affirming the self, the patient will progress. This unproven assumption strikes many Asians as profoundly irrational.

What Fromm offers us is a theory of universal needs, based not on a psychosexual timetable, but on the challenges inherent in human existence. In every society, humans need to solve the problems of both physical and emotional survival. We need to adapt ourselves to our environment, especially our culture, so that we can feed and clothe ourselves and so that we are not alone. We also have particularly human needs for meaning and self expression. These existential needs are never satisfied once and for all, but most of us address them through the social character, by learning to think, feel, and act like others in the culture, and being affirmed for so doing.

In 1973, I visited Fromm in Locarno, Switzerland, and we took a long walk on the lakefront. There is a limit to how deeply one can analyze, he said, unless a person has a system of belief, a spiritual framework. Without such a philosophy, we cannot make sense of our deepest



experience. We feel crazy. Fromm had often remarked that given the reality of human experience, the most puzzling question is not why some people become insane, but why anyone is sane. How can human beings make sense of life's absurdity, the inevitability of tragedy and death, the fleeting nature of all our pursuits? And if we become fully aware of our repressed impulses, our envy, greed and egoism, how can we stand ourselves?

I have thought a great deal about Fromm's comments. Perhaps, most people are sane because they conform and adapt. The social filter determines what they experience and what they consider to be nonsense. What does not pass through the filter may appear in dreams or be glimpsed in movies and novels. To a large degree, the social character — the shared emotional attitudes and values — keeps people sane, adapted to their material and social environment, yet at the same time, it limits their fullest human development. The most creative people are those who can expand the limits, raise their level of awareness, widen the social filter, and stretch the social character. As Freud pointed out, some of these people are narcissistic characters who are able to stand apart and resist consensus. Yet, the narcissist may also struggle with what William James called the discordant elements in his personality and seek a kind of rebirth of "unmitigated hope, faith and enthusiasm." Fromm believed that we can accept our full humanity only by becoming more creative and loving, by engaging ourselves productively with the world and overcoming the illusion of our separateness.

### Fromm's Concept of Hope

The concept of hope was central to Fromm's thinking about the human condition. He spoke about hope, even more than he wrote about it. I remember a conversation with him in the late 60s when he was writing *The Revolution of Hope*. "What do you think is the difference between Christianity and Judaism?" he asked me, in the manner of a Socratic tutor. I gave an answer which contrasted the Jewish emphasis on this worldly good living as contrasted to the Christian idealization of self abnegation and martyrdom. "No, that is not so important, there are also Jewish martyrs. The only real difference is the meaning of hope in the two religions. For the Christian, since the messiah has already come, hope lies in the life to come, immortality. Hope for



the Jew is that the messiah will come and put the world in order. And that can happen at any time, if we are ready.”

Fromm (1966) described the rabbinical view that one cannot force the messiah, but one must expect him each minute. “The attitude required is neither one of rash impatience nor of passive waiting; it is one of *dynamic hope*. The hope is, indeed, paradoxical. It implies an attitude which visualizes salvation occurring right at the moment, yet it also is ready to accept the fact that salvation may not come in one’s own lifetime, and maybe not for generations to come.”(pp 153-4).

Fromm believed that all religions are attempted solutions to the universal need for a frame of orientation and devotion. However, he argued that while authoritarian religions reinforce regressive dependency needs and authoritarian -submissive relationships, humanistic religions strengthen progressive human strivings for freedom, individuation, love and creativity. The Old and New Testaments expressed the development of the god concept from that of an authoritarian tribal warrior king to the prophetic God of justice and compassion, and ultimately the God-man who teaches what it means to be fully human.

In contrast to both Christian and Jewish hope which imply advancing the human condition either individually or socially, Fromm viewed pagan religions as forms of self alienation, caused by projecting our powers onto some idol, thus impoverishing ourselves and seeking to escape from the demands of freedom. In return for worshipping the idol, the idolaters hope that the gods they have invented will grant their wishes and protect them. Fromm also criticized versions of the Judeo-Christian tradition in which “God, originally a symbol for the highest value that we can experience in ourselves”, becomes an idol “for those who want to be certain, those who want an answer to life without daring to search for it themselves.”(1976, p 42.) Fromm also described certain character disorders as private religions as, for example, ancestor worship or the narcissistic idolatry of the puffed up self. I shall describe later how Fromm’s own personal religious solution shifted gradually in his 60s and 70s from a non theistic messianic hope expressed in a vision of democratic socialism to a more individualistic hope of overcoming egoism, greed, and individual pain and suffering as expressed in Buddhism, Jewish, and Christian mysticism.



From a Freudian perspective, irrational hopes are rooted in unconscious infantile wishes. While Fromm accepted this, his view of what is rational had to do with strivings and action that furthered the fullest human development. For Fromm, normality might be irrational. He believed that irrational hopes might be rooted in the patient's social character. For example, the patient who hopes for affirmation by the analyst might not be seeking affirmation of an authentic self. The patient might be a "marketing character," alienated from self, because he has tried to become what he believes others want him to be. He transfers this need to the analyst who may prolong the treatment by satisfying the addictive need for self-esteem rather than helping the patient become aware of deeper fears and feelings that block self affirmation.

For Fromm, particularly in his late 60s and 70s, rational hope was not merely a hope to achieve or gain something, but an emotional attitude, which expresses what he called biophilia, or love of life. He believed this biophilic hope can be strengthened by courageous and caring acts and by a sense of meaning in a mode of "being" or "aliveness and authentic relatedness" as opposed to "having" or compulsive consuming.

Fromm (1976) describes the being mode in these terms:

- Freedom that is not arbitrariness but the possibility to be oneself, not as a bundle of greedy desires, but as a delicately balanced structure that at any moment is confronted with the alternative of growth or decay, life or death.
- Knowing that evil and destructiveness are necessary consequences of failure to grow.
- Knowing that only a few have reached perfection in all these qualities, but being without the ambition to "reach the goal," in the knowledge that such ambition is only another form of greed, of having.
- Happiness in the process of ever-growing aliveness, whatever the furthest point is that fate permits one to reach, for living as fully as one can is so satisfactory that the concern for what one might or might not attain has little chance to develop. (p 172)



## The Development of Hope

While Fromm provides an approach to understanding the existential meaning of hope, he does not offer much of a developmental theory. Erik Erikson offers a complementary framework for describing hopes at different stages of life, particularly in Western society. Erikson proposes that we view the life cycle in terms of psychosocial challenges. In Fromm's terms, the culturally standardized solutions to these challenges describe, essentially, the development of the social character common to members of that culture.

Erikson (1964) affirms that: "Hope is both the earliest and the most indispensable virtue inherent in the state of being alive... if life is to be sustained hope must remain, even where confidence is wounded, trust impaired." (p. 115). While he sees hope or a hopeful attitude as the achievement of infancy, we can assume that at each stage, the individual's hopes are focussed on meeting the appropriate psychosocial challenge. These hopes, so to speak, motivate behavior and dominate planning for life. Thus, the two-year old's hopes focus on autonomy, communicating clearly, doing things for him or herself. Later, in school, the child's hopes center on mastering subject matter, doing well and being recognized as a good performer in school, sports and peer activity. Above all, he or she hopes to be liked, to be popular with peers. According to Erikson's theory, by these achievements, the child hopes to avoid feeling first shame, then guilt, then a sense of inferiority or in the current terminology, low self-esteem. The adolescent challenge is first to develop a sense of identity and then to find intimacy with another person. In terms of Erikson's framework hopes are directed to success with one's chosen occupation and with a sexual partner: success at work and love. Once this is achieved, the next challenge is what he calls generativity, taking on the role of parent and mentor, expanding one's caring beyond the self in the family, workplace and community. Here one's hopes expand beyond the self. Finally, the old person's challenge is ego integrity, avoiding despair by coming to terms with one's life and its meaning, detaching oneself, indeed, transforming the "having" to the "being" mode of existence where hope has to do with receptiveness to life, "living as fully as one can."





## The Social - Historic Context of Hope

As both Fromm and Erikson indicate, a person's hopes express a relationship with and adaptation to the world. Furthermore, while loss of hope can result from a number of factors, including severe failure or loss, unconscious conflict, or chemical imbalance, hope may also be affected by social and historical events, interacting with the social character. Clinically, despair or loss of hope may indicate the deepest depression, a cause of suicide. However, from Fromm's existential perspective, destructiveness, even suicide is not the opposite but a perversion of life-loving hope. The suicide may hope to end unbearable suffering. The destructive person may hope for revenge or power. The ghetto youth may kill a person who has "dissed" him, shown disrespect, in order to affirm his dignity, his self esteem and gain the esteem of others like him. At a meeting I attended recently of local leaders in the Anacostia section of Washington, D.C. one black woman stated forcefully, "Where there is no love, violence takes its place." Half of the young men in this ghetto are either victims of violence or in jail. They have lost hope of reaching a respected place in society.

When Fromm and I studied Mexican villagers, we found that the alcoholics were men who had lost hope, who could not envisage a positive future for themselves. This resulted not merely from their economic situation, but from a passive submissive social character. For these campesinos, the children of hacienda peons, the meaning of hope was literally the Spanish word *esperar*, to wait, hoping that a new patron would save them, rather than trying to envisage a positive future and working to achieve it by themselves. To change this attitude required more than an economic solution. The villagers had to become conscious of this attitude and aware of an alternative.

In *Social Character in a Mexican Village* (1970) Fromm and I described an orphanage started in Mexico forty years ago by Father William Wasson. *Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos* (Our Little Brothers & Sisters) has taken in thousands of orphan children who have witnessed violence and experienced despair. When my Mexican colleagues and I interviewed these children, we found that after two years at NPH, they had developed a positive attitude to life and had become hopeful



about their future. What produced this transformation? Father Wasson organized NPH as a family, rather than an institution. He balanced values of unconditional love — no child ever has to leave, work — each child must contribute according to his or her capability, education — many of the children have become teachers and professionals, and a philosophy of sharing. Perhaps some of the despairing people who seek hope in psychotherapy would benefit from this kind of loving community.

In his study *Suicide*, Durkheim found that major economic changes increased the suicide rate. He explained this in terms of *anomie* which might be interpreted as loss of hope. For example, people brought up to believe that by practicing certain values they will prosper, suddenly find their life's work is worthless, their values have become meaningless. In this condition, they may despair, and they become vulnerable to demagogues. Hitler's appeal to the hard-working German people who had been humiliated by losing World War I and discouraged by inflation that wiped out their savings was a combination of hope to rebuild and hope to gain revenge. It appealed to the narcissistic ideal of a German family, a folk, united by blood ties. In contrast, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's message of hope "that we have nothing to fear but fear itself" appealed to the creative, life loving spirit of Americans made fearful by economic depression. Roosevelt appealed to individual initiative, with government providing opportunity. Ronald Reagan's hopeful message of "it's morning in America" proved more potent psychologically than Jimmy Carter's diagnosis of national malaise, and Reagan's America did prove hopeful for many investors, if not for the workers who slipped to the bottom of the middle class. Today, Louis Farrakhan's message to black men mixes hope based on self affirmation, responsibility, and hatred into a powerful and potentially poisonous stew, appealing to those who see no alternative vision. At the same time, the rise of local militias and other angry groups who blame immigrants and minorities for their hopelessness threatens the future of all of us.

In his earlier work, Erikson (1950) suggested that hopes for building institutions and creating a better world were most appropriate for a mature person challenged to achieve generativity. But as he observed in the protests of the late 60s, adolescents also have hopes for the



world beyond the self.(Erikson 1968). Adolescents are particularly sensitive to hypocrisy and phoniness, to false promises. As they gain knowledge of the world which clashes with the ideals and hopes they are taught in families, school and churches or synagogues, normal adolescent rebelliousness intensifies their indignation.

We live in an age in which the hopes raised by the fall of the Berlin wall and collapse of communism are themselves crumbling due to revived nationalism, increasing inequality, governmental corruption, and failures to deal with environmental threats. Is it rational or irrational to hope for a better world? When we feel depressed about the future, is this a rational feeling or rather a symptom of an unresolved inner conflict?

These questions do not have simple answers. The answers, I believe might be either/or both/and. There are large differences in the degree to which people are engaged in a larger world beyond their individual hopes for making it in love and work. Yet, families, institutions and cultures prosper because the hopes of parents and leaders center not only on their own well being but on the well-being of others in the present and future. While it is clearly rational to center one's hopes on personal success, it is not irrational to have hopes for one's larger circle of relationships.

"I am myself and my circumstances," wrote Ortega y Gasset, "and if I do not save my circumstances, I cannot save myself." Tocqueville described the genius of America in the 1830s as "self interest, rightly understood" meaning taking responsibility for the community that supports its individual members. And David Riesman has argued that Americans tend to rationalize their idealism in terms of self interest, since we distrust the idealist as either fuzzy minded, a religious fanatic, or a slick salesman. One can see this in some of the best companies where managers are inspired by visions of creating better products and improving the quality of working life, all of which they must justify in terms of increased profit. It is not so believable or legitimate for a businessman to explain charitable actions in terms of improving society, but these same actions can be rationalized in terms of corporate strategy. Yet, this country was founded by a group of 18th century leaders, well educated in the classics, who combined practical business interests with radical ideals of individual liberty and a community dedicated to human perfectability. Other great



leaders such as Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King have called Americans to dedicate themselves to these ideals. High hopes rooted in humanistic philosophy, strengthened by commitment, and affirmed by fellowship are powerful motivators of great deeds and profound feelings of accomplishment. These hopes and the actions they produce give meaning to many people who are not so inspired by hopes of getting rich. Some of the movements of our time — civil rights, women's rights, peace in Southeast Asia, environmental protection — testify to the power of these hopes. However, hope based on a movement is not always sustainable. As James Billington has put it, while religion may be the opiate of the people, revolution can be the amphetamine of the intellectuals.

Sometimes the difference between rational and irrational hope is clear, as in the case of the patient who hopes to realize infantile fantasies, but sometimes the difference is not so clear, as in the case of the grandiose patient who hopes to change the world for the better. Individuals including some rather grandiose people, can and do improve the world, even in small ways, as we recall each Christmas season when we watch *A Christmas Carol* or the movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*, where a man sees how worse his town would have been if he had not lived. Erich Fromm brought to psychoanalysis a vision of what it means to be healthy that went beyond adaptation to one's culture. He observed in the dreams of patients a humanistic conscience and yearnings to transcend egoism and fear to create richer relationships. He saw this vision in the development of humanistic religious thought. He believed the analyst should have the knowledge and ability to respond to these humanistic strivings, to take them seriously and to challenge the patient to actualize his or her authentic self, to strengthen the well-spring of sustainable hope.

### **Fromm's Two Voices**

I have written elsewhere (Maccoby 1995) that Fromm sometimes confused his audience and his patients, because he spoke with two voices: analyst and prophet. In his analytic voice, he described what is, while in his prophetic voice he proclaimed what should be. When he was most inspiring, the analytic and prophetic voices harmonized, as in *You Shall Be As Gods* (1966) where he analyzed the historic struggle in the Old and New Testaments to progress from idolatry and a



tribal authoritarian religion to a belief in justice and love of the stranger as the guiding principles for humanity.

For Fromm, messianic hope was for humanization. The messianic vision is not a place but a society of fully individuated people motivated by love of life. From this point of view, normality could be seen as pathological, as a “socially patterned defect.” In *The Sane Society* (1955) Fromm describes the alienated marketing character as the socially patterned defect which short circuits the messianic project. In *The Revolution of Hope* (1979), it is the mechanized society, the megamachine which threatens humanity’s realization of its full human potential. Speaking in his prophetic voice in the 50s, Fromm calls for communitarian and social democratic solutions and in the late 60s for a humanistic movement supported by small groups of truthseekers. In this period, he conceived of psychoanalysis as a method for overcoming alienation by confronting the patient with an unalienated response to his or her attempts to engage the analyst in the transferential collusion of pathological normality. He combined a kind of Reichian attack on character armor, with a rabbinical disgust with sham, and, after his encounter with D.T. Suzuki in the late 50s, a Zen master’s strict discipline. As Fromm became more pessimistic about social movements in the 70s, his emphasis shifted. Hope was to be found not in a political platform, but through the individual’s spiritual struggle to overcome the greed and egoism which cause pain and suffering.

In Erikson’s terms, Fromm’s hopes shifted from the stage of generativity to that of ego integrity, avoiding despair by letting go and experiencing a sense of harmony and unity with all of nature. In his 70s, Fromm showed me Buddhist exercises of practicing dying and overcoming fear of death, and he sent me *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* by Nyanaponika Thera, as an example of an ideal for human development. Although he still believed that a transformed society could support “being” rather than “having”, he now termed his approach as “utopian” rather than socialistic. He wrote (1976) “Many think: ‘Why strive for the impossible? Let us rather act as if the course we are steering will lead us to the place of safety and happiness that our maps indicate.’ Those who unconsciously despair yet put on the mask of optimism are not necessarily wise. But those who have not given up hope can succeed only if they are hardheaded realists, shed all



illusions, and fully appreciate the difficulties. This sobriety marks the distinction between *awake* and *dreaming* utopians". (p. 172)

Fromm's utopianism still begs some questions. Although Fromm, as much as any modern thinker, analyzed the human potential for destructiveness, he still believed in the possibility of a messianic age. He tended to reject the compromising demands of the democratic political process which is based on a somewhat different view of human nature. Isaiah Berlin (1991) argues that utopian visions are unrealistic, because good values such as equality and freedom, or Christian love and republican vigilance may be incompatible. He writes, "Perhaps the best that one can do is to try to promote some kind of equilibrium, necessarily unstable, between the different aspirations of differing groups of human beings—at the very least to prevent them from attempting to exterminate each other, and, so far as possible, to prevent them from hurting each other—and to promote the maximum practical degree of sympathy and understanding, never likely to be complete, between them." Berlin goes on to say that "Immanuel Kant, a man very remote from irrationalism, once observed that 'Out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made.' And for that reason no perfect solution is, not merely in practice, but in principle, possible in human affairs, and any determined effort to produce it is likely to lead to suffering, disillusionment and failure." (p. 18).

Speaking in his prophetic voice, Fromm underestimated the need for individuals to adapt to a society before attempting to transform it. It is through institutions such as family and schools and through political, legal, and economic organizations that we create health, wealth, and good relationships. In an increasingly complex, technology based society, improving these institutions and organizations requires expert knowledge combined with pragmatic idealism and supportive colleagues. It can be slow and arduous work. There will always be conflicts of different interests that must be negotiated. There is no dramatic cultural transformation that will dissolve psychopathology, create harmony, and make a society sane.

In practice, productive hope is generated when people work together to protect civilization and to push forward the envelope of their culture, even a little bit. They are the responsible parents,



dedicated teachers, community volunteers, union organizers, idealistic researchers and environmental activists. Perhaps there are no sane societies, but there are saner societies or sane enough societies that allow individuals to join together to develop themselves and their culture.

### **Hope And Psychoanalysis**

What is the role of hope in psychoanalysis? Some hope, however weak, of a more positive future and some belief in the process brings the patient who complains of hopelessness to the office of a psychotherapist or analyst. The first question is one of diagnosis. What is causing a sense of hopelessness, which we usually call, rather inadequately, depression.

I have seen a number of patients who were made to feel more hopeless by analysts who insisted on psychologically interpreting chemically caused depression. In my experience, those patients who did not respond to insight were almost invariably helped by psychopharmacological treatment. Although psychotherapy and in a few cases, psychoanalysis also proved helpful for some of these patients, their hopelessness resulted in the main from the extreme lack of energy or control over feelings caused by the chemical imbalance. When one woman in her 20s finally left her orthodox analyst after a year of fruitless analysis, he insisted she was acting out a negative transference, and he complained that I had let her do so by accepting her in treatment. This highly intelligent woman responded quickly to a combination of medication and psychotherapy. Within a year she became exceptionally creative at work and soon after married and had a child. Another patient was at the point of giving up on himself. After years of “Frommian” analysis in which he had “learned” that his problems were caused by his narcissism and mother fixation, he still had periods in which he was immobilized and unable to carry out high level executive responsibilities. A combination of lithium and supportive psychotherapy quickly resulted in feelings of liberation, and effective work relationships.

However, the hope that drugs will resolve unconscious conflicts and cure spiritual suffering appears to be another form of secular idolatry, an unquestioning belief in the physical sciences. Fromm believed that the psychoanalytic encounter at its best offered an opportunity to explore and make conscious one’s deepest experience. His two voices harmonized most beautifully



in his analysis of the Old Testament psalms. He pointed out that some of these express a struggle to overcome despair and regain faith and hope in a way which models a profound analysis. A prime example is the 22nd psalm which scholars believe was referred to by Jesus on the cross when with his last words, he quoted the first line of the psalm: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” The psalm follows this despairing beginning by a statement of hope followed by deeper despair followed by a stronger affirmation of hope followed by the expression of the deepest possible despair:

*“Yea, dogs are round about me, a company of evildoers encircle me, they have  
pierced my hands and feet —  
I can count all my bones — they stare and gloat over me, they divide my  
garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots.”*

This is followed, wrote Fromm, by “unmitigated hope, faith, and enthusiasm” as the psalmist’s plea to God is answered. The 22nd psalm is followed by the confident faith of the 23rd psalm, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” For Fromm, the 22nd psalm expressed the process of recovering hope by fully experiencing one’s despair. He saw the role of the analyst with the patient who despairs because of life’s bitter experiences as similar to Dante’s Virgil, the guide to one’s personal hell. This guide is empathic, rational, and moral without being moralistic. Only after experiencing the deepest hell can Dante then struggle with his pride in purgatory and finally through the intervention of Beatrice’s love reach paradise. Some patients must experience the repressed guilt and shame caused by their own choices, including mean and unloving actions, before they can begin to find happiness. The analyst, like Virgil, illuminates the journey, helping the seeker understand how he or she became emotionally blocked. In these cases, Fromm likened a successful analysis to a change of heart.

Most people who place hope in the psychoanalytic process have more modest aims and do not suffer from profound despair. Their goals tend to be more like those described by Erikson, to meet the challenges of ego identity, intimacy, and generativity than to transform themselves from a “having” to a “being” mode of existence. Rather than transcend the social character, they seek to





make it fit them better, to adapt more successfully to the world rather than to change it. They are not eager to open Pandora's box, and let out all the pain and troubles, even with the promise that hope is also there. Some hesitate to hope for too much, for fear they will be painfully disappointed.

I suspect also that in this age of the mass media, most people who seek out a psychotherapist have formed some idea of what to expect from seeing therapists at work in TV or movies or reading about therapy in novels or popular expositions like Janet Malcolm's *The Impossible Profession*. While some patients put their hopes in an Orthodox analysis, others do not want a couch but rather seek someone who is more like a coach.

The analyst also will have hopes about what the analytic process can achieve. Fromm believed that Freud hoped for too little for the patient when he spoke of transforming neurotic suffering into normal unhappiness. Fromm believed that becoming fully human requires us to experience our irrational selves and face our deepest, most painful feelings. By being authentically in touch with our own reality, we become better able to experience others and relate ourselves to the world with our total energies. But Fromm sometimes hoped for too much when he engaged the patient in an authentic encounter of truth-telling. Rather than creating safe space where the patient could explore the past, struggle with transference feelings, and try out new solutions, Fromm's approach sometimes resulted in a short circuiting of the therapeutic process and identification with the "productive, loving" analyst.

While few people may wish to be reborn into a radical mode of being, many people in this affluent, market dominated society, feel that they lack a center and are driven by addictive needs. They do not feel they are free to find a satisfactory balance between "having" and "being". Like Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, they are confused about what it means to develop the self. They may seek us out for many different reasons: inability to commit themselves, a conflictful relationship, inexplicable anger, loss of self-confidence, a sense of hopelessness. Together with these reasons, they present themselves through their dreams and associations. We respond to, interpret, or ignore the patient's messages, depending on how well we understand them. We can try to limit our



interpretations to what happens within the confines of a consulting room and in terms of a comfortable theory, or we can try to understand the patient's relationship to the world outside.

How well we understand this relationship depends on how well we understand ourselves, our own adaptation to the world, our own hope or lack of it. Theory is essential to sensitizing us to pay attention and give weight to certain messages, but understanding depends on both our experience and capacity to empathize. Perhaps, it also depends on what John Keats called "negative capability," the ability to be actively receptive without needing to interpret too quickly, to remain puzzled without feeling confused. This is not the same thing as understanding the patient by analogy with our own similar experiences. Rather, it means both expanding our knowledge and directly experiencing the patients's feelings. In some cases, it means becoming containers of despair, supporting the patient so that he or she will not flee in panic, impotent rage or some other self-defeating escape. We need to affirm the patient's hopeful, life loving strivings and to facilitate understanding of resistances to that understanding. But for a person who lacks a philosophical or religious framework, insight is not enough. Both Freud and Fromm developed their own philosophical frameworks to support their insights. Freud's was in tune with the skeptical, anti-religious spirit of the early 20th century. Only near the end of his life in *Civilization and Its Discontents* did he question whether reason alone can withstand human destructiveness. Fromm's philosophy combined the humanistic religious tradition with thinking about character development in the work of Aristotle and Spinoza. Yet, Fromm's attempt to bypass the patient's defenses and stimulate a radical transformation did not always allow patients to develop their own frameworks for increased freedom. Rather, it sometimes led to adopting a Frommian ideology.

An attitude of hope in the analyst does not imply optimism or unrealistic expectations. Rather, I think, it is dynamic hope that the therapeutic encounter will facilitate the patient's exploration, as far as he or she wants to go, to find his or her own solution to the human condition. Perhaps that will mean modifications of the social character that stimulate continued growth and better adaptation. Perhaps it will mean abandoning irrational or infantile (Mitchell 1993) hopes and finding a more rational vision of a positive future. It may also mean more, if we



as analysts are ready. That readiness will depend not only on our own perceptions and awareness, but also our religious philosophy and knowledge of the world.

To summarize, hope is essential to human functioning, not only cognitively but also emotionally. Erich Fromm's existential theory of human needs provides a framework for understanding the meaning of hope, how it can be perverted, lost, and regained through psychoanalysis. Fromm describes the role of religion in stimulating and directing hope, and he shows the relevance to psychoanalysis of religious wisdom about overcoming despair by experiencing one's deepest thoughts and feelings. Fromm challenges us as psychoanalysts to expand our knowledge of ourselves and society and to develop our own philosophical framework, our own solution to human existence. In responding to this challenge, we increase the hope of revitalizing both ourselves and our profession.



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