

COMMENTS ON THE FROMM MANUSCRIPT

-- Jules H. Masserman, M.D.

I am honored by your kind invitation to join a select company of commentators on Erich Fromm's latest contribution, but other than this communication (which you may use in any way you wish) I must decline for two closely related reasons:

First, my previous commitments.

My second and more cogent reason is derived from my generally negative reactions to Erich Fromm's article, which I can here only skeletally itemize as follows:

(a) I am repelled by titular tiltings such as Mind vs Matter, Love against Hate, and Man -- Sheep or Wolf?

(b) When comprehensive, operational thought is essential I am impatient with the intellectual naivete of attempting to reify the infinitely protean contingencies of human transactions by giving them pseudo-sustantive names such as "necrophilia" or "biophilia," animating these vapid abstractions into "instincts" and then further crystalizing them into "traits of behavior," or worse, "types of personality." I had begun to hope that the shades of Gall, McDougall and Lombroso had long since been decently shrouded with Thanatos and exorcised from serious psychologic discourse.

(c) I likewise persist in wishing that writers who appeal to stereotyped nature-myths about animals (actually, sheep can be quite "vicious" even to their young, and wolves relatively "kind" to their conspecifics) will eventually become fully acquainted with modern ethologic and comparative evolutionary thought (see my attached "Ethology, Biodynamics and Psychoanalytic Research").



(d) I also resent "psychoanalytic" clinical verbiage being traduced ex cathedra into "objective data" -- and, as a card-carrying analyst with a ~~displac~~ quarter-century of disconcertingly variegated experience, I shall continue to deplore this epistemologic hubris until fewer of my colleagues remain addicted to it.

(e) Finally, I am disconcerted that, while the world teeters under our increasingly futile lecterns and typewriters, the American Friends Service Committee, with so much good work at hand, can seriously consider adding yet another pamphlet of parlor patois, however nicely composed in eight-bar cadences, to a public repertoire already replete with recondite irrationalizations. In effect, for the life of me--and it may amount to that--I can see no practical relevance or applicability of Dr. Fromm's newest departure into human taxonomy to any of our pressing problems.

I shall therefore request your indulgence...for this condensed reply which, were I to read it once more, might well sound unnecessarily intemperate even to me despite my mounting exasperation with pseudo-analytic persiflage; and for knowingly committing the very sins for which I criticize Fromm; i.e., not documenting and substantiating my own arbitrary counter-assertions.....

