



## CHAPTER SEVEN

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# *Erich Fromm*

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### INTRODUCTION

**ERICH FROMM STUDIED** psychology and sociology at the University of Heidelberg and subsequently received orthodox psychoanalytic training in Munich and at the famous Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute before he emigrated to the United States in 1933. However, although he has drawn liberally from classical psychoanalytic thought, his focus of interest has been the relationship between man and his society. Thus, his theories reflect the orientation of the social scientist rather than the classical psychoanalyst's concern with the individual per se. Insofar as he has sought to elucidate the relationship between psychological functioning and social milieu, his basic formulations are closely associated with the dynamic cultural positions of Adler, Sullivan, and Hornev. Within this frame of reference, Fromm has contributed important insights into individual psychodynamics and their relationship to historical and socioeconomic concepts, which have exerted a significant influence on laymen as well as on psychoanalysts, psychologists, sociologists, and philosophers.

### FROMM AND FREUD: MAJOR DIFFERENCES

In general, Fromm has been critical of many of Freud's formulations, which he considers either inadequate or misleading because of their overemphasis on certain developmental phenomena. However, the chief target of his criticism has been Freud's concept of the source and nature of psychic energy, his libido theory. As opposed to the view of classical psychoanalysis, Fromm believes that "the fundamental basis of character is not seen in various types of libido organization but in specific kinds of a person's relatedness to the world," in the action of acquiring things and

relating to people. Fromm has also been critical of Freud's failure to devote sufficient attention to the analysis of the mature or genital character, and he has differed sharply with the position of classical psychoanalysis with respect to the significance of dreams. Freud defined dreams as the expression of the individual's irrational aspects, but Fromm assumes that the dream "can be the expression both of the lowest and most irrational and of the highest and most valuable functions of our minds." Fromm has also emphasized his disagreement with Freud's concept of self-love as selfishness. In contrast, Fromm believes that selfishness is actually the opposite of self-love, which is really self-affirmation, which, in turn, is the basis for the capacity to love others.

### FROMM'S THEORY OF PERSONALITY

#### MAN AND SOCIETY

Fromm recognizes that man's behavior is motivated by his biological requirements. However, he contends that man's adaptation is not related solely to the satisfaction or frustration of his instinctual or libidinal needs. Rather, human motivation and behavior are culturally determined, and society generates new needs and problems that are superimposed on man's instinctual needs and are as imperative as the instinctual demands of hunger, thirst, and sexuality, if not more so. To quote from *Escape from Freedom*, the first volume Fromm published in this country in 1941, given the presence of certain universal instincts, "those drives which make for the differences in men's character, like love and hatred, the lust for power and the yearning for submission, the enjoyment of sensuous pleasure and the fear of it, are products of the social process," not a part of a fixed and biologically given human nature. Thus, Fromm believes that society has a creative as well as a suppressing function; that man's passions and anxieties are, for the most part, products of his culture; and that man himself is the most important creation and achievement of the human effort of history.

#### MAN'S QUEST FOR MEANING

Fromm draws an extensive analogy between individual development and the history of mankind. Man's biological helplessness at birth is the prime cause of the emergence of his specifically human qualities, such as his subsequent awareness of himself as a separate entity. His ability to remember the past and to visualize the future, his capacity for conceptualization and symbolization, and his realization that death is inevitable. These qualities give rise, in turn, to certain existential dichotomies—an awareness of being one with nature, yet transcending it, and the hope for immortality on the one hand and the knowledge that death is inevitable on the other. The human condition drives man to resolve these incompatibilities. Religion, with its promise of an eternal life, represents one such attempt at resolution. There are also historical dichotomies, such as that of abun-

dance versus scarcity. However, these may be resolved through human wisdom and effort.

Above all, man differs from other animals because he has become separated from nature and other men; as a result, he is overwhelmed by feelings of loneliness and isolation. He is compelled to relate significantly to self and others; to give his life meaning through the realization of his powers to reason and to love and of his capacity for productive activity. This provides the necessary frame of reference that will enable him to answer the questions of what he is and how he can best implement his search for meaning and belonging. This human need for meaning and belonging is the key concept in Fromm's theory.

#### SEPARATION AND INDIVIDUATION

Just as man's history begins with his awareness that he is separate from nature, so the growth of individuality begins with separation of the newborn from the mother; separation occurs first through the physiological birth process and then through the individual's gradual psychological awareness of himself as an entity distinct from mother and other objects. Education, which necessarily involves frustration and prohibition, sharpens this awareness of separateness; once the primary ties of infancy have been broken, the child learns to use his own unique powers. And, gradually, he achieves greater physical, mental, and emotional integration, leading to the development of a structured self, guided by will and reason. Ideally, dependency is gradually surrendered.

On the other hand, the child's primary ties to his parents have given him a sense of security and belonging, which growth and individuation threaten to destroy. Confronted with an external world that appears strong and threatening, the growing child feels powerless and anxious. If his early experiences were unfavorable in that he was deprived of respect, warmth, and affection and if he failed to achieve confidence in his capacities as a result, the child will find the problems of individuation and isolation difficult, if not actually agonizing and insoluble. Generally, there is a lag between individuation and the development of a sense of security based on confidence in one's own capacities rather than the omnipotence of one's parents. During this period the individual whose early environment was unhealthy may find his impotence and isolation intolerable; he may then seek to surrender his individuality and re-establish his dependency through one of several mechanisms of escape. These mechanisms, which include specific forms of neurosis—masochism, sadism, destructiveness, and automaton conformity—are discussed in further detail below as pathological phenomena.

#### THEORIES OF PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

Fromm's theories of personality development are in harmony with his hypothesis that man relates to his world either through acquiring and assimilating things (assimilation) or by relating to people and to himself



(socialization). He can take things or produce them himself to satisfy his needs. But he must also associate with others in work, play, and sexual activities. Complete isolation is incompatible with sanity. The specific way in which the individual relates—that is, whether love or hate is predominant, competition or cooperation, freedom or oppression—is an expression of his personality or character.

Socialization may take one of five forms or orientations, which correspond to five types of assimilation. Socialization orientations include masochism, sadism, destructiveness, automaton conformity, and love. And these are correlated with the orientations of assimilation, which emerge as the receptive, exploitative, hoarding, marketing, and productive characters. Thus, for example, the receptive character is a masochistic person. These classifications are ideal constructs. In reality, human personalities are mixtures of these orientations, although one is usually predominant.

Temperament, as the mode of reaction to experience, is constitutional. As such, it influences the character of the activity in the several personality types. For example, the productive or loving personality with a choleric or irritable temperament will react vigorously to love; on the other hand, the sadistic person with this temperament will react vigorously to submissiveness in another. In this sense, personality, through which energy directed outward to the world is channeled, is the counterpart of the instinctual mechanism of the animal.

The family, the psychic agent of society, forms the child's character by compelling him to become a person who wants to do what is required of him as an effective member of society. Thus, the core of personality is the social character, on which the individual orientations are then superimposed. The reason why certain social character patterns predominate rather than others is a sociological problem. In any event, the social and individual character orientations are the end zones of a continuum that ranges from the conventionally patterned to the most idiosyncratic individual, as described below.

**The receptive character.** The receptive character, whose socialization orientation is basically masochistic, believes that his needs must be fulfilled by an external source, not through his own efforts. In fact, he feels inadequate and helpless. Therefore, he seeks a magic helper and becomes anxious when his supply line is threatened. Feudal societies fostered this orientation, which corresponds to the Freudian oral-passive type.

**The exploitative character.** This basically sadistic character, which corresponds to the Freudian oral-aggressive personality, attempts to seize what he requires from others, including things, ideas, friends, and mates. He is hostile, manipulative, envious, and cynical. Sociologically, he resembles the feudal robber barons and the adventure capitalists of the nineteenth century.

**The hoarding character.** Like the Freudian anal personality, the security of the hoarding character derives from his hoarding and saving ac-

tivities. Spending arouses anxiety. Love is possession. He is orderly and pedantic but generally sterile. Thus, mastery is achieved through order and remoteness. Sociologically, this type corresponds to the bourgeois, Calvinistic-Puritan personality that was a product of the period of transition from feudalism to capitalism.

**The marketing character.** The marketing character, a product of modern society, is the automaton conformist. In his nonproductive orientation, individual qualities have no intrinsic value. Personality is a commodity for sale, and there are fashions in personality just as there are in other commodities. Moreover, as might be expected, there is no genuineness or stability in human relationships. The classic example is the mythical character of Peer Gynt, who tries to find himself beneath layers of superficial values, only to find that he has no inner core of truth.

**The productive character.** This is the only productive orientation in Fromm's schema, and thus far it has not characterized society at any stage of its historical development, although Fromm has sufficient faith in humanity to believe that man will ultimately have the courage "to be himself and to be for himself." The criteria of productivity are the ability to reason independently and the ability to love. Love is a human capacity but difficult to realize. As an expression of productiveness, genuine love implies care, respect, responsibility, and knowledge. The ability to love is acquired through loving specific individuals, such as members of one's family. Love for self is not incompatible with love for others; rather, the two are interdependent. Modern culture has produced individuals who cannot love themselves and who, therefore, cannot love others. The productive personality has many virtues; but these do not exceed appropriate limits. Thus, he is adaptable but not unprincipled; he is active but not exploitative. When productiveness is dominant, it tends to transform the nonproductive orientations in the personality. Under such circumstances, a tendency toward submission, for example, becomes devotion.

Authoritarianism is a basic concept of Fromm's thought. It is the most general mechanism of escape from the sense of isolation by seeking external powers, whether personal and direct, as that of a leader, or impersonal, as that of God. All forms of this mechanism serve to avoid personal responsibility and stultify the individual's creative productivity and growth. Basically, "the power to act creates a need to use this power and failure to use it results in dysfunction and unhappiness."

Fromm is averse to the anatomization of personality structure. Simply stated, he believes that only a spontaneous, integrated self can ensure the individual's successful relationship with his world. Therefore, since sex, for example, is only one of man's basic needs, it cannot function as a nuclear explanatory principle, nor can adequate sexual functioning be considered the sole prerequisite for happiness. Happiness is the result of free, productive activity that extends well beyond the limits of this single sphere of activity.



FROMM ONLINE

## THEORY OF PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

Fromm has not dealt specifically with the differential diagnosis of mental disorders; he is concerned primarily with the role of modern society in the pathogenesis of such disorders. Accordingly, his main theoretical emphasis is on the neurotic mechanisms used by man to escape from the basic dichotomies in human existence. As mentioned earlier, these include masochism, sadism, destructiveness, automaton conformity, and neurosis.

## MASOCHISM

Masochism and sadism are usually conjoined in the sadomasochistic or authoritarian personality. The sadomasochistic person in whom masochism predominates feels inferior and insignificant, never experiencing the fulfillment and joy of freedom, which he fears. However, masochism does permit some sense of relatedness to others, despite the fact that such an individual remains weak, helpless, and dependent beneath his mask of love, loyalty, and devotion.

## SADISM

Fromm delineates three types of sadistic behavior: (1) making others dependent by wielding unrestricted power over them; (2) exploiting and robbing others materially, intellectually, or emotionally; and (3) making others suffer. Actually, the sadist is not strong and independent but weak and helpless. Unless he is able to dominate someone, he feels isolated and alone. Either trend, masochism or sadism, may predominate in the sadomasochistic personality. Anxiety arises when such a person is neither dominating nor submissive.

## DESTRUCTIVENESS

The destructive person tries to destroy or eliminate another person or object who represents a potential basis for comparison or threat. Fromm formulated the attitude of this character type as follows: "I can escape the feeling of my own powerlessness in comparison with the world outside myself by destroying it." Such irrational destructiveness may masquerade as love, duty, or patriotism.

## AUTOMATON CONFORMITY

Some degree of conformity is required in any culture, of course. But in automaton conformity, the entire personality is dependent on the cultural pattern, and the individual becomes what others are and expect him to be. His fear of aloneness is overcome by thinking, feeling, and acting exactly like everyone else in his culture or group. A pseudoself is created.

Fromm sees these neurotic and characterological deformations as attempts to escape from the warping, alienating effects of a society that

denies man's basic needs for relatedness, transcendence, rootedness, identity, and a stable frame of reference for the perception and comprehension of his world. It is the sick society that drives man into insanity, self-destruction, and antisocial behavior. The family communicates its traditional pathological mechanisms and social irrationalities to the child and reinforces these by communicating its feelings of hostility and anxiety. Treated with hostility instead of warmth and respect, deprived of confidence in his own capacities, the child finds individuation difficult or impossible, and the escape devices described above are called into being.

## THERAPEUTIC PRINCIPLES

Fromm has not developed a separate psychotherapeutic method. Instead, he has drawn freely on other systems, particularly Freudian techniques. However, he differs from both the Freudian and the Jungian approaches in his use of dreams as a therapeutic tool. Fromm believes that dreams reflect the rational as well as the irrational aspects of personality. He has also introduced modifications in orthodox psychoanalytic technique with respect to the frequency of treatment sessions, use of the couch, sole reliance on free association; he has, in addition, advocated greater emphasis on current life situations. Fromm contends that the therapist must play a more active role in treatment. This stems, in turn, from his belief that insight must derive from experience that has an affective quality if it is to be therapeutically effective and that this insight will determine the outcome of man's innate struggle toward health. Above all, Fromm is concerned with the requirements for a sane society as a matrix for the creation of the productive, fully human man. Ideally, this would be a humanistic, communitarian society in which man could relate to others creatively as an individual rather than a conformist.

## CURRENT PERSPECTIVES

Erich Fromm has not created a separate school of psychoanalysis, although his ideas have been adopted by many psychotherapists. He was chairman of the faculty of the William Alanson White Institute of Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis and Psychology in New York City for many years. At present, he holds the position of professor at the National University of Mexico, where he teaches psychiatry and psychoanalysis, is director of psychoanalytic training, and exerts considerable influence. In addition, Fromm's appeal to the general public remains undiminished, and he spends several months each year in New York City, lecturing to lay and professional audiences.





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# INTERPRETING PERSONALITY

## *A Survey of Twentieth-Century Views*

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