



Erich Fromm

b. 1900



Freud has often been criticized for neglecting the role of society in molding man's character. Fromm has attempted to correct this oversight by showing how society shapes its members so that their needs and traits are in harmony with the aims of the society. Fromm was heavily influenced by the theories of Karl Marx, and is sometimes referred to as a Marxian personality theorist.

Erich Fromm was born in Frankfurt, Germany, on March 23, 1900. He studied psychology and sociology at the Universities of Heidelberg, Frankfurt, and Munich. After obtaining his Ph.D. in 1922 from the University of Heidelberg, he went to Berlin to receive training in psychoanalysis at the Psychoanalytic Institute there. Before coming to the United States in 1933, Fromm was



associated with the influential Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt.

In the United States, he joined the International Institute for Social Research in New York City and established a private practice in psychoanalysis. Fromm now divides his time between Mexico City, where he lectures at the National University, and New York City, where he is a fellow of the William Alanson White Institute of Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis, and Psychology, and is a professor at New York University.

Fromm has written a great many books, which are widely read. His latest volume, published in 1973, is *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*.

One of the basic themes of Fromm's writings is that man feels lonely and alienated because he has become separated from nature and from other men. Any form of society that man has developed represents an attempt to resolve this feeling of isolation. Man lives a life of contradiction because he is both a part of nature and separate from it; he is both an animal and a human being. This dual role of being both human and animal constitutes the basic conditions of his existence. Various **needs** arise out of these conditions of existence, and these needs are realized in accordance with the social arrangements under which he lives.

The bridging concept between the individual and society is **social character**. Fromm has identified various character types that exist in Western society.

NEEDS

Man has five needs that are uniquely human. These are the need for **relatedness**, for **transcendence**, for **rootedness**, for **identity**, and for a **frame of orientation**.

Relatedness. The need for relatedness stems from the fact that man, because he can imagine and reason, has lost his instinctive relationship with nature. Consequently, man has to create his own relationships, the most satisfying one being a relationship of productive love with another human being which yields a mutuality of care, responsibility, respect, and understanding.



Transcendence. Man has a strong need to rise above his animal nature. He wants to become a creative, imaginative person rather than remaining a creature.

Rootedness is the need to feel that one is an integral part of the world, to feel that one belongs. In early childhood this need is satisfied by being close to the mother. After childhood, a person tries to satisfy this need by developing a feeling of brotherliness with other men and women.

Identity is the striving to be recognized as a unique individual, to have a sense of personal identity. Identity is achieved by one's own accomplishments or by associating oneself with another individual or with a group.

Frame of orientation is the need for a stable and consistent way of perceiving the world.

SOCIAL CHARACTER

Fromm defines social character as "the nucleus of the character structure which is shared by most members of the same culture" (1963, p. 83). The function of social character is "to shape the energies of the members of society in such a way that their behavior is not a matter of conscious decision as to 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 . . . and for the purpose of the continued functioning of the society" (1963, pp. 84–85).

Social character may express itself in a variety of forms in any given society. For example, in Western nations, these character types are found: *receptive, exploitative, hoarding, marketing, and productive*. The healthiest of these types is the productive.

More recently, Fromm has described another pair of character types: the *necrophilous* versus the *biophilous*. The necrophilous character is attracted to death, the biophilous character is in love with life.



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