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Fromm's Humanistic Psychoanalysis

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Erich Fromm was born in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1900, the only child of Jewish parents. His father was an independent businessman; his mother, a homemaker. As a boy, Fromm was an ardent student of the Old Testament. He was aroused by the compassion and the possibility of human redemption in the stories of Abraham and Jonah, of Adam and Eve, and by the words of the prophets. In particular, he was impressed by the promise that one day nations "shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Hausdorff, 1972, p. 11). This prophecy had special meaning for Fromm because of the anti-Semitism and isolation he experienced. He sought consolation in the Old Testament and began to long for a universal peace and brotherhood he hoped would help him transcend the present. This longing can be seen clearly in his later writings about the nature of mature love and the establishment of a utopian social order.

Fromm's family life was not one of harmony. A strong concern with spiritual values was matched by an equally strong concern with the attainment of material success. He described his household as "tense," his father as "over-anxious and moody," and his mother as "depression-prone" (Hausdorff, 1972, p. 12). Fromm believes, retrospectively, that this conflict between spiritual and secular values in his boyhood provided the impetus for his later search for a harmonious social order. His concern with understanding the fundamental questions of life and society was increased dramatically at age twelve when a friend of the family, a beautiful and talented woman, committed suicide. Her death seemed incredible and senseless to him (Hausdorff, 1972, p. 13).

At thirteen, Fromm began fourteen years of study of the Talmud under two humanistic and socialistic rabbis. He then left organized Judaism but retained a lifelong interest in religious writings (Hausdorff, 1972, p. 13).



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He entered the University of Heidelberg at a time when the social sciences were enlivened by a burst of new ideas. Karl Marx's theories on the ways in which the political and social order affected the individual's development were by then widely known, and it is clear that Fromm was influenced by them, as will become apparent later in the chapter. Darwin's theory of biological evolution was also sweeping the academic world, as was Freud's new and startling formulations of human personality (Hausdorff, 1972, pp. 14–15). Freud's ideas were particularly intriguing to Fromm since they seemed to offer insights into problems he could not resolve. For example, Freud's concepts helped Fromm understand the suicide of the family friend. As he put it, "When I became acquainted with Freud's theories, they seemed to be the answer to a puzzling and frightening experience" (Hausdorff, 1972, p. 16). While he then continued his studies in sociology and received his Ph.D. from Heidelberg in 1922, his interest in psychoanalysis soon became paramount. In 1925, Fromm went through instruction in psychoanalysis and later was analyzed by Hans Sachs. He never had any formal medical training, a fact that has led some of his critics to speculate that this "lack" in his education accounted for his "de-biologizing" the Freudian position (Hausdorff, 1972, p. 16). Fromm underwent still further psychoanalytic training in Berlin at the Psychoanalytic Institute in 1932. His teachers included some prominent Freudians—for example, Karl Abraham, Sandor Rado, Theodor Reik, and Franz Alexander—although he never met Freud himself (Hausdorff, 1972, pp. 20–21).

While increasing his knowledge of psychoanalysis, Fromm lectured at several institutes in Frankfurt and wrote papers utilizing both Marxist and Freudian ideas. It was at this point that he began to develop his theory of character formation. In 1931, Fromm wrote *The Development of the Dogma of Christ*, in which he adhered to the Freudian idea that religion was illusory, an infantile attempt to seek psychic gratification (Hausdorff, 1972, p. 22). He continued to publish papers compatible with orthodox psychoanalytic ideas throughout the 1930s.

In 1934, Fromm emigrated to the United States and became an American citizen. Several years later, he published the beginnings of his new theory in a popular book called *Escape from Freedom*. In it, Fromm discussed the ways in which modern society and ideologies mold the social character of the individual. In his view, men and women are primarily social beings who have been historically conditioned but who also have human needs that occur prior to the socialization process. We are born with certain potentialities whose development is fostered or hindered by the prevailing social order. Fromm believed Freud was correct in his contention that the family was the primary agent of society but wrong in his assumption that instincts govern the behavior of the individual. Likewise, Fromm thought that Marx's emphasis on the power of ideas in bringing about social change was incorrect. For Fromm, ideas "are answers to specific human needs prominent in a given social character"



(Hausdorff, 1972, p. 36). In general terms, Fromm's analysis is truly socio-psychological in nature. It is an attempt to construct a theory in which the physiological and psychological needs of the individual and the needs and goals of society are mutually satisfied. His ideas about the development of social character are more precisely formulated in *Man for Himself* (1947). Most of the types he postulates bear a close resemblance to the Freudian character types, as we shall see. Numerous other books followed: *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (1950), *The Forgotten Language: An Introduction to the Understanding of Dreams, Fairy Tales, and Myths* (1951), *The Sane Society* (1955), *The Art of Loving* (1956), *The Heart of Man* (1964), *The Revolution of Hope* (1968), *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973), and *To Have or to Be?* (1976).

In *The Sane Society*, Fromm continued the analysis of society he had begun in *Escape from Freedom*. He pointed out that contemporary Western society is "sick" because its citizens are alienated from themselves and others. Using a historical analysis of capitalism, he stated that the emphasis on competitiveness and the accumulation of material wealth in the nineteenth century led to the exploitation of workers and to the establishment of an industrial and political order whose primary concern was economic advance at the expense of human relationships. This alienation process continues in the twentieth century, but its causes take a different form. In fully industrialized societies, big business and big government are the rule, and their existence and modes of operation often lead to special forms of estrangement and alienation. In Fromm's view, workers in these complex bureaucracies are faceless entities who have little input into their organizations. They are "managed" by bureaucrats as though they were objects or things, manipulated and treated as non-thinking automatons. The result is widespread apathy and destructiveness. Workers long to escape from their tedious jobs and to get involved in meaningful and creative activities. But, unfortunately, these desires are never realized. Even in their leisure time, they remain passive and alienated consumers. They consume football games, films, books, lectures, and social gatherings in an abstract and sterile way.

What can be done to overcome such malaise? How can we move toward sanity? For Fromm, the answer lies in "humanistic communitarian socialism," a social, legal, political, economic, and moral system in which working people are active and responsible participants in the economic structure and in which the primary emphasis is on harmonious and cooperative relations between people. In such a society, people would be productive and capable of mature love. To reach this utopian state, Fromm calls for a humanization of technological society. This humanization process involves an altering of the administrative structure of big government so that grass-roots participation becomes possible and desirable. (We will discuss Fromm's views of the utopian society in more detail later in the chapter.)

Throughout his highly productive life, Fromm held a variety of impor-



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tant academic and clinical psychology positions. He lectured at Columbia University, Bennington College, Yale, Michigan State, New York University, and at the National University in Mexico. He also held positions at the International Institute of Social Research in New York City, the American Institute of Psychoanalysis, the William Alanson White Institute of Psychiatry, and the Mexican Institute of Psychoanalysis.

After his retirement in 1965 from his appointment as professor of psychiatry at the National University in Mexico, Fromm continued commuting between the United States and Mexico for many years to continue his teaching and consulting activities. Then, in 1976, Professor Fromm and his wife moved to Switzerland. He died in 1980 at his home in Muralto, Switzerland.

BASIC CONCEPTS AND PRINCIPLES

Human Beings, “Freaks” of Nature

For Fromm, the most powerful motivating force for men’s and women’s behavior stems from their attempts to find a reason for their existence. In his view, we are all animals with certain biological needs that must be satisfied—and yet, we are more than animals. We can be aware of ourselves and we can also use reason to solve our problems. In addition, we have the capacity to imagine and to create new and useful products. These abilities, according to Fromm, are both a blessing and a curse. Although our self-awareness and reason can be used to solve our problems, they also make us conscious of our limitations, including the fact that we must inevitably die (Fromm, 1947, p. 49). Each of us must deal with this problem, and we all resolve it in relatively constructive or destructive ways. Our reason makes us aware of other problems, including the fact that we cannot possibly realize all our potentialities in the time available to us. It also informs us that we can no longer be unified with nature like the other animals. It impels us to deal with our frailties and to engage in a painful struggle with life.

In Fromm’s view, these capacities provide us with a fundamental choice. We can choose to lead healthy and productive lives by developing our potentialities, or we can choose to escape from our freedom by submitting ourselves to others or by trying to destroy them. Using our freedom to develop into productive citizens can be painful, but it is also genuinely satisfying, whereas escaping from freedom by blind obedience to others, while it produces temporary security, is in the long run counterproductive and stifles our basic nature. We need to relate productively to one another if we are to maintain our sanity.

Human Needs

Fromm argues that, because we are no longer one with nature, we all feel isolated and alone at times (Fromm, 1955, p. 35). We are aware of our



ignorance, our limitations, and the role of chance in our births and deaths. To remain in such a state would lead to insanity; we must unite ourselves with others if we are to survive. Thus, the **need for relatedness** is a direct outgrowth of our existential condition. This relatedness can be relatively constructive or destructive in nature. We can achieve union by submission or by domination over others. In Fromm's view, both forms of relatedness are symbiotic and involve harmful dependencies. The passive form of symbiotic fusion is masochism (Fromm, 1956, p. 16). The person with masochistic tendencies feels alive only when he or she submits to the commands of others. It is almost as if the person says "You are everything: I am nothing." Perhaps you have known someone like this. Such a person tends to worship or adore others; the other is absolute perfection and can do no wrong. The masochistic individual feels alive primarily when he or she is being hurt by the other. Fromm also maintains that one can masochistically submit to fate, sickness, and to the orgiastic state produced by drugs. The active aspect of symbiotic relatedness is sadism. The sadistic person overcomes his aloneness, according to Fromm, by dominating and humiliating others. "I am everything and you are nothing" seems to be the battle cry (Fromm, 1956, p. 16).

Both these character types provide evidence of union without love. In contrast, Fromm believes that **mature love** is the embodiment of productive relatedness. He defines such love as "union under the condition of preserving one's integrity, one's individuality" (Fromm, 1956, p. 17). Its basic elements are "care, responsibility, respect and knowledge" (Fromm, 1956, p. 22). Mature love involves care and concern for the welfare of others. Although we often think of responsibility as a duty imposed by others, Fromm views it as the ability to respond voluntarily to the needs of others. *Respect* is also a term that sometimes has negative connotations, but Fromm uses it in the root sense of an ability to see others as they are and to be concerned with their growth and unfolding. Finally, Fromm maintains that we cannot respect and love people if we do not know them (Fromm, 1956, p. 24). Such a criterion means that mature love requires considerable time and effort as well as a gradual, mutual self-disclosure.

In contrast, Fromm treats romantic love as pseudo-love because of its immediacy and the fact that it requires no effort. Such "love" is based primarily on physical attractiveness and not on intimate knowledge of the "loved" one. Although there is intense commitment, that commitment is usually temporary. Fromm's definition of mature love suggests that we be leery of "instantaneous friendships" or situations in which we arrive at the simplistic conclusion that we truly love someone we have known for six months. Mature love should be treated as an ideal goal to be sought instead of one presumptuously claimed. In a positive sense, Fromm's conception tells us that there is always something to be known about ourselves and the other person and that we can delight in the exploration of the mysteries of another.



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Another aspect of the human condition is the **need for transcendence**. For Fromm, we overcome our passive natures by acting creatively. To act creatively, however, we must love ourselves as well as others. The negative side of transcendence is destruction. Fromm maintains that the impotent person—that is, the one who feels powerless and incapable of creation—can transcend the environment only by destroying it. People have within them the potential for happiness and the capacity for self-destruction (Fromm, 1955, pp. 41–42).

The **need for rootedness** is also one of our basic needs. In discussing this aspect of our natures, Fromm builds on Freud's treatment of the potentially incestuous ties between mothers and their children and on historical evidence of the relationships between individuals in patriarchal and matriarchal societies. Fromm says our most fundamental relationship is with our mothers. As infants, we are physically helpless and completely dependent on them for the gratification of our needs. As he put it: "Mother is food; she is love; she is warmth; she is earth. To be loved by her means to be alive, to be rooted, to be home" (Fromm, 1955, p. 43). It is, therefore, extremely difficult to separate ourselves from her so that, even as adults, we sometimes long for this former security. Fromm credits Freud with recognizing the importance of the relationship between mother and child in his formulation of the Oedipal conflict, but he says that Freud placed too much emphasis on its sexual roots and not enough on its irrational, affective origins. In brief, Fromm maintains that an intense and irrational dependency on the mother, which may or may not have sexual overtones, is a universal problem for people (Fromm, 1955, pp. 45–46).

He continues his discussion of rootedness by examining the positive and negative features of the individual's historical behavior in matriarchal and patriarchal cultures. In cultures ruled by women, Fromm claims, there is a positive sense of equality and freedom. In his words, "the mother (in the generic sense) loves her children not because one is better than the other, not because one fulfills her expectations more than the other, but because they are her children, and in that quality they are all alike and have the same right to love and care" (Fromm, 1955, p. 48). In the negative sense, a matriarchal structure implies an answering loyalty to blood and soil (mother earth), so that creative development is stifled. In patriarchal cultures, people look on male authority figures with fear and awe. Such relationships were and are negative because they encourage inequality and oppression. Positively, such cultures promote reason, individualism, and discipline. Fromm believes that loyalty to authority, when it places country above humanity, is destructive. In his judgment, a world of peace and understanding is possible only when we can experience rootedness in our brothers and sisters. In short, we must transcend boundaries that cripple us and keep us from experiencing solidarity with others (Fromm, 1955, pp. 60–61).



People also have a **need for identity**. They have to be able to say to others "I am I" and not "I am as you desire me." Each of us has a degree of self-awareness and a knowledge about our capabilities. Fromm would maintain that we should value our abilities and use them productively. We should also avoid, at all costs, basing our identities on what others expect of us. Such identities are shaky and create problems. In Fromm's view, identity based on "herd conformity" is unfortunately widely present in our culture. We learn to accept uncritically the pronouncements of authority and to "buy" truth as others see it without engaging in our own thinking.

Finally, we all need a perspective on reality or, in Fromm's terms, a **frame of orientation and devotion**, if we are to live productively. Such orientations are necessary because we need to make sense of our many experiences. The frame of orientation develops gradually in early childhood to the point where we learn to use reason and imagination effectively in coping with our problems or to rely instead on rationalization to help us justify our behavior. Productive individuals utilize reason as well as feelings in their attempts at adaptation. In addition, Fromm maintains that we need an object of devotion and that the form and content of that object differ widely among peoples. Some use systems of animism and totemism; others worship monotheistically (Fromm, 1955, p. 66). Devotion to a humanistic ethic, an ethic in which "there is nothing higher and nothing more dignified than human existence," is apparent in Fromm's orientation (Fromm, 1955, p. 23). For him, God is seen not in traditional terms but in the form of ideals such as love, truth, and justice that we all struggle to attain. Consequently, Fromm believes that "God is I, inasmuch as I am human" (Fromm, 1956, p. 59).

THE PROCESS OF PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

The Development of Character Orientations

In his formulations of the developmental process, Fromm discarded Freudian libido theory. Instead, he focused on the unique social and cultural conditions that affect the character development process and the satisfaction of our basic, existential needs. This process parallels Freud's position in some respects, as will become clear, but the etiological factors underlying it differ. It would be tempting to conclude that whereas Freud emphasized the biological determinants of personality, Fromm was concerned only with the cultural aspects. Such a conclusion would be incorrect for two reasons. First, Fromm does recognize individual differences in temperament; he argues that character, which is based on one's experiences, and temperament, which is constitutional, combine to affect behavior. Despite the lack of scientific evidence for the typology of tem-



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peraments developed in ancient Greece by Hippocrates, Fromm utilizes it in his theorizing. For example, choleric individuals who are capable of mature love would tend to react very strongly and quickly when they love (Fromm, 1947, p. 60).

Second, and more important, Fromm argues that people have innate needs and potentialities that unfold in the course of development, provided social conditions are right. In particular, Fromm maintains that the norms of society are initially communicated to the child through the parents. The development of nonproductive orientations in children is the result of living with parents who are largely incapable of love. The acquisition of a productive orientation stems from experiences with loving parents. Although the following descriptions are presented as though they were ideal types, Fromm makes it clear that people are typically blends of these orientations, although one type tends to predominate (Fromm, 1947, p. 69).

Nonproductive Orientations

Receptive Character Type. In Fromm's view, receptive character types are people who believe that the source of all good or satisfying events lies outside of themselves. A similar formulation is seen in Freud's description of the behavior of infants during the oral-receptive stage of development. Neo-Freudian Karen Horney also describes a similar character type in her discussion of individuals who attempt to adjust to feelings of basic anxiety by indiscriminately "moving toward people."

Receptive characters are always looking for a "magic helper." They need desperately to be loved, yet are incapable of truly loving anyone themselves. They are also highly dependent people. They are dependent not only on authorities for knowledge and help but on people in general for any kind of support. Most often, receptive characters are friendly, cheerful, and optimistic under many conditions. When subjected to threat, however, they become distraught and rely on others and not on their own intellectual resources for the solution to their problems (Fromm, 1947, pp. 70–71).

Exploitative Character Type. Exploitative characters are people who believe that the source of all satisfactions lies beyond themselves. They do not, however, wait passively to be gratified but instead they actively take whatever they want from others by force or cunning. A similar description is found in Freud's treatment of the oral-aggressive person and in Horney's description of the aggressive type. Such people, according to Horney, experience momentary satisfaction by "moving against people."

Fromm believes that individuals with an exploitative character relate to others symbiotically and that they themselves are not productive (Evans, 1966, p. 4). As a result, they rob and exploit others in order to



attain their ends. Examples include the man who “steals” the affections of another’s wife and the person who plagiarizes the work of others (Fromm, 1947, pp. 71–73).

Hoarding Character Type. Hoarding characters have little faith in the goodness of the outside world. Instead they “relate” to the world in a negative fashion, usually by withdrawing from others. People with hoarding orientations have characteristics similar to the ones attributed by Freud to the anal character. Horney’s description of the detached type who tries to adjust by “moving away from people” also bears a close resemblance to Fromm’s hoarding type.

Hoarding types are obstinate, orderly, and obsessed with cleanliness. Obstinance is a logical reaction to any attempt by others to intrude into their private space. Orderliness signifies the attempt to keep the world in its proper place as a means of avoiding threat from the outside world. The outside world is also seen as dangerous and unclean so that hoarding types tend to try to annul the menacing contacts with it by compulsive washing (Fromm, 1947, pp. 73–75).

Necrophilous Character Type. In 1973, Fromm discussed the existence of another character type more closely related to Freud’s anal character. In Fromm’s view, necrophilia is the malignant form of the anal character (Fromm, 1973, p. 387). Whereas hoarding types show their destructiveness by withdrawal and passivity, necrophiles exhibit destructiveness by actively exploiting and destroying people and things.

Necrophilous characters are people who are attracted to and fascinated by all that is dead: corpses, decay, feces, dirt. They enjoy talking about sickness, burials, and death. Moreover, they are truly enamored with force and power (Fromm, 1964, p. 38). They believe that the only way to solve a problem is through violence (Fromm, 1973, pp. 375–376).

In Fromm’s view, necrophiles also worship technology. They have used technology to create nuclear weapons and other instruments of death. In the name of progress, they have also continually created new things for us to use and consume and, in the process, have polluted the planet. Their approach to the world is intellectual and unfeeling. They have pushed us to the edge of destruction. What is needed, in his opinion, is reason, not mere intelligence. Reason combines intelligence *and* feeling and would help us to act constructively. It would turn us from the path of death and destruction (Fromm, 1973, pp. 380–398).

Marketing Character Type. Fromm’s description of the marketing character represents a clean break with his Freudian roots. He states that this orientation has developed only recently in industrial societies. In such societies, people learn to treat themselves and others as commodities with a certain exchange value in a way that parallels the interchanges in the economic marketplace. In short, we all become buyers and sellers in



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an ever-fluctuating and uncertain “personality market.” Appearance becomes the reality for us; substance becomes illusion. Commercials bombard us with messages about products that, if used, would make us more acceptable to others. Many of us go to considerable lengths to heed the current pronouncements. Films and popular magazines tell us how to dress and act if we are to be “successful.” Business executives and other professionals have a definite image of how they should appear if they are to win promotions. Like professionals, college students also bow to such social pressures; they indiscriminately wear the “uniform of the day.”

Finally, people with marketing orientations have little genuine interest in the welfare of other people. Others are treated as “objects” to be used for their own selfish purposes. As a consequence, marketing relationships are typically characterized by indifference.

The Productive Orientation

Biophilous Character Type. **Biophilous characters** are people who love life and who want to mold and influence others by love, reason, and by example, not by force and not by treating people in bureaucratic terms as though they were things (Fromm, 1964, p. 49). Biophiles have a productive attitude. Such an attitude encompasses their “mental, emotional, and sensory responses to another, to [themselves], and to things” (Fromm, 1947, p. 49). It involves the use of their powers and the maximum realization of inherent potentialities. Fromm believes that biophiles can use their powers only if they are free and independent of control by others. Under these conditions, they are able to use their reason and imagination to penetrate to the essence of their experiences. They are capable of mature love, of understanding another on an intelligent and emotional level.

A love of life is shaped by association with people who themselves love life, according to Fromm. Parents and others communicate to the child through gestures and tone of voice their feelings about life; they do not need to preach to the child that he or she ought to love life. Instead, they provide a warm, supportive, nonthreatening environment in which they act as ethical role models (Fromm, 1964, p. 55).

Research Evidence for the Theory of Character Types

Fromm and Maccoby (1970) found evidence confirming the theory of character types in an extensive field study using Mexican villagers as subjects. Through the use of questionnaires, projective testing, and interviews, they were able to show that the main types of social character postulated in Fromm’s theory were present in the populace—the receptive, hoarding, and exploitative types. There were also some individuals who possessed a highly productive orientation. Furthermore, the inves-



tigators found, as Fromm's theory would predict, that receptive types were more likely than the other types to have intense mother-fixations and to depend on heavy drinking to deal with their stress. Over 80 percent of the twenty-eight alcoholics in the village of nearly five hundred people had a receptive orientation.

Fromm and Maccoby also found that exploitative characters were the village's first modern entrepreneurs, creating new capitalistic businesses that had the effect of destroying village traditions. Such character types also took advantage of the workers, most of whom were economically dependent on these entrepreneurs for survival.

The data also indicated that hoarding types were rebellious and destructive. This tendency toward destructiveness was consistent with Fromm's theory about the traits associated with necrophilia. Destructiveness was seen in sadistic treatment by necrophiles of members of their family. They often used either physical attacks, severe criticism, or isolation to punish their children for wrongdoing. The result was a deadening of initiative in them.

Productive villagers possessed both democratic and traditional attitudes. For example, they expressed a traditional respect for authorities who had worked hard to help the villagers. Also, they did not feel they were superior in any way to other community members. Instead, they were the people who most respected the rights and wishes of others. Productive people were also loving, caring parents who respected their children and did not use heavy physical punishment to discipline them.

Society and Human Productiveness

Although the character types postulated by Fromm are acquired initially through contact with parents, he also discusses the ways in which the nature and organization of society dramatically affect the development of individual potentialities. At the risk of oversimplification, Fromm argues that we live in a "sick" society in which indiscriminate competition and exploitation prevail and in which individuals feel powerless to correct the situation. In Fromm's view, a sick society tends to produce sick people, while a healthy one produces healthy people. Like Marx, he believes that work and mental health are intimately linked. In a sick or insane society such as ours, men and women tend to be alienated from their work. They are exploited by members of the ruling class—for example, entrepreneurs and powerful politicians—and treated like commodities. These "rulers" live by the sweat of the workers and treat them as inferiors. Such exploitation leads the workers to feel intense resentment and hostility toward their "oppressors," with revolution as the outcome. For Marx, the goal of the workers should be personal liberation from such tyranny through violent revolution. Fromm appears to be much more of a moderate in this regard, calling instead for reform via the humanization of the means of production. Such reform will not be easy, in Fromm's



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opinion, because people are generally unaware of the forces that determine their behavior. Yet the task must be undertaken if we are ever to live in harmony and understanding with one another.

In order to understand the process by which society hinders our self-development, Fromm conducts a historical and Marxist analysis of capitalism. He notes that nineteenth-century capitalism was characterized by ruthless exploitation of the workers. It was considered virtuous to maximize profits at the workers' expense. The workers presumably had a choice—namely, to work or not to work. In reality, of course, they had to work in order to survive, and so they accepted the wages offered by the boss. Not only were the wages low, but there was also little correlation between personal effort and pay, so there was little incentive to improve oneself. Exploitation also took other forms including the abuses of child labor and the callous unwillingness on the part of many owners to rectify unsafe working conditions. Capitalists then used their profits to seize new opportunities for expansion and to acquire property for production and consumption (Fromm, 1955, pp. 86–87).

The result of such social and economic tyranny was the formation of exploitative and hoarding types among the elite—people who were “unimaginative, stingy, suspicious, pedantic, obsessional and possessive” (Fromm, 1955, p. 87). The exploitative types were characterized by arrogance, conceit, exploitativeness, and egocentricity (Fromm, 1947, p. 120). Each type also had a positive side. For example, the positive aspects of the hoarding orientation included the need to be “practical, economical, careful, reserved, cautious, tenacious, imperturbable, orderly, methodical, and loyal” (Fromm, 1955, p. 87). The positive features of the exploitative character included initiative, pride, and self-confidence (Fromm, 1947, p. 120).

Vestiges of the hoarding and exploitative types are found today, according to Fromm, but they are not the primary types. Instead the twentieth century is characterized by the emergence of the receptive, marketing, and necrophilous orientations. In this century, capital and the means of production have come under the control of fewer and fewer companies. These companies have grown so large that management has been separated from ownership. We are also living in an era of big government. Bureaucracy reigns supreme under these conditions, and the result is increased **alienation** among the workers. The current emphasis, Fromm believes, is on efficiency and smoother operation. As a consequence, capitalism in our time seeks men and women with marketing orientations, people who mesh well with organization. The bureaucratic mentality does not tolerate the risk-taker. Such people are perceived as troublemakers who need to be replaced by others who are more “adjusted.” In brief, bureaucracy demands conformity from its personnel.

In addition, Fromm sees the necrophilous character as the product of the second half of this century. Such individuals have turned their inter-



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ests away from life, people, nature, and ideas and have instead transformed life into things. Sexuality becomes a technical skill in which men and women often feel obligated to perform on cue and then judge their adequacy in terms of frequency of "performance" each week. Love and tenderness are directed toward machines and gadgets. We aspire to make robots as one of our great achievements, robots who will be virtually indistinguishable from human beings. We are, in Fromm's judgment, beginning to sacrifice all life in the worship of "progress" (Fromm, 1973, p. 389).

Fromm also thinks that the emphasis on bigness in institutions and in the media has led to a relative standardization of tastes and interests among the citizenry. We read the same papers, watch the same television programs and films, and listen to the same radio broadcasts. We are more concerned with consuming goods passively and with having entertainment spoon-fed us than we are in actively participating in the process. More specifically, we rely in rather uncritical fashion on instant analyses of political events by news commentators instead of trying to do our own thinking about these issues. We also pay people large sums of money to entertain us so that we do not have to make the effort to create our own diversions. Many of us buy art for investment purposes and have not the slightest knowledge of aesthetics. In all these areas, and many more, the indiscriminate and passive incorporation of events has led to the acquisition of a receptive orientation. In the final analysis, then, these social conditions have produced people who are alienated from themselves and others. They are security conscious to the point of dullness. Most of all, they feel powerless.

Humanistic Communitarian Socialism as the Solution to Alienation

How, then, do we satisfy our psychic needs and learn to substitute a productive orientation for a nonproductive one? According to Fromm, the answer lies in a drastic reordering of society and in an awakening on our part. It involves creating "an industrial organization in which *every working person would be an active and responsible participant, where work would be attractive and meaningful, where capital would not employ labor, but labor would employ capital*" (Fromm, 1955, p. 248). Under such conditions, men and women would be productively related to one another. Fromm contends that, in order to ensure relatedness, workers should be organized into groups sufficiently small so that they can learn to know one another, even though there may be thousands of workers in the factory. In addition, the worker should be informed not only about the various job aspects but also about the various facets of the entire production process. The worker should know how the organization is related to the economic needs of the entire society. Most important, the worker must be given an active role in the decision-making process of the organization. Fromm points out that he is not advocating that workers own the means of



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production but that they participate in the formulation and review of company policy. His solution involves a blend of centralization and decentralization in which all individuals participate actively in the process—a **humanistic communitarian socialism**. Finally, the primary purpose of any organization, according to Fromm, is to “serve people and not make a profit” (Fromm, 1955, p. 35).

In addition to massive changes in the area of work, Fromm urges the transformation of the political system. He notes that the voter today is alienated from politics; the whole situation is beyond comprehension. As Fromm puts it:

. . . nothing makes real sense or carries real meaning [to the citizen]. He reads of billions of dollars being spent, of millions of people being killed; figures, abstractions which are in no way a concrete, meaningful picture of the world. (Fromm, 1955, p. 295)

To overcome this impersonal and unreal situation, we must recognize that the best decisions cannot be made via mass voting. Instead, we can make good decisions only in relatively small groups, much like the old town meetings (Fromm, 1955, p. 296). The voters must also have the necessary information to make meaningful decisions. Above all, their decisions must be capable of influencing our leaders.

Finally, Fromm states that society will also have to be changed on a cultural level. There must be an “. . . opportunity for people to sing together, walk together, dance together, [and to] admire together” (Fromm, 1955, p. 303). There must also be a spiritual renewal. This renewal would involve an increased commitment to the aims of Judaism and Christianity that includes “. . . the dignity of man as an aim and end in itself, of brotherly love, of reason and of the supremacy of spiritual over material values” (Fromm, 1955, p. 304). A commitment to these ideals, whether one believes in a monotheistic God or not, would eventually lead to a sane society in which all people would be productively related.

TECHNIQUES OF ASSESSMENT

In some respects, Fromm remains close to his Freudian roots in his attempts to assess personality functioning. Like Freud, he focuses on the ways in which traumatic experiences in early childhood hinder personality development. He also agrees with Freud that the unconscious conflicts responsible for the patient’s problems must be made known if he or she is ever to recover and that free association and dream analysis are useful tools for achieving that objective.

Yet, Fromm goes well beyond Freud in his assessment attempts. In addition to his use of psychological methods of inquiry, he also employs a historical method that emphasizes the role that political, religious, eco-



nomie, soziologische, und anthropologische Faktoren spielen in der Formung der Persönlichkeit. Es ist dieses kontinuierliche und systematische Bemühen, ein mehrstufiges Vorgehen zur Erforschung der Persönlichkeit zu entwickeln, das Fromm und seine **humanistische Psychoanalyse** einzigartig macht. Das Ziel, das er anstrebt, ist die theoretische Konstruktion der menschlichen Natur durch Beobachtung und Interpretation des tatsächlichen Verhaltens in einem kultur- und geschichtlichen Kontext (Fromm, 1947, S. 33). In konkreteren Worten, er hofft, die Grundnaturen unserer Spezies durch Beobachtung des Verhaltens in einer Vielzahl von Kontexten zu erschließen.

APPLICATION OF THE THEORY TO THE TREATMENT OF PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

Demnach sind die Ursachen von Pathologie primär soziokulturell in der Natur. Auf der mikroskopischen Ebene beinhalten sie symbiotische Beziehungen zwischen Eltern und Kindern. Auf der makroskopischen Ebene beinhalten sie ökonomische und politische Kräfte innerhalb der Gesellschaft, die das persönliche Wachstum ersticken. Diese vielfältigen Kräfte sind größtenteils für die Unfähigkeit des Einzelnen, eine produktive Orientierung zu erlangen, verantwortlich. Sie erzeugen Repressionen seiner oder ihrer Bedürfnisse nach Liebe und Verbundenheit und erzeugen stattdessen brutale und ausbeuterische Bestrebungen. Die Person beginnt, andere als Bedrohungen für ihr persönliches Dasein zu sehen – das heißt, als Hindernisse, die überwunden oder beseitigt werden müssen. Unter diesen Umständen ist die Person von sich selbst und von anderen entfremdet. Diese Person versteht nicht die Ursachen der Probleme oder dass ihr Verhalten im Widerspruch zu ihrer Grundnatur steht.

Um ein positives Wachstum zu erreichen, muss die Person sich bewusst machen, dass sie in ihrer Familie und in der Gesellschaft Bedingungen vorfindet, die ihr Entwicklungspotenzial ersticken. Neben der Selbstkenntnis muss die Person aktiv jene Lebensbedingungen ändern, die für die Krankheit verantwortlich sind. Sie muss ihre Werte und die Normen und Ideale ändern, die ihr Wachstum blockieren (Fromm, 1955, S. 240). Fromm glaubt weiter, dass die Chancen für ein positives Wachstum nicht nur von den Veränderungen innerhalb der Person, sondern auch von den Veränderungen innerhalb der Gesellschaft abhängen. Wie bereits erwähnt, glaubt er, dass eine gesunde Gesellschaft gesunde Menschen produziert und dass eine Gesellschaft, die auf humanistischen Werten basiert, dringend benötigt wird. In einer solchen Gesellschaft würden Qualitäten wie Gier, Narzissmus und Ausbeuterisches nicht existieren, und die Menschen würden in Harmonie und Kooperation leben (Fromm, 1955, S. 242).

CRITICAL COMMENTS

Wir bewerten nun Fromms Theorie anhand unserer sechs Kriterien.

Comprehensiveness. Fromm hat eine umfassende Theorie entwickelt, die versucht, zu zeigen, wie biologische und soziokulturelle Kräfte unsere Persönlichkeiten formen. Er konzentriert sich auf die Bedingungen, die für eine positive psychische Gesundheit verantwortlich sind, ebenso wie auf diejenigen, die Pathologie erzeugen und den Prozess des



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cusses many different phenomena—for example, work performance, ethics, justice, cooperation and competition, self-love, power, and prestige.

Precision and Testability. Fromm's theory is dotted with imprecise terms—for example, "potentiality," "inner voice," and "love." *Love* is defined as "primarily giving, not receiving" (Fromm, 1956, p. 18). Fromm himself points out that this definition is ambiguous. He then proceeds to attempt to clarify the meaning of the term and ends his argument by declaring that "giving is more joyous than receiving, not because it is a deprivation but because in the act of giving lies the expression of my aliveness" (Fromm, 1956, p. 9). Even here the meaning is not very clear. Other definitions are equally confusing. Note, for example, his definition of *conscience*:

Conscience is thus a reaction of ourselves to ourselves. It is the voice of our true selves which summons us back to ourselves, to live productively, to develop fully and harmoniously—that is, to become what we potentially are. (Fromm, 1947, p. 163)

Parsimony. Fromm's theory is not very parsimonious. It seems as though he has been reluctant to abandon concepts of dubious value in helping us to understand personality functioning. For example, he still utilizes the typology of temperament proposed by Hippocrates many centuries ago (see Chapter 16). In addition, he continues to employ Freudian concepts in his discussions of the causes of nonproductive orientations when it is clear that he favors the utilization of sociocultural explanations. Are both sets of concepts necessary for the adequate explanation of individual behavior? Even if they are, the criticism may still be valid since Fromm also employs a set of existential concepts to explain the same behaviors.

Empirical Validity. There have been very few attempts to test Fromm's theory of character development. The interdisciplinary field study conducted recently by Fromm and his colleague, Michael Maccoby, however, was strongly supportive. There are also studies in the social psychological research literature that support Fromm's claims that workers are most satisfied with their work situations when they have actively and fully participated in decision making related to their jobs. In addition, there is a considerable body of evidence which shows that self-alienation is associated with other socially undesirable personality characteristics; for example, low self-esteem and high anxiety are directly associated with poor performance in a variety of situations.

Despite this empirical support, many of Fromm's major arguments about the dehumanizing influences of modern society on human experience and the ways in which society must be restructured to produce healthy, creative citizens are stated as metaphysical questions so that they cannot be empirically investigated (for example, may man prevail?



to have or to be? where are we now and where are we headed?). Other arguments are stated so globally that they cannot be investigated empirically in their present form. They remain interesting, insightful speculations by a person who was clearly more of a social philosopher than a scientist. In general, then, empirical support for most of Fromm's theory is minimal.

Heuristic Value. The primary value of Fromm's theory is its ability to stimulate the thinking of others. It is a complex set of formulations that rests firmly on moral issues that are important to each of us and that Fromm correctly concludes must be grasped and understood if we are to live in a more harmonious relationship with one another.

Applied Value. Fromm's writings have been read by countless academicians and their students and by millions of ordinary people as well. It is difficult to assess whether they have a positive impact on the lives of those readers, but editorial comment in the media has been generally favorable and his readership has continued to increase. In personal terms, I and many of my students have found Fromm's writings highly provocative. They strike a responsive chord in us because they encourage us to aspire to the creation of a more humane society. Thus, Fromm's theorizing seems to have considerable applied value for many people.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways are human beings "freaks" of nature? What are our fundamental existential concerns?
2. Do you believe that most people have a need to relate to others? If so, why do they?
3. What is meant by the "need for transcendence"? In what ways have you acted creatively?
4. Do you agree with Fromm that we must place love of humanity before love of country if we are to behave productively?
5. Have you ever engaged in "herd conformity"? What were the determinants and consequences of your actions?
6. List the nonproductive character orientations, as envisioned by Fromm, and describe the ways in which they are similar to the Freudian character types.
7. Is the marketing personality type obsolete in contemporary society?
8. Would you agree that the owners of big business are oppressing poor people? Can you muster arguments that show both the harmful and the beneficial results of the consolidation of power in the hands of a relatively few large corporations?
9. Do you feel that many people today can be characterized as receptive



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in their orientations? Do you and your friends take primarily an active or passive part in recreational activities?

10. Is Fromm's utopian dream of a humanistic communitarian socialist society possible or desirable?

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GLOSSARY

Alienation. Feelings of powerlessness and aloneness experienced by individuals who have rejected traditional values of society and are incapable of instituting a social and political system compatible with their own values and principles.

Biophilous Character. Person oriented toward promoting life.

Frame of Orientation and Devotion. Development of a consistent and meaningful set of values and principles that help individuals make sense of their worlds.

Humanistic Communitarian Socialism. An ideal democratic society in which all individuals would have input into the

decisions that affect their lives and be able to develop their potential to the fullest, without fear of exploitation.

Humanistic Psychoanalysis. Theoretical position advocated by Fromm that draws on Freudian principles to explain the conditions within early family life and within society that restrict or facilitate the healthy development of the individual.

Mature Love. An active concern for the well-being of the other and the ability to give generously of oneself for the benefit of the other without expectation of return. It also involves a knowledge of the other and an acceptance of the other's weaknesses as well as strengths.



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Necrophilous Character. Person attracted to death and destruction.

Need for Identity. Need on the part of a person to become aware of his or her own characteristics and capabilities.

Need for Relatedness. The basic human need to be in contact and share experiences with one another.

Need for Rootedness. The basic human need to feel that we have a place within society.

Need for Transcendence. Need on the part of the person to resolve conflicts by acting in a creative or destructive manner.



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