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Erich Fromm dies at 79

Psychoanalyst saw love as 'sane' answer

By Dava Sobel
New York Times News Service

NEW YORK — Dr. Erich Fromm, the psychoanalyst and social philosopher whose influential writings ranged over subjects from the alienation of the individual to the sanity of society, died yesterday of a heart attack at his home in Muralto, Switzerland. He would have celebrated his 80th birthday this Sunday.

Fromm wrote 20 books, most of them hailed as major works in the field of psychology, including "The Art of Loving" (1956), in which he called love "the only sane and satisfactory answer to the problem of human existence." He sought a sane solution to political difficulties as well and in 1957 helped to organize the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy, or SANE, which took its name from his book, "The Sane Society" (1955).

Fromm was schooled in Germany in the analytical technique of Sigmund Freud, but he developed his own theories and his own style of psychoanalysis.

Born in Frankfurt March 23, 1900, Fromm became a pacifist at the age of 14 when World War I began. He sought American citizenship after visiting the United States in 1933 and emigrated from Germany, then dominated by the Nazis, in 1934.

His theory of human nature cut a middle path between the instinctivists, who held that innate qualities were fixed at birth, and the behaviorists, who taught that all responses are the result of learning.

"Every character trait is interrelated with every other," Fromm wrote in 1972, "and a single trait cannot be changed without changes in the whole system. That is why to change the character of a



Dr. Erich Fromm
Wrote on individual's alienation

person can be compared to splitting an atom; to change only his behavior can be done by conditioning."

Fromm entered psychoanalysis from philosophy, not medicine. He earned his doctoral degree from the University of Heidelberg in 1922 and also trained at the University of Munich and the Psychoanalytic Institute in Berlin.

He began seeing patients in 1925 and began what was to be a distinguished teaching career in 1929 at the Frankfurt Psychoanalytic Institute and the Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt.

Dr. Earl G. Witenberg, director of the William Alanson White Institute for Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis and Psychology in New York, said in an interview that Fromm was one of the founders of the institute in 1943.

"He was a penetrating man," Witenberg said. "He could very adroitly make formulations and statements about a patient after one hour of interviewing. He could describe a patient's difficulties in literary and graphic, almost poetic, terms."

Once, when Witenberg asked him why he had given up his strictly Freudian approach to analysis, Fromm replied that he had gotten bored with it. "He was more interested in confronting the patient," Witenberg said.

Witenberg cited this practice as one of Fromm's major contributions to psychoanalysis.

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