



COMMENTS ON THE FROMM MANUSCRIPT

-- Pitirim A. Sorokin

Just now I do not have time for a serious discussion of E. Fromm's paper: On Psychological Causes of War. In brief, I am in an agreement with his position in regard to the threatening explosion of a new World War but I have a serious doubt in regard to his variation (much better one) of the Freudian theory of death-instinct. Neither the necrophilic nor biophilic "instincts" can really account for why some persons become killers while others sacrifice their life to save the life of a fellow man? Nor why the rate of the graves forms of murder: of matricide, patricide, uxorcide etc. of all the kings and absolute rulers of England, France, Russia, Germany, Turkey, Japan, Italy, Ancient Roman Empire and so on is from twenty to fifty times higher than the rate of the ruled populations? (See the actual figures in my Power and Morality) Shall this be explained by the theory that the Necrophilic instinct is so many times stronger and more frequent among the kings and rulers than among the ordinary population? Likewise, the Freud-Fromm theory does not account at all why the curves of movement of wars and revolutions and their casualty greatly fluctuate from period to period in the history of Greece, Rome, and each of the Western countries (see the movement of wars and internal revolutions and their casualties in Greco-Roman and the Western history from 600 B.C. to the present time in my Social and Cultural Dynamics, vol. III)? This theory likewise does not explain at all why the twentieth century happened to be the most murderous and bloodiest century out of all the preceding twenty-five centuries of Greco-Roman and Western history—measured by the absolute and proportionate number (per 1,000,000 of respective populations) killed in wars, revolutions, riots, individual crimes of this century?

"Instincts" are supposed to be constant and not liable to vary greatly. As



such, they cannot and do not explain at all an enormous fluctuation of mass-and-individual murders of man by man in various social groups and in the life history of the same society at various periods of its history. Similarly they do not satisfactorily account why some individuals are becoming murderers and the necrophiliacs while an overwhelming majority of human beings remain free from such crimes?

These remarks mean that Freud-Fromm's theory is quite inadequate for these explanations. "Causation of wars, civil wars, and enormous contrasts in the rate of killing of human beings in different groups and periods is much more complex and still insufficiently known than Freud-Fromm hypothesis suggest.

Some of the factors of making human beings more loving and less sociocultural-murderous, indicated by Fromm, are more sound and correct; but his outline of these factors is too general and vague and incomplete. At the present time, I believe, we possess a more adequate knowledge of these factors than they are sketched by Fromm (See on this my The Ways and Power of Love).

Finally, the typological portraits of the necrophiliacs and biophiliacs, drawn by Fromm, need also serious corrections. For instance, many ascetic saints (Occidental and Oriental) would fall into Fromm's "necrophiliacs" (especially such persons as St. Francis of Assissi); meanwhile, factually, most of them were the sublime apostles of love, and of "the reverence for life." According to Fromm's typology, almost all Buddhists beginning with Gautama Buddha and most of the Buddhists of the first five centuries of Buddhism, have to be put rather into the class of the necrophiliacs; meanwhile, they have had so great a reverence for life that refused to kill even poisonous snakes.

These brief remarks can possibly explain why Freud-Fromm's theory of psychological causes of war appears to me doubtful and inadequate in its scientific validity.

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