

Fromm's Last Interview

By John Wykert

ADLER, Rank, Horney, Sullivan, and Fromm, those famous quintuplets, are often listed as if they were a cohort of the influential postfreudians. Yet, each was unique and different, and none more so than the last survivor, Erich Fromm. He succumbed to a heart attack on March 18th, five days before his 80th birthday. He had lived since 1974 in Switzerland, and at the time of his death was reportedly at work on a treatise about psychotherapy. Although one of the founders of New York's prestigious William Alanson White Institute, Fromm was not so much identified with one school or another as with a restless, searching *Zeitgeist*. Truly a child of the century, he was an activist, having founded SANE, the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy, a humanist with a social point of view who influenced the human potential movement, an early investigator of Eastern mysticism, a philosopher, psychologist, anthropologist, and talented author of 20 influential books. Proof that despite failing health he was in the midst of activity and that, as in the United States, he had found a devoted German-speaking following, is a final interview that appeared in a West German newspaper (on March 23) and now in an April issue of the English-language *The German Tribune*. To reporters Jürgen Lodemann and Micaela Lämmle, Fromm spoke on a number of topics, of which an excerpted sample follows:

On Freud: "I was a good disciple

and I had no doubts. . . . But the way it is with such doctrines, I simply suppressed my doubts, and so I remained a good Freudian throughout my time at the university. But then doubts began coming up. Still, I graduated at the Berline Institute of Psychology. . . . But eventually I realized that I knew too little about the patient as a person. And secondly, I became bored with the whole thing. Little by little I started asking myself what it was I really saw, and then my eyes were opened and I saw the patient as a whole. I began to shed the libido theory, which was a terribly confining position, not only in the family but also in society."

Asked what he found confining in Freud's theories, Fromm replied: "Its bourgeois attitude, with the family as the ultimate reality. Freud was unable to look beyond the family. . . . Unlike other thinkers, like the much more radical John Stewart Mill, not to mention Karl Marx, Freud was as confined as the bourgeoisie and the whole bourgeois structure. What mattered was possession and success."

Does this also apply to Freud's image of man and woman?

"Well, that was really one of the most amazing things. I mean that such a great psychologist, out of his male chauvinist attitude, wanted to rationalize and prove scientifically that women are biologically lesser creatures. This is roughly the arguments used against Negroes or those Hitler used against the Jews."

On Karl Marx: "Hardly any great philosopher has been so badly dis-

torted as Marx—both by the Communists and the Social Democrats, both of whom interpreted Marx to the effect that what mattered was for the working class to live as happily as the bourgeoisie. In other words, a bourgeoisie for all.

"This was both the Stalinist and the reformistic solution. What Marx wanted was to put man in the center again . . . to have society structured in such a way that the principles of justice, love, truthfulness—or of *being*, rather than having—prevail in daily life. Marx came 100 years too early. He lived in a time which he believed marked the end of the capitalist system. But he was badly mistaken . . . the capitalist system still had its peak before it. If Marx were living today . . . his message would have been much more effective. It could not have been as easily distorted. . . . I believe that a great many people today are prepared to seek a road that would respect man. They are people who feel that a life where everything serves money, competition, and exploitation is in reality a life that makes people unhappy.

"For this reason there are so many people now who embrace Eastern philosophies . . . in fact, I'd say, who 'fall for them.' Most of this stuff is pure fake. It is the commercialization of . . . Buddhism and Zen Buddhism and Taoism. . . . What's happening today is not serious, it is salesmanship with modern business methods, complete with advertising, trying to sell something that will satisfy religious feelings and longings. The people are so far removed from genuine religious experience that they take appearance for reality, that they fall for things that don't activate them, don't change them, things they can find in a much

better and more beautiful form in existing religions.

On happiness: "Most people pretend to be happy—even to themselves—because if you are unhappy you are a failure. So you wear the mask of happiness because otherwise you'll lose your credit on the market and you will no longer be a normal and successful person. But just look at the people. You can see the unrest and irritability behind the mask, you can see annoyance, depression, sleeplessness, unhappiness. At the very beginning of this century, people spoke of the *malaise du siècle*. That is what Freud called the discomfiture in culture. But it is not discomfiture in bourgeois society that has made man a workhorse and that has prevented all that is important: the ability to love, to be there for others, to think and not to be an instrument of the economy, but the ultimate purpose of all economic processes.

Asked if the people "we generally term normal are actually sick," Fromm replied: "Oh yes. The most normal are the sickest. And the sick are healthy. I know that sounds witty and exaggerated. But I am very serious about it. The sick person shows that he has not yet so suppressed certain human things that they can no longer clash with cultural patterns, but that they do clash and this causes symptoms of illness. Like pain, such a symptom is only a sign that something is wrong. Lucky are those who have symptoms. If man could not feel pain he would be in a very dangerous position. But many people—I mean the normal ones—are so adapted, have rid themselves of everything that is their very own, they are so alienated and so much a robot-like instrument that they no longer feel a conflict. In

See "Fromm," page 20

Fromm

Continued from page 4

other words, like real sentiments, their love, their hate, have already been suppressed or have so atrophied that these people present the picture of a chronic light schizophrenia.

"The reasons are obvious. Our society is based on the principle that the aim in life is more production and more consumption. Progress in economy and technology. Not man. What is good for man interests no one. Not even what is harmful to man plays any role. Many of our advertisements praise things that are harmful and indeed deadly. . . . If we continue on this road, if we go on consuming everything that comes our way, if we destroy nature, leaving our heirs nothing but a destroyed and impoverished and poisoned world, if people continue to be attached to profit rather than life, and if they continue seeking power, a nuclear disaster must come of necessity. We shall have another war. . . . The East Block is even worse. They don't have the living and progressive elements that capitalism has. They have a state capitalism that corresponds to the conservative stage of the Metternich era. Almost everything indicates that we will continue on our course and slither into disaster. But I'd also like to say that as long as there is a slight chance in matters of life . . . we must not give up . . . we must try everything to avert disaster."

SB-29

20



For the aged person suffering from withdrawn or apathetic senile behavior, Ritalin can often help relieve bothersome symptoms.

In one double-blind study¹ of withdrawn, apathetic geriatric patients, Ritalin elicited notable improvement in competence and interest and a decrease in retardation. While no side effects were reported in this study, blood pressure and pulse variations were noted in both groups but were not considered of exceptional magnitude.

Help for patients with mild depression*

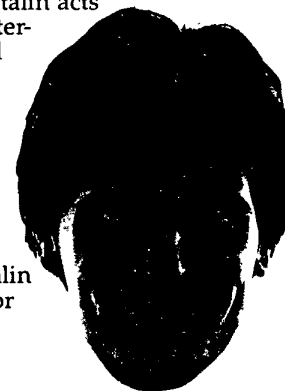
As Ritalin acts promptly to relieve symptoms of mild depression, mood and outlook usually improve, and the patient can cope again. Generally, one prescription is sufficient. Ritalin is contraindicated in severe depression.

*Ritalin has been evaluated as possibly effective in these indications



The narcoleptic patient can fall asleep anytime . . . anyplace . . . and the consequences can be grave, or, at the least, embarrassing.

Although there is no known cure for narcolepsy, Ritalin acts promptly to counteract sleepiness and is the medication most frequently used by cited investigators.^{2,3} Occasional problems of tolerance may be managed by completely withdrawing Ritalin during vacation or holidays, then reinstating it at lower dosage.³



Psychiatric News, May 16, 1980