

# ***Erich Fromm (1900-1980)***

***The most beautiful as well as the most ugly inclinations are not part of a fixed and biologically given human nature but result from the social processes which create [us].  
--Erich Fromm***

## *Fromm's roots*

- Fromm was born in Frankfurt, Germany, March 23, 1900, in an orthodox Jewish family.
- His father was a businessman, grandfather was a rabbi, and his mother's uncle was a well-known scholar of the Talmud.
- Fromm himself became (in his own words) an **atheistic mystic**. He is a very interesting thinker, often paradoxical.



# *An atheistic MYSTIC?*

- Fromm said: " There is no one without a religious need, a need to have a frame of orientation and an object of devotion."
- " Man is the only animal for whom his own existence is a problem which he has to solve, and from which he cannot escape. He cannot go back to the prehuman state of harmony with nature; he must proceed to develop his reason until he becomes the master of nature, and of himself."

From: Fromm, Erich (1950) *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, Yale University Press: New Haven and London, p. 25 and p. 23

# *What about God?*

- "While it is not possible for man to make valid statements about the positive, about God, it is possible to make such statements about the negative, about idols. Is it not time to cease to argue about God, and instead to unite in unmasking of contemporary forms of idolatry?"

From: Fromm, Erich (1950) *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, Yale University Press: New Haven and London, p. 118

# *What idols?*

- Our own idea of God, the words we use and reify about God --because the Bible prohibits making an image of God in any form (p.115)
- The deification of state and of power (p.118)
- The deification of machine and success(p.119)

From: Fromm, Erich (1950) *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, Yale University Press: New Haven and London

# *WWI: starting to search for answers*

- Fromm was 14 when WWI started. He saw most of his professors, who seemed to be rational, normal, bright people, somehow become infected by the spirit of the time, and becoming irrational, hateful, antisemitic nationalists.
- He wanted to know how this transformation took place, what caused people to "sell out" their freedom, to be destructive and hateful etc.

# *Do we try to run from freedom?*

- Yes, we often do. We'd like someone else to take responsibility for our actions. This way, we will not be blamed if things go wrong.
- If a situation is frightening, we may want somebody to take charge for us, and we are ready to surrender our freedom in order to be safe.
- When we are frightened, we might attempt to control a situation, push it into a mold, make others behave so that it gives us the outcome we want.

# *How do we run from freedom?*

- Fromm consider 3 psychic escape mechanisms:
  - Authoritarianism : seeking to control/ to be controlled --wanting an absolute, very clear and unambiguous authority
  - Destructiveness: seeking to eliminate objects or persons perceived as dangerous
  - Automaton conformity: surrendering to rules and norms (even when disagreeing), in order to be safe.



# *A contemporary application*

- Here is a link to a [blog posting](#) that applies Fromm's approach to some of the dynamics currently going on in Iraq (and to nazism etc as well). What do you think of this analysis? Would you agree, disagree?

# *Personality Development in Childhood*

- As children grow they move from dependence (less freedom) to autonomy (more freedom)
- Moving toward more freedom is frightening at times, and these tensions influence the parent-child relationship.

# The parent-child relationship

- The ideal parent-child relationship is **love**, a balanced relationship, which helps the child feel secure while assuming progressively more responsibility.
- Sometimes the child and the parent stay too interwoven, in a state of **symbiotic-relatedness**
- Sometimes the child distances too much too fast, pushes back in a state of **withdrawal-destructiveness**

# What do human beings need?

- According to Fromm, all psychological needs come from our desire to simultaneously:
  - Be free, live authentic lives, but also escape loneliness and be secure

# Fromm's Psychological Needs

<b>Relatedness</b> but also <b>Identity</b>	Need to be connected, caring and cared for <b>But also</b> Need to develop one's uniqueness
<b>Transcendence</b> but also <b>Rootedness</b>	Need to rise above our animal nature (creatively or destructively), <b>but also</b> Need for a sense of belonging to community, family etc.
<b>Excitation</b> but also <b>Frame-of-orientation</b>	Stimulating and changing environment <b>But also</b> A consistent view of the world and an <b>object of devotion</b>

# *About Character Types*

- The ideal type is what Fromm calls the **productive type**. This person lives an authentic life, is at one with him/herself, and does not attempt to manipulate.
- The pressures of life and society, and the choices one makes can result into distortions of character which are **non productive** or even **evil**.

# *The Non Productive Character Types*

- Too much passivity and dependence: the **receptive** orientation.
- Never letting go, stingy, suspicious, compulsive: the **hoarding** orientation.
- Aggressive, egocentric, rash, seducing: the **exploitive** orientation.
- Selling oneself, becoming a product, opportunist, aimless: the **marketing** orientation.

# *The Evil Character Type*

- Lover of death and decay, destroying for the sake of destruction, preferring the mechanical over the human, trying to reduce humans to mechanisms, to dehumanize: the **necrophilous** character type.
- The opposite of necrophilous is **biophilous**, or lover of life, the healthy personality.



# *On the Continuum from Love of Life to Love of Death*

- The **productive** character is also **biophilous**.
- The **receptive, hoarding, exploiting, marketing** characters have components of "love of death" (or necrophilia) in them. How much? It depends how strong the orientation is.
- The **necrophilous** character is evil and death-loving.

# *Ways of Life: To Have or To Be?*

- The **having** mode leads us to live life as a consumer and to see ourselves as a commodity. We define ourselves by what we **have and accomplish**. This is what as Christians, we might call the "false self".
- The **being** mode leads us to live life authentically, without hiding behind a mask. It is about living life, being not building ourselves up. This would be living out of one's true-self, a Christ-like way to live.

# We are a mixture...

- The ideal would be to always live out of one's "being mode".
- In fact, we are only partially able to live this way. We need to grow into more authenticity. We need to become less afraid and less sensitive to peer and societal pressure.
- We need to work at building a society that encourages a productive and life-loving orientation.

# Where are you on the "having"/"being" continuum?

- Consider where you are on the polarities described in the 6 following slides. Keep a note of your scores and add them at the end to see where you rate yourself on the having-being continuum.

# Insecurity/Security

- If **1= insecurity**, showing itself in one's fear of loosing possessions, status, job, reputation
- And **10= security**, sense of being OK, no matter what happens (because you are yourself, not your possessions, grades, jobs, reputation...)
- Where are you? (give yourself a score between 1 and 10)

# Antagonism/Solidarity

- If **1=antagonism**, that is to say, perceiving yourself in competition with others in a win-lose dynamic, afraid that others will take your possessions, or job, or status.
- And **10=solidarity**, that is to say, for you, sharing with others is enjoyable, you live in a win-win dynamic
- Where are you? (give yourself a score between 1 and 10)

# Pleasure/joy

- If **1=pleasure**, that is to say seeking peaks of excitement, maximizing sensory enjoyment, being driven by strong passion
- And **10=joy**, that is to say enjoying being alive, growing, participating, learning, encountering the newness of life
- Where are you? (give yourself a score between 1 and 10)

# Understanding of sin

- If **1=avoiding sin to avoid punishment and guilt**, repentance and submission being the main elements of forgiveness of sin.
- If **10=avoiding sin because of not wanting to betray one's own integrity, and not wanting to be alienated from God**, the main elements of forgiveness being reconciliation and healing.
- Where are you? (give yourself a score between 1 and 10)



# Life and death

- If **1=being afraid of death**, afraid of losing one's life and identity, feeling lost, feeling one "is nothing"
- And **10=feeling connected to life**, focusing on one's love for others and their love for oneself
- Where are you? (give yourself a score between 1 and 10)

# Time

- If **1=focusing on the past and the future**, what I can have, what I might lose, what will happen to me
- And **10=focusing on life as it presents itself to me here and now**, being in harmony with life as it unfolds.
- Where are you? (give yourself a score between 1 and 10)

# Adding your scores

- Where are you as you add your scores? The maximum would be 60, a complete "being" orientation, whereas 6 would be a complete "having" orientation.
- You will be somewhere in between.

# Interpreting your score

- If your score is below 30, you tend toward the "having" mode. This sometimes happens when people are stressed, or in "survival" mode. Is this the case for you? Look at again at the various areas. Any specific stressors or demands that influence you at this time?
- If your score is above 30, you tend toward the "being" mode. Hopefully, as we grow, we move in that direction --though it is certainly a slow and progressive movement.

# What do you think of that analysis?

- What do you think of where you ended up?
- Do you see areas of possible growth?
- Do you think society and its structure and demands plays a role in how you score on some of these?
- Might someone who lives in circumstances where plain survival is a challenge tend to be more on one side or the other?

# A cautionary quote

- We have become things, and our neighbors have become things. The result is that we are powerless and despise ourselves for our impotence.
- We have no conscience ... since we do not dare to trust our own judgment. ... We are in the dark and keep up our courage because we hear everybody else whistle as we do.

Man for himself, p.248

- Is Fromm right? What do you think?

**THE END**



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