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[Maurice R. Green]

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Erich Fromm

I met Erich Fromm in 1941, as one of my supervisors in my psychoanalytic training at the W.A. White Institute in New York City. I first read him in college in Escape From Freedom which was assigned in my class entitled Social Motivation and Conflict in 1941 taught by Eberhart & <sup>Ca</sup> ~~K~~empbell. In 1951, I had been matriculated at the White Institute for two years, and I asked for Fromm as one of my supervisors (the others were Margaret Mahler, Janet Rioch, Hilda Bruch and Edward Tauber) -- I was also supervised for two years from Fromm's ex-wife, Frieda Fromm-Reichman. I began seeing him at his tiny office, crowded with books piled up everywhere, on Riverside Drive. He often cancelled appointments as he was in great demand for his lectures which I attended when they were in New York, but he frequently gave them in other cities. They were given in large theatres and were always sold out. We seemed to have instant rapport when we met. Although I had been very enthusiastic about Sullivan and his ideas about schizophrenia, I found no support for this with Erich Fromm. He was very pessimistic about work <sup>with</sup> schizophrenic patients, and as far as I could tell showed no interest in treating them in his practice as a non-medical psychoanalyst. I presented a patient to him in whom he was very interested. He was a Latin American from the Carribean - a graduate from a University who knew Fidel Castro when Castro was still a professor at the University. Now the Revolution had

at what college?

begun and he was very conflicted about returning to Cuba. He rejected the narrow commercial interests of his family, and suffered from anxiety, depression, difficulty in attention and concentration. Fromm encouraged me to make minimal interpretations and offer empathic support to encourage his examining of his experience with his family. Over a period of time the patient clarified these issues in his neurotic conflicts, understood their origins and came to an independent decision for the direction of his life. Contrary to what I had been told of Fromm's harsh confrontational style, I found him very warm and interested in my own personal life apart from the work I was doing with patients. I experienced in him a kind, warm and patient understanding of my own personal problems. This was in marked contrast to my experiences of him in the lecture hall when he appeared to me as a kind of grandiose arrogant priest or prophet expressing, with a kind of absolute authority, a contempt for the greedy commercialism and shallow cheapening of many members of our capitalist society. He, of course, did not try to indoctrinate me with his socialist ideals. Some believe these qualities of public appearance stem from his training as a rabbi. Nonetheless, I was very interested as I had been an ardent student of Max Weber, whose brother Alfred, had been a teacher of Fromm for his Ph.D. at Heidelberg. Later, I was grateful to Fromm for introducing me to the work of Martin Buber whom I later met in Washington, D.C. Fromm may

have been influenced also by Karl Abraham, a senior figure at the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute while Fromm was in training there. Abraham had made some of the earliest contributions to object-relations theory which focussed on persistent patterns of interaction between the analyst and his patient. Buber, Sullivan and Fromm all made this interaction a central feature of their theory for understanding and treating mental disorders, as did Fairbairn and the Tavistock group in England.

Fromm and his second wife had moved to Mexico because of health problems in 1950 where he founded the Mexican Institute of Psychoanalysis under the auspices of the National Autonomous University of Mexico. He taught there and headed the institute for many years. He maintained an apartment in Mexico City, and a magnificent house and estate in Cuernavaca<sup>near Mexico</sup>. I visited him in his office in Mexico City for supervision when I was there. In 1957 I spent a summer with him and five or six others from New York in Cuernavaca where we met for 3 hour sessions twice a week participating in a case seminar. Daizets~~u~~ Suzuki, the famous Zen Buddhist, was a house guest with Fromm~~at~~ that time. I very much enjoyed meeting with him at lunch, and sometimes sat with him inside a little shelter on the mountain side that had been built as a meditation retreat.

During the 3-hour sessions with Erich Fromm we focussed on patients who had been very difficult or whom we had failed to help. Fromm was very pessimistic about treating schizophrenia

but he was very helpful with all others. He focussed more on characteristic "non-productive" patterns of human relations rather than the usual psychiatric diagnostic labels. He did not use the term from his book of "receptive" (oral dependent), "exploitative" (phallic narcissistic), "hoarding" (anal retentive) and marketing. "Marketing" referred to a relationship that is governed by the value of commodity exchange and monetary values -- not exercise of powers but the sale of them.

The seminar was suffused with a spirit of humble inquiry. I would have expected a good deal of ego friction and defensive posturing but Fromm encouraged the opposite by presenting his own work with his patients as a peer among equals instead of talking as a Master to inexperienced pupils. This experience of his participation as a peer encouraged a refreshing openness among us. This gave us the opportunity to learn much from each other, as well as from Erich Fromm himself. Thus we experienced directly the freedom from an authoritarian structure that Fromm so eloquently advocated in his books.

Inspired by Fromm's book on dreams - The Forgotten Language (1951), we paid a good deal of attention to interpretation of the patient's dreams. I was especially interested as Eduard S. Tauber and myself had recently completed a book on dreaming called Prelogical Experience, of which Fromm had written an introduction. Since Tauber had spent a great deal of time with Fromm his

thinking was very much in tune with that of Fromm. The emphasis then was on the present pattern of the patients unfortunate ways of relating to others in his life rather than on specific signs and symptoms of a psychiatric disorder. His insight into the common alienation of so many individuals in our society who felt isolated and powerless was profound. Apparently, some of his trainees and audience suffered this experience of powerlessness momentarily when Fromm impacted on their sensitivity with his blunt contempt for what he saw as sham or deceptiveness. However, I never witnessed this side of him myself. In fact I experienced a kind of humility in Fromm that I very much admired even though some of my colleagues distrusted this observation. My observation, however, was consistent with Fromm's commitment to a more democratic and egalitarian climate in the psychoanalytic training wherein he persuaded the administration of the White Institute to cease the practice of allowing the training analyst the ultimate decision on approving or discrediting the trainee. After this intervention by Fromm trainees were protected from brainwashing and indoctrination.

Fromm, like Sullivan, attacked the notion of the analyst as a completely objective detached scientist observing his patient like a researcher observing an insect through a microscope. He insisted on the importance of the empathic bond in which he and the patient share a common humanity. He also rejected the

the reductimism to infantile conflict. He was opposed to simplistic interpretations of oedipal conflicts, sibling rivalries, etc. and insisted on achieving an understanding of the entire context of the issue in a systematic enquiry. Therefore he viewed the transference phenomenon, not just in terms of childhood experience, but very much present in dreams, associations, slips of tongue, style of speaking and moving, facial expressions and tone of voice.

Rather than focussing on symptoms of illness, Fromm preferred to focus on the isolation, loneliness, emptiness, unhappiness, dissatisfaction, anxiety and lack of joy in a person's life. This approach called for more than palliation of pain and despair. It called for a change of basic attitudinal orientation and behavior. One of his successful patients gave up an extremely successful career (in monetary terms) to begin an alternative career that was much more satisfying and creative. Fromm<sup>also</sup> referred several patients to me. They were all from very prominent wealthy families, but they were very bright and very serious thinkers. They had sought Fromm out even travelling to Mexico to consult with him. One was very frustrating, and I felt <sup>(it to be my)</sup> a failure. However, the patient -- a victim of the McCarthy era, was extremely talented and felt I had cured him of his illness and liberated him to live the style of life he wished. However, to my middle class bourgeois mind he had simply moved from being a dutiful repressed child-man, to a free-wheeling sybaritic self-indulgent adventurer, and I was

disappointed. I wanted him to use his considerable talents and intelligence for the service of man and society. I suppose Fromm would say he achieved his own independent fulfillment of his potentialities.

One of the issues that had come up in the seminar was the potential destructiveness of the psychoanalytic enquiry. I presented a case to our group with Fromm, of a doctor who had been referred to me by <sup>a</sup> senior colleague. While this senior colleague was treating this patient on the traditional psychoanalytic couch, the patient began to hallucinate and became acutely paranoid and delusional frightening the analyst into hospitalizing the patient briefly. Fromm saw this as a result of a misuse, unfortunately, all too common, - a misuse of the psychoanalytic method that promoted an intense narcissism and regression from reality in a vulnerable individual. In reconnoitering the history and characteristics of this man it became clear that he was not schizophrenic and would respond well to a more empathic exploration of his present relationships to peers and authorities in his work situation, and domestic life. Fromm's advice was <sup>e</sup>ffective.

Fromm also advocated for all of us a training in body awareness which I undertook with Charlotte <sup>e</sup>Silver with whom Fromm himself had studied. Silver's work stemmed from the German school called Feldenkreis. Personally, I found Silver's work very helpful to my own posture and relief of back problems. I also found the breathing exercise associated with Zen meditation very relaxing.

I cherish the memories of sitting on the lawn in front of his house in Cuene<sup>R</sup>/~~ca~~ with the tall mountains reaching high above us, birds singing and peacocks strolling across the lawn. I shall always be grateful for the occasion for appreciating the many subtle ways in which greed and deceit operated in our society with sometimes devastating effects on the naive and trusting.

In 1959, Fromm presented an unpublished lecture, detailing his technique, at the William Alanson White Institute in New York. It was later published in German in 1992, posthumously. First of all he declared that it is not enough to make the unconscious conscious and to help the patient understand it. He insisted that one be very related to and engaged with the patient. Then one must form an idea of the core identity of the patient - who the patient is and was meant to be underneath the effect of distortions and neglect in life experience. How would this person be if his life experience were much more fortunate? Secondly he affirmed the necessity for some theoretical framework without specifying. After that he called for an estimate of "the chances for profound change" -- depending on vitality, circumstance, amount of suffering, gift for honesty and degree of resistance. Lastly, one must measure the value of analog<sup>ies</sup> as against good counselling, supportive therapy or stopping therapy. He cautioned that one must not suffer the ~~onticality~~ <sup>eventuality</sup>



that nothing useful has occurred in four years of psychoanalysis. Sometimes you can get an insight in the second or third meeting. If the patient responds even ever so slightly one can be encouraged. If the patient resists in an unfeeling flattering way and continues to do that over a period of time one can be discouraged from further work. Then as always there are the resistances to be considered. One must estimate the nature of the main resistances and the degree of the main repressions. If they prove to be too ironclad and the patient is very sick one can give psychoanalytically oriented supportive therapy.

It was also very helpful for Fromm in the lecture to describe the main faults he saw in his students. He stated that because of inexperience the student therapist might minimize the difficulty of treatment and doubtfulness of the outcome. He underscored this by giving the example of a <sup>so of boy & common culture</sup> commonality between ministers and analysts of disbelief, doubt, double-talk, and rationalizations suffused with a constant sense of guilt about these feelings and his secret sense of failure in his own analysis. He exhorted all to be absolutely open and frank about these things.

He insisted in spelling out the analytic situation that the interaction be absolutely without pretense, sham or fiction. There is no room for conventional amenities. It must be a space of complete realism. Furthermore, he asked that the patient experience something and not just verbalize intellectual abstraction.

After that, the analyst must say precisely what he sees in full clarity and complete engagement. In the light of this engagement the truth will penetrate the resistances. Fromm is not cruel and points out that in cases of intense anxiety, or pre-psychotic vulnerability one must be more cautious with the truth. However, one musn't hesitate for mere conventionality or fear of making the patient angry.

Fromm also spent some time on helping the analyst to cut through the resistance, and deprive the patient of evasive moves, denials and rationalizations. The reward will be in the exhilaration and joy the patient will experience in freeing something from dissociation. ~~Lastly as a famous French analyst once said - one must never be bored or boring. When that occurs one knows that the work of that hour is wrong!~~

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Dear Maurice,

I like your paper very much & I am puzzled why Franck thought you did not agree with me, I got the impression she thought you said Sullivan denied the existence of an innate self, as you know from <sup>my</sup> paper. I thought he recognized something of the kind but did not concern himself with it. You seem to make the point that in the prototypic model concept he even somewhat recognized its existence & I would agree with that. I am impressed with your working out his relation to American philosophical concepts, & I see no real disagreement between us. What do you think?

Clara