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OBITUARY

PROFESSOR ERICH FROMM

Eminent psychoanalyst

Professor Erich Fromm, the psychoanalyst and social philosopher died yesterday at his home near Locarno in Switzerland where he had lived quietly in the latter years of his life. He was 79.

Fromm grew up in an intellectual climate in which Freud's ideas were beginning to have wide dissemination and his own procedures owed much to the founding father of psychoanalysis, though he himself applied Freud's ideas to societies rather than individuals. Fromm began by writing with considerable perception on the psychological background of Nazism and Fascism but he turned later to a running diagnosis of the maladies of Western society in psychological terms. A critic of the capitalist ethic, he also collected a series of essays on *Socialist Humanism* by a number of Eastern European Marxist writers.

Erich Fromm was born in Frankfurt on March 23, 1900. He attended the university of Heidelberg, taking his PhD and later went to the university of Munich where he was trained in psychoanalysis, and the university of Berlin. In 1929 he returned to Frankfurt where he lectured on social psychology from 1929.

In 1933 he had visited America as a visiting professor and when Hitler came to power he emigrated to the United States arriving there in 1934. From that point onwards he was associated with a succession of leading American universities; he taught at the International Institute of Social Research in New York; he lectured at Columbia University and Bennington College; he was a professor at the National University of Mexico from 1951; he held a chair in psychology at Michigan State University from 1957 to 1961 and was, from 1962 a professor at New York University.

Fromm published over twenty books, many of which gained wide currency as examples of the application of psychoanalytical thinking to social and cultural problems. *Escape from Freedom* (1941), published in Britain as *The Fear of Freedom* (1942), examined the plight of man in the post existentialist world; it saw man as cut off from the homely security of the medieval paradise, driven by

loneliness and fear to seek solutions to his predicament in the shelter of political tyrannies. Fromm's was a subtle exploration of the "negative aspect of freedom" a situation in which he saw modern man as alleviating his unbearable powerlessness and isolation only by morbid activity.

Man for Himself (1949) overlapped the earlier work but went on to identify the divorce of psychology from ethics as being a fundamental flaw in modern social thinking. *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (1950) explored the idea of enlarging the role of analysis to make it an all embracing moral discipline, a postulation in which Fromm distinguished between what he called "authoritarian religion" and the theocentric humanism in which the idea of God gives a reflection to man's own moral imagination. *The Forgotten Language* (1952) was an introduction to the understanding of dreams, fairy tales and myths, which had digested much of Freud, on whom Fromm wrote in *Sigmund Freud's Mission* (1958).

The Sane Society (1955) articulated Fromm's continuing preoccupation with the application of psychoanalytic procedures to societies as a whole, rather than simply to individuals. Here, his view of man as existing in relation to his society was developed; though Fromm owed much to Freud, while Freud saw man as an individual embodying a closed system of biological forces, Fromm viewed him primarily as a social being. This emphasis on the group attitudes of communities was a natural adjunct to an interest in Marxism of which *Socialist Humanism* (1961) which he edited, was a consequence.

By *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis* (1972) Fromm was examining the causes of the weakening hold of psychoanalysis over human beings, as a solution to personal and social ills and his later works ranged widely over psychoanalysis, religion and cognate subjects.

After 30 years in America Fromm left the country to settle in Muralto on Lake Maggiore, in Switzerland where, despite failing health, he continued to write, publishing another study of Freud in West Germany only last year and continuing to write on psychotherapy.

He was three times married.