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GUILT ACCORDING TO ERICH FROMM  
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INTRODUCTION

Various recent developments in the field of psychoanalysis were anticipated years ago by **Fromm**, but his contributions have not received recognition. One example of this was the debate on **Freud's** abandonment of the seduction theory in 1897. In this debate **nobody seemed** to remember that Fromm had already made his position clear in this connection in an essay of 1969, "**Freud's Model of Man and its Social Determinants**," reprinted in 1970 in The Crisis of Psychoanalysis. I have tried on various occasions to claim **Fromm's** priority in this matter (Bacciagaluppi, 1984a, 1985c).

## GUILT ACCORDING TO FROMM

In this paper I mean to discuss another **subject** in which **Fromm's** contribution has not been acknowledged, namely guilt. In 1947, in what I consider to be possibly his best **work**, Man for Himself» Fromm drew a fundamental distinction between authoritarian and humanistic **conscience**. Fromm later went back to this distinction in an extended version of the 1969 essay quoted **above**. This new version is not to be found in **Fromm's** more readily available works, but may be read in the Gesamtausgabe (1980-81) edited by Rainer Funk (**this** German edition of **Fromm's** complete works is the only existing one to date and is thus an indispensable **reference**).

According to Fromm, "the authoritarian conscience is the voice of an internalized external **authority**," and corresponds to what Freud described as the **super-ego**. The prescriptions of authority "**have not become** the norms of conscience **because** they are good, but because they are the norms given by **authority**." "Good conscience is consciousness of pleasing the ].. .[ authority; guilty conscience **is the consciousness of displeasing it.**" The authoritarian conscience is rooted in admiration for the authority and in fear, not only of

punishment but above all of rejection on the **authority's** part. In the authoritarian situation, the prime offenses are rebellion against the authority, **disobedience**, criticism, the attempt to become like the authority. The anger generated by submission is thus turned back against the self. Clinically, Fromm claims that "parental authority and the way children cope with it are revealed as being the crucial problem of **neurosis**." The **children** are made to feel guilty if they express criticism or anger and if they do not satisfy their **parents'** needs. **Finally, Fromm** points out the instrumental meaning of authoritarian ethics: "**not** only do guilt feelings result from **one's** dependence on an irrational authority [...] but the guilt **feeling** in its turn reinforces **dependence**." If, in the fight to be **him/herself**, the child is defeated, the result is a "weakening of the self and the substitution of a pseudo **self**." "**The** most important symptom of the defeat [...] **is** the guilty conscience."

"Humanistic conscience is not the internalized **voice** of an authority [...] » **it is our own voice**." It is "the reaction of our total personality to its proper functioning or **disfunctioning**." "Conscience judges our functioning as human **beings**." Because it is the reaction of our total personality, conscience is not

only knowledge but it also has an affective quality. Conscience "is the voice of our true selves which summons us back to ourselves," "to become what we potentially are." It can also be called "the voice of our loving care for ourselves." In present conditions, Fromm points out that this voice is feeble, overwhelmed by that of authoritarian conscience. One expression of humanistic conscience is the fear of growing old and dying, which results from the failure to live one's life fully. Fromm states that, like speech and thought, also humanistic conscience, though an intrinsic human potentiality, only develops in a social and cultural context»

Both forms of conscience are present in everybody. For instance, "although the contents of norms are identical, the motivation for their acceptance differs." Fromm also addresses the problem of the historical development of the two forms of conscience, and tends to agree with Julian Huxley, according to whom authoritarian conscience belongs to a preliminary phase of human development»

## RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

As **compared** to **Freud's** concept of the super-ego, in the last few years there have **been** developments which, independently of . Fromm, lead to an alternative view of guilt, based on the **existence** of innate altruistic motivations. These developments are reviewed in an extensive paper published in **1985** by Michael **Friedman**.

Friedman points out that "**Freud's** theory of motivation precludes even the logical possibility of prosocial **instincts**." "According to drive theory an **individual's** deepest motivation is by definition egoistic, having as its goal the discharge of his own accumulated **tensions**." Thus, even the **child's** attachment to the mother is viewed as secondary to the satisfaction of oral needs. According to Freud, guilt can only originate from the fear of punishment. Freud makes only marginal reference to the possibility of remorse, based on love.

A different concept of guilt developed later within Freudian psychoanalysis. **According** to **Melanie** Klein, guilt and **reparative**

tendencies **arise** in the depressive position and originate in love for the object. Guilt is the feeling that accompanies the belief of having damaged the loved object«

Another important step towards the **reconceptualization** of guilt was taken by Arnold Modell. Modell started from the phenomenon of "survivor **guilt**," which was described by Niederland in survivors of the Holocaust, and arrived at the concept of "separation **guilt**," based on the feeling that **one's own** autonomy is damaging to others.

**An** alternative model also emerges from recent progress in evolutionary biology and developmental psychology. In evolutionary theory, the possibility of the selection of altruistic behavior in the service of population survival is now an accepted concept. Examples of this are the model of inclusive fitness, developed by **Hamilton**, and that of reciprocal altruism, developed by **Trivers**.

**The existence** of innate altruistic tendencies is confirmed by the direct observation of children, which places its onset in the second year of life. In particular, Yarrow and

Zahn-Waxler reported that the most important factor in developing altruistic behavior in small children was the mother's protective attitude towards the child.

According to Martin Hoffman, the innate capacity mediating altruistic behavior is empathy, namely the capacity to experience the emotional states of others. Through empathy we may suffer for the painful experience of someone else. Hoffman describes various levels of empathy, which he links with the child's cognitive development. Global empathy is experienced by newborn babies, who react in the first day of life to cries of other infants. Egocentric empathy characterizes children in the second year of life, when they help others by giving what they themselves find most comforting. Empathy for another's feelings develops around the ages of 2 or 3, when the child begins to recognize the inner states of others. Finally, our empathic distress will be transformed into a feeling of guilt if we ourselves have caused the other's distress.

The most important example of altruistic motivation is the mother's love for the child. There are pathological situations, which Bowlby calls inversions of parent-child relationships, in which the altruistic behavior potentially present in the child is unconsciously exploited by the parent. An infantile

part of the parent elicits inappropriate **parental behavior** in the child (Bacciagaluppi, 1985b).

In his proposed **reconceptualization** of guilt, Friedman draws a distinction between "**super-ego anxiety**," whereby a child is motivated by danger to the self, and "**guilt**," whereby a child is motivated by danger to the significant others» Guilt may be elicited by blame. This leads to superimpose guilt on super-ego anxiety and to a confusion between the two **situations**.

According to this **reconceptualization** of guilt, aggressiveness may contribute to guilt, but is not a necessary condition for its development« A child may perceive that even his/her normal development, leading to separation, is harmful to the parents, and may therefore feel guilty for **it**.

#### DISCUSSION AND **CONCLUSION**

Although Friedman does not acknowledge **Fromm's** priority, it seems to me that his distinction between **super-ego anxiety** and guilt corresponds to the distinction drawn by Fromm nearly forty years before between authoritarian and humanistic



**conscience.** The correspondence between **Fromm's authoritarian conscience** and **Friedman's** super-ego anxiety is practically complete. There are differences between **Fromm's** humanistic conscience and **Friedman's** guilt, **Fromm's** concept is more extensive, and in addition to responsibility towards others also includes responsibility towards the self.

However, I do not **wish** to limit myself to claiming priority for Fromm. I believe that these recent developments may also lead to an enrichment of **Fromm's** concepts and in particular to the recognition of their **evolutionary** basis. Fromm **himself**, in his last **works**, referred explicitly to a model derived from evolutionary biology. In The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness Fromm (1973) writes: "**man's** biological constitution is the source of norms for living. He has the possibility for full development and growth, provided the external conditions that are given are conducive to this aim."

One aspect of Fromm's views on guilt which may be integrated with recent findings is ontogenesis. Fromm's description of humanistic conscience **seems** to apply mostly to the adult level. The findings reported clarify its ontogenetic development. In **order** to develop, this innate tendency needs an environmental

influence, **which Fromm**, as we saw, had already assumed. **The** observation of children shows that the first social context that allows the development of the humanistic conscience is the relationship with the mother« A good relationship with the mother may **promote** the unfolding of altruistic **tendencies** in the child **both** by fostering in a general way the development of the **child's resources**, and more specifically by providing a model. **Fromm** anticipates this idea when he calls the humanistic conscience "the **voice** of our loving care for ourselves." Here he seems to be describing a positive **super-ego**, based on the **intemalization** of truly loving parents, whose love is addressed **not** only to the dependency needs of their children but also to their autonomy needs (Bacciagaluppi, 1985a).

Another aspect to be developed is aggression. In the relationship with irrational authority, anger does not serve its innate purpose of removing the cause of frustration, but becomes self-defeating. To use **Bowlby's** distinction in Separation, the anger of hope is transformed into the anger of despair. **Anger** becomes **destructive**, both towards the self and towards the object. In the subjection of humanistic conscience to **authoritarian conscience** which takes place in authoritarian **relationships**, the authoritarian **conscience** can

exploit **the** innate altruistic tendencies. Next to the fear of punishment and **rejection**, already described by **Fromm**, we must also place the **Kleinian** fear of destroying the object.

**Finally**, **Fromm** needs maybe to be corrected on another point, that of phylogenesis. **Fromm** believed that the authoritarian conscience preceded the humanistic conscience, but the opposite is probably true. If altruistic **motivations** are innate, they should be part of prehistoric adaptation. Actually, the paleoanthropologist **Richard** Leakey believes that prehistoric human adaptation was characterized by cooperation and sharing. The authoritarian **conscience** probably came after the agricultural revolution, which introduced a discontinuity into our evolution and led to an increasing discrepancy between biological and cultural evolution, I suggest that the authoritarian conscience is a product of the family and character structure of the peasant culture, which even now exerts an influence on all of us (**Bacciagaluppi, 1984b**).

I would like to conclude by recalling the opposition between St« Augustine and Pelagius which was often mentioned

by **Fromm**. Fromm states that Freud arrived at a view of the "sinful child" similar to that held by St. Augustine. Fromm contrasts this view with that of the heretic Pelagius, according to whom every child is born uncorrupted by original sin. We could conclude that recent research seems to contradict **Freud's Augustinian** view and confirm **Fromm's Pelagian** view«

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