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# Guild 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-ago. 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 dipleasing it. „ T*he 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 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 pro-social 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 superimposition 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.

## Discuss 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 my self 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 observations of children show that the first social context that allows the development of 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 internalization 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 (Bowlby, 1973), the anger of hope is transformed into the anger of despair. Or, to use Fromm's distinction (Fromm, 1973), defensive aggression is transformed into malignant aggression. 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 relationship, 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, perhaps Fromm needs 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 paleonthropologist 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.

## Summary

Fromm's distinction between authoritarian and humanistic conscience is summarized. Recent developments in the fields of psychoanalysis, evolutionary biology and developmental psychology, leading to a reconceptualization of guilt, are reported. It is claimed that these developments were anticipated by Fromm. On the other hand, they can integrate Fromm's concepts as regards ontogenesis, aggression and phylogenesis.

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