



Erich Fromm International Symposium  
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"Erich Fromm's Clinical Bequest,  
A Radical Revision of Psychoanalysis"  
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The Mystery Paper of Erich Fromm

I had to modify my paper at the last minute because I encountered a Sherlock Holmes setting whereby Erich Fromm's lead article was printed among the papers presented at the IV International Forum of Psychoanalysis in New York City, 1972. This was a meeting that Fromm did not attend. I presided over this Forum and co-edited the published volume. After 22 years I did not remember Fromm's title, "The Psychoanalytic Image of Man and its Historical and Socio-Cultural Background." I found a reference in small type that indicated, much to my surprise, that the paper had been read in Fromm's absence at the III International Forum in Mexico, in 1969. But just a few days before today's meeting, I came across a special program of the 1969 Mexican Forum that contained abstracts of all the papers presented on that occasion. Fromm's abstract in Mexico had the title "Basic Problems of Psychoanalytic Technique." It was

affirmed by Dr. Jorge Silver <sup>garcia</sup> that he read Fromm's paper at the Mexican Forum in 1969.

Fromm has been widely criticized for avoiding clinical material in his writings and major speeches. It is obvious that the designated Mexican Forum paper has no connection with its rambling material without Fromm's personal style. On the other hand, Fromm's "real" 1969 Forum paper in Mexico is titled "Basic Problems of Psychoanalytic Technique." In the abstract Fromm states that the overall outcome of psychoanalytic therapy depends on its particular goal. He also defines the automatic attempt to make the unconscious/conscious which leads to a generic formula, losing its individual meaning. In addition, he pays special attention to the problem of the curative value of de-repression and self-confrontation.

While preparing my paper for this meeting, I had reviewed Fromm's The Revision of Psychoanalysis and The Art of Being, both published in 1992 and covering roughly the period from 1968 to

1970. I then received yet another posthumous book, published in February 1994, Erich Fromm on Being Human, based on material that covers the last twenty years of Fromm's life.

In casually turning the pages of the new book, I immediately recognized the lead article, "Modern Man and the Future." I was present when this paper was delivered by Fromm. On that occasion I was a participant observer on behalf of the William Alanson White Society at the "International Congress for Psychoanalysis and Its Future Development," in Dusseldorf in September of 1961. The meeting was troubled, since a number of Classical Analysts did not show up at the last moment. Among them were Rado, Alexander, Sperling, Weigert, and Grotjahn.

The Dusseldorf meeting was considered a stepping stone toward an International Federation of Psychoanalytic Societies. Fromm, in his presentation, advanced the ideas of humanistic renaissance, a new form of humanistic Socialism, in contrast to existing capitalism. Fromm's quest for a "Humanistic



Alternative" came to the fore after the collapse of the Third Reich, after the war the Reichinstitute after the War split into two warring groups that became openly destructive. Fromm called himself a lifetime Freudian Analyst, but came to the rescue of the allegedly tainted Schultz-Henke group. This group was the DPG (German Psychoanalytic Society) under Werner Schwidder. Fromm contacted the White Institute--of which he was a co-founder--with the request that the White Institute collaborate with Schwidder's DPG, Fromm's Mexican group, and Caruso's Vienna Circle. The White Society held a special meeting and empowered me to serve as their representative in Europe.

At that time I travelled a great deal in Europe, introducing Sullivan's interpersonal point of view, also interviewing on the project of "Psychoanalysis During the Third Reich" as well as collaborating on the formation of the International Federation of Psychoanalytic Societies. The IFPS became a reality at the Amsterdam Forum of July 1962.



As it was, the four key IFPS Societies and their key representatives were the Mexican Group (Fromm), DPG (Schwigger), Viennese Circle (Caruso), and White Society (myself). This nucleus was the platform for the International Federation of Psychoanalytic Societies as a liberal setting in contrast to the "elitist" IPA (International Psychoanalytic Association).

In this burgeoning Federation I had personal contact with Fromm, as well as ongoing correspondence with him, until the unfortunate complexities involving the postponed III Mexican Forum. Fromm called me in New York from Locarno in February 1967. He told me that he had suffered a mild heart attack and needed to recuperate. It was his wish that I get in touch with Schwigger, Heigel, and Binswanger, since it meant a great deal to him that prominent European analysts attend the Forum in Mexico in 1968. He did not realize that Mexico City was to host the Summer Olympics that year, which made it impossible to hold the Forum there at that time. It was belatedly rescheduled for 1969.

Fromm expected to set up a small committee consisting of himself, me and Schwidder to promote the Mexican Forum and to personally accept or reject all papers submitted for the occasion. As time went on, he began to make unreasonable demands, such as telling him the exact number of American analysts that would attend rather than giving him a calculated guess. Then he complained that I did not ask for his advice any longer while I set myself up as a big shot at his expense. The facts do not support him, since he evidently lost interest in the IFPS when he cut himself off from Mexico and permanently settled in Locarno. After 1969, Fromm no longer answered my letters. In his last letter he thanked me for sending him relevant correspondence, but complained that the last few years I did not seek his advice and counsel. I clearly missed any correspondence from him on his side, and never accepted to be in charge of it.

It occurred to me that his belated communication with me, after five years and two years after the 1972 New York Forum. He

did not inquire or comment on New York's successful Forum, which attracted close to 800 attendants.

Fromm supervised me creatively but not without a touch of authoritarianism. I recall a session where he asked me to take a deep breath after closing my eyes and when opening my eyes express what came to mind when I thought of the word I. This intrigued me at a later time when I read a book by the painter Matisse, who studied a flower from every angle, then closed his eyes before painting his individual version. Fromm's supervision was in marked contrast to Frieda Fromm-Reichman, who supervised me over a long period of time and whose attitude was graciously maternal, overpraising me. The trouble was that I could do no wrong with her, which legitimately irritated my peers.

So much for a few of my personal encounters with Erich Fromm. Now, a few words about the permanent shadow Freud cast over him; and his perception of Humanism and Psychoanalysis.

I would now like to offer two quotations:

"It was Erich Fromm's conviction that  
Psychoanalysis needs to retain Freud's essential  
insight into the Unconscious while replacing his  
mechanistic-materialistic philosophy with a  
humanistic one."

This statement appears in Erich Fromm's posthumously published  
The Revision of Psychoanalysis, edited by Reiner Funk, 1992.

The next quotation is of Sigmund Freud, speaking on his  
seventieth birthday:

"It was the poets and philosophers before me who  
discovered the Unconscious. What I discovered  
was the scientific method by which the  
Unconscious can be studied."

This statement was preserved and printed by Lionel Trilling. It  
seems to me that Freud put his cards on the table, in contrast to  
Fromm who in his 1969 Mexico Forum "paper" took issue with the  
classical construct of the Unconscious.





There is no evidence that Fromm at any time made an effort to be introduced to Freud, or considered corresponding with him. But Fromm evidently knew many classic Freudians who had contact with Freud, including his analyst, Hans Sachs, who was a member of Freud's inner circle.

It is hard to understand why Fromm insisted to the end of his life that he was a Freudian Analyst. As time went on he viewed Psychoanalysis as a materialistic approach that was in a state of crisis.

In this frame of reference Fromm is genuine while at the same time sounding like a preacher. He has largely taken his particular humanistic point of view in attacking Classical Psychoanalysis without taking credit for some of his own significant contributions. Marianne Eckhart has thoughtfully referred to Fromm as a highly gifted "enabler." Her point is well taken except that Fromm had a tendency to put his foot in his mouth, as when he confronts us with terms like "biophilia"

versus "necrophilia." An example of being self-deprecating is his description of himself as "not the founder of a school, but rather a Psychoanalyst who has attempted to further Freud's theory by making certain revisions."

There is concrete evidence that Fromm distanced himself a long time ago from Classical Analysis. In Dialogue with Erich Fromm by Richard I. Evans, and in similar words in the German Newspaper Die Zeit, Fromm is quoted as follows:

"As a student I remained a good Freudian, true, my doubts increased, but I graduated from the orthodox Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute, and during the following five to six years my analysis adhered strictly to what I had learned. I finally realized that I got bored. There was never anything new; the ever-present Oedipus complex, the fear of castration, etc. ... Nothing new happened. I had no living relatedness to the

patient. As time went on I began to see on my own the whole patient as an individual in his society."

Fromm was overtly critical of Freud, as well as of Classical Analysis. In The Art of Being (Fromm, 1992) he accused Freud of not changing his theories because Freud had to hold his adherents together by common ideology. If he had changed basic theoretical positions he would have deprived his adherents of unifying dogmas. He criticized Freud for "ordaining" his followers, who in this frame of reference tended to embrace dogmatism and incompetence.

Fromm addresses himself to "the new concept of the Unconscious according to Ronald D. Laing." He refers to Laing as a radical humanist who conceives of psychotherapy as a mandate for two people to recover the wholeness of being human through the relationship between them.

In "Therapeutic Practice" (Fromm, Revision, 1992), Fromm refers to the writings of Sullivan, Laing, himself and others to illustrate the most fundamental point of revision. It is based on the transformation of the whole analytic setting from one in which a detached observer studies an "object" to one of interpersonal communication. According to Fromm this is only possible if the analyst responds to the patient, who in turn responds to the analyst's response. It is also mandatory that the analyst respond subjectively, within himself or herself, not merely on a cerebral basis. The analyst must give up the illusion of being well while the patient is sick. Both participants in the therapeutic setting are human, whereby the experiences of even the most troubled patient must strike a chord of experience within the analyst. In addition, the analyst has to show a measure of vulnerability, rather than hiding behind the role of a professional who is paid for knowing the answers.

In this frame of reference Fromm rejects reconstructed material as having any curative effect. In his opinion it entails the risk of the power of suggestion, akin to exorcising the devil, which may produce a "cure" albeit not an analytic one. There is a risk that suggestibility will become enhanced when the patient is artificially infantilized vis a vis the analyst in the classic procedure.

Fromm believes that one must keep in mind that the aim of Psychoanalytic therapy is not historical research into early childhood. By looking mainly at the past and expecting the present to be its repetition, one tends to oversimplify and focusing on what appears to be repetition can limit the development of new understanding. He also points out that speaking whatever comes to mind can lead to a cul de sac rather than a genuine experience which may or may not be a "scientific truth."

In connection with his radical revision, Fromm raises the question of whether psychoanalysis--in its traditional point of view--qualifies as a specific therapy that is expected to provide an analytic cure for neurotic disorders.

Fromm used Sullivan's term "difficulties of living" to refer to the interpersonal complexities of daily life such as marital difficulties, the challenges of rearing children, societal pressure, problems in the workplace, and so forth. Fromm's frame of reference suggests that traditional psychoanalysis should no longer pretend to be a curative therapy but rather a method for human growth.

Fromm stated that:

"In regard to a creative channel, Psychoanalysis is possible only if it overcomes its positivistic conformism and becomes again a critical and challenging theory in the spirit of radical humanism."



Later, Fromm raises the question, who is to decide what the essence of the original theory was? There is a problem in the formulation of a construct as to what actually constitutes the essence of one particular system. There is often a controlling influence over the direction of scientific development. This was according to Fromm the case with the Psychoanalytic movement, in that it is frequently the psychoanalytic bureaucracy that determines which theory and therapy deserves the title "Psychoanalysis." In Freudianism there is a dogma whereby anyone who does not follow the rules of the organization has no right to call himself a Psychoanalyst. The absurdity to which this bureaucratic spirit can lead is shown by the fact that five sessions per week and the use of the couch were made into criteria that decided whether or not somebody underwent "real Psychoanalysis."

Erich Fromm evoked in me an image of a highly gifted individual who had a Nansen Passport. Fritjof Nansen was a

Norwegian scientist, explorer and dedicated humanist who was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize. His work resulted in the development of an international identify known as "the Nansen Passporter." After World War I there were more than two million refugees in Europe and Asia minor. Nansen pioneered an attempt to create a home away from home with an emphasis on civil rights, employment and other essential aspects of human existence.

To come back to my image of Fromm as a Nansen passport carrier: in some ways Fromm was a potential stranger from his Talmudian cradle. He also became a stranger to Classical Psychoanalysis. At the dawn of the Third Reich he became an immigrant from Germany without becoming a flag-waving American; then he had a partial home in Mexico, and a final home in Switzerland.

Reiner Funk in his book on Erich Fromm pointed out Fromm's affinity for the Old Testament with a particular reference: "Thou shall love the stranger as you love yourself,





since you yourself were a stranger in Egypt." You can only understand the stranger when you yourself have been a stranger. "To be a stranger means to be at home in all the world." These words were used by Fromm just a few days before his death.

It is conceivable that Fromm could not emancipate himself from Freud in the role of Moses who guided the Israeli people out of Egypt. At the same time, Fromm was a highly gifted individual who in many respects was remarkably ahead of his time, as in his awareness of Freud's mechanistic construct of Human Drives, the myth of the Oedipus complex as a universal phenomenon, the impact of society on humanity, the brilliant construct of the "marketing personality" with the companion idea of "I will be as you desire me," and his quest for authenticity as a prerequisite for addressing the patient.

In particular, Fromm understood the role of the analyst's subjectivity, that is, the analyst's awareness of himself or herself in responding to the patient's predicament.

I believe that Psychoanalysis is neither a free-for-all nor a dogmatic system. Fromm had a personal belief system that was in some ways in tune with modern psychoanalysis. It may be said that he had his share of foibles and peculiarities, but they did not overshadow his constructive impact on the field of Psychoanalysis.

Erich Fromm Symposium: Bibliography

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