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Fromm's Relevance Today

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Fromm's productive orientation is both an attitude and a character trait which allows a person to experience, see, feel, and think in a way that is consistent with human development and humanistic ethics.

A person's character structure, which is influenced by the socio-economic-political times in which he lives, is the key to developing a productive orientation. Fromm's astuteness regarding the intersection of sociopolitical structure and character structure is relevant today. In addition to major changes brought about by modern capitalism and technology, society contains many viewpoints which are antagonistic to a productive orientation such as fundamentalistic thinking, authoritarianism of any type, and cultural relativism. Some psychoanalytic use of postmodern thinking may not be conducive to a productive orientation while others may be. A perspectivist viewpoint may lead to solipsism to which Fromm was adamantly opposed. Citing Nietzsche's term "perspectivistic", Fromm notes that grasping all perspectives allows the essential and universal to appear.

Resistance to a productive orientation, engendered by the socio-economic-political times and the attitudes they produce, exists in both patient and analyst. In the States, treatment goals are affected by managed care corporations whose goal is a profit motive. Criteria of medical necessity is used to determine the frequency

and length of treatment. These criteria both reflect and determine social attitudes which are consistent with a logical positivistic attitude, a view of people as commodities, and American concerns about dependency. In addition it is more profitable both to the managed care corporation and to the employer, usually a corporation, which furnishes the insurance. In the States a corporate mindset has permeated many social organizations including government. It may be an American form of a corporate state. This corporate state is wedded to a fundamentalist element that has always existed in the States.

Fromm's standard for the usefulness of any policy or technology is whether it aids or hinders human development. The current socio-economic-political structure does not have this criterion in mind. Technology by itself does not produce a productive orientation since such an orientation is dependent upon changes in one's character structure. Whatever its advantages are, technology allows for a 24/7 mindset which reduces boundaries and privacy both of which are necessary conditions for a self.

Man has the capacity for choice and no longer needs to escape from freedom. A productive orientation in which a person can develop his potentials requires piercing the societal illusions as well as the illusions about oneself. Knowing oneself allows one to find a place in



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the society that is conducive to one's development. It also enables one to oppose and cope with social forces which are not conducive to a productive orientation. These antagonistic forces are greater with the increased concentration of economic power especially in the media.

In the discussion period current opportunities and difficulties in achieving Fromm's goal of a productive orientation will be raised. Analytic therapy when it works well provides one way for an individual to develop a productive orien-

tation. Such a treatment is based upon a humanistic ethic and not simply a technique. The importance of an individual is critical to Fromm's humanistic ethic. Despite his criticism of conventional treatments, he often said that a person could come to therapy as long as he wanted to and as long as you felt you could work with the person. He said that for some people their best moments were in treatment. Inherent in this statement is a valuing of an individual which is consistent with humanistic ethics.