

D. Elkind:

Erich Fromm

Erich Fromm was born in Germany in 1900 to middle class Jewish parents. After completing his work at the Gymnasium he attended the University of Heidelberg where he studied sociology, philosophy and psychology and attained his Ph.D. at the age of 22. It was because of his human concerns that he became interested in psychoanalysis. At the Berlin Institute *Erich* met and married his first wife, *Frieda Fromm-Reichmann*. He and *Frieda* helped to found the Psychoanalytic Institute in Frankfurt. As the political situation in Germany worsened, *Erich* accepted, in 1933, an invitation to come to the United States that was offered to him by the Chicago Psychoanalytic Institute. He liked America and determined to settle here. However, he preferred New York to Chicago and established himself there and became one of the founders of the White Institute. *Erich* accepted, in 1949, a professorship at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. He proceeded to build a department of psychoanalysis in the graduate department of the medical school. In addition, he also founded and directed the Mexican Psychoanalytic Institute. *Erich* continued to commute to New York from Mexico to teach, supervise and engage in other professional activities. In 1976 *Erich* and his third wife, *Annis Freeman Fromm* (his second wife, *Henny Sinlaud*, died in 1952) moved to Switzerland.

Fromm, like *Wilhelm Reich*, was a student of *Marx* as well as of *Freud* and was constantly trying to integrate these two diverse positions: *Freud's* view that human nature determined society, as opposed to *Marx's* view that society determined human nature.

For both *Fromm* and *Reich*, the individual was caught inexorably between instinctual drives on the one hand and social forces on the other. Both men saw some aspects of society as working against the realization of human freedom and both advocated social systems that would free humans. But *Reich* saw human freedom as equivalent to sexual liberty. *Fromm*, in contrast, saw human freedom as a lifelong struggle to realize one's transcendent human qualities while recognizing that such realization was always socially bounded. His concept of freedom as a lifelong struggle to realize one's uniquely human potential against the opposition of both animal being and restrictive social

forces informed all of *Fromm's* writing. In gaining freedom from one form of bondage, one necessarily encounters a new level of enslavement. The young adolescent who breaks free from the restraints of parents becomes subject to the controls of the peer group and the battle for freedom must be begun anew. The struggle for human freedom is anxiety provoking. Many choose not to engage in the battle and to ESCAPE FROM FREEDOM by means of *mechanisms of escape* that *Fromm* saw as *unproductive* to both the individual and to society. Among the unproductive orientations were the *receptive* character whose aim in life is to seek and win approval from others; the *exploitative* character who demands and takes what he or she wants; the *hoarding* character who seeks to escape from anxiety by owning material things; and the *marketing* character who seeks to escape from freedom by attaining visible material success. *Erich* regarded these orientations as destructive because neither the individual nor society is well served. *Fromm* argued that the productive orientation was the only solution to our existential dilemma of being animal and human, individual and social. The attainment of a productive character is an extraordinary achievement for which everyone has the potential but for which few have the required will and stamina. The truly productive character has conquered greed, selfishness and loneliness.

For *Fromm*, there were many levels of loving. Some, like brotherly and motherly love, are productive insofar as they are directed towards others and involve caring, responsibility and respect. Erotic love is a less productive orientation because of its exclusive character. Self love is the least productive since it involves self hatred. *Fromm* had in mind a love of humankind, a sense of caring, respect and responsibility for humanity. It unites the individual with the social. The concerns with our special qualities as humans and of uniquely human dilemmas is characteristic not only of *Fromm* but also of *Harry Stack Sullivan* and, indeed, of the workers at the White Institute generally. For *Sullivan* and *Fromm*, friendship was a relationship of the highest order. Friendship imposes obligations to keep in touch, to ask for help when it is needed and to be supportive when support is necessary and, not least of all, to challenge intellectually with respect and with responsibility.

Fromm was warm and friendly but also maintained a quiet reserve, a sense of privacy and personal space. He was attentive



Love is not primarily a relationship to a specific person; it is an attitude, an orientation of character, which determines the relatedness of a person to the world as a whole, not toward one "object" of love. If a person loves only one other person and is indifferent to the rest of his fellow men, his love is not love but a symbiotic attachment, or an enlarged egotism. Because one does not see that love is an activity, a power of the soul, one believes that all that is necessary to find is the right object, and that everything goes by itself afterward. This attitude can be compared to that of a man who wants to paint but who, instead of learning the art, claims that he has just to wait for the right object, and that he will paint beautifully when he finds it.

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and a good listener but not overly serious and he had a lively sense of humor. He was incisive diagnostically and clear and direct in his formulations. He felt free to suggest the effect of the social cultural conditions that may have contributed to a patient's condition. His training sessions were characterized by a liveliness and freshness that enhanced their teaching value. His contributions to social science and to psychotherapeutic practice were considerable. Much of contemporary social criticism, such as that of Christopher Lasch, follows a model that *Fromm* laid down, and it was *Fromm* who gave Marx's term alienation a psychodynamic rendering. *Fromm's* greatest contribution was his humanism as he articulated it and as he lived it.

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