

Otto Fenichel. Psychoanalytic remarks on Fromm's book Escape from Freedom. In The Collected Papers of Otto Fenichel. New York: Norton & Co., 1954. (Second Series.) Originally published in Psychoanalytic Review, vol. 31, 1944, pp. 133-152.

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This seems to me to be an especially important paper since it, along with the one on culture and personality by Hartmann, Kris, and Loewenstein which I reviewed in Papers on Psychoanalytic Psychology, incorporates the most important objections that the orthodox Freudians have to Fromm's viewpoints. The approach seems to be that Fromm generalizes as to what Freud's theory was all about and then distorts that theory in his writings.... That Fromm sees Freud's theory as so completely an instinct-drive-libido theory that he completely disregards the emphasis that Freud placed on object relations and the influence of society in the development of personality (character). The following excerpts are among the more pertinent ones. The objections raised to Fromm's approach both in this paper and in the one by Hartmann, Kris, and Loewenstein, should ~~in~~ be rebutted by Fromm either in his book or in a separate lengthy article.

"What has been said up to now might be summarized as follows: The ways of production and distribution, and their contradictions, inflict severe frustrations upon individuals of all classes (though in different forms and to different degrees). Today they arouse especially feelings of being lost and of 'not belonging.' These feelings have various mental consequences; one of these consequences is a longing to have once more an omnipotent person in the external world to whom one may submit, losing one's helpless individuality in a magnificent oceanic feeling. This longing forms the psychological condition in the masses which meets the influence of Fascism halfway. At least that is the case in the times of Fascism's coming to power and in the period right afterward. The leaders make use of this longing; they give or promise its satisfaction, and they do so on conditions. So they are able to offer to the frustrated and longing individuals magical rewards, and so they are able to achieve a voluntary obedience and a general renunciation of independent judgment and feeling. I do not know whether Fromm would concede that this summary of our own considerations is simultaneously a summary of his book Escape from Freedom. I suppose he would not. He probably would protest against two details in this formulation: against the 'frustrations' and against the 'conditions.' But the above formulation is the way in which the reviewer would express Fromm's ideas. He tried to make them clear to himself and to bring them into agreement with what we know and thought about these problems before Fromm's book." (266-267).

"Without any interpretation and additions Fromm's main theses are: In the course of history revolutionary (and evolutionary) changes in economic conditions have often created deep changes in the position of (all or certain) individuals in society; they have brought liberation from old chains, prejudices, limitations, frustrations; people have become free from something which had bound them hitherto. But such liberations have always been bought at a high price; with their limitations the individuals also lost their feeling of belonging, their being a part of a whole--they became lonely. And always, in such situations, they became afraid of this loneliness. A mental conflict was aroused in them between the tendency to enjoy the new liberty and the anxiety created by the loss of the belonging and by their regressive longing. There are various possibilities of escape from this conflict. Which escape is chosen depends on the social and cultural conditions. The longing for a 'Fuehrer' and sado-masochistic submission in Fascism is one modern escape of this kind. But there is not only a 'freedom from...'; there is also a 'freedom to....' It is possible to strengthen the uniqueness and activity of the individual in such a way that he may find contact and 'belonging' with other free individuals in 'love and creative work' without any chains. To make this possible, mankind must rationalize their ways of production and distribution" (267).



"This is not the place to review and discuss all details of Fromm's book. But I should like to pick out certain points which seem worth while, especially concerning Fromm's criticisms of Freud. These criticisms begin in the first chapter: 'Freud was so imbued with the spirit of his culture that he could not go beyond certain limits which were set by it.' Freud's main mistake was that he took modern man's drives for 'the biological drives of man.' 'The individual appears fully equipped with biologically given drives which need to be satisfied. In order to satisfy them, the individual enters into relations with objects.' 'Contrary to Freud's viewpoint, the analysis offered in this book is based on the assumption that the key problem of psychology is that of the ~~more~~ specific kind of relatedness of the individual toward the world, and not that of satisfaction or frustration of this or that instinctual need.' To the objection that the relatedness of the individual toward the world is nothing else than the sum of all his drives, Fromm ~~would~~ probably would answer with the arguments of the Gestalt psychologists that the 'whole' is not the 'sum.' In discussing this, he cannot avoid falsifying Freud: 'Although there are certain needs, such as hunger, thirst, sexuality, which are common to man, those drives which make from the differences in man's character, like love and hatred, lust for power and yearning for submission, enjoyment of sensuous pleasure and the fear of it, are all products of the social process.' And he thinks that that contradicts Freud; the truth is that this is just the opinion Freud holds. Freud never denied that all those strivings--love, hatred, love of power, yearning for submission, enjoyment of sensuous pleasure, and especially fear of sensuous pleasure--are products of experience--i.e., of the social process. What else does psychoanalysis do than find out in which way those attitudes are formed in the individual by experiences during his childhood? Freud only added one thing which Fromm now tries to get rid of: He found out how the 'social ~~more~~ process' 'produces' 'those strivings': by transforming the aims, objects, and directions of 'certain needs which are common to man such as hunger, thirst, sexuality'--especially 'sexuality.' And what is the 'wholeness' of the 'interpersonal relationships'? Fromm gives examples of drives which came into existence at certain points of the historic development and thinks this is an argument against Freud: the drives 'to enjoy nature's beauty' and 'the drive to work.' Certainly nobody will deny the social origin of these 'drives,' but their social origin does not contradict the assumption that deeper biological needs have been transformed into these 'new drives.'" (267-268).

"As an example of the 'ambiguity of freedom'--simultaneously with freedom, loneliness, and oceanic longing increase--Fromm discusses the sixteenth century, and these chapters are the most interesting ones of his book. The Italian Renaissance and the German and Swiss Reformations are discussed in this connection. 'Protestantism and Calvinism, while giving expression to a new feeling of freedom, at the same time constituted an escape from the burden of freedom.' Fromm succeeds in showing that the development of a new feeling of time and of new ethics of 'working' are the most important psychological changes which accompanied the economic development of capitalism. The new religions 'gave expression to the new feeling of freedom and independence as well as to the feeling of powerlessness and anxiety by which their members were pervaded.' And Fromm is of the opinion that the roots of many of today's escape mechanisms were developed at that time: the morals of being active at any cost (which is so characteristic of Calvinism), the absolute authority of certain words, and an all-pervading hidden hostility, especially against one's own ego, self-humiliation and the concept of 'duty' as a substitute for external authority. How Freud is treated in this connection may be seen from the following quotation: 'Freud has seen the hostility of man against himself which is contained in what he called the superego. He also saw that the superego was originally the internalization of an external dangerous authority. But he did not distinguish between spontaneous ideals which are part of the self, and internalized commands which rule the self.' I wonder whether Fromm knew before Freud that the superego is an internalization of an external dangerous authority; actually Freud did distinguish between different types of 'internalization,' 'ideals' which became a part of the ego, and 'ideals' which rule the ego as the external authority did before." (268-269). [I am not certain what Fenichel is referring to here, but perhaps it is to that fact that Freud did not view the superego as comprised of only conscience, but of the ego-ideal as well, although it is true that neither



can be considered as "spontaneous ideals which are part of the self."

"Fromm goes on: Capitalism brought not only increase in individualistic tendencies, but also an increase in the self-negation and asceticism which had begun with Protestantism. Modern man does not do what he likes to do or what is advantageous for him; 'the man-made world has become his master.' He is isolated because his 'interpersonal relationships' are not governed by 'love' but by the rules of the market. 'Man does not only sell commodities, he sells himself and feels himself to be a commodity....If there is no use for the quality a person offers, he has none; just as an unsalable commodity is valueless though it might have its use value.' That explains the immense amounts of 'social anxiety' in our society; 'the self-confidence, the feeling of self, is merely an indication of what others think of a person.' Monopolistic capitalism brings this development to a maximum. The individual becomes a nothing and the only counterbalance which society can offer to him is the fact that there are always people who are still more of a nothing (for example, wife and children for the proletarian man). Fromm gives a good description of the prodigious cutting out of every individual tendency not only in production but also in consumption. The individual cannot do anything else than develop the 'mechanisms of escape.' The first of these 'escapes' is 'authoritarianism.' Fromm recapitulates the main thoughts of his paper about authority: Somebody outside of the subject determines his self. The subject renounces the functions of his ego and gets the feeling of being sheltered. There is no reference either to sexuality or to the historical development of the feeling of omnipotence. Fromm adds an unsexual theory of sadism and masochism, which phenomena are 'explained' as escapes from isolation; Freud's concept of a 'death instinct' limits research about sado-masochism (with which we would agree). 'In psychoanalytic literature a viewpoint different from Freud's has been presented by Wilhelm Reich and Karen Horney.' 'Although Reich's views are based on concepts of Freud's libido theory, he points out that the masochistic person ultimately seeks pleasure and that the pain incurred is a by-product, not an aim in itself.' ('Although?') 'Horney was the first one to recognize the fundamental relation of masochistic strivings in the neurotic personality, to give a full and detailed description of the masochistic character traits and to account for them theoretically as the outcome of a whole character structure.' Horney stated that the masochist behaves masochistically because he has an oceanic longing for being united with a great unity; the unity with whom he unites seems the greater to him, the smaller he is himself, and that is the reason for the striving for self-humiliation. It is not clear why the feeling of pain should give the conviction of being united with a greater unity; but it is to be admitted that this theory is very similar to that of Fromm. But it certainly cannot be admitted that Freud did not see 'The fundamental relation of masochistic strivings in the neurotic personality,' or that Reich's paper about the masochistic character did not give 'a full and detailed description of the masochistic character-traits' and did not 'account for them as the outcome of a whole character structure.' However, Fromm is of the opinion that a masochistic person may behave masochistically also in sexual life, but that this connection is merely accidental. The aim of the masochist is only 'to get rid of his individual self.' Fromm quickly shows that he does not mean that the masochist just uses the mechanisms of the 'lesser evil' or of doing 'prophylactically actively' what would happen passively anyhow. He simply states that the person who is afraid of feeling insignificant and powerless can overcome this fear by making himself extremely insignificant and powerless. He saves himself from his conflict by 'reducing the individual self to nothing,' by overcoming 'the awareness of the separateness as an individual.' 'The phantasy of suicide is the last hope if all other means have not succeeded in bringing relief of the burden of aloneness.' But people who are pathologically striving for suicide usually are not called masochists but depressives; they mostly do not simply feel alone, but alone with an overwhelming conscience; they have no pleasure as the masochists have; and they have fantasies connected with the idea of 'death' which, it is true, might mean overcoming 'the awareness of separateness of an individual' (268-271).

"With certain remarks Fromm in this connection goes so far as to identify masochistic behavior and neurotic behavior: 'In neurotic strivings one acts from a

compulsion which has essentially a negative character: to escape an unbearable situation.' That is the same idea as Horney had: neurosis as an active adaptation to a certain pathological condition--to anxiety, according to Horney, to isolation, according to Fromm. They do not see that there are neurotic phenomena which are not adaptations at all but the failure of any adaptation, something which happens to the ego from the part of the unconscious drives. If the masochist had no other aim than getting rid of himself, he would strive for an entire lack of feelings rather than for suffering. On the other hand, it is certainly correct to say that the sadist, too, is dependent upon his object, and in a similar way as the masochist is. Fromm calls sado-masochistic relations in which one person needs to be dependent on another person, 'symbiosis.' 'Symbiosis' is often believed to be love; but it is a cover for the inability to love. In a similar way Fascism is believed to be power; but actually it is a reaction-formation against the feeling of powerlessness. 'In a psychological sense the lust for power is not rooted in strength but in weakness.' The striving for domineering is not identical with potency; 'these two qualities are mutually exclusive.' Instead of a full sado-masochism some persons develop the longing for a 'magic helper' who would be able to bring the necessary supplies. That becomes especially clear in the psychoanalytic cure, where the longing for the magic helper is called 'transference.' 'The relationship looks like love; it is often accompanied by sexual desires; yet it is essentially a relationship to the personified magic helper.' And if transference is no longer sexual, the oedipus complex cannot be sexual either. 'Although the phenomenon of sexual attraction between parents and children does exist and although conflicts arising from it sometimes constitute part of the neurotic development, neither the sexual attraction nor the resulting conflict are essential in the fixation of children on their parents...When the parents, acting as the agents of society, start to suppress the child's spontaneity and independence, the growing child feels more and more unable to stand on its own feet; it, therefore, seeks for the magic helper, and often makes the parents the personification of him,' which then is called oedipus complex. And if 'oedipus complex' is interpreted in this sense, Fromm agrees that it is the nucleus of all neuroses: 'The neurotic person is the one who has not given up fighting against complete submission but who at the same time has remained bound to the figure of the magic helper....Neurosis is always to be understood as an attempt, and essentially an unsuccessful one, to solve the conflict between their basic dependency and the quest of freedom.' It is regrettable that Fromm could not resist the temptation to write accessorially a theory of neurosis in a book with quite different aims. It seems that Freud's theory still is more in accordance with the facts" (271-272).

"The second escape mechanism is 'destructiveness.' One wonders whether sadism and masochism are not 'destructive.' But Fromm defines the difference which he has in mind. Sadism and masochism aim at 'symbiosis,' destructiveness and 'elimination of the object.' The third escape mechanism is 'automaton conformity.' 'This particular mechanism is the solution that the majority of normal individuals find in modern society. To put it briefly, the individual ceases to be himself; he adopts entirely the kind of personality offered to him by cultural patterns. On this basis Fromm attempts to explain the 'psychology of Nazism,' the psychological ground being different in different classes but always based on the effectiveness of 'mechanisms of escape.'" (272).

"The last chapter, 'Freedom and Spontaneity,' seems the weakest of the book. 'Positive freedom consists in the spontaneous activity of the total integrated personality.' But Fromm cannot say much more about this than that his spontaneous activity has to be achieved through love and creative work. The tendency toward his spontaneous activity (probably in contrast to Freud's 'instincts') is innate to everybody and biologically determined. It is suppressed today, but it cannot be suppressed entirely. Even today there are many hopeful glimpses of originality and creative work, namely, in artists and in children. 'Love is the foremost component of such spontaneity,' love as distinguished from 'symbiosis;' and 'spontaneous ideals' as distinguished from foreign and suppressive pseudo-ideals. Freud is reproached again for not having distinguished between the two in his conception of 'superego.' Love and spontaneous creative work are inclined to bring



'human happiness,' which is something else than 'subjective experience of pleasure.' Fromm attempts to define the differences between 'happiness' and 'subjective experience of pleasure' remain absolutely insufficient: 'The sensation of pleasure can be the result of a pathological perversion and proves as little about the objective meaning of the experiences as the sweet taste of a poison would prove about its function for the organism.'" (272-273).

A psychoanalytic appendix, 'Character and Social Process,' contains only repetitions of Fromm's criticisms against Freud. It starts the discussion of the relations of character and social process by stating that the same or similar experiences form the same or similar character structures. 'Social character is a character structure which prevails under certain social conditions which means in a certain society or only in a certain class in a given society.' But the 'ideology of a given society is the ~~ideology~~ ideology of its ruling class.' The individual has to adapt himself to given institutions, to given restrictions or to given possibilities of ways of expressing 'love and creative work.' The real dynamics are decisive, not mere 'ideas.' (Example: The socialistic parties in Germany in 1933 had 'ideas' which were not effective because the dynamic character structure of the members of the parties was not in accordance with them.) 'It is Freud's achievement to have shown this, even if his theoretical frame of reference is incorrect.' Freud did not see that the individual is structured by social forces in such a way that he intends to act as given conditions force him to act. The 'lagging behind' of the acquired social character complicates the picture. It remains psychologically effective even if the material basis has changed. Then the feelings of the individuals do not fit the social needs. Mental structuralization is brought about by education. And Fromm tries to discuss the conception of 'education' in general. 'The educational system of any society is determined by this function; therefore, we cannot explain the structure of society or the personality of its members by the educational process; we have to explain the educational system by the necessities resulting from the social and economic structure of a given society.' The most important means of education is the family. Reich has called the family the 'factory of ideologies'; Fromm calls it 'the psychological agent of society.' But innate biological needs cannot be put out of function. The most important of the 'psychological qualities inherent in man that need to be satisfied' is 'the tendency to grow, to develop and realize potentialities which man has developed in the course of history.' (That, according to Fromm is 'innate.' But the erogeneity of certain organs is not!) If these tendencies are repressed, symbiotic and destructive escape mechanisms develop. In full contradiction (or do I only not understand it?) Fromm formulates: 'Although there is no biologically fixed human nature, human nature has a dynamism of its own that constitutes an active factor in the evolution of the social process.' As this dynamism he defines 'a tendency to grow, to develop and to realize potentialities.' This 'dynamism' (but no 'instincts') is innate, but 'we are not yet able to state clearly in psychological terms what the exact nature of this human dynamism is.' We have to acknowledge ~~that~~ its existence to avoid the 'sociological relativism in which man is nothing but a puppet on the strings of social circumstances.' 'Metaphysical and biological errors,' which Fromm puts under the same heading, result, if these 'innate forces' 'are not correctly evaluated.' The suppressed instincts come back with Fromm in a distorted form as a mystical 'innate tendency to grow, to develop and to realize potentialities.'" (273-274).

"Fromm summarizes his criticisms of Freud: (1) Freud, according to Fromm, looks upon man as an instinctual entity formed by satisfactions and frustrations, who needs objects out of instinctual demands. 'We believe that man is primarily a social being and not as Freud assumes primarily self-sufficient and only secondarily in need of others.' 'The key problem is that of the ...relatedness of the individual towards the world, not that of satisfaction or frustration of single instinctual desires.' We have already had the opportunity to answer this pseudo-Gestalt criticism: The statement that the bonds between human beings are of an instinctual nature does not mean at all that the individual is a closed entity and develops interpersonal relationships only secondarily. (2) Freud 'mistook the causal relation between erogenous zones and character traits for the reverse of what they really are.' The development and destiny of erogenous zones is dependent on the development



~~...of the~~ of the 'whole human relationship to the parents,' and not vice versa. The behavior is 'rooted in the whole of the character structure,' but no character is to be explained by erogenous zones. Freud's assumption that instinctive energies might be turned ~~into~~ into character attitudes, is called 'mysterious' by Fromm. The clinical facts which prove Freud's assumptions are not even mentioned. Fromm is, like Kardiner, of the erroneous opinion that if ~~he~~ she shows that an 'anal' character is the result of conflicts with the parents, he has contradicted the statement that this character is 'anal.' Instead of studying the interrelation of erogenous zones and object relationships, they think statically and are of the opinion that the insight into the role of object relationships contradicts the importance of erogenous zones. (3) Freud interprets 'all ideal motives in man as a result of something mean.' 'We believe that ideals like truth, justice, freedom... can be genuine strivings.' We believe that such a statement shows a misunderstanding of psychoanalysis and a rejection of the very materialistic advantages of psychoanalysis, which has shown that all these ideals are not 'genuine strivings,' but are formed out of biological needs by socially determined experiences. (4) Freud neglects 'the differentiation between psychological phenomena of want and those of abundance.' He thinks that man is lazy and obeys a 'nirvana principle'; only outer needs enforce actions. But Fromm states that 'free and spontaneous acts are always phenomena of abundance.' With which idea we return from a clear-cut materialistic basis again to an idealistic 'vital force' which urges man to act and which is called by Fromm 'need to growth and development.' Freud ~~has~~ certainly not neglected the possibility of 'acts of abundance'; he actually saw in the prolonged childhood of man, which gives the possibility of postponement of certain struggles for life, one of the prerequisites for the development of culture. But he stated correctly that such phenomena are secondary, and that in the last analysis only tensions, i.e., needs and dissatisfactions, are the driving forces. Fromm is consistent enough to attack even the way in which psychoanalysis studies sex. 'Not only did Freud omit phenomena of abundance, but he also had a limited understanding of the phenomena to which he paid so ~~much~~ much attention, sex.... The sexual drive as a phenomenon of abundance, the sexual pleasure as spontaneous joy, the essence of which is not negative relief from tension' (what else?) 'had no place in his psychology.' It is surprising that the summaries with which Fromm describes his point of view can be wholeheartedly accepted. He states: '...that man reacts to changed external situations by changes in himself, and that these psychological factors in their turn help in molding the economic and social process. Economic forces are effective but they must be understood not as psychological motivations but as objective conditions; psychological forces are effective, but they must be understood as historically conditioned themselves.' And: 'Social conditions influence ideological phenomena through the medium of character; character, on the other hand, is not the result of passive adaptation to social conditions but of a dynamic adaptation on the basis of elements that either are biologically inherent in human nature or have become inherent as a result of historic evolution.! It would have been advantageous for Fromm and his book if he had actually been guided by these principles and had not contradicted them so often. It is not to be understood why an idealistic tendency to grow and to develop should be regarded as 'biological inherent in human nature,' and sexual partial instincts should not.' (274-276).

"The insight into the social importance of the 'wish to belong' and the 'fear of isolation'--in customary psychoanalytic terminology, of the 'narcissistic need' and the 'fear of loss of love'--would give opportunity for the discussion of important psychoanalytic problems which certainly cannot be solved here. I only want to give a hint of what they are: (1) The relation of the fear of being isolated to castration fear. What Freud called 'fear of loss of love,' and which would be better called 'fear of losing necessary narcissistic supplies,' is often used to hide a deeper repressed castration anxiety. But there is no doubt that this hiding distorts in a regressive way, and that an original 'fear of being abandoned' is a fear of the infant, and a more archaic one than castration fear is. It makes its appearance again in all states of society which promote regressions. (2) The relation between the 'longing to belong' and the ideas of eating and of being



eaten, of diffusion, of losing one's own self. Under certain circumstances the longing turns into anxiety. This is not investigated, not even mentioned by Fromm. It cannot be understood as long as the sexual nature of the involved phenomena is denied. Longing for and fear of fusion are related to each other in the same way as sexual longing and sexual fears are related to each other" (276).

"To return to Fromm's book: Does our review mean that everything which is good in it is not new, and everything which is new is not good? It seems we have to answer: Yes. We showed ^{in a previous section of the paper, not included here} that the essential psychological theses of Fromm were known beforehand. And we hope to have shown that Fromm's criticisms of psychoanalysis, which are new, are not only incorrect but befog the issues, that is, deny just those aspects of psychoanalysis which would bring the most valuable applications to sociology. In this respect Fromm's book in general can be looked upon in the same way as Kardiner's and Horney's writings. For the purpose of avoiding and correcting mistakes which psychoanalysis has admittedly made, they abandon psychoanalysis altogether instead of applying it in a better way. On the other hand, we will not do injustice to certain values of Fromm's book. We have to admit: there is a difference between knowing ~~and~~ something in principle, and the elaboration of the real and concrete effectiveness of these principles under certain cultural conditions, which Fromm has done for the sixteenth century and for the present. There are not many sociological books written from the point of view of psychoanalysis, and we have to be grateful for every contribution. But for the same reason we have to be strict and have to ask for an application of a correct psychoanalysis to a correct sociology. Fromm's psychoanalysis is certainly not correct. And even his sociology tends to glide into idealism and overlooks certain basic facts" (277).

