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## Interview with Mike Wallace

Erich Fromm  
(1958b-e)

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WALLACE: This is Dr. Erich Fromm, one of the most influential psychoanalysts in the world, a man whose work has been hailed as a significant step forward from the theories of Sigmund Freud. Recently Dr. Fromm said: „There has never been a better society than in the United States in 1958.“ But, he added: „If the United States goes on in the direction it is now taking, it is in serious danger of destroying itself.“ We'll find out why in a moment.

ANNOUNCER: The Mike Wallace Interview, presented by the American Broadcasting Company in association with the Fund for the Republic, brings you a special television series discussing the problems of survival and freedom in America.

WALLACE: Good evening, I'm Mike Wallace ... In recent weeks we've been discussing the problems of a free society and what it must do to survive. Tonight we'll try to measure the impact of our free society on us as individuals and whether we're as happy as we like to think we are, or as free to think and to feel. Our guest is Dr. Erich Fromm, a psychoanalyst and social critic who is internationally renowned for his studies of men and their search for freedom.

Dr. Fromm, first let me ask you this. From different quarters of the world the United States has been criticized as a materialistic society, even a shallow society. Yet only recently you said: „There has never been a better society than in the United States in 1958.“ What did you mean by that? {04}

FROMM: Let me first say a word about this criticism of the United States by Europeans and people of other countries. I think they have no particularly good reason to criticize the United States, because the phenomena they criticize are aspects of our modern industrialized culture. The United States, having no feudal remnants, is just a little bit more advanced, while some of the virtues which European nations have preserved are the last remnants of feudalism. After all, feudalism has its virtues, too. To come specifically to your question, if I say there has never been a better society I mean it in a relative sense. The history of man so far is nothing to brag about, but the United States has a society with greater wealth for all than any society before, a society of greater mobility, of lack of oppression, of tremendous increase in the spread of thought, music, art. Beyond that,



I would say we have people in our society with a remarkable amount of good-will, human kindness, fairness, and energy. All this would certainly justify the statement I made which you quoted.

WALLACE: All right, then, justify, if you will, your later statement, which apparently contradicts the first. You also said, just this week, „If the United States goes on in the direction it is taking, it is in serious danger of destroying itself.“ How? In what ways?

FROMM: It sounds paradoxical, but we have seen many societies that have developed in one direction and then are so proud of the problems they have solved that they don't see the defects and dangers which have arisen after they have solved the problems of the previous century. You might say it is a kind of Maginot Line psychology--fighting the next war in terms of the previous war. I would say the dangers we are confronted with are no longer the dangers of the nineteenth century. We have solved most of these. But we have new ones. For instance, to speak generally, in the process of producing more and consuming more we have transformed--or are in the process of transforming--means into ends. {05} Once, more production was a means for more consumption and more consumption was a means for a more dignified, richer human life for the individual. Today, I am afraid, production and consumption have become ends in themselves. We produce and consume more and more, and if we ask „why,“ „what for“ we don't quite know the answer.

WALLACE: And so, in a sense, we are losing ourselves as human beings?

FROMM: Exactly. We are losing the end for which all this effort should be the means and was once meant to be the means. I can give you an example. We try to save time and are very eager and proud when we have saved time. But what do we do with it? We are afraid and embarrassed with all this free time on our hands and we try to kill it. Nevertheless saving time has become an end in itself. There is another aspect to this general question which I would like to formulate by quoting Emerson, who said a hundred years ago: „Things are in the saddle and ride mankind.“ What Emerson meant was that while we are so eager to produce more and more things we are in the process of transforming ourselves into things. While we make things, we become the prisoners of things; while we create circumstances, we become the prisoners of circumstances; while we pretend that we control our society, we eventually become the prisoners of the very circumstances which we create and which have become our gods. I mean this quite literally. It is the same thing that the prophets of the Old Testament called idolatry--worship of the products of your own hands. You don't experience yourself as a creator of things any more. Things become your idols. I think we are experiencing this today, without being aware of it.

WALLACE: Let me ask you about man in his various pursuits. First of all, how do you regard man in relationship to his work? {06}

FROMM: I think if you ask most people whether they like their work they will say „yes“ consciously. But if you probe into their dreams and how they feel in the evening or



when they come home from work, I think you will find many millions of Americans who really hate their work, who hate the boss, the competitors, the customers, everybody.

WALLACE: Why?

FROMM: Because they sense that they spend the best of their energy--eight hours a day--for things, and in a way that is not meaningful for them.

WALLACE: You say „meaningful.“

FROMM: By „meaningful“ I mean that they have no real relatedness to what they are doing, because they are doing it only in order to make money and that is not enough to satisfy the spending of one's best life energy.

WALLACE: In our social relationships--in our feelings toward our neighbors, our friends, and our business associates--what is happening to us?

FROMM: Again I think we meet a peculiar phenomenon. Consciously everybody speaks about „togetherness“ today. We all feel consciously very friendly, we smile, we have many friends. And yet I think most of us are actually very lonely. Underneath we feel anxious, we feel isolated, our friendliness is a kind of superficial friendliness among people who are in the same boat and actually are lonely and frightened. While we talk a great deal about friendship and friendliness, we are at the same time afraid to be closer to each other, and we cover up this feeling by a kind of superficial camaraderie, but not by any deep and intense feeling.

WALLACE: In your book, *The Sane Society*, you write at some length about the „marketing orientation,“ and how it makes a man less than he can or should be. {07}

FROMM: This has to do with the point I mentioned before, that we have transformed ourselves into things. We meet each other as things would meet each other on the market--eager to exchange themselves, with a profit. Could I give you a concrete example? It is not entirely realistic, as you will see. Let us assume that a handbag in a department store could think and feel. There is one beautiful handbag there but because of the recession, let's say, it hasn't been sold. If that handbag could feel like modern man, it would have a terrific feeling of inferiority because it would think that because it hasn't been sold it has no value. To translate that into more direct terms, I would say that the sense of value of most of us depends on our salability on the personality market--we are called successful if we have sold ourselves.

WALLACE: And success should be what instead of that kind of salability?

FROMM: Success should be the satisfaction of work well done, work useful, work meaningful.



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WALLACE: Let's go to politics. What is happening to man in relation to his politics? At the same time, as a corollary, without becoming specific, I would like to ask you about our political leaders...

FROMM: I am a Democrat, so that is a different topic. We find a peculiar phenomenon in this area; namely, that we talk a lot about politics, we read about politics, but if you look at the results of a number of studies we are really concerned only with private affairs. Most Americans, ninety per cent, are concerned with health, money, family problems. They are not concerned with matters of society or with politics... You might ask what I mean by „concerned.“ I mean the kind of thing over which you lose some hours of sleep.

WALLACE: You're not suggesting that there is anything wrong with being concerned over health, family affairs, money affairs. This sounds perfectly natural. {08}

FROMM: It sounds perfectly natural to us. It might not sound so natural to someone else. It is always „my“ and „me“ and „my family“ and „my money“ and „my car“ rather than the expression as a reality of my relatedness to others, my solidarity with others, my sense of responsibility for what happens to me and the rest of the world and the rest of the people in this country.

WALLACE: When we talk about men, are we talking about United States man and woman, or Western man, or world man?

FROMM: There is man as such. I would say-although this is not a very popular concept - there is such a thing as human nature in general. There is such a thing as a basic condition of human existence. But this human nature never appears in itself; it always appears as molded by a particular culture or society. The strange thing is that most societies assume naively that the way they are is human nature.

WALLACE: You say that you are a Democrat, and I don't want to hear about that particularly. I am talking about our political leaders of whatever political hue.

FROMM: I would say, without being facetious, that what we miss are men who have convictions, an emotion in which these convictions are rooted, and a deep penetration of the problems of society -ours or others--and of the forces which operate within them.

WALLACE: And you feel we miss them on both sides of the political fence?

FROMM: Oh yes, in this respect I am quite neutral. I think we miss them on both sides.

WALLACE: How do you account for it, or are you accounting for it in our discussion?

FROMM: For the same reason we talked about a minute ago -that we are so concerned with {09} instrumentalities that we are not sufficiently concerned with discovering or uncovering the essence, the causes, the forces which are underneath the surface.



WALLACE: Let's talk now about man in relation to his intellectual development. Aldous Huxley, who was our guest last week on this program, has written a series of articles called „Enemies of Freedom“ which will shortly be appearing in *Newsday*, a Long Island newspaper. He says that our entertainments, particularly television, are robbing Americans of their capacity to think, to discriminate. Do you agree?

FROMM: I agree wholeheartedly.

WALLACE: Do you wish to elaborate?

FROMM: I think Mr. Huxley has done a very good job of elaborating on this and I just agree.

WALLACE: What of man in relationship to love and marriage? Where are we getting off the track?

FROMM: We talk a lot about marriage and about love. We have courses in marriage and I think we might have some courses on love, because there are courses on everything. Indeed, the wish to love is probably the deepest wish and longing in every man; it is part of human nature and of man. But I think we have the wrong concept of love, as expressed in the phrase „falling in love“--as a sentiment which comes over us. We don't understand that love is an active relatedness, that is not easy to achieve, that it is in fact the most difficult thing to achieve, and that one must take it much more seriously than we do in order to become a master or even a decent apprentice at it. What we consider love is often the kind of thing you read about in newspapers and columns--a kind of smooth cooperating team, a kind of egotism a deux, a kind of friendly relationship between two people who consider their marriage a refuge from aloneness and yet {10} who never make the jump into any intense relatedness with each other.

WALLACE: Religion?

FROMM: Religion is a very sad picture as I see it. Of course many people are very happy about the renaissance of religion which allegedly is going on in the United States now. More people talk about God than a hundred years ago. They go more to the churches than they used to a hundred years ago. But actually they take a word for a reality. Instead of having a religious experience, they just go to church and, if I may be biblical, I am afraid they use the word „God“ in vain.

WALLACE: You say „instead of having a religious experience.“ What is a religious experience?

FROMM: This is indeed a very difficult question to answer and many people would answer it different ways. I would say: to have a sense of „ultimate concern“--to quote Dr. Tillich -for the spiritual values in man, for our love for man, for our reason, for truth, and to experience this development of ourselves as the most -and only -important aim





of life.

WALLACE: You say in *The Sane Society*: „In the nineteenth century the problem was that God was dead. In the twentieth century the problem is that man is dead.“

FROMM: Yes, I think that's true. We make machines that act like men and we try to make men who act like machines--little automatons--but we are not yet aware of it.

WALLACE: May I give you a kind of Rorschach test, Dr. Fromm, by putting some words to you? I would like you to define them, if you will, from the way that we perhaps view them and the way you believe they should be viewed -good and bad words. First, happiness. {11}

FROMM: I would say that what people really mean by happiness is unlimited consumption. We are a society of consumers, we and the whole Western world, more and more. I think if you ask people what their concept of Heaven is, they would say, if they were honest, that it is a big department store with new things every week, all the money to buy them--and maybe a little bit more than the neighbor--and they would go around buying, buying, buying. Actually we are the eternal suckling, the eternal baby who wants the bottle.

WALLACE: And happiness should be ?

FROMM: Happiness should be not an aim in itself but something that accompanies intense relatedness to many things--to man, to nature--a relatedness that does not exclude deep sadness, because one cannot remain sensitive and responsive to the world without often being deeply sad.

WALLACE: „Equality“?

FROMM: Equality? I have the impression that what most people today really mean by equality is sameness, that everybody is equal inasmuch as he is the same, and if he is not the same as everybody else he hasn't quite the right to be equal.

WALLACE: And equality really should be...?

FROMM: As I see it, in the philosophical and religious tradition of the Western world, equality should be, if I can put it theologically, that we are all created in the image of God; and, philosophically, that no man must be the means for the ends of another, that every man is an end in himself and that is the only equality there is.

WALLACE: Let me ask you about a couple of political words: democracy and socialism.

FROMM: I would define democracy, as it is developed today in practice, as consent by the governed, achieved by manipulation and not by force. {12} What I think democracy was once meant to be--and I hope will be--is the active participation and responsibility



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of each citizen in the whole social life and not just being a little cog who is satisfied that he is manipulated in the right way.

WALLACE: And socialism?

FROMM: Socialism is one of those bad words. Why are people afraid of it? I think what most people mean by it is being subject to a governing bureaucracy and materialism in the sense that one only cares for material goods and has no interest in spiritual values. This is, incidentally, a strange thing, because if that is socialism we are approaching it very rapidly. We are more and more bureaucratically run in our society, and while we believe in spiritual values and principles and talk about them on Sundays, actually our main interests are production and consumption, in having more things. Besides that, the word socialism is connected with Hitler's nazism and Stalin's communism, which in reality have nothing to do with socialism. Russia is the most reactionary, conservative, autocratic society there is in Europe. The words Marxism and socialism are chosen by them as a very convenient symbol but I am sure that if Marx had lived in the thirties he would have been shot as an agent of capitalism by Stalin.

WALLACE: From reading your *The Sane Society* I would gather that you are a kind of Socialist.

FROMM: Yes, indeed, I always have been.

WALLACE: The thing I find difficult to understand is that you talk about the individual, about realizing himself, about human dignity, and yet does not socialism demand that the individual put himself at the disposal of the State and thereby lose the very individuality you talk about?

FROMM: Well, I am indeed a Socialist, a Democratic Socialist, for the very reason that my main {13} concern is the individual. I think that Marx shares something with the Old Testament, if you will pardon the comparison, in that everybody talks about it but nobody has read it, or read more than a little bit of it. But if I may answer the question in this way: what socialism meant to Marx was to be radical; he defined it as going to the root and the root is man--to have a society in which man is the supreme purpose and this means the full unfolding of his powers of love and reason.

WALLACE: Dr. Fromm, it would seem that what Karl Marx said his socialism constitutes is beside the point. What does count is what has happened with his socialism. This calls for the government's seizing of land, for an oppressive centralized state that controls practically everything, even the education and the private lives of its citizens. All of this is pretty carefully outlined in the Communist Manifesto. It seems to me that the Soviet Union has done a pretty good job of putting into action what Marx talks about in the Manifesto and has completely done away with the human dignity and human relatedness that you talk about.

FROMM: It has happened again and again in history that an idea has been misused. If



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you think of the Catholic inquisition and what they did, you would say that this was certainly not the teaching of Christ. I don't mean to compare the teaching of Christ to the teaching of Marx. People have a way of quoting a few lines of Marx, quoting certain things and not the whole. You, Mr. Wallace, join in that. This is a great disservice and confirms the propaganda of the Russian claim that they represent Marxist teaching, when they actually represent exactly the opposite.

WALLACE: Well, now, wait a moment. May I read from the Communist Manifesto: „The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a {14} Communist revolution.“ It seems to me that this undignifies, de-dignifies human freedoms.

FROMM: It is awfully difficult to take one quote and discuss it. I could quote you some sentences from Robespierre, on whom modern democracy is based, and you would find arguments.

WALLACE: Perhaps I should reread my Marx and perhaps I should reread my Erich Fromm. We have just thirty seconds left, Dr. Fromm. Are you pessimistic about what's happened to us?

FROMM: I am worried only in one sense, namely, the danger of war and our possible inability to avoid it. But I am very optimistic, or rather I have faith in our world, in the development of our democracy. I think one thing is necessary: to face reality rather than believe in fiction, and to be aware that we will have vitality only if we are able to fulfill that which is essential to our whole tradition; that is to put man back in the saddle.

WALLACE: Thanks so much, Dr. Fromm, for taking this time to come and talk with us... Whether or not one agrees with his solution, Dr. Erich Fromm points to a pressing problem. As he sees it, America tends to worship machines instead of men. We seem to prefer success to sanity. A society that is politically free, says Dr. Fromm, should guard against this kind of spiritual enslavement.