



Introduction to Steps to Being

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Under the alternatives having or being Fromm understands „two fundamental modes of existence, two different kinds of orientation toward self and the world, two different kinds of character structure the respective predominance of which determines the totality of a person’s thinking, feeling, and acting.“ (To Have or to Be, p. 24). If one examines all the possible kinds of orientation in a human-being’s practice of life, then you would come to the conclusion, that in the end, man is oriented in his practice of life either to having mode or to being mode of existence.

What does it mean, that one ultimately is oriented in his/her practice of life to having?

If your life is oriented to the having mode, you determine your self, your existence, your meaning of life, your practice of life by that what you have, want to have and what you can have more of. Now, there is practically nothing that couldn’t become an object of having and wanting to have: all kinds of material things (your own house, money, shares, works of art, books, stamps, coins and other such things, which are partly collected by a „collector’s passion“).

Even other people can also become an object of the having mode of existence. Of course one wouldn’t say that you take possession on another person and regard him/her as your own property. In that respect people are somewhat „more consid-

erate“ and rather talk about caring for others and bearing the responsibility. But it is well known that the person bearing the responsibility also has the right over others at his/her disposal. And this is how children, the handicapped, the elderly, sick and those in need of therapy are taken possession of, viewed as a part of one’s own self, - and woe - the sick gets well again and the child would like to determine itself be itself. Then the determining by the having mode becomes clear.

It’s not enough that also other persons can be „had“. We also determine our practice of life by having virtues and values: We are only interested in having honour, having a reputation, having a certain image, having health, beauty or youthfulness, and when this is no longer possible, we at least want to have the experience or determine ourselves from memories. Even convictions of the political, philosophical view of life and of the religious kind can be acquired as a possession and obstinately defended right to the bitter end. Everything is dependent on the fact as to whether or that one is in possession of the truth or justice is on one’s side.

Literally speaking, everything can be had if a person’s practice of life is oriented towards the having mode. Well noticed, it is not a matter of somebody having something or not, but whether that person hangs his heart on that what he has or not. Even the orientation towards not-having is an ori-



entation of having. Fromm is not an ascetic, and orientation towards being is just not the same as an orientation towards not-having. It's always a matter of question as to which status the having orientation or even the not-having orientation has with respect to determining the meaning of life and determining one's own identity. Whether someone has something in the having mode of existence, or whether someone has something as if he/she would have nothing, is often difficult to distinguish. And yet each one of us can quickly test ourselves by asking the question, what is really valuable to me, and then trying to imagine what would happen to you if this important and valuable thing were to be taken away: would you then lose your footing, and would your life then be meaningless? Then, if you can no longer be selfconfident and sense your intrinsic value, if it's not really worthwhile living and working anymore, then you determine your life by the having orientation: Of having a job, of having children, of having a good reputation, of having more profound insights, of having the better arguments etc.

The person oriented towards having always uses a crutch instead of his/her own feet; he/she uses an external object in order to be, to be something and to be someone; this person is only him/herself as far as having something is concerned. She/He determines his/her subject being by having an object; therefore, he is had by the object.

The metaphor of the crutches replacing one's feet at the same time illustrates what is meant by orientation to being. Just as man has the physical ability to stand by himself, which he can replace in an emergency by crutches, he also has the psychic abilities to stand by himself: his ability to love, his ability to reason and his ability to be productively active. But man also has the possibility to replace his own psychic forces by an orientation to having, so that the ability to love, to reason and to be productively active depends on the possession of those objects of having to which someone may attach his/her heart.

Love, reason and productive activeness are psychic forces, they are a person's own powers

which only develop and grow to the extent to which they are practised; they can't be consumed, bought or acquired like the objects of having can be; they can only be practised, exercised, dared and used. Unlike the objects of having which are used to the extent to which they are needed, love, reason and productive activeness are to be used so that they grow and multiply when they are shared and used.

The being mode of existence always means that his/her meaning of life is oriented by his/her own psychic forces by perceiving the unknown and foreign things within himself and in the outside world as his own, getting to know them, acquiring them and hence attaining a more greater and more inclusive relatedness to himself, and to the environment.

The question arises - how is such an orientation towards being acquired? When Erich Fromm was writing the manuscript to the book *To Have or to Be?*, he devoted an entire chapter to this question consisting of 120 manuscript pages. He described the following „Steps to Being“: the „awareness of the bodily and psychical state“, „concentrating on one's self“, „meditating“ and „self-analysis“. When he had finished writing the rough draft, he removed it from the book and replaced with a chapter on the new man and new society. In this chapter he tried to demonstrate in detail in what way the spiritual, religious and above all the socio-economic conductance and structures had to be changed, should each individual in his efforts have the chance to come from an orientation towards having to an orientation towards being.

Why did Fromm take out the chapter on the „Steps to Being“ again and replace it? He did this because he thought that his book could be misunderstood to the effect that it were only a matter of everyone seeking his/her salvation of the soul in self-experience, self-development and self-analysis, and that in this way the new society oriented towards being would be shown. Fromm's fear was justified as „New Age“ was drastically taking the lead in front of his eyes.

Fromm's starting point in *To Have or to Be?* is



the observation that orientation towards having is today a great phenomenon having its footing in the economic and social conditions of a society which has too much and as a consequence can succumb to temptation to define itself by having. In the structural conditions of the present economy, the present organization of work and the present co-existence, the roots for the abundant loss of one's own psychic forces can be found.

If the roots for the disastrous development of individual man are at all to be found in the determined socio-economic fate of life in today's people, then you also should take care of the roots first and understand individual man as always having been socialized. This is why Fromm replaced his chapter on the „Step of Being“ with his suggestions for a structural change. And this is why the individual efforts on individual persons stemming from an orientation towards being can only be fraught with meaning, when they, at the same time with efforts for a greater alertness, self-knowledge and an encompassing self-experience, change the personal structural requirements, - i.e. changing the conductance of the personal, socio-economic practice of life, so that in professional deeds, in organizing one's own work, in the political and social experi-

ence of the self, one's own psychic forces of reason, love and productive activeness can indeed be experienced and can grow by means of practice.

Our efforts for self-experience and self-development, for a concept of self and the world that really corresponds to the inner and outer reality is connected to the freedom of our socio-economic practice of life. Because, „only to the degree that the practice of life is freed from its contradictions and its irrationality can the map correspond to reality.“ (*To Have or to Be?*, p. 137.) These insights should accompany us when the following sections are read aloud from the chapter „Steps to Being“, which has up till now not been published.

It's now understandable why Fromm didn't publish that chapter, but it will be very much missed by someone who starts to suffer from his own orientation towards having and makes his way to the being mode of existence, and who, like Fromm himself, when he was writing the manuscript, asks the question: What are all the possible concrete steps to strengthen one's orientation to being?