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"WHOLLY AWAKE AND FULLY ALIVE" Margit Norell. Ph D.

Personal thoughts on some of Erich Fromm's contributions to psychoanalytic theory

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To me these words, quoted from Fromm, better than any other words I know express the essential truth about his own personality and life. They also express the ultimate aim of psychoanalysis - although we seldom come even close to it.

To be wholly awake and fully alive is not to HAVE knowledge nor even to HAVE love, but belongs to the mode of being, according to Fromm. In TO HAVE OR TO BE (p.61) he quotes from Master Eckhart: "Love has to do with desire and purpose, whereas knowledge is no particular thought, but rather it peels off all (coverings) and is disinterested and runs naked to God, until it touches him and grasps him." The way to being is penetration through the surface and insight into reality. In this direction of his thinking and inner experience Fromm no doubt belongs in the tradition of the mystics.

But the path of psychoanalysis is the path through selfknowledge, which is something much more concrete, because it goes the whole way back to our early experiences, feelings and needs. Although my main orientation is that of Object-Relations theory as represented by Fairbairn, Winnicott and Guntrip, I feel that as a psychoanalyst I have learnt very much from Fromm and have much to thank him for.

Some time ago one of my patients said: "I feel I have a choice now and that I have the responsibility to make choices - I can choose what I feel is more right or I can choose in the wrong direction. To free our patients for this choice is our task as psychoanalysts. Fromm has told us what the freedom to choose really means. Let me quote from THE HEART OF MAN (p. 173 ff). "The argument for the view that man has no freedom to choose the better as against the worse is to some considerable extent based on the fact, that one looks usually at the

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LAST decision in a chain of events, and not at the first or second ones. .... Our capacity to choose changes constantly with our practice of life. The longer we continue to make the wrong decisions, the more our heart hardens; the more often we make the right decision, the more our heart softens - or better perhaps becomes alive. ..... In fact, there is no such thing as "freedom" except as a word and an abstract concept. There is only one reality; the ACT of freeing ourselves in the process of making choices. ..... Most people fail, because they do not wake up and see, when they stand at a fork in the road and have to decide. They are not aware, when life asks them a question, and when they still have alternative answers. Then with each step along the wrong road it becomes increasingly difficult for them to admit, that they ARE on the wrong road, often only because they have to admit, that they must go back to the first wrong turn, and must accept the fact, that they have wasted energy and time."

As analysts we sometimes see, that it can take years for a patient to go back to that earliest fork in life, where more or less unconsciously a disastrous choice was made and when - as can be the case - that choice seemed to be in favour of life and also actually may have been so from the point of psychic survival.

After several years of analysis, when more or less fragmented homosexual relationships no longer made any sense to him one of my male homosexual patients was complaining about having no capacity for deeper relationships and then had the following dream: He was on one of the Danish islands. Together with him was a young male friend, holding his arm around my patients shoulders and pointing out on a map the sunny beaches of that island. Then the scene in the dream changed and my patient was standing alone outside the Tower of London. As he stood there watching, a black coffin came flying through the air towards him. He woke up with the feeling of having no way out and in what he descibed as a state of total nothingness and desolation.

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In the following session, as we talked about the dream and the Tower as the symbol of isolation and imprisonment which leads to death, it seemed as if my patient for the first time quite clearly could grasp and express the great emotional poverty of his early childhood, the desperate flight from this poverty - and as a consequence his holding on to the few elements of something which cou attract the small boy to his father. This was what later, with the addition of many fantasy elements - including fantasies also about his mother - had led him to homosexuality.

The experience of total nothingness and desolation can never give a child a real possibility to choose - and it can not even be fully experienced. But now in therapy, when my patient was able to experience this early situation of impossible choices, among other things it meant to him a breakthrough to a more realistic way of experiencing real people, first men and later also women. In his case this was the long journey he had to make back in order fully to experience that separateness which Fromm sees as the one condition for experiencing love.

Fortunately not every psychoanalysis includes those kinds of impossible early choice. But I feel that when Fromm speaks of loneliness and the process of individuation he comes close to these realities. He does this also when speaking of incestuous ties and the oralreceptive orientation.

Early in his analysis the patient I was just speaking of had a dream in which he was going up a flight of stairs where on every step a dish of food was placed As he looked up, he saw, that the stairs led nowhere. I felt, as you will understand, a great relief when listening to this dream - because if the stairs had led somewhere, I would have had little hope of being of any help to him. The only fairly gratifying part of his early mother-relationship was a relatively long period of breastfeeding, so no wonder there was a strong oral - receptive trend in him.

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Fromm shares the position of Object-Relations theory - and even preceded it - when he states, as in THE HEART OF MAN in the chapter on incestuous ties (p.119) "This pre-Oedipal attachment of boys and girls to their mother, which is qualitatively different from the Oedipal attachment of boys to their mother is in my experience by far the more important phenomenon." And "man is only fully born, and thus free to move forward and to become himself, to the degree to which he liberates himself from all forms of incestuous fixation." (p. 133) This is for Fromm the path of individuation - separation and to brotherhood. And here I would like to quote one of Fromm`s close friends, the late David Schecter, who in an unpublished paper of Jan. 79 writes: "Fromm regarded the patient`s predicament as arising from a thwarting of his natural growth and development." ..... "The child in this constricted position will retreat to familiar territory and gratifications, in which there is a sense of actual or promised fulfillment and a sense of security." ..... This familiar territory might be "mother`s womb, breast, lap, hand or father`s command." ..... "Fromm saw the issue in interpersonal terms, for instance between infant and mother and later with significant others - a presage of Object-Relations theory."

When I first read THE FORGOTTEN LANGUAGE in the beginning of the fifties, what Fromm says there began to open up to me the full implications of the creativity of the dreaming process, its capacity to bring out the whole range of repressed psychic experiences and what we in depth intuitively know. "We are not only less reasonable and less decent in our dreams but we are also more intelligent, wiser and capable of better judgement when we are asleep than when we are awake" (p.33), says Fromm. "In sleep-existence there is no `as if`; the person IS present." (p. 31) Just as Josef in his dream - mediated to us through the Old Testament - "saw his own sheaf arise and stand upright while the sheaves of his eleven brothers stood round about and made obeisance to his sheaf", - we al-

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have dreams which can reflect both our passionate ambition and our true gifts.

In a late German TV-interview of June 77 Fromm repeats his belief that all of us have a much deeper knowledge than we are conscious of and that our dreams express the insights we deny when awake. "At least as often as dreams are wishfulfilments, and I believe more often, dreams are insights, that do not fit into the conscious images we have", Fromm says in this interview. This can be specially true where parents are concerned or people in authority or the emperor in Andersen's story, who had no clothes, Fromm continues. And sometimes the sudden intuitive insight when someone sees something of the truth, can turn a Saul into a Paul. But Saul was always a Paul, otherwise he could not become one. Only he was not conscious of it, it was repressed.

In some small villages high up in the rain-forests of Malaya a people have rather recently become known, to whom the dream language is not a forgotten language.x) On the contrary the nuclear Senoi family meet every morning at breakfast to share and discuss their dreams, including those of their small children. If a dream is not fully understood by the family it will be discussed further at a second breakfast together with the extended family.

Not to give in to a frightening beast when you meet it in a dream, but to stop and try to confront it, is one of the recommendations the older Senoi give to their children. Apart from the to me questionable method of manipulating ones dreams there is still a deep wisdom in the knowledge that our dreams often are an experimental stage of practice for what then becomes possible to carry out in life.

To accept pleasurable dreams and for instance follow an erotic dream to its climax without consideration for any taboos which could check or correct the course is another principle.

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x) Kilton Stewart: Dream Theory in Malaya
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The Senoi are also fully aware of the fact that a hostile or frightening dreamfigure often expresses a corresponding tendency in the dreamer's own personality. They therefore say that a dream-enemy who is killed will immediately rise again as a friend or a servant.

If the Senoi dream that a friend behaves in a hostile way towards them, they tactfully tell it to the person concerned and in this way give him the opportunity to change.

Those anthropologists who have closely studied the Senoi have all agreed that they are an exceptionally peaceful people. They are never seen in severe conflicts, criminal acts of violence are unknown among them and not a single act of this kind is remembered in the 200 - 300 years covered by their oral tradition. The anthropologists describe this community as the most democratic that is known in the literature. Also the Senoi are exceptionally free from mental disturbances and their common state of health is a great deal better than what is usual among groups who live under comparable circumstances.

To me the importance the Senoi give to their dreams and the way they see the dream language has a great deal in common with and confirm Fromm's theory of dreams. We could certainly also learn from them how meaningful it would be to bring "the forgotten language" into shared and valued use again.

In the therapeutic process dreams often bring us deeper and deeper into those parts of our personality and assets which once had to be sacrificed in order for us to survive in those early relationships, without which we had not been able to develop as human beings. What I refer to is for instance what Interpersonal Theory names not - me experiences. They can block the development of very vital parts of our personality.

A young woman patient of mine, sensitive and with an unusually bright intellect, was the oldest of 3 siblings and was at the age of 13 finally left by her mother

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to her father together with her two younger siblings. The reason given later by the mother was that she feared her husbands violence so much. The father was an intellectual man who opened up to his daughter the world of thinking and culture. He expected and encouraged her to study but he easily felt threatened and could never allow her to question anything he said, or that she in her thinking went outside the domains he controlled with his knowledge. And he often characterized her as stupid, when she did not know something she had never heard about, or when she questioned his way of argumentation. Decisive aspects of this patients therapy have been related to this situation, as well as to her mother's fear of depth in life and in her feeling and thinking.

In one dream the patient is walking towards a small lovely looking lake. As she comes closer she sees that the whole lake is covered with a carpet and the water underneath is only noticeable through small heavings along the shores. On the farther end of the lake a women is moving on it holding a vacuum-cleaner.

In another dream my patient sees some dark, frightening animal lying in a cave or underneath her bathtub. She quiets it through giving it small slates with inscriptions, something like hieroglyphics.

In a third dream she is waiting for some pretentious contest to take place in the rain on a small meadow. Suddenly the clouds part and she sees the dark sky. A fascinatingly beautiful, brightly shining comet whistles along. It is fantastic, my patient is struck with fascination. She has never seen anything so brigh and beautiful before. She sees the comet distinctly for quite a while, then it disappears from her angle. She turns towards her mother and asks her if she saw the fantastic comet. Her mother seems uninterested and says vaguely 'oh yes' and my patient feels she has probably not seen it. My patient says: "This is a remarkable country - look at the cucumbers growing so lushly". Her mother has a large cucumber under her arm and looks at it with dislike. "They are so difficult to peel when they are that large", she says. My patient gets confused, she had not

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thought of that, maybe the cucumbers were not so good anyhow. Associations among other things led to a storybook in which a family of animals heard about a bright comet nearing the earth and were sure it meant the end of the world.

These dreams picturing her mother, the pretentiousness of her parents intellectual ambitions, her own need for ancient knowledge both in her individual history and that of humanity and her earlier so often denied intense need for clarity in her thinking, and for feeling and sensuality, seem to me well to illustrate the creativity of dreams as Fromm saw it. In other dreams there have been invisible ceilings preventing my patient from moving, feeling and thinking freely and of catastrophes and total aloneness. The need to survive and to deny so much of what she saw going on in her family, because seeing it would have meant unbearable loneliness, were strong formative forces in her childhood. She consequently once pictured herself as a child, in the figure of a small bird with ruffled up feathers and hardly any body left.

This young woman is now studying philosophy and is going through many barriers of fear to be able to recognize and make use of her own very creative way of thinking. After an early marriage, in which she could mainly only look for security, she is at present living alone with her 12 yar old daughter, a gifted child whom she takes good care of.

"The whole range of repressed psychic experiences", does not apply only to the individual in his relation to his personal, early or present experiences, says Fromm, but also to us as members of humanity and of a specific society and group. I am convinced that since Fromm the questions we ask our analysands as we try to find answers to the ever more comprehensive question "who are you?" will for almost every analyst include the essential data about the cultural, social and political background of their childhood. I am also convinced that after Fromm most analysts will for instance much more readily identify in themselves and in their

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analysands the element of boredom which has been inherent in so much of middle-class life and upbringing.

I would like to continue with a quotation from THE ANATOMY OF HUMAN DESTRUCTIVENESS (p. 206), where Fromm brings up the theme of socially repressed impulses and what it means to see and express the truth on this level: "Historically, the same thing happens. Those who told the truth about a particular regime have been exiled, jailed, or killed by those in power whose fury had been aroused. To be sure, the obvious explanation is that they were dangerous to their respective establishments, and that killing them seemed the best way to protect the status quo. This is true enough, but it does not explain the fact that the truth-sayers are so deeply hated, when they do not constitute a real threat to the established order. The reason lies, I believe, in that by speaking the truth they mobilize the resistance of those who repress it. To the latter, the truth is dangerous not only because it can threaten their power but because it shakes their whole conscious system of orientation, deprives them of their rationalizations, and might even force them to act differently. Only those who have experienced the process of becoming aware of important impulses that were repressed know the earthquake-like sense of bewilderment and confusion that occurs as a result. Not all people are willing to risk this adventure, least of all those who profit, at least for the moment, from being blind."

"What can man do to cope with the fright inherent in his existence", Fromm asks in THE HEART OF MAN (p. 148 ff). "What can man do to find a harmony to liberate him from the torture of aloneness, and to permit him to be at home in the world, to find a sense of unity? ..... The first answer to the quest to transcend separateness and to achieve unity I call the REGRESSIVE answer. If man wants to find unity, if he wants to be freed from the fright of loneliness and uncertainty, he can try to return to where he came from - to nature, to animal life, or to his ancestors. He can try to do away with that which makes him human and yet

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tortures him: his reason and selfawareness: It seems that for hundreds of thousands of years man tried just that. ..... The alternative to the regressive, archaic solution to the problem of human existence, to the burden of being man, is the PROGRESSIVE SOLUTION, that of finding a new harmony not by regression but by the full development of all HUMAN forces, of the humanity within oneself."

One of Fromm's main contributions to psychoanalysis is no doubt his careful analysis of the different types of benign and malignant aggression. I would finally like to stop for a moment with one aspect of this large topic, with the function of aggression as defense against anxiety, because I feel we encounter this very often in our analytic work. Fromm writes in THE ANATOMY OF HUMAN DESTRUCTIONESS (p. 198). "There are many ways to get rid of fright and anxiety, such as the use of drugs, sexual arousal, sleep, and the company of others. One of the most effective ways of getting rid of anxiety is to become aggressive. When a person can get out of the passive state of fright and begin to attack, the painful nature of fright disappears." We prefer to feel strong and aggressive instead of weak and helpless. We also cover up and ward off our innermost needs for contact and trust with aggression, as Harry Guntrip says.

The aggression we as therapists encounter from our patients is in my experience to a large part of this quality. We tend to speak a lot about aggression in the transference and often we do not clearly distinguish this from the defensive aggression, Fromm here and in other places points out.

A patient of mine, a young woman, who had experienced a very traumatic and dramatic situation shortly before her third birthday, which had finally planted in her a deep distrust of her parents and in every human being, reacted with intense aggression and by closing herself off from me, every time we came close to some new aspect of this experience. True, there was a strong transferential hate and a fear of repetion, but more important still was the intense defensive

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aggression when we came close to what the small girl had suffered of unbearable fear, loneliness and the psychic loss of both her parents. What she most deeply warded off was also intense sorrow.

In a last interview for German TV, slightly more than 24 hours before his death Fromm once more in his clear and straightforward way puts before us what he feels man could be if he gives up the illusion of being happy in our present consumer society: man could become conscious of himself and know himself - also his unconscious, says Fromm. This does not mean that he should be analyzed, but man could know much more about what he truly feels if he would not so often give in to demands to feel what he is told he ought to feel.

The last words of the interview concern themselves with how state and religion together so often have prevented man from using his own powers and experiencing himself as active in the world. They have brought man into obedience, says Fromm, through arousing his fear and giving him guiltfeelings - guiltfeelings which then make it possible for the religious authorities or the State to make man dependent on them through the absolution they alone have the power to give. - These were Dr Fromm's last words in public and I feel they are a testament that obliges us all.

I would like to close with a short vignette: When I in November 1973 went to see Dr Fromm in Locarno, because I did not know what to do in a for me personally difficult situation, Fromm among other things answered me through telling a different story of how Moses led the people of Israel through the Red Sea: Moses went first and as he proceeded step by step the waters gave way and the people could follow. In his fearless and faithful searching for the truth of what the human dilemma and task implies, Fromm was a true follower of Moses. He has opened up to us paths to follow him on and on which to continue his searching, never more needed than to-day.