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Review of Fromm, E., *To Have Or to Be?*

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Erich Fromm, one of the early collaborators of Karen Horney, has written a book in which he eloquently incorporates the basic tenets of Eastern philosophy as they apply to our possession-oriented society. He begins with the observation that Western society is the greatest social experiment ever made to solve the question of whether pleasure can be a satisfactory answer to the problem of human existence. He notes that the experiment has already answered the question in the negative. For the first time in history the physical survival of the human race depends on a radical change of the human heart.

The main thrust of this book is the analysis of the two basic modes of existence: the mode of having and the mode of being. The former is represented by our acquisitive society where one's happiness lies in one's superiority over others, in one's power, and, in Fromm's opinion, in one's capacity to conquer, rob, and kill. In the being mode one's happiness lies in loving, giving, and sharing. Fromm beautifully demonstrates the difference between having and being in various poetic expressions. Tennyson embodied Western philosophy in his description of a flower that was so special he had to pluck it in order to *have* it. Basho's Eastern haiku allowed him to enjoy the flower in its natural habitat without destroying it to make it his own. Modern equations are reduced to the formula: I am

= what I have and what I consume. In the area of learning the having mode is best portrayed by the memorization of facts in order to pass an examination; in the being mode content becomes a part of a person's own individual system of thought, enriching and widening it. Conversing in the being mode is spontaneous. Knowing means to see reality in its nakedness; to penetrate the surface and to strive critically and actively in order to approach truth even more closely.

It is Fromm's deep conviction that we must move from the having mode to the being mode in order to survive. It will be especially interesting to psychoanalysts to note that he draws on a great deal of Freudian theory in support of his viewpoint. The having mode is equated with the anal character. All children, before they reach maturity, go through a phase which Freud designated as the anal-erotic. Freud's equation: money = feces is an implicit, although not intended, criticism of bourgeois society. In Freud's view the predominant orientation toward possession develops in the period before the achievement of full maturity and is pathological if it remains permanent. For Freud, the person exclusively concerned with having and possession is a neurotic, mentally sick person; hence it would follow that the society in which most of the members are anal characters is a sick society.



Fromm draws on the four Noble Truths of Buddha when he conjectures that we can change if these conditions exist: we are aware of our suffering; we recognize the origin of our ill being; we recognize there is a way of overcoming our ill being; we follow new norms. Again, Freud's thinking contributes significantly here. Freud noted that patients came into treatment because they suffered and were aware of it. Patients were now aware *of what* they suffered *from*. The psychoanalyst's usual first task is to help patients give up their illusions about their suffering and learn what their ill being really consists of. The therapist has to help make patients aware of the *causes* of their ill being. The next step is to provide insight that their illness can be cured, provided the causes are done away with. Fromm suggests carrying this process a step further—insight alone is not enough. We must work on the insights and actively strive to overcome the acquisitive style of life. Today one finds the marketing character, which is based on experiencing oneself as a commodity, the predominance of the cerebral along with underdevelopment of the emotional sphere. Hopefully, it is possible to begin productive activity with people who animate whatever they touch, who give birth to their own faculties and bring life to other persons and to things. Likewise, in Freud's psychoanalysis the main achievement is to understand the discrepancy between behavior and character, between one's mask and the reality it hides.

How does Fromm suggest implementing

these changes? Admittedly he states that there is only a two percent chance for salvation, but since this is a life and death matter we cannot afford to turn it down. Our future depends on whether, given awareness of the present crisis, the best minds will mobilize to devote themselves to the new humanist science of Man (to include both men and women). The model of the new society must be determined by the requirements of the unalienated, being-oriented person. Additional features of Fromm's envisioned new society include participatory democracy, prohibition of brainwashing methods, guaranteed yearly income, women's liberation, a supreme cultural council, improved information-sharing techniques, separation of scientific research from application in industry and defense, and atomic disarmament.

Fromm concludes that many people are beginning to discover that having much does not create well being. Change the social climate, the values that are either approved or disapproved, and the change from selfishness to altruism will lose most of its difficulty. Our only hope lies in the energizing attraction of a new vision. *To Have or To Be?* should serve to stimulate many bright and creative minds in this desired direction. I strongly recommend reading this book. Fromm's arguments are compelling and require immediate attention. If enough people are inspired by his message the result might be the fulfillment of his seemingly idealistic proposals.