

Fromm: Humanistic Psychoanalysis

Erich Fromm's basic thesis is that modern-day people have been torn away from their prehistoric union with nature and also with one another, yet they have the power of reasoning, foresight, and imagination. This combination of lack of animal instincts and presence of rational thought makes humans the freaks of the universe. Self-awareness contributes to feelings of loneliness, isolation, and homelessness. To escape from these feelings, people strive to become reunited with nature and with their fellow human beings.

Fromm's humanistic psychoanalysis assumes that humanity's separation from the natural world has produced feelings of loneliness and isolation, a condition called *basic anxiety*.

Fromm was very interested in historical and cultural perspectives on human nature, not just psychological perspectives.

The changes in the human condition lead to feelings of anxiety, isolation, and powerlessness. The cost is freedom and this cost far exceeds the benefits. Humans have two alternatives:

- to escape from freedom into interpersonal dependencies
- to move to self-realization through productive love and work

Biography

- Classical psychoanalyst
- Founded the International Institute of Social Research in Geneva
- Lectured at the Chicago Psychoanalytic Institute
- Practiced in New York
- Relationship with Karen Horney that failed
- Professor at Michigan State University
- Died in March, 1980
- Influenced by five important sources
 - Teachings of humanistic rabbis
 - The revolutionary spirit of Karl Marx
 - The equally revolutionary ideas of Freud
 - The rationality of Zen Buddhism
 - The writings of Johann Jakob Bachofen on matriarchal societies

Basic Assumptions

- Must understand individual personality in terms of human history
- We have minimized our adaptive instincts
- We no have no powerful instincts to adapt to the changing world
 - Instead, we have acquired the facility to reason, called the *human dilemma*
- Humans face fundamental dichotomies
 - The first is life and death
 - The second is that humans are capable of conceptualizing the goal of complete self-realization but are also aware that life is too short to reach that goal
 - The third is that people are ultimately alone, yet we cannot tolerate isolation

Human Needs

- Only distinctive *human needs* can move people toward a reunion with the natural world
- These *existential needs* have emerged during the evolution of human culture, growing out of their attempts to find an answer to their existence and to avoid becoming insane
- Health individuals are better able to find ways to reunite with the world productively solving the human needs of
 - Relatedness
 - Three basic ways
 - Submission (search for a domineering partner)
 - Power (search for a submissive partner)
 - Love (the only route to become united with the world and help the person achieve individuality & integrity)
 - The four basic elements of genuine love are *care, responsibility, respect* and *knowledge*
 - Transcendence (the urge to rise above a passive and accidental existence and into the “realm of purposefulness and freedom”)
 - Rootedness (the need to establish roots or to feel at home in the world again)
 - Without Rootedness, the feelings of isolation and helplessness can become unbearable

- Can be *productive* or *unproductive* as in separation from the mother or not (fixation)
- A sense of identity (the capacity to be aware of ourselves as a separate entity)
 - Historically humans identified more closely with their clan and did not see themselves as existing apart from the group
 - Now a days, people identify attachments with institutions
- A frame of orientation (being split off from nature, humans need a road map to make their way through the world)
 - We need to put things into a framework
 - A road map without a goal or destination is worthless

Summary of Fromm's Human Needs

	Negative Components	Positive Components
Relatedness	Submission or domination	Love
Transcendence	Destructiveness	Creativeness
Rootedness	Fixation	Wholeness
Sense of Identity	Adjustment to a group	Individuality
Frame of Orientation	Irrational goals	Rational goals

The **burden of freedom** results from humans being torn from nature yet remaining in the world with the same physical limitations as other animals.

As children become more independent from their mothers they gain more freedom to express their individuality. However, at the same time they experience the burden of freedom, that is, the loss of security from being with mother. This causes **basic anxiety**.

There are three primary mechanisms of escape:

- Authoritarianism (the tendency to give up the independence of one's own individual self and to fuse one's self with somebody or something outside oneself, in order to acquire the strength which the individual is lacking.
 - This can happen with a powerful partner and is called *masochism*
 - Or, it can happen by dominated in the unity with another person called *sadism* by controlling and exploiting others
- Destructiveness (rooted in the feelings of aloneness, isolation, and powerlessness, and it seeks to do away with other people)
 - Destroying others to acquire a feeling of lost power

- Conformity (people who conform to try to escape from a sense of aloneness and isolation by giving up their individuality and becoming whatever other people desire them to be)
 - The more they conform the more powerless they feel; the more powerless they feel the more they must conform

People can break the cycle of conformity and powerless only by achieving *self-realization* and *positive freedom*.

- *Positive Freedom* can be attained by the individuals spontaneous and full expression of their rational and emotional potential
- *Positive Freedom* is a successful solution to the human dilemma of being part of the natural world and maintaining individuality
- Love and work are the twin components of positive freedom

Character orientations

- The person's relatively permanent way of relating to people and things
- "The totality of inherited and acquired psychic qualities which are characteristic of one individual and which make the individual unique."
- People relate to the world in two ways
 - By acquiring and using things (*assimilation*)
 - By relating to self and others (*socialization*)
 - These things happen *productively* or *nonproductively*
- Non productive orientations
 - *Receiving things passively*
 - Receptive characters feel that the source of all good lies outside themselves and that they can only relate to the world by receiving things like love, knowledge, and material possessions.
 - Receiving > Giving
 - Negative qualities include passivity, submissiveness & lack of self-confidence
 - Positive qualities include loyalty, acceptance, & trust
 - *Exploiting or taking things through force*
 - Exploitive characters believe that the source of all good is outside them yet they act aggressively to take what they desire rather than passively receiving it.
 - Like to steal from others

- Negative qualities include egocentrism, conceited, arrogant, and seducing
 - Positive qualities include impulsivity, pride, charm, and self-confidence
- *Hoarding objects*
 - Hoarding characters seek to save that which they have already obtained. They hold everything inside and do not let go of anything.
 - They, in a sense, focus on what is *not alive*
 - Negative qualities include rigidity, sterility, obstinacy, compulsivity, and lack of creativity
 - Positive qualities include orderliness, cleanliness, and punctuality
- *Marketing or exchanging things*
 - Market characters see themselves as commodities with their personal value dependent on their exchange value and their ability to sell themselves.
 - They have shaky personal security and adjust to fit what others want
 - Negative qualities include aimlessness, opportunistic, incompetence, and wasteful
 - Positive qualities include changeability, mindedness, adaptability, and generosity
- Productive Orientations
 - The single productive orientation has three dimensions
 - Work
 - Love
 - Reasoning
 - The individual works toward positive freedom and the realization of their potential
 - Only through productive activity can people solve the basic human dilemma
 - That is, to unite with the world and others while retaining uniqueness and individuality
 - Healthy people work not as an end in itself but as a means of creative self-expression

- Healthy people have *biophilia*, a passionate love of life and all that is alive
- Self-love and love of other are inseparable but that self-love must come first
- **In summary**, Fromm believed that healthy people rely on some combination of all five character orientations. Their survival as healthy individuals depends on their ability to *receive* things from other people, to *take* things when appropriate, to *preserve* things, to *exchange* things, and to *work, love, and think* productively.

Personality Disorders

- Personality Disorders are marked by problems in these three areas, work, love, and thought, and especially in love.
- Psychologically disturbed people are incapable of love and have failed to establish union with others
 - *Necrophilia* (attraction to death & the opposite of biophilia)
 - Necrophilic personalities hate humanity; they are racist, warmongers, and bullies; they love bloodshed, destruction, terror, and torture; and they delight in destroying life. They are strong advocates of law & order; love to talk about sickness, death, and burials; and they are fascinated by dirt, decay, corpses, and feces. They prefer night to day and love to operate in darkness and shadow.
 - All people behave aggressively and destructively at times, but, the entire lifestyle of the necrophilous person revolves around death, destruction, disease, and decay.
 - *Malignant narcissism* (interest in *themselves* so that this thinking impedes the perception of reality so that everything belonging to a narcissistic person is highly valued and everything belonging to another is devalued)
 - Preoccupation with the body can lead to *hypochondriasis*
 - Or can lead to *moral hypochondriasis* when the preoccupation is with *guilt*

- Their sense of self worth depends on their narcissistic self-image and not on achievements. When their efforts are criticized by other, they react with anger and rage, frequently striking out against their critics, trying to destroy them. If the criticism is overwhelming, they may be unable to destroy it, and turn the rage inward resulting in *depression* and feelings of *worthlessness*.
- *Incestuous symbiosis* (an extreme dependence on the mother or mother surrogate)
 - Can be an exaggerated form of *mother fixation*
 - They are inseparable from the host person; are blended together
 - These individuals feel frightened and anxious when the relationship is threatened
- The attraction to death, taking pleasure by destroying others, and neurotic symbiosis with mother figures form what is called the *syndrome of decay* while biophilia, love, and positive freedom comprise the *syndrome of growth*.

Psychotherapy

- He believed that the aim of therapy is for patients to come to know themselves.
- Without knowing ourselves, we cannot know any other person or thing.
- Because communication is so important, Fromm believed that the therapist must relate “as one human being to another with utter concentration and utter sincerity.”
- This is accomplished through
 - Talking
 - Dreams
 - Fairy tales & Myths
- Examples of the application of Fromm’s methods include:
 - The Mexican Village study
 - The psychohistory of Adolph Hitler

Critique

- Exquisite writing style!!
- Negligible research and few empirical studies – 1
- Unable to falsify what is done – 1
- Ability to organize and explain is clear but the terms, precision, and explanations are lacking – 2
- As a guide to action, it is difficult for therapists to know exactly what to do with clients – 2
- There is little internal consistency and it is difficult to follow single themes – 2
- Fromm's theory is anything but parsimonious – 2
- Fromm's theory is both pessimistic and optimistic ($P = O$)
- It is both free will and deterministic ($FW = D$)
- It emphasizes a future orientation rather than the past causes ($C < T$)
- It stress the conscious and unconscious equally ($C = UC$)
- It stress social causes and culture more than biology ($S > B$)
- And, it places more emphasis on similarities as opposed to individuality ($S > I$)