



## The Greatness and Limitations of Erich Fromm's Humanism

Mauricio Cortina M.D.

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MAURICIO CORTINA, M.D.

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## THE GREATNESS AND LIMITATIONS OF ERICH FROMM'S HUMANISM

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*Abstract.* Erich Fromm's most important contribution to "the science of man" and psychoanalysis was the development of an existential humanism. This existential bent was based on his view that the human condition developed over the course of human evolution trans-survival needs for meaning that transcended our biological needs for survival. His second important contribution was a brilliant Marx–Freud synthesis, which he used to explore how ideologies can mask economic conditions, and how shared social values that are internalized (social character) are adaptive to socioeconomic conditions. A third contribution was his view of psychoanalysis as a "center-to-center relation" where analysts and patients are able to recognize and share their common humanity as a vehicle for change. Like all major contributors to understanding the human condition, Fromm had strengths and weaknesses. I propose some revisions that address some of the weaknesses while supporting the strengths.

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*Keywords:* humanistic psychoanalysis, social character, human nature, center-to-center relation, existential dichotomies, social change

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### Introduction

Erich Fromm was one of the great humanistic thinkers of the 20th century. His ability to write clearly and synthesize complex issues in jargon-free language made his work accessible to a large educated lay audience. His books were bestsellers, with over 100 million copies sold, and were translated into many languages (Friedman, 2013b). Over a

span of almost 40 years, Fromm remained a well-known author and major public intellectual. His writing covered a wide variety of topics, from psychoanalysis to Marxism, social psychology, the psychology of totalitarian states, religion, ethics, and a critique of materialistic, consumer-driven capitalistic societies, yet there is a remarkable degree of coherence in his work as a whole.

Friedman's (2013b) well-researched and revealing biography, *The Lives of Erich Fromm: Love's Prophet*, chronicles the many activities and chapters of Fromm's life, but does not provide a sense of how these different "lives" are connected with each other. I think Fromm's deeply rooted humanism integrated the many facets of his life.

Fromm's work can be understood best as an application of humanistic principles to a variety of topics, beginning with his revision of Freud's libido theory based on a sociopschoanalytic theory of character development (Fromm, 1932, 1980); his brilliant integration of Marx and Freud and his theory of social character (Fromm, 1962; Fromm & Maccoby, 1970); an introduction to Marx's early work, published for the first time in English (Fromm, 1961a); his landmark study of the rise of Nazism (Fromm, 1941); his development of a humanistic ethics and a view of productive human development (Fromm, 1947); his critique of modern consumer-driven, conformist societies (Fromm, 1955b); his approach to dream interpretation (Fromm, 1951); his respectful and scholarly approach to religion (Fromm, 1950; Fromm, Suzuki, & DeMartino, 1960); his analysis of loving relations (Fromm, 1956); his analysis of life-affirming modes of being versus life-strangling "having" modes of existence (Fromm, 1976); his passionate call for reason and dialogue at a time when the United States and the Soviet Union were at the brink of nuclear war (Fromm, 1961b); his attempts to find a third way between "democratic" capitalist and totalitarian "socialist" societies (Fromm, 1965, 1968); and his analysis of pathology (Fromm, 1964, 1973).

Fromm's humanistic approach to all these topics was not always successful and his work contains overgeneralizations and conclusions that are questionable or not adequately supported by evidence. Given the scope of his work and its interdisciplinary nature, some of these limitations were inevitable, and the evolutionary and development science that support many of his views of human nature, while questioning others, were still in their infancy (see below). His emphasis was always on evaluating individual and social change based on whether it advanced "the brotherhood of man," the capacity to relate to others and to oneself with

loving, affirming attitudes, and the capacity for reason; or whether these capacities were stifled by social, cultural, and economic conditions.

### The Roots of Fromm's Humanism

The core of Fromm's humanism was rooted in the Talmudic tradition. Fromm came from a long line of distinguished rabbis and Talmudic scholars. On his father's side, his great-grandfather, Seligman Bar Bamberger, was one of the most prominent 19th-century rabbis in Germany, and his grandfather, Rabbi Seligman Pinchas Fromm, was a leader of the Frankfurt Jewish community. Fromm's father departed from this tradition and became a wine merchant in Frankfurt. Fromm felt estranged from his father and described him as a "pathologically anxious" man who "overwhelmed me with his anxiety, and at the same time not giving me any guidelines or having any positive influence in my education" (Friedman, 2013, p. 6). Fromm tried to escape from this suffocating environment by seeking guidance and examples where he could, and first turned to the members of his father's family who kept the distinguished tradition of scholarship and leadership. He frequently visited his great-uncle Ludwig Krause, a prominent Talmudic scholar, who introduced the young Fromm to the work of his great-grandfather. His great-uncle introduced him to the Jewish messianic view of peace and universal brotherhood, and the belief that a messiah would emerge at any moment to lead the people toward this vision if they were prepared to receive the message (M. MacCoby, personal communication, November 15, 2013). Another important influence in Fromm's early adolescence was Oswald Sussman, a Galician Jew who his father hired to help with the wine business. Sussman took Fromm to museums and introduced him to the work of Marx (Friedman, 2013b, pp. 8–12).

As a young man, Fromm continued to seek and find mentors and teachers. Rabbi Nehemiah Nobel was a leader of the Frankfurt community, and was a student of the well-known socialist and neo-Kantian, Herman Cohen. Fromm took long walks with Nobel as an adolescent and young man to discuss his sermons and absorbed three main ideas. First, it was not enough to advocate for progressive change, one had to practice these ideals in daily life. Second, one had to take people's questions seriously and be responsive to their needs; and third, raw power was not enough to produce change. Love, humility, and an embrace of justice were necessary to bind people together so that change could take root

among them (Friedman, 2013b, pp. 8–18). The circle surrounding Nobel included Martin Buber, Gershom Scholem, and Leo Baeck. As Friedman notes, this was the first of several communities of scholars committed to humanistic principles with whom Fromm interacted throughout his life.

Fromm began studying law in Frankfurt, but switched to sociology to study with Alfred Weber (Max Weber's brother) at the University of Heidelberg. Weber was the only gentile mentor in Fromm's early intellectual formation and was, like Nobel, committed to a universal humanism. Weber emphasized that individuals could only be understood within the community in which they lived, and he supported Fromm's application of a sociological approach in pursuing his early love for Jewish studies. Fromm's dissertation was an investigation of the importance of Jewish law in explaining how Jewish communities were able to cooperate, bond together, and thrive in the Jewish Diaspora, despite prejudice and the hostility to them. During his university studies, he made another important contact: the Talmudic scholar Rabbi Salmon Rabinkow. Rabinkow helped Fromm with his dissertation and introduced him to Hassidism, which emphasized feeling over erudition and contemplation over economic activity. Indeed, as Friedman points out, the Hassidic emphasis on a joyful life became a central component of Fromm's concept of "biophilia" (love of life). Rabinkow, like Nobel, and later in Fromm's life, the maverick psychoanalyst Georg Groddeck, provided the guidance Fromm was seeking; they served as role models, leading him to establish a positive identity as an adolescent and young man and helping him escape a constraining and anxiety-laden family environment.

I think the influence of these men also served as prototypes of what he would later call, in *Man for Himself* (1947), a "humanistic conscience"—the internalization of loving, self-affirming values that support autonomy and the need to express these faculties toward others and toward the world.

### Inner Tensions in Fromm's Work

In his essay, "The Two Voices of Erich Fromm," Michael Maccoby (1996) points out, that at his best Fromm was able to integrate a prophetic voice (a "seer," not a foreseer) that spoke truth to power and unmasked comforting illusions with an analytic, empirically grounded voice. As Maccoby notes, Fromm's prophetic voice sometimes overwhelmed the empirically grounded and scholarly voice to the detriment of both. I will

explore some of these tensions in Fromm's work by focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of his model of the human condition and suggest a way to support the strengths by revising some of his evolutionary assumptions.

Fromm never questioned the view that social psychological and clinical psychoanalytic theories and hypotheses had to be tested empirically with methods that went beyond the consulting room. His development of a social character interview that probes for unconscious beliefs and values that can be in conflict with consciously held beliefs is an example of his efforts to develop empirical instruments that could be tested scientifically.<sup>1</sup> Social character theory (Fromm, 1941, 1947; Fromm & Maccoby, 1970) was an attempt to bridge a missing link in Marxist thought. How are shared ideologies that reflect economic modes of production created and reproduced? Fromm (1947) pointed out that the family and social institutions act as "psychic agents of society" (p. 68), which inculcate shared social norms and beliefs beginning early in childhood. Shared values and beliefs become internalized as emotionally based character traits that operate automatically, so that people will "want to do what they have to do" in order to adapt to society (Fromm & Maccoby, 1970, p. 18). Once created, social character functions as a social glue that helps group members identify with each other and bond together.

Social character differences are fundamentally the result of adaptations to different modes of economic production, how people actually make a living under different socioeconomic conditions (see the discussion of the Mexican study below as an example). This is what makes Fromm's approach different from the culture and personality school represented

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<sup>1</sup> The social character interview is interpretative in nature and asks questions such as, "Is physical punishment important for raising children?" A "yes" or "no" answer is irrelevant when scoring the interview. What is important are follow-up questions, to see if the answer is an opinion subject to change, or a conviction based on strongly held values that become internalized as part of a person's character. Based on a probe, one person might say "parents need to set limits and children need to learn how to obey their parents," whereas another answer might be "physical punishment only teaches the child to fear and not to be respectful of other people." The first answer is consistent with an authoritarian personality, whereas the second would be classified as democratic. It only takes a few clear answers of this nature to predict how other questions will be answered. If other answers do not show any strong convictions based on internalized values, it suggests the person will go along with prevailing cultural opinions. The social character interview is an early forerunner of similar, but more sophisticated, instruments such as the Adult Attachment Interview that look at contradictions and inconsistencies in the way individuals construct a narrative in regard to attachment-related experiences in childhood (Main & Goldwyn, 1998).

by Ralph Linton, Margaret Mead, and Ruth Benedict (among others), who see personality as an adaptation to cultural values and rituals. In contrast, Fromm saw shared cultural values in Marxist terms as adaptations to different modes of production. This is the main reason why Fromm did not consider himself a "neo-Freudian" with Horney and Sullivan, who were influenced by the culture and personality school, and not by the Marxist approach of understanding social adaptation and change.

Fromm carried out two significant research projects during his lifetime that tested social character theory. The first was a study of German workers during the Weimar Republic that was published in English after his death (Fromm, 1984). He developed and used an instrument to probe social character on a representative sample of 600 individuals, and he found that a small proportion of German workers (10–15%) had strong convictions rooted in an authoritarian character. Another 10% had a strong anti-authoritarian character structure. The vast majority (75%) was neither authoritarian nor anti-authoritarian. This research led him to question the prevailing view that the German working class, which was ideologically leftist, would resist Nazism. One of Fromm's most important books, *Escape From Freedom* (1941), was informed by this research project and is a brilliant analysis of the historical, social, economic, and psychological conditions that gave rise to Nazism.

The second research project was a more rigorous attempt to test social character theory. The project was carried out in collaboration with Michael Maccoby, a psychologist and anthropologist who trained to become a psychoanalyst with Fromm in the psychoanalytic institute that Fromm founded in Mexico (Instituto Mexicano de Psicoanálisis, Asociación Civil [IMPAC]). The study included an ethnography of the studied village and social character interviews with all the adult villagers and many of the children (Fromm & Maccoby, 1970). No other study of village life and its people, before or since, has matched the thoroughness and analytic power of this landmark project. The study showed one group of villagers, who had a passive and submissive social character, had come from backgrounds where their ancestors had lived in conditions of indentured servitude in the *haciendas* (semi-feudal estates with large landholdings). Another group of villagers came from villages that had not been incorporated into the *hacienda* system, and the social character of these villagers was quite different. They were much more active and took care of their land while maintaining traditional patriarchal values.

After the Mexican Revolution of 1910 broke up the *hacienda* system and gave land to the *campesinos* (peasant farmers), both types of villagers shared new conditions in which to live and work, but with dramatic differences in their ability to take advantage of the new conditions. The villagers that came from *hacienda* backgrounds were prone to alcoholism, had worse marriages, didn't take proper care of their land, and were more likely to sell their land. The villagers that came from free villages were not alcoholics and had better marriages. They farmed their land effectively and did not sell it.

Another example of Fromm's analytic and empirically grounded voice can be found in a letter I received from Fromm when I was in the third year of my psychiatric residency at the Menninger Clinic in 1975. I had been selected a Sol W. Ginsburg fellow for the Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry, a psychiatric think tank that still meets twice a year in Philadelphia. I joined the committee of international relations that was studying the Arab–Israeli conflict. I wrote Fromm asking him what he thought about using concepts of group narcissism, which were being considered by the committee to understand the Arab–Israeli conflict, and if he had any thoughts about conducting interviews with a small sample of individuals on both sides of the conflict. To my surprise and delight he wrote back; his letter, dated June 6, 1975, provides another example of his thinking about applying sociopschoanalytic concepts to larger social issues, and it expresses his views on the Arab–Israeli conflict:

... many analysts still believe that narcissism is primarily a phenomenon which is important in early childhood and in the psychosis. I believe it is one of the most important phenomena in adult life, widespread and only called pathological in extreme forms. I have described individual narcissism and group narcissism and its consequences in more detail in the *Heart of Man*, but I think in other books of mine.

As to the Israeli–Arab conflict, it seems to me that group narcissism plays a role on both sides as in all nationalistic and somewhat fanatical movements, but of course this is much too general an explanation to do justice to the specific elements in the Israeli–Arab conflict. I think here one would have to study what factors make the Israelis aggressive, contemptuous of non-industrialist people, highly nationalistic, giving up completely on their religious and humanistic tradition; on the other hand what are the sensitive points in the Arab personality, such as for instance their sensitivity to humiliation, which has to do with their factual passivity and political

powerlessness, and partly with the emotional charge of the concept of honor, which one finds in many pre-industrial and pre-capitalist societies. I believe any study of the conflict which does not do justice to detailed and depth study of both sides will not contribute anything of importance, and such study must be very empirical and make itself free from all dogmatic clichés and be guided completely by the wish to understand all the details of that empirical material and to do that in a very objective manner.

I find the topic so interesting that I fell to the temptation to write a few remarks about it, which are of course casual and by no means meant to sketch an answer.

The letter is an example of how Fromm blended deeply held values with an unflinching belief in objectivity. I know that postmodern trends in the social sciences and psychoanalysis have come to question the possibility of developing an objective perspective on several grounds, but I am convinced that it is possible to have an objective approach that is contextually, historically, and culturally situated, embraces the subjectivity of individuals being studied, and doesn't hide the values of the researcher (Cortina, 1999).

A final example of Fromm's prophetic and analytic-empirical voices working in greater harmony is *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973), a multidisciplinary scholarly book that examined evidence from anthropology, the neuroscience of his day, and some popular evolutionary theories in regard to the biological roots of human aggression. Fromm debunked these popular evolutionary ideas in *The Anatomy*, primarily the work of Konrad Lorenz (1963) on aggression, while providing an alternative existential-humanist explanation of destructiveness. There are several aspects of *The Anatomy* that are dated and require revision. His theory of necrophilia, which he defined as an active passion to destroy and an attraction to everything that is dead, was wrong in assuming that biophilia (love of life) and necrophilia are polar developmental opposites, similar to Freud's dual instinct theory of motivation (Eros vs. death). My view is that the opposite of biophilia and joy is depression, feeling defeated, and feeling shamed, not necrophilia. If necrophilia were the developmental opposite of love of life, one would expect to find necrophilic traits in a bell-curve pattern of distribution in the general population. The surveys that Fromm used to test the necrophilic hypothesis with some of his colleagues are flawed because they did not make the distinction between

feeling dead (often the result of severe depression, which secondarily leads to morbid and dark thoughts) and having an *active* attraction to everything that is dead (necrophilia). There are indeed necrophilic characters such as Hitler and Himmler, who Fromm considered to be a typical example of a bureaucratic sadistic character. In *The Anatomy* Fromm describes with clinical precision these necrophilic and sadistic characters, but such characters are relatively rare perversions of the human personality that are consistent with contemporary descriptions of serial murderers (Ramsland, 2005). These individuals are sometimes highly intelligent but deeply alienated (schizoid), paranoid, grandiose, and have strong sadistic traits.

This critique should not distract us from Fromm's profound insight. Human destructiveness and extreme sadism can be understood as cases of negative transcendence, i.e., if I don't have the power to be a loving and creative person, I have the possibility of turning to the perverse power to kill and inflict untold suffering on my victims. These perversions may come from histories of children who have been sadistically treated and humiliated by one or more attachment figure and live in families or cultures in which violence is rampant.

Fromm differentiated this human form of destructiveness from a biologically rooted, defensive type of aggression in the service of survival and of life. The hypothesis of malignant destructiveness as a form of negative transcendence and as a perverse form of sadistic control can and should be examined in cases of brutal dictators, mass murderers, and sadistic personalities.

### Fromm's Humanistic Message and Its Impact on Post-World War II Generations

Fromm was most successful in his approach to psychoanalysis and human development when he used his deep immersion in the humanistic tradition, his research, and his experience in life and as a psychoanalyst to articulate a hopeful and positive view of human development while at the same time viewing the capacity for destructiveness and evil as rooted in the same biological and historical conditions that give rise to the best expressions of being human. Fromm (1947) described the loving and creative side of the human condition as a "productive orientation" and defined productiveness as "a fundamental attitude, a *mode of relatedness*

in all realms that includes mental, emotional, and sensory responsiveness to others, to oneself and to things" (p. 91; emphasis in original). Productiveness is the result of the growth in developing our capacities for love and reason and is characterized by a sense of abundance, a freedom to be oneself, and the desire to affirm the best in others. Fromm (1968) expressed this view of productiveness and the human condition in many of his writings and put it succinctly in *The Revolution of Hope*:

The dynamism of human nature inasmuch as it is human is primarily rooted in the need of man to *express his faculties in relation to the world rather than in his need to use the world as means of his satisfaction of his physiologic necessities*. This means because I have eyes, I have the need to see; because I have ears I have the need to hear; because I have a mind I have the need to think; and because I have a heart I have the need to feel. In short, because I am a man, I am in need of man and of the world. (p. 69)

Fromm's concept of productiveness is an "ideal type" in Weber's (1922/1978) sense of types, and Fromm recognized that all of us are a mixture of productive and nonproductive attitudes. This view contrasted with the more pessimistic vision expressed by Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930/1961). In the United States, Freud's darker view was reflected in books such as *Man Against Himself*, written by the psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Karl Menninger (1938).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Menninger never forgave Fromm for having written *Man for Himself* (1947), with a title that might have been a deliberate contrast to Menninger's *Man Against Himself*. When I was a psychiatric resident at Menninger's in the mid-1970s, William Menninger, who was Karl's nephew and director of training, invited a group of us (residents) to attend a series of meetings with his famous uncle. After several of us attended the World Congress of Psychiatry held in Mexico City, in which Karl Menninger and Fromm gave papers on aggression, Karl asked us about our impressions. When we mentioned being impressed by Fromm's presentation, Karl exploded in anger and said we had been taken in by Fromm's popularity and charisma. He went on to say that Fromm was not really a psychoanalyst, and that his understanding of psychoanalysis was superficial. He also brought up that Fromm's book *Man for Himself* had been a cheap shot directed at him. To his credit, Karl apologized in the same meeting for his explosion, saying it was childish.

In fact, Fromm and Menninger had much in common. Fromm was a loyal revisionist of Freud's work and was closer in spirit to Freud than the other two brilliant contemporary revisionists, Sullivan and Horney (Burston, 1991; Cortina, 1992). Menninger was also a visionary and was committed to many progressive causes. He was an eloquent and indefatigable advocate for reform of prison systems and psychiatric institutions based on punishment and banishment from society, and advocated for treating prisoners and severely ill psychiatric patients with dignity and for providing them with opportunities for growth and renewal. See, for instance, *The Crime of Punishment* (Menninger, 1968). Menninger's (1963) *The Vital*

Fromm was able to articulate for a large and growing educated middle class an ethical and spiritual guide that filled a gap left by the rejection of traditional authoritarian religions or the abandonment of religious beliefs altogether. Fromm also provided a humanistic outlook on social change. This was particularly significant in the United States in the late 1950s and 1960s, when, in spite of many setbacks, there was enormous hope for change in the wake of the civil rights, antiwar, and woman's liberation movements, and the war on poverty. I was one among many who were inspired by this vision, and I am grateful to Fromm for having been such an important spiritual guide at a time of enormous turmoil, the late 1960s and 1970s, when I was a young man trying to find myself.<sup>3</sup>

### The Relevance of Fromm's Sociopsychanalytic Approach for Today

Within the relational movement in the United States, there have been efforts to recapture the critical voice of psychoanalysis as applied to larger social issues as exemplified by the commendable efforts of Philip Cushman (1995) and Neil Altman (2010). Except for Michael Maccoby's studies of leadership and social change (Maccoby, 1976, 1981, 1988, 2003, 2004, 2007), these efforts have not built on Fromm's Marx–Freud synthesis and his socially and economically grounded social character theory.

Fromm's analysis of the historical, economic, social, and psychological factors that contributed to the rise of Nazism in Germany provides a model for explaining some of the present-day fanatical movements around the world, such as the rise of the right-wing Tea Party movement in the United States. In Germany, the working and middle classes during the Weimar Republic were threatened by hyperinflation and loss

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*Balance* has striking similarities to the view expressed by Fromm (1973) in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* of the antimony between life-loving and destructive passions.

<sup>3</sup> I became acquainted with Fromm's work while a medical student at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Fromm founded a psychoanalytic institute in Mexico that was affiliated with the medical school and I had the opportunity to hear some of his lectures. A small group of us were inspired by Fromm, began to read his books, and decided out of curiosity and interest to seek psychoanalytic treatment at the low-cost clinic at the Institute. These experiences, together with the 1968 student movement—which I joined in protest against Mexico's authoritarian government, and which ended with a massacre of 500 students in the Plaza de Tlatelolco on October 2, 1968—made me decide to switch from becoming a medically trained researcher to becoming a psychoanalyst. I went to Menninger's because of its psychoanalytic orientation.

of savings and economic power, and were humiliated by the defeat of World War I. As Fromm (1941) explained in *Escape From Freedom*, the Nazi party, led by Hitler, a charismatic populist demagogue, was able to channel that anger into a collectivist, nationalistic, and virulent racist ideology. This ideology promised the restoration of German grandeur and the purity of the Aryan race, while fanning the fires of victimhood, demonizing the victorious allied powers, and making Jewish people into scapegoats.<sup>4</sup>

In the United States, a large class of mostly white males without college degrees have been disempowered by the loss of millions of manufacturing jobs and small businesses. In large part, this is due to the globalization of the economy and the exportation of manufacturing jobs to places like China and India, and the loss of small “mom-and-pop” businesses to huge corporations such as Walmart.

This economic tidal wave has been made worse by social policies that began with the Reagan administration, which reduced taxes on the wealthy and began to roll back many social programs and banking regulations that were put in place to mitigate some of the worse effects of the Great Depression and to prevent a repeat of another economic

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<sup>4</sup> Neil McLaughlin's scholarly review of Fromm's analysis of who supported Nazism (McLaughlin, 2014) shows that Fromm was wrong in thinking that the main support for Nazism came from the lower middle classes, artisans, and shopkeepers:

Writing with the benefit of over forty years of modern research, Richard Hamilton convincingly argues that there is little empirical evidence for a lower middle-class affinity for Nazism, particularly in urban areas. He describes a linear positive relationship between the social class and the Nazi vote in major German cities. The upper middle class, not the lower middle class, were more likely to vote for the Nazi party, relative to their numbers in Germany at the time. The evidence is not as clear when one considers party membership instead of voting (Kater, 1983); nonetheless, Hamilton has raised serious empirical questions about the conventional wisdom regarding the lower middle-class nature of both the Nazi vote and the party cadre (Hamilton, 1996). . . . Fromm was right, however, to perceive a link between the 1500s and 1600s and the 1930s. Protestantism is the single best predictor for Nazism, a point blurred by a Marxist-influenced orthodoxy that focuses on the lower middle class. And while Fromm stressed how the uprooting of community led to Nazism, Hamilton's data suggest that rural, not urban, Protestants were the single most important social stratum voting for the Nazi party. (pp. 198–199)

Although this new data invalidates some of the premises of *Escape from Freedom*, it does not disprove that hyperinflation and destabilizing economic conditions contributed to the rise of Nazism. To this day, fear of hyperinflation haunts the German psyche, which explains popular support for anti-inflationary and economic austerity policies, even as these factors have contributed significantly to economic stagnation in many European Union countries (Krugman, 2012).

calamity. This has led to an erosion of the middle class, the engine of post-World War II American prosperity and growth, and a ruinous income inequality between the rich and the rest of society (Reich, 2012). The economic downturn and the recent “great recession” aggravated these trends, creating a “new normal” of stagnant economic growth and chronic unemployment for millions of people, while sapping the foundations of our democracy (Krugman, 2012; Stiglitz, 2012). The election of a black president and the fact that Latino, Asian, and black populations will soon make up the majority have further threatened white males who feel angry and powerless in face of these developments.

The recent *Citizens United* (2008) decision by the U.S. Supreme Court, treating corporations as persons and allowing contributions by the mega rich like the Koch brothers, have poured vast amounts of money into political campaigns to elect officials who favor policies that support their interests. The money also financed massive public relations misinformation campaigns that have successfully channeled the anger and powerlessness of millions of Americans left behind into a hyper-individualistic, nationalistic, anti-government, anti-immigrant, and anti-woman ideology, portraying the poor as leeches living off welfare and unions, the “liberal press,” and a “bloated bureaucracy” as allies in creating an un-American “socialist” agenda that takes away money from the middle class and gives it to undeserving classes.

The totalitarian collectivist ideology in Nazi Germany and the hyper-individualistic ideologies of the extreme right-wing Tea Party movement in the United States might seem to be worlds apart, but in fact they have striking similarities. They are the result of ideologies that obfuscate and distort the real causes of social problems, create scapegoats, and channel populist anger, powerlessness, and humiliation into hateful and mean-spirited social policies.

A sociopschoanalytic questionnaire, such as that used by Fromm in the German and Mexican studies, could help us understand who the members of the Tea Party are. Are there different social character types and motivations among Tea Party members? Are some of the motivations and values unconsciously in conflict? Is it possible to address their legitimate concerns and their more positive values and motivations through campaigns that speak to these motivations and concerns and counteract the misinformation campaigns?

### Why Has Fromm's Legacy Been Largely Forgotten in the United States?

In psychoanalysis and the social sciences, Fromm's work is rarely mentioned today, and when it is cited, the citation is often limited to a cursory note situating Fromm as part of the "neo-Freudian" group that included Sullivan and Horney. Fromm's books are still read in Europe and Latin America, and in many places where people are trying to free themselves from dictators and despots. Lawrence Friedman (2013a) reports that in his travels, he saw books by Fromm in many libraries after the Arab Spring.

The decline of Fromm's legacy in the United States does not have a single cause. The most obvious reason for his decline as a psychoanalyst is that Fromm never wrote his promised book on psychoanalytic technique. New psychotherapists in the field are interested in how to become therapists and improve their skills. They do not see the relevance of Fromm's broad interests in understanding human nature and the critique of society as fundamental to clinical work, but the causes go much deeper.

McLaughlin examines several factors that led to the decline of the "neo-Freudians," including Horney, Sullivan, and Fromm in the United States, all of whom seemed to offer a promising alternative to Freudian orthodoxy in the 1940s (McLaughlin, 1998b). The alliance of these brilliant thinkers was based on sharing a trenchant critique of Freud, but there were many differences among them, including their political attitudes. Horney, and to some extent Sullivan, were liberal reformers, whereas Fromm was an avowed socialist with a deep aversion toward the acquisitive spirit of capitalism. After the deaths of Horney and Sullivan, Fromm was the sole representative of this group. At first, this did not seem to have a negative effect.

Fromm's phenomenal success as a writer gave him the independence to pursue his critical analysis of contemporary society and develop his humanistic approach to psychoanalysis, but this success did not necessarily translate into producing a generation of psychoanalysts that would teach his work in psychoanalytic institutes. Fromm was director of training at the William Alanson White Institute—which he founded with Sullivan in 1946—until he left for Mexico in 1950. He was also a founding faculty member of the postdoctoral program at New York University (NYU) and had a strong influence on Bernie Kalinkowitz, who developed the relational track at NYU, which has been directed by Lew Aron more recently (Aron & Starr, 2013, p. 358). Although Fromm spent a few months of

every year in New York, his departure to Mexico curtailed the possibility of training and cultivating analytic candidates in the United States. Fromm's Marxist radicalism and prophetic voice alienated psychoanalytic reformers in the United States, who could have been potential allies. The combination of these factors isolated Fromm and kept him from being able to maintain a presence as an important psychoanalyst in the United States.

*Escape From Freedom* (1941) made Fromm into a credible social critic and created a following among American intellectuals. His next sociopsychanalytic book, *The Sane Society* (1955b), was an analysis of modern capitalism. The book sold very well and received good reviews, but by the end of the 1960s, Fromm's reputation as a social critic began to decline (Burston, 1991; McLaughlin, 1998a). Much of this dismissal can be traced to the split with members of the Frankfurt School, who were attempting to integrate Marx's ideas about the alienating and dehumanizing effects of capitalism with Freud's new theories. Aside from Fromm, other prominent members of the Frankfurt School include Horkheimer and Adorno, as well as several psychoanalysts tangentially connected with the Frankfurt School, such as Wilhelm Reich and Otto Fenichel, who were part of the Freudian group left in Germany during the early 1930s (Wiggershaus, 1994). The split had several causes, but the key factor was that most members of the Frankfurt School believed that one of the most important aspects of Freud's work were his libido and instinct theories, and they were threatened by Fromm's rejection of libido theory. They also feared that Fromm's social character theory, which showed how shared character traits were adaptations to prevailing socioeconomic conditions, would lead to justifying alienating conditions within capitalistic societies.

Once the Frankfurt School was transplanted to the United States to escape from Nazism (thanks to Fromm, who made all the arrangements for the transfer), they turned against him. Marcuse led the attack in the famous 1955 and 1956 exchanges with Fromm in *Dissent* magazine. Marcuse claimed that Freud's theory of instinctive polymorphous sexuality contained the seeds of a liberating impulse that could serve as a natural and spontaneous bulwark in resisting the alienating and dehumanizing forces of modern capitalism. According to Marcuse, by giving up on Freud's instinct theory, Fromm had missed the radical implications of Freud's theories. He accused Fromm of turning to reformist platitudes (Marcuse, 1955). Fromm countered that far from being a liberating force,

sexuality had become a commodity in modern society used to sell products (Fromm, 1955a). In effect, sexuality and conformist attitudes were incorporated into the spirit of the age, the marketing character (Fromm, 1947, 1955b), adapted to modern capitalism.

Marcuse's view of Freud's pansexual theories as a possible source of liberation and renewal was naïve. In *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), Marcuse reached the conclusion that the repressive effects of modern capitalism were "totalistic" in nature, and insurmountable. At the end of the book, he famously (or infamously) called for a heroic "great refusal" by quoting Walter Benjamin: "It is thanks to those that have lost all hope that it is possible to have hope" (p. 274), a highly intellectualized expression of despair and nihilism.<sup>5</sup>

The "new" left also became out of touch in siding with Marcuse in this debate (see Friedman, 2013b, p. 373, n. 14), arguing that reforms within a capitalist society, such as outlined by Fromm in *The Sane Society* (1955b), would only sustain the status quo and undermine the possibilities for radical change. Marcuse's message of liberating sexuality attracted many within the youth movement of the 1960s, who were discovering sexuality for themselves and rebelling against the hypocrisy and conventionality of their parents and society. It is ironic that a conformist Freudian establishment that was trying to become accepted as a respectable profession in the United States also dismissed Fromm with the same critique as the radical left, saying Fromm was a superficial culturalist neo-Freudian.

By the end of the 1960s, Fromm's influence and prestige was declining, and until this day, he remains a forgotten psychoanalyst and intellectual figure in the United States (McLaughlin, 1996, 1998a).

### Fromm as a Public Intellectual

In one of the most revealing chapters in his biography of Fromm, Friedman shows that despite Fromm's marginalization within psychoanalysis and among the New Left, in his role as a public intellectual Fromm played an important and constructive role in moving the United States away from

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<sup>5</sup> Marcuse was by no means an intellectual slouch. His book *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (Marcuse, 1941) is considered a classic and was admired by Fromm, who called it "penetrating and brilliant." Fromm and Marcuse were colleagues and respected each other during the early years of the Frankfurt School, which made Marcuse's attack all the more painful for Fromm.

a dangerous confrontation with the former Soviet Union and the threat of nuclear war. Through his friendship with Adlai Stevenson, who became the U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union during the Kennedy administration, and with William Fulbright, who was chairman of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Fromm had extensive interchanges on a variety of foreign policy issues, trying to find ways to counteract the hawks in the Kennedy administration and establish a dialogue with the Soviet Union (Friedman, 2013b, pp. 199–210). Fromm's (1960) article, "The Case for Unilateral Disarmament," called for a fresh approach to the nuclear arms race. It is likely that Kennedy read the article and it might have influenced his announcement of a new approach to disarmament in his well-known speech at American University in 1963 (Kennedy, 1963).<sup>6</sup> According to Friedman, there are striking similarities between Fromm's article and Kennedy's speech (L. J. Friedman, personal communication, November 13, 2013). Fromm also wrote speeches and participated actively in Eugene McCarthy's presidential campaign.

### Fromm's Existential Humanism

Fromm continued to expand his study of the human condition for the rest of his life by incorporating thinkers—such as Aristotle, Spinoza, Marx, Goethe, and the Christian mystic Meister Eckardt (Eckhart von Hochheim)—and many elements of Zen Buddhism. Yet, what gives Fromm's humanism an existential dimension was the bold biological speculation he first expressed fully in *Man for Himself* (Fromm, 1947):

The first element that differentiates human from animal existence is a negative one: the relative absence in man of instinctive regulation in the process of adaptation to the surrounding world. . . . the less complete and fixed the instinctual equipment the more developed is the brain and therefore the ability to learn. The emergence of man can be defined as occurring at a point in the process of evolution where instinctive adaptation has reached

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<sup>6</sup> Kennedy follows Fromm's article in describing the nuclear arms race as insane (Kennedy calls it "a death wish") and the single most important threat to mankind. Kennedy also follows Fromm, who calls for the United States to take unilateral steps toward disarmament as a way to break the cycle of mutual suspicion. In his speech, Kennedy announces that the United States would unilaterally stop atmospheric nuclear tests and called for a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty with the Soviet Union, which the UK would join. Friedman is right to suspect that Kennedy read the Fromm article, perhaps given to him by Adlai Stevenson.

a minimum. But he emerges with new qualities which differentiate him from the animals: his awareness of himself as a separate entity, the ability to remember the past and visualize the future, and to denote objects and acts as symbols; his reason to conceive and understand the world; and his imagination through which he reaches far beyond the ranges of his senses. Man is the most helpless of all animals, but this very biological weakness is the basis for his strength, the prime cause for his development and his specifically human qualities. (p. 48)

The dynamism between minimal instinctual equipment and a large brain capable of learning, creating symbolic forms, and imagining past, present, and future produces several existential dichotomies that are built into the fabric of our humanity. As Fromm (1947) put it:

Self-awareness, reason and imagination have disrupted the “harmony” which characterizes animal existence. Their emergence has made man into an anomaly, into a freak of nature. He is part of nature, subject to the rest of nature. He is set apart while being a part; he is homeless, yet chained to the home he shares with all creatures. Cast into the world at an accidental place and time, he is forced out of it, again accidentally. Being aware of himself, he realizes his own powerlessness and the limitations of his existence. He visualizes his own end: death. Never is he free from the dichotomy of his existence. He cannot rid himself of his mind, even if he should want to; he cannot rid himself of his body as long as he is alive—and his body makes him want to be alive. (p. 49)

Fromm continued to refine the nature of these existential needs. In *The Sane Society* (1955b), he defined these needs as:

1. Relatedness versus narcissism
2. Transcendence: creativeness versus destructiveness
3. Rootedness: brotherliness versus incest
4. Sense of identity: individuality versus herd conformity
5. The need for a frame of orientation and devotion: reason versus irrationality

In *The Revolution of Hope* (1968), he noted that the conditions of human existence gave rise to survival and trans-survival needs: “These two forms of human existence, that of food gathering for the purpose of survival in a narrower sense, and that of free and spontaneous activity

expressing man's faculties and seeking for meaning beyond utilitarian work, are inherent in man's existence" (pp. 69–70); further on: "activity at the level of survival is what one calls work. Activeness on the trans-survival needs is what one calls play, or all those activities related to cult, ritual and art" (p. 70).

What remained constant was Fromm's belief that these existential conditions had emerged as the result of our species having lost our instinctual equipment, leaving our species with basically two solutions: to progress by affirming the "better angels of our nature," to use Lincoln's famous words; or regress to the lost paradise of Mother Nature and its ontogenetic equivalent, a symbiotic tie to mother.

### Have We Really Lost Our Instinctual Equipment?

The main problem with Fromm's hypothesis of a markedly reduced instinctive nature, which he used to explain the flexibility of humans to adapt to radically different environments, is that it is not supported by the new knowledge and discoveries on human evolution and development that have emerged during the three decades since his death. The view of human evolution is that beginning with the Ice Age (the Pleistocene era 2.6 million to 12,500 years ago), our human ancestors survived by becoming a highly cooperative and social species, and this development required the development of social instincts, already present to a lesser degree among our ape relatives (chimpanzees, bonobos, gorillas, and orangutans). This cooperative mode of survival among small groups of nomadic hunter-gatherers was the result of dramatic climate changes that produced severe droughts in East Africa, which significantly reduced the rain forest and river ravine environments that previous Australopithecine species had inhabited for millions of years. Our hominin ancestors had to adapt to the radically different environment of the open African Savannah. The first *homo* species that is clearly adapted to these conditions, with an anatomy designed to walk and run for long distances and a brain double the size of our Australopithecine ancestors, is *homo erectus*, which appeared 1.8 million years ago.

These new environmental conditions created selective pressures on learning to cooperate to hunt and scavenge meat left behind by lions and other predators and to distribute this food among other group members. Dominance hierarchies (the main form of social organization observed among primates) had to be suppressed in favor of cooperative hunting

and sharing of food. This view is supported by examining the ethnographies of extant nomadic hunter-gatherer groups, studied throughout the world over the past 80 years. There are many cultural differences among these nomadic foragers—who live in drastically different geographic environments—but remarkably they are all egalitarian societies, particularly in sharing food obtained from hunting big game, and to some extent, foraging activities. They fiercely suppress individuals who try to gain dominance over the group (Boehm, 1999, 2012). A recent archeological discovery found tools and other artifacts used by humans in a cave in South Africa 40,000 year ago (d'Errico et al., 2012). These are some of the same types of tools and artifacts used by contemporary Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert, providing the first evidence of cultural and behavioral continuity over a span of 40,000 years. This finding supports Boehm's belief that ethnographies of nomadic hunter-gatherers who have remained isolated represent a reasonable approximation to the type of nomadic groups that existed during the late Pleistocene.

Another major adaptation that is unique to humans (and most likely all our *Homo* species ancestors) is that we are “cooperative breeders,” a type of infant care in which mothers allow other relatives and close companions to assist in care and feeding of their infants and young children. None of our ape relatives allow other members of the group to assist in the care of their infants, probably due to the high incidence of infanticide in many species of mammals (Hrdy, 1999, 2009).

A third difference from our ape relatives is that humans are the only ape species in which males establish long-term pair bonding (monogamous) relations with females. Chimpanzees and bonobos, our closest ape relatives, have a social organization in which females leave the natal group once they become sexually mature—most likely to avoid inbreeding and the negative effects of accumulating recessive genes that are deleterious. Among these apes, sexual relations are of limited duration and are particularly promiscuous in the case of bonobos (de Waal, 2013). The change toward longer-term pair bonding produced more tolerance and less aggression toward other males in natal groups and even with other males that have lived in their natal groups and migrate to new groups (Chapais, 2008, 2012). These changes in male behavior had major effects on the social and family composition of nomadic hunter-gatherers, creating a greater degree of cooperation (Hill et al., 2011).

There is growing and convergent evidence coming from many disciplines that humans are a highly cooperative and social species (Bowles & Gintis, 2011; J. Henrich & N. Henrich, 2006; N. Henrich & J. Henrich, 2007; Tomasello, 2009). The growth of the neocortex in primates, and particularly the exponential growth observed in our *homo* lineage, is a direct result of increasing social complexity (Dunbar, 2010; Dunbar & Shultz, 2007). The social brain hypothesis is now widely accepted as a fact (Gazzaniga, 1997).

What were some of the consequences of these changes? Greater degrees of cooperation and sociability put selective pressures on developing better modes of communication. Cooperation and communication coevolved and fed on each other, producing two important emergent properties: language and a new form of evolution—cultural evolution. Cultural evolution is a process whereby groups begin to develop their unique cultures and ways of cooperating with each other. As this process develops, groups begin competing and cooperating with *other* groups in complex ways. Groups that function more cohesively and cooperatively begin to outcompete and succeed over groups that are less cooperative and cohesive (Boyd & Richerson, 2005; Durham, 1991; Henrich, 2002; Lumsden & Wilson, 1981; Tennie, Call, & Tomasello, 2009; Tomasello, 2008; Wilson, 2012).

A sense of “we-ness” and group solidarity based on a prolonged immersion in intimate close relations and attachments during a protracted period of development, the most protracted of any known species (Bjorklund & Rosenberg, 2005), and a strong affiliation to groups, are central characteristics of our species. Strong group affiliations produce parochial (tribal) identities, in-group solidarity (Choi & Bowles, 2007), and, all too often, intergroup hostility and war—the “us versus them” mentality (Bowles, 2006, 2012; De Dreu et al., 2010).

Cultural evolution requires language-based teaching and learning, which surpasses the social learning seen among our ape relatives (Boyd, Richerson, & Henrich, 2011a). The transmission of cultural knowledge from one generation to the next has allowed our species to explore, invent, and create new technologies, art forms, reading and writing symbols, mathematical and musical symbols, all of which continue to evolve and proliferate. This, in turn, defines the multiplicity of ways of being human (Boyd, Richerson, & Henrich, 2011b).

Cultural and behavioral modernity began to appear in Africa approximately 100,000 years ago (McBrearty, 2007; McBrearty & Brooks, 2000) and in Europe 60,000 years ago, as seen in the beautiful paintings and

art carvings found in caves of southern France and in Altamira in Spain. These expressions of cultural and behavioral modernity were not motivated by direct survival needs, but by the trans-survival needs described by Fromm.

### The Importance of Prosocial Instincts in Our Species

Without a motivational base to develop new sociocognitive skills and communicate, share, and learn from others, these abilities would never have taken off (Cortina & Liotti, 2010, 2014). A generation of researchers has shown how infants and primary caregivers are socially engaged. They begin to have “proto-conversations” with each other by two to four months after birth that have all the markings of a real conversation, except that infants cannot speak words (Beebe, Knoblauch, Rustin, & Sorter, 2005; Stern, 1985; Trevarthen, 1979; Trevarthen & Aitken, 2001; Tronick, 2007). The work of Steven Porges has shown us the evolutionary and developmental origins of this social engagement system, closely linked to innervations of the facial muscles by cranial nerves 9 and 11, and by the emergence of a ventral myelinated branch of the vagal nerve, which is part of the parasympathic system (Porges, 2011).

It is not surprising that social engagement takes the form of a conversation, because communication is its most important function, and prepares the ground for the extensive cooperation and social learning needed to assimilate a huge amount of cultural knowledge that has accumulated through several millennia (Boyd et al., 2011b). For humans, this form of social engagement is the earliest expression of a social instinct to engage with others. Other primate species show rudimentary forms of this early eye contact, face-to-face interactions, and joint attention, but it disappears after a month or two (Ferrari, Paukner, Ionica, & Suomi, 2009), whereas in humans, it continues to develop and persists throughout life.<sup>7</sup>

By the end of the first year of life, an attachment to an exclusive parenting figure, which is activated in moments of distress, is fully developed. As Bowlby (1969) showed us, we share this social instinct with other mammals and some species of birds. The enormous significance of this attachment is that it provides a base of security that children need in

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<sup>7</sup> Social engagement in primates is based on grooming other members of the group and forming coalitions to defend and protect one's position within social hierarchies—the main form of social organization in primates.

order to assimilate the culture to which they belong and to explore their material and social worlds (Bowlby, 1988). Children need attachment figures to help them gradually develop the capacities to self-regulate their emotions and levels of arousal (Sroufe, 1996).

By 14 months of age, a new set of social motivations begins to emerge. Children engage in simple joint tasks or games like playing peek-a-boo, and spontaneously helping strangers. Tomasello and colleagues at the Max Plank Institute in Leipzig Germany have documented the presence of these spontaneous prosocial motivations (Hepach, Vaish, & Tomasello, 2013; Warneken & Tomasello, 2007, 2009). It is impressive to watch these videotaped demonstrations of spontaneous helpful and cooperative behaviors with strangers in 14- to 18-month-olds,<sup>8</sup> unprompted by parents and with no immediate reward. By the second year of life, infants are engaging in a new form of we-centered interactions, and infants show a strong desire to share experiences with others. When playful interactions are suddenly suspended by an adult, children expect and request that the adult continue the playful interaction (Warneken, Chen, & Tomasello, 2006). Toddlers even turn instrumental tasks into a social game. The desire to share experience with others can also be seen by the simple gesture of pointing as a way to call attention of others to objects or situations of interest. This gesture to share something of interest is unique to humans (Tomasello, Carpenter, & Liszkowski, 2007).<sup>9</sup> All these developments prepare young children to internalize shared social norms and assimilate cultural values (Rahoezy & Schmidt, 2013).

As any parent who has raised a toddler knows, the presence of prosocial motivations in young children does not mean that they are always cooperative and helpful. Toddlers do not have the reputation of the “terrible twos” for nothing. Sporadic selfishness, stubbornness, and resistance to share with siblings, peers, and even with the adults they love is a normal part of development. But parents’ cooperativeness and helpfulness with their children strongly predicts how cooperative and helpful

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<sup>8</sup> The videotapes illustrate, in ways that a verbal description fails to convey, the importance of these prosocial instincts. You can see some of these videos by going to Michael Tomasello’s website at: [http://www.eva.mpg.de/psycho/videos/children\\_clothes.mpg](http://www.eva.mpg.de/psycho/videos/children_clothes.mpg)

<sup>9</sup> Apes raised in captivity can learn to point to request something, but they never point to share an object of interest.

they will become with peers and teachers later in development (Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005).

Although this growing body of knowledge would have forced Fromm to abandon the minimal instinct hypothesis, I think he would have been delighted with the growing literature on prosocial motivations and early internalization of shared social norms. This new body of knowledge strongly supports his “concept of man” and his view of the human condition and, in many ways, strengthens it by showing that prosocial motivations are not just cultural, but rooted in human evolution, and that our “genius for good and evil” are closely related (Fromm, 1964). The demonstration that three-year-olds are already internalizing shared social norms and cultural values and beginning to enforce these norms with peers (Rahoezy & Schmidt, 2013) also support his view of how social character is formed in childhood.

#### **Problems With Fromm's View of the Nature of the Mother-Infant Bond**

Like Otto Rank and Margaret Mahler, Fromm believed that infants were symbiotically dependent on their mothers for survival:

But the way to paradise is blocked by man's biological and—particularly his neurophysiologic constitution. He has only one alternative: either to persist in his cravings to regress and to pay for it by symbolic dependence on mother (and on symbolic substitutes, such as soil, nature, god, nation, a bureaucracy), or to progress and to find new roots in the world by his own efforts, by experiencing the brotherhood of man, and by freeing himself from the power of the past. (Fromm, 1973, pp. 232–233)

This belief led Fromm to think that the only way to reach independence is to break the symbiotic ties with mother or her symbolic cultural equivalents. In fairness to Fromm, he had a view of what mature loving relations looked like, which he articulated in his phenomenal best-seller, *The Art of Loving* (1956). What he lacked was an understanding of how loving affectional ties developed, or how anxious and disorganized forms of attachment could interfere with the growth of autonomy and the ability to love. He could only encourage or exhort people to develop autonomous, respectful, and caring relations and become independent. Fromm could not, however, provide them with an empathic understanding of the developmental pathways that derailed their ability to develop

loving relations, or explain why they became anxiously attached or panicked about being abandoned (Cortina, 1996).

Attachment theory has clearly shown that the route to autonomy is not based on breaking ties with attachment figures, but by being able to develop an effective dependence—in the language of attachment theory—a secure attachment (Ainsworth, 1972). Developing a secure attachment is based on attachment figures' abilities to respond sensitively to infants' communications, to be attuned to their affects, and not to overstimulate them. This allows the infant to develop an expectation that attachment figures will be available when needed. Feeling safe and protected, they are able to explore their social and material environment with confidence. This emotional schema becomes eventually internalized to the point that the physical presence of mother is not needed for confident exploration.

#### Strengths and Weaknesses of Fromm's Approach to Clinical Work

Fromm never wrote the clinical book he promised, so we are left with a few interviews, unfinished manuscripts published after his death, and recollections of his former patients, colleagues, and supervisees to form an impression of how he actually worked with patients (Funk, 2009).

Marco Bacciagaluppi (1996) proposed a useful way to try to locate Fromm within the spectrum of clinical approaches in contemporary relational psychoanalysis. One end of the spectrum is based on the idea that insight (i.e., interpretation of repressed material and defensive processes) is the main agent of change in therapy. The other end is based on the idea that new experience provides an alternative to old ways of being and, therefore, a corrective emotional experience is the main change agent. Fromm embodied both approaches in his work. He saw the aim of psychoanalysis as making the unconscious conscious. His main difference with Freud was that rather than relying on interpretations that would play into patient's intellectualizations or obsessional thinking, Fromm used what *he* was feeling *with* patients and then communicated his feeling directly to them.

One of Fromm's favorite sayings was from Terence, the ancient Roman playwright: "I am human, and nothing human is alien to me"—also one of Freud's favorites. For Fromm, this meant that we all have the potential to experience the whole of humanity within us, and we can use our shared humanity to resonate with our patients emotionally, what he called a "center-to-center relationship."

Everything is in me. I am a little child, I am a grown up, I am a murderer, I am a saint, I am narcissistic, I am destructive. There is nothing in the patient I do not have in me. And only if I can muster in myself those experiences which the patient is telling me about, either explicitly or implicitly, only if they arouse an echo within myself, can I know what the patient is talking about and I can give him back what he or she really is talking about. Then something very strange happens. The patient will not have the feeling I am talking *about* him or her, but the patient will feel I am talking about something we both share. (Fromm, 1994, p. 100)

Without mincing words, Fromm might tell patients that what they were saying was boring or banal, or that they were terrified of their mother, or had murderous feelings. Although working within the classic approach of making the unconscious conscious, this “center-to-center” approach puts Fromm squarely in the intersubjective camp, with those who believe that authentic new experience is the most important mutative factor in treatment.

We can sometimes intuitively sense what a patient is feeling, as when a patient is sad despite appearing cheerful, but it is not enough to try to experience within ourselves what the patient might be feeling. It is dangerous to rely solely on our experience with the patient to understand their communications. We might think that lack of feelings or a guarded attitude is a resistance, or a banal communication and feel bored, but it might be that a patient is cooperating in the only superficial way she or he knows—a pathological accommodation, to use Bernard Brandchaft's concept (Brandchaft, Doctors, & Sorter, 2010). Some of these expectations might be so familiar for patients (and for us) that they are not recognized as such, what Donnel Stern (1997), following Sullivan, calls “unformulated experience.” For example, a common expectation that is an outcome of a history of avoidant attachment is: “I am on my own, and I don't expect much from others.” Like many other analysts of his generation, Fromm did not have at his disposal an understanding of the developmental paths that create these types of automatic expectations.

Attachment theory and research has mapped out the main developmental paths that lead to different unconscious affect regulation strategies and automatic expectations that may minimize (avoidant pattern), magnify (ambivalent pattern), or completely dysregulate (disorganized pattern) attachment and caregiving bonds with significant others

(Cortina, 2013; Sroufe et al., 2005). Moreover, patients' attributions to their therapists might contain more than a grain of truth, and it behooves us to examine them with honesty and explore with our patients what they perceived in us that is accurate. This admission often has positive effects for our patients and for us (Fromm sometimes encouraged his patients to describe what they perceived about his personality; M. Maccoby, personal communication, summer 1996).

In sum, empathy must include a first-person perspective (i.e., how I experience the patient) and a second-person perspective (i.e., a direct emotional responsiveness to each other), which Fromm called the "center-to-center relationship." This two-way interactive view of empathy can help analyze impasses and enactments in therapy and minimize the risk of failed treatments, an approach advocated by Joe Lichtenberg and his colleagues (Lichtenberg, Lachmann, & Fosshage, 1996) and Irwin Hoffman (1983), among others.

Fromm thought that pathology was not a case of an ego controlling irrational passions, but more a case of life-affirming and enhancing passions and feelings being in conflict with life, strangulating and inhibiting passions and feelings. As Fromm (1994) put it, "the problem is not the fight of ego versus passions, but the fight of one type of passion against another type of passion" (p. 21), a view that is consistent with Terence's humanistic credo. This is an aspect of Fromm's contribution that Sandra Buechler developed beautifully with her use of affect theory based upon Silvan Tompkins's groundbreaking work on emotions (Buechler, 2008). As Buechler points out, joy can be mobilized as an antidote to grief and loneliness, or healthy pride can be an antidote to pathological shame. This is not an alternative to a developmentally informed approach, but a complement, and emphasizes the therapist's aliveness and willingness to actively encourage and suggest ways patients can feel better.

Another aspect of Fromm's clinical approach concerns his use, or lack of use, of transference. Maccoby (1996), who was analyzed by Fromm, thinks that not working with the transference was one of Fromm's main shortcomings as a clinician. The problem might have been that Fromm lacked a good theory of the development of affectional bonds; moreover, he thought the main source of transference was the patient's expectation that the therapist would become a "magic helper." The idea of a magical helper was based on the enormous importance Fromm gave to the experience with mothers (cast as a symbiotic tie), and he might have viewed

this primal dependence as the main source of transference that needed to be analyzed and experienced, almost to the exclusion of anything else.

### Conclusions

Fromm thought the main aim of psychoanalysis is to help discover and develop our best selves, to have the freedom to be who we are and not what others expect us to be. This inner freedom allows us to love ourselves and love others for who they are. He thought that this mutual recognition and support is our highest calling and the source of a loving and affirming attitude toward life. Neville Symington (2012) has expressed a similar view of what the “essence” of psychoanalysis should be. These core humanistic values informed all of Fromm's efforts to integrate psychoanalysis with the social sciences and with Marxist thought to develop a view of the human condition rooted in our biology and history, and to explore the social, cultural, ethical, and religious ramifications of this approach.

Several authors within relational psychoanalysis have been calling for a broad-based, inclusive, interdisciplinary, and empirical opening of psychoanalysis as a humanistic and scientific discipline committed to address broader social issues, and as a way to combat the current marginality of psychoanalysis as a treatment modality (Aron & Starr, 2013; Frank, 2013; Safran, 2013; Stepansky, 2009; Strenger, 2013). The legacy of Erich Fromm has much to offer in formulating this vision.

The science to develop this vision is there for the taking: in infant research and developmental psychology, attachment theory, neuroscience, and the neurobiology of emotions, epigenetic regulation, and gene-environment interactions, evolutionary sociobiology and cultural anthropology, primate studies, sociology, and behavioral economics, to name some of the main relevant fields. A nucleus of psychoanalysts have embraced this inclusive view, doing systematic research of psychodynamic psychotherapy and integrating psychoanalysis with this explosion of new knowledge from related fields. It is an exciting time for doing this difficult but enormously rewarding and creative work.

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Mauricio Cortina, M.D., is director of the Attachment and Human Development Center at the Washington School of Psychiatry and a member of the faculty at the Institute of Contemporary Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis Seminario de Sociopsicoanalysis, Mexico City.