Erich Fromm's Social Philosophy

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Abstract:

Erich Fromm is a philosopher and a psychologist. He has many good ideas about religion, ethics, people and society, in which the problem that he always worries about and worries about is about people and society. Fromm criticizes modern society for creating individuals who are corrupted and lose their humanity. He believes that society needs to change to create better living conditions, helping people develop more comprehensively and happily. Therefore, he has ideas to build a new society - a society full of humanity and happiness for everyone.

Keywords: social philosophy, new society, new man, social character

1. Preamble:

Erich Fromm in his research always focused on issues surrounding humans, especially human freedom. He believed that freedom is the essence, or attribute of humans, meaning that humans are no longer humans without freedom. According to him, the emergence of capitalism contributed to the liberation and freedom of individuals. However, when individuals were freed from the Middle Ages, they felt increasing confusion and insecurity. When referring to modern man, Erich Fromm realized that although he had been freed from the constraints of pre-individualist society, he did not have freedom in the positive sense, and did not have the expression of intellectual and emotional potential. Freedom brings people independence, making them lost, so they become confused and helpless. Loneliness and fear make people unable to continue to bear the burden of "liberated" freedom, forcing people to face the escape from the burden of freedom or move towards true freedom

based on the foundation of independence and individuality. Therefore, he found that due to the binding relationships of society, they greatly influence people, so he had the idea of a happy society - a place where everyone lives a happy life, helping people find their true freedom.

2. Research Results:
2.1. Introduction to Erich Fromm:

Erich Fromm, (born March 23, 1900, Frankfurt am Main, Germany - died March 18, 1980, Muralto, Switzerland), was a German social psychologist, psychoanalyst, sociologist, humanist philosopher, and democratic sociologist. During his research life, he left behind many famous works such as : Escape from Freedom (1941), *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (1950), *Man for Himself* (1947), *Psychoanalysis* and Zen (1963), The *sane society* (1955)..., including books ranked as best sellers in the West revolving around issues such as people, freedom, morality, religion, society... Especially in the chaotic situation of Germany at that time, Erich

Fromm always wondered how to build a stable society, bringing a free and happy life to everyone. From there, he brought us extremely profound social philosophical concepts.

2.2. Concept of social personality:

Social character is a central concept in Erich Fromm's social psychology. Fromm refers to social character as a set of characteristics, the core of the personality structure of most members of a group, which have been formed as a result of the basic experiences and common lifestyles of that group. That is, social character is a personality structure shared by members of a group or community, individuals in a society or a class, which is formed based on their lifestyles, as well as the common expectations of society or cultural conventions that require them to adjust their behavior to adapt. This adaptation is the result of the interaction between the individual and the social environment, our cultural environment. Fromm uses the concept of social character as the key to understanding and comprehending the social process of an individual, and also the key to understanding the spirit of a culture.

E. Fromm explains the unity of social consciousness by social character: "To ensure the smooth functioning of a given society, its members must attain a type of character that makes them want to act as members of that society or of a class within it. They must want to do it objectively" [2]. In this sense, social character has the function of adapting individual desires to social needs; it creates a set of personality traits and cultural values, internalized by the members of the group. In industrial societies, for example, social character determines individuals to go in the direction of work and effort, discipline and punctuality, so Fromm discovered that the character structure of a modern worker in an industrial society is obedience, discipline and punctuality [5].

Erich Fromm argued that social personality is a characteristic system of personality that develops as people adapt to the economic, social, and cultural conditions of a group. He was interested in how society and culture influence people, and he believed that they create specific characteristics in each person's personality. According to Fromm, people are not only products of their individual minds but also results of the social environment in which they live. He proposed many important concepts related to social personality, including "freedom" and "autonomy". Freedom according to Fromm is not the freedom to do whatever you want, but instead he believes that true freedom is the ability to make decisions and control your own life. Freedom does not only exist at the individual level, but also depends on society and culture. Fromm was interested in how society affects people's ability to be free. Self-control is the ability to self-manage, self-control and self-expression. Self-control is not only related to self-management of daily life, but also to self-expression through creativity and love.

The concept of social personality was Fromm's alternative to Freud's theory of motivation and is considered by him (and most contemporary commentators) to be his most important theoretical contribution. The structure of *an individual's personality* , Fromm argued following Freud, is a durable, enduring, and relatively fixed entity. People tend to behave in specific, often predictable, and almost automatic ways. More broadly, *social personality* refers to "the kernel of personality structure shared by most members of the same culture, as opposed to the individual personality in which people of the same culture differ" [7].

While for Freud, social behavior originated from the interaction between the individual's biological drives and their formation in social structures such as the family, Fromm argued that "the most important conditioning factor in the formation of the social character, the context in which it exists, is the mode of production" [9].

So what is the key element in Fromm's concept of social personality?

Firstly, it is a broader concept than ideology, while it includes conscious ideas, it also includes unconscious thoughts, feelings and behaviours (in this respect, social personality has some

similarities with Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* , a point also noted by Kieran Durkin) [3].

Second, Fromm argues, the psychoanalytic concepts used in the analysis of individual behavior can be applied, with some modifications, to the explanation of the social characteristics of groups or classes. Thus, for example, the concept of masochism plays an important role in his explanation of the role of the German middle class in the rise of Nazism. In saying this, however, Fromm does not mean neurosis or perversion but an attitude toward power rooted in social character: "He (the petty bourgeois) admires power and tends to submit to it, but at the same time he wants to be a powerful person and make others submit to him" [1].

Third, for Fromm, social character plays an important role in the smooth functioning of the capitalist system. Just as individual character means that people behave in "characteristic" ways without having to re-solve each new situation, the social character of the working class also means that its members tend to behave in fairly predictable ways, consistent with the needs of capital:

For example, modern industrial society cannot achieve its ends unless it harnesses the energies of free men to an unprecedented extent… It is not enough for each individual to consciously decide every day that he wants to work, be on time, etc., because any such conscious deliberation would lead to more exceptions than would allow the society to function smoothly. Threats and force are also insufficient as motivators because the very different tasks in modern industrial society can, in the long run, be the work of free men and not of forced labour. The social *need* for work, punctuality, and order must be transformed into internal *motivation*. This means that society must create a social ethos in which these efforts are inherent [7].

2.3. Erich Fromm's thoughts on building a new society:

Erich Fromm believed that human unhappiness was largely due to the way capitalist society was structured. For him, becoming happier required changing society first. From this, Erich Fromm conceived of a happy society - a place where everyone lived a happy life in a state of "being" rather than having.

For Fromm, there is a crucial difference between our two ways of living: in the so-called "mode of having," we are trying to possess valuable things by *incorporating* them into our bodies, homes, and lives. In the "mode of being," we acquire valuable *characteristics* (for example, knowledge or experience) by *becoming* the kind of person who has these characteristics.

In the state of having, the valuable thing remains outside of us: it can be lost or stolen, and we ourselves are not changed or made any better by having it. In the state of being, the valuable thing becomes part of us: it cannot be lost or stolen, and we become better people by *living with* the valuable thing and making it part of our character.

Erich Fromm's first idea about building a new society is to build a "new human".

First, creating "new human"

Fromm develops his concept of a new society that can be built by humans in a way that is based on mature and constructive interaction between its members. Fromm identifies four conditions that must be met for human character to change:

1. People are suffering and are aware that they are suffering.
2. Man realizes the origin of his suffering.
3. People realize that there is a way to overcome their illness.
4. People accept that to overcome illness, they must follow certain standards in life and change their current lifestyle [8].

Here Fromm's psychoanalytic approach is evident: the path to social healing must begin with the awareness of one's own suffering and one's insight into the mechanisms that cause that suffering. Only after these have been clearly seen by oneself can one begin to walk the path toward healing.

According to Fromm, the "new society" will eventually abandon its goal of conquering and

exploiting nature. For Fromm, evil and destruction are the inevitable consequences of the failure to develop. Fromm attributes aggression and destruction to man's innate fear of freedom, which leads to man's attempt to "escape from freedom." Ultimately, happiness is "the process of living ever more fully, regardless of the furthest point that fate allows one to reach, because living as fully as possible is so satisfying that one no longer cares about what one can achieve or not "opportunities for development."

From here, Erich Fromm introduced the personality of "new human", with the following characteristics:

One is to be willing to give up all forms of possession in order to exist fully.

Second, security, a sense of identity and self-confidence are based on faith in one's own humanity, in the need to relate, care, love, and unite with the world around one, rather than on the desire to possess, own, control the world, and thus become a slave to one's possessions.

Ultimately, the "new human" will be fully present where he is. He will experience the joy that comes from sharing rather than from hoarding and exploiting. He will love and respect life, striving to reduce greed, anger, and illusion. And finally, he will develop the capacity for love, "along with the capacity for critical, unsentimental thinking. He will renounce his ego and accept the tragic limitations inherent in human existence." This last one is interesting.

Second, the idea of the rule of law state

Erich Fromm did not write directly about the concept of "rule of law", however he had many views related to society, power and individual freedom, which can be applied to a deeper understanding of the rule of law.

First, Erich Fromm emphasized freedom and personal development.

Fromm emphasized the importance of freedom and personal development in a democratic society. He believed that an ideal society is one where individuals can develop fully, without being oppressed by power structures. This is closely related to the concept of the rule of law, where the law is respected and the freedom of each individual is protected. He also emphasized that individual freedom is the core element for human comprehensive development. In his work "Escape from Freedom", he analyzed that people need to escape from social constraints and oppressive power to achieve true freedom. The rule of law, with its protection of individual freedom and guarantee of fair laws, is an ideal environment for this to happen.

Second, Erich Fromm criticized oppressive power systems.

Fromm was a strong critic of political and social systems that he saw as oppressive and limiting to individual development. He believed that a just and humane society must be based on mutual respect and the freedom of all people. In his work "The Sane Society," he argued that a just and humane society must be based on mutual respect and the freedom of all people. The rule of law, with its principle of the supremacy of law and separation of powers, helps prevent abuses of power and protects the rights of citizens.

Third, the decentralization and control of power.

Fromm believed that power needs to be controlled and divided to avoid abuse of power. The rule of law state with the principle of separation of powers (legislative, executive and judicial) and mutual control between the branches of power is a testament to this view.

Fourth, humanity and fairness

Fromm always emphasized the importance of humanity and justice in society. He believed that an ideal society is one where everyone is treated fairly and humanely. The rule of law, with its guarantee of fundamental freedoms and justice in the law, clearly reflects this idea.

Third, the idea of humanistic and democratic society

The culmination of Fromm's social and political philosophy was his 1955 book The Sane Society, in which he argued for humanistic and democratic

socialism. Building largely on the early works of Karl Marx, Fromm sought to re-emphasize the ideal of freedom, which was absent from most Soviet Marxism and was often found in the writings of libertarian socialists and liberal theorists. Fromm's socialism rejected both Western capitalism and Soviet communism, which he saw as inhumane and leading to a near-universal alienation from modernity. He became one of the founders of social humanism, promoting Marx's early works and his humanistic message to the American and Western European publics.

The renewed interest in the ideas of Erich Fromm reflects two key aspects of 21st-century politics. First, there is the widespread and profound desire for an alternative to neoliberal capitalism, which found its political expression first in the 1999 Seattle protests against the World Trade Organization and in the subsequent development of the anti-capitalist movement. Slogans such as "the world is not for sale" and "another world is possible" reflect almost exactly the core elements of Fromm's thought: first, his moral critique of materialism and consumerism, responsible for the "marketing" society that he saw as the dominant social figure of our time; second, his "prophetic messianism," which expressed a utopian yearning for a different, more just society.

However, Fromm's ideas also fit with another, more negative, feature of much of today's political left: namely, the rejection of class politics and any notion that the working class can change the world. His work lacks the notion of the working class as a collective agent capable of liberating itself and thereby humanity. In this sense, Fromm is actually closer to the early nineteenth-century utopian socialists than to Marx himself.

A third factor that may also have contributed to Fromm's current popularity is the desire for a more critical social psychology than the currently dominant "surface" approaches such as cognitive-behavioral psychology, which have increasingly been tainted by their deployment in welfare-to-work programs [4]. While this is itself a positive development, it is questionable whether Fromm's "brand" concept of social personality is capable of

providing that critical alternative. As I have argued above, it risks reifying working-class consciousness and becoming a substitute for a concrete analysis of the factors that shape human thought and emotion.

Fourth, the difficulties that the new society will have to face

The shift towards such a utopian society would not be easy, and Fromm argued that this new society would have to overcome a number of obstacles.

First, we will have to solve the problem of how to continue the industrial mode of production without complete centralization. We have seen how Karl Marx argued that the capitalist mode of production necessarily requires more and more capital to be concentrated in the hands of those who are already rich, and how this leads to a widespread alienation in the lives of the working classes.

But of course no one wants to abolish industrial society altogether, and Fromm was realistic enough to admit that. Whatever we think of Marx and the evils of capitalism, we all want continued access to electricity, the Internet, cheap clothing, safe and affordable housing, a steady supply of food, and other agricultural and medical technologies.

Fromm thought that such a society would have to "combine total planning with a high degree of decentralization, abandoning the "free market economy," which has become largely a fiction." As part of this, the new society would have to abandon the goal of unlimited growth (and we can see the problems of this unlimited growth model much more clearly in our time than Fromm did in the 1970s). A new society would have to replace this ideal with "selective growth," perhaps focusing on the things we really need to live a good, satisfying life - and in particular creating a "general spirit in which not material goods but other spiritual goods," satisfaction, are the effective motivators.

All of this can only be achieved by a society that is able to control scientific progress and prevent it "from becoming a danger to humanity through its practical application." It will have to facilitate genuine happiness and joy, rather than making us

chase after material wealth and short-term pleasure. And it will "provide basic security for individuals without making them dependent on a bureaucracy for their sustenance."

If all this sounds like a tall order, it is. But then, utopias are supposed to be hard to come by. How this ideal world would work economically, Fromm asks: after all, he is not an economist but a psychiatrist.

But whether we can one day make Fromm's vision (or something like it) a reality is the important thing – and Fromm would probably be the first to say so. He doesn't encourage us to keep dreaming of a better world, but like his ideal lovers, he wants us to be unsentimental, uncritical, and clear-sighted. To see what's wrong with our world and go out with a screwdriver, megaphone, pen, or ballot in hand and fix things one by one, until we create a world better than the one we were born into.

3. Conclusion:

Fromm's social philosophy has certain values in the study of human beings, nature, freedom as well as human alienation in modern society. From there, it is the premise to build a new and better society with its humanistic values in his social philosophy, at the same time bringing positive values in his philosophy and its influence on the history of modern Western philosophy in particular and the history of world philosophy in general later.

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