

## 📖 Topic Page: [Fromm, Erich \(1900 – 1980\)](#)

Definition: **Fromm, Erich** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

US psychoanalyst and writer, b. Germany. Fromm applied psychoanalysis to the study of peoples and cultures, stressing the importance of interpersonal relationships in an impersonal, industrialized society. His books include *Escape from Freedom* (1941) and *The Art of Loving* (1956).



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### Summary Article: **Fromm, Erich Pinchas**

From *The Edinburgh International Encyclopaedia of Psychoanalysis*

Fromm was born in Frankfurt and educated as a sociologist in Heidelberg. He received his psychoanalytic training from Sachs in Berlin and was for some years a member of the Institute for Social Research (the so-called 'Frankfurt School'). In 1934 he emigrated to the United States, where he was close to Horney and Sullivan. Although he divorced his first wife, Frieda Fromm-Reichmann, Fromm's own therapeutic ideas are very similar to Fromm-Reichmann's *Principles of Intensive Psychotherapy*. After his split from the Horney group in 1943, Fromm – together with Sullivan and Fromm-Reichmann – became co-founder of the New York William Alanson White Institute. From 1950 through 1974 Fromm lived in Mexico, where he established his own psychoanalytic institute. His last years were spent in Locarno, Switzerland.

Fromm is often ranked among the neo-Freudians and proponents of humanist psychology. But Fromm himself consistently rejected such attributions. In the 30s he developed his own highly fruitful psychoanalytic approach to the interpretation of conscious and unconscious strivings both in the individual and in society.

Moulded by his Jewish origins and influenced by Marx's *Early Writings*, his scientific interest was focused on the economic and social constraints that make individuals and society (and also social groups) behave in a specific way. In contrast to Freud's theory, Fromm claims that in regard to most psychic strivings we are not driven by an intrinsic drive, or even by partial drives; rather we are driven to satisfy psychic needs (for instance, to be related to others) which stem from our existential situation as human beings and which are not rooted in an inherent drive. By satisfying these existential or psychic needs we are driven to react in ways conditioned by those economic and social requirements that determine our social practice of life.

Hence it is that we establish by the formation of our psychic structure (or as Fromm puts it, by the formation of our social character) the specific conscious and unconscious strivings by means of which we finally wish to think, feel and act as we are expected to do. According to Fromm, the individual develops not only an individual character but also a social counterpart. (Using this concept of a social character, Fromm goes on to explain psychoanalytically why and how a society is dynamically integrated.)

Fromm illustrates his socio-psychoanalytic approach in terms of various socially moulded orientations of social character, to wit the authoritarian character (in his 1941 *Escape from Freedom*), the marketing character (in the 1947 *Man for Himself*), the narcissistic character (in his 1964 *Heart of Man*), and the necrophilic character (in the 1964 *Heart of Man*, and in the 1973 *Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*).

Much more than for these socio-psychoanalytic concepts, Fromm is usually known for his humanistic concept of psychoanalysis. Eschewing Freud's instinctivist and (from 1920 on) dualist drive theory, Fromm became convinced that there is a primary potentiality (or tendency) in all human beings for growth, love, reason, freedom, autonomy, creativity – i.e. for 'productivity', as he came to call it after 1947 in *Man for Himself*. Destructiveness, sadism, masochism, hate of life, etc., are only a secondary potentiality – namely the result of a severe inhibition, or thwarting, of the primary tendency to develop human productivity (or a 'productive character orientation'). Hence Fromm came to stress the human capacity for love (in *The Art of Loving*) and the ability to overcome alienation by strengthening one's own humane powers (in *To Have or to Be?* and in *The Art of Being*).

For the impact of Fromm's humanist sociopsychanalytic approach on psychoanalytic theory and on psychotherapy, the reader is referred to Fromm's *Greatness and Limitations of Freud's Thought*, as also to the posthumously published works *The Revision of Psychoanalysis* and *The Art of Listening*.

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## MLA

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