

To Have or To Be?, by E. Fromm

a. People / Organizations:

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b. Quotes:

- "dare to face the situation.... Man has become a superman.... But the superman with the superhuman power has not risen to the level of superhuman reason. To the degree to which his power grows he becomes more and more a poor man....It must shake up our conscience that we become all the more inhuman the more we grow into supermen." - Albert Schweitzer (pg. 2)

c. General Notes:

- Introduction: The Great Promise, its Failure, and New Alternatives (pg. 1)

- "To be sure, our civilization began when the human race started taking active control of nature; but that control remained limited until the advent of the industrial age. With industrial progress, from the substitution of mechanical and then nuclear energy for animal and human energy to the substitution of the computer for the human mind, we could feel that we were on our way to unlimited production and, hence, unlimited consumption; that technique made us omnipotent; that science made us omniscient. We were on our way to becoming gods, supreme beings who could create a second world, using the natural world only as building blocks for our new creation." (pg. 1)

- "We are a society of notoriously unhappy people: lonely, anxious, depressed, destructive, dependent-people who are glad when we have killed the time we are trying so hard to save." (pg. 5)

- Part 1 - Understanding the Difference Between Having and Being (pg. 11)

- Chapter 1 - A First Glance (pg. 13)

- 'The difference is rather between a society centered around persons and one centered around things.' (pg. 17)

- "By being or having I do not refer to certain separate qualities of a subject as illustrated in such statements as 'I have a car' or 'I am white' or 'I am happy.' I refer to two fundamental modes of existence, to two different kinds of orientation toward self and the world, to two different kinds of character structure the respective predominance of which determines the totality of a person's thinking, feeling, and acting. In the having mode of existence my relationship to the world is one of possessing and owning, one in which I want to make everybody and everything, including myself, my property. In the being mode of existence, we must identify two forms of being. One is in contrast to having, as exemplified in the Du Marais statement, and means aliveness and authentic relatedness to the world. The other form of being is in contrast to appearing and refers to the true nature, the true reality, of a person or a thing in contrast to deceptive appearances as exemplified in the etymology of being (Benveniste)." (pg. 21)

- "Living structures can be only if they become; they can exist only if they change. Change and growth are inherent qualities of the life process." (pg. 22)

- "The attitude inherent in consumerism is that of swallowing the whole world." (pg. 23)

- "To sum up, to consume is one form of having, and perhaps the most important one for today's affluent industrial societies. Consuming has ambiguous qualities: It relieves anxiety, because what one has cannot be taken away; but it also requires one to consume ever more, because previous consumption soon loses its satisfactory character. Modern consumers may identify themselves by the formula: I am = what I have and what I consume." (pg. 24)

- Chapter 2 - Having and Being in Daily Experience (pg. 25)

- "Knowing, then, begins with the shattering of illusions, with disillusionment (Ent-äuschung). Knowing means to penetrate through the surface, in order to arrive at the roots, and hence the causes; knowing means to "see" reality in its nakedness. Knowing does not mean to be in possession of the truth; it means to penetrate the surface and to strive critically and actively in order to approach truth ever more closely." (pg. 35)

- Chapter 3 - Having and Being in the Old and New Testaments and in the Writings of Master Eckhart (pg. 41)

- See text

- Part 2 - Analyzing the Fundamental Differences Between the Two Modes of Existence (pg. 57)

- Chapter 4 - What is the Having Mode? (pg. 59)

- "Our ego is the most important object of our property feeling, for it comprises many things: our body, our name, our social status, our possessions (including our knowledge), the image we have of ourselves and the image we want others to have of us. Our ego is a mixture of real qualities, such as knowledge and skills, and of certain fictitious qualities that we build around a core of reality. But the essential point is not so much what the ego's content is, but that the ego is felt as a thing we each possess, and that this "thing" is the basis of our sense of identity." (pg. 61)

- "It must be clearly understood, though, that freedom is not laissez-faire and arbitrariness. Human beings have a specific structure - like any other species - and can grow only in terms of this structure. Freedom does not mean freedom from all guiding principles. It means the freedom to grow according to the laws of the structure of human existence (autonomous restrictions). It means obedience to the laws that govern optimal human development. Any authority that furthers this goal is "rational authority" when this furtherance is achieved by way of helping to mobilize the child's activity, critical thinking, and faith in life. It is "irrational authority" when it imposes on the child heteronomous norms that serve the purposes of the authority, but not the purposes of the child's specific structure." (pg. 68)

- Chapter 5 - What is the Being Mode? (pg. 75)

- "Having refers to things and things are fixed and describable. Being refers to experience, and human experience is in principle not describable. What is fully describable is our persona - the mask we each wear, the ego we present - for this persona is in itself a thing. In contrast, the living human being is not a dead image and cannot be described like a thing. In fact, the living human being cannot be described at all. Indeed, much can be said about me, about my character, about my total orientation to life. This insightful knowledge can go very far in understanding and describing my own or another's psychical structure. But the total me, my whole individuality, my suchness that is as unique as my fingerprints are, can never be fully understood, not even by empathy, for no two human beings are entirely alike. Only in the process of mutual alive relatedness can the other and I overcome the barrier of separateness, inasmuch as we both participate in the dance of life. Yet our full identification of each other can never be achieved." (pg. 75)

- "The mode of being has as its prerequisites independence, freedom, and the presence of critical reason. Its fundamental characteristic is that of being active, not in the sense of outward activity, of busyness, but of inner activity, the productive use of our human powers. To be active means to give expression to one's faculties, talents, to the wealth of human gifts with which though in varying degrees every human being is endowed. It means to renew oneself, to grow, to flow out, to love, to transcend the prison of one's isolated ego, to be interested, to "list," to give." (pg. 76)

- "The unconscious is basically determined by society, which produces irrational passions and provides its members with various kinds of fiction and thus forces the truth to become the prisoner of the alleged rationality." (pg. 84)

- Chapter 6 - Further Aspects of Having and Being (pg. 93)
 - "While having is based on something that is diminished by use, being grows by practice. (The "burning bush" that is not consumed is the biblical symbol for this paradox.) The powers of reason, of love, of artistic and intellectual creation, all essential powers grow through the process of being expressed. What is spent is not lost, but on the contrary, what is kept is lost. The only threat to my security in being lies in myself: in lack of faith in life and in my productive powers; in regressive tendencies; in inner laziness and in the willingness to have others take over my life. But these dangers are not inherent in being, as the danger of losing is inherent in having." (pg. 95)
 - "...the fundamental elements in the relation between individuals in the having mode of existence are competition, antagonism, and fear." (pg. 97)
- Part 3 - The New Man and the New Society (pg. 113)
 - Chapter 7 - Religion, Character, and Society (pg. 115)
 - See text
 - Chapter 8 - Conditions for Human Change and the Features of the New Man (pg. 145)
 - "The function of the new society is to encourage the emergence of a new Man, beings whose character structure will exhibit the following qualities:
 - Willingness to give up all forms of having, in order to fully be.
 - Security, sense of identity, and confidence based on faith in what one is, on one's need for relatedness, interest, love, solidarity with the world around one, instead of on one's desire to have, to possess, to control the world, and thus become the slave of one's possessions.
 - Acceptance of the fact that nobody and nothing outside oneself give meaning to life, but that this radical independence and nothingness can become the condition for the fullest activity devoted to caring and sharing.
 - Being fully present where one is.
 - Joy that comes from giving and sharing, not from hoarding and exploiting.
 - Love and respect for life in all its manifestations, in the knowledge that not things, power, all that is dead, but life and everything that pertains to its growth are sacred.
 - Trying to reduce greed, hate, and illusions as much as one is capable.
 - Living without worshiping idols and without illusions, because one has reached a state that does not require illusions.
 - Developing one's capacity for love, together with one's capacity for critical, unsentimental thought.
 - Shedding one's narcissism and accepting the tragic limitations inherent in human existence.
 - Making the full growth of oneself and of one's fellow beings the supreme goal of living.
 - Knowing that to reach this goal discipline and respect for reality are necessary.
 - Knowing, also, that no growth is healthy that does not occur in a structure, but knowing, too, the difference between structure as an attribute of life and "order" as an attribute of no-life, of the dead.
 - Developing one's imagination, not as an escape from intolerable circumstances but as the anticipation of real possibilities, as a means to do away with intolerable circumstances.
 - Not deceiving others, but also not being deceived by others; one may be called innocent, but not naive.
 - Knowing oneself, not only the self one knows, but also the self one does not know - even though one has a slumbering knowledge of what one does not know.
 - Sensing one's oneness with all life, hence giving up the aim of conquering nature, subduing it, exploiting it, raping it, destroying it, but trying, rather, to understand and cooperate with nature.
 - Freedom that is not arbitrariness but the possibility to be oneself, not as a bundle of greedy desires, but as a delicately balanced structure that at any moment is confronted with the alternative of growth or decay, life or death.
 - Knowing that evil and destructiveness are necessary consequences of failure to grow.
 - Knowing that only a few have reached perfection in all these qualities, but being without the ambition to "reach the goal, in the knowledge that such ambition is only another form of greed, of having.
 - Happiness in the process of ever-growing aliveness, whatever the furthest point is that fate permits one to reach, for living as fully as one can is so satisfactory that the concern for what one might or might not attain has little chance to develop." (pg. 147-149)
 - Chapter 9 - Features of the New Society (pg. 151)
 - See text

d. Further Readings:

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