

Erich Fromm (1900-1980)

Person: Erich Fromm (1900-1980)

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Description Few intellectuals in the twentieth century played the role of the global public intellectual as successfully as the controversial social critic Erich Fromm. The author of such influential books as *Escape from Freedom* (1941), *The Sane Society* (1955), and *To Have or To Be* (1976), Fromm combined the role of scholar, activist, and popular critic. Born in Germany in 1900, Fromm was a member of the "critical theorists" of the Frankfurt School. Exiled from Nazi Germany in the 1930s, Fromm moved to the United States, developed an unorthodox Freudian psychology, and wrote best-selling and critically acclaimed books on Nazism, communitarian socialism, disarmament, and humanistic Marxism. Moving to Mexico City in the early 1950s, and then back to Europe in the last decade of his life, Fromm had an enormous worldwide influence on a broad range of intellectual and political traditions. Fromm was an early critic of the consumerism of modern globalizing culture, an opponent of traditionalism and neo-liberalism in the Global South, and a leading voice against both the American military and corporate empire and communist dictators. Fromm's thesis about how the breakdown of community can lead to a fascist "escape from freedom" is all too relevant today.



Erich Fromm

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Fromm was not without his critics. Berkeley political theorist, John Schaar, viewed Fromm as an unrealistic utopian proponent of an "escape from authority." Fromm was widely attacked for his position for a bi-national state in the Middle East, and for his opposition to the Vietnam War and American-led "modernization." Orthodox Marxists and Freudians criticized his work for dismissing insights from these traditions. Despite these controversies, Fromm can be said to have been an important twentieth century thinker and a truly engaged global public intellectual.