

# Evaluating Fromm's Theory of Love and its Pedagogical Significance

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Abstract:

*Erich Fromm presents an expansive conception of love, according to which love is a universalistic orientation toward others that promotes autonomy and mutual respect for humanity. This is a compelling theory, but it suffers from several conceptual limitations, such as vagueness and unresolved internal contradictions. After exploring these challenges, I show how they can be overcome in ways that clarify Fromm's theory of love and its significance for formulating ethical norms that should govern specific relationships. Once it is rehabilitated Fromm's conception of love provides a way of explaining how the teacher-student relationship can rely on hierarchy and authority while still promoting autonomy and empowerment. Specifically, it shows that the basis of the teacher-student relationship lies not in differences of knowledge or authority, which are only enabling conditions for this relationship, but rather in the mutual recognition that teachers and students are engaged in the same pursuit of knowledge.*

## Introduction

Erich Fromm is unique among twentieth-century western philosophers in making love a central concept in his work. To do this, Fromm relies on a far more expansive and substantive conception of love than is found in theories that associate love with affective attachments to specific objects or people. As Fromm describes it, love is not an attitude toward a particular object – whether an individual, an object, or a group – but rather a universal orientation towards people in general, which is premised upon the recognition of a shared human nature. This love is not narrowly-focused, as other conceptions of love so often are, but rather pushes individuals to overcome any attachments that are exclusionary and that may therefore serve as the basis for factionalism. Fromm further argues that the type of love he describes establishes the basis for non-authoritarian relationships, making love a powerful and comprehensive ethical concept.

Fromm's theory of love provides a useful framework for thinking about how love plays a role in pedagogy – a framework that Fromm himself helps to establish. He occasionally describes love as it exists between teachers and students as being a paradigmatic example of his conception of love. There is much to gain from applying Fromm's theory of love as a theory of pedagogy. It can explain the dynamics of a healthy relationship between teachers and students, what roles each should perform, their respective ethical obligations, and how the hierarchical relationship that exists between them can avoid becoming oppressive or authoritarian. However, despite these strengths, Fromm's theory of love is imperfectly developed as it applies to the teacher-student relationship. It faces at least two significant challenges that have to be overcome for Fromm's theory of love to be a convincing theory of pedagogy.

First, Fromm fails to explain what specific quality or qualities a universal love between teachers and students is based on. This is a serious omission. Fromm's theory of love presupposes that people share certain qualities that are so valuable that they can serve as the basis for generalizing love beyond specific individuals, to include large

groups of people or even humanity in general. Without an account of what qualities are valued in pedagogical relationships, it is unclear how love can take on a universal character. Second, although Fromm insists that the teacher-student relationship is based on a non-exploitative form of hierarchy, he fails to explain how any type of hierarchical relationship can be reconciled with love, which he often defines as being based on equality. This problem is especially serious because it extends beyond the pedagogical context narrowly defined to any type of hierarchy in which one person facilitates another's acquisition of knowledge. This includes relationships such as those between psychologists and their patients, parents and children, or friends of unequal status.

I will explore Fromm's theory of love as it applies to the teacher-student relationship and develop it to overcome the omissions and apparent contradictions left in his descriptions of that relationship. Specifically, I will argue that the two problems I raise in regard to Fromm's explanation of the teacher-student relationship can be overcome by importing Fromm's theory of human nature into his theory of pedagogy. Fromm argues that all humans undergo the experience of being detached from their 'primary bonds,' including their family, their home, and their early beliefs, as they grow up. This creates a constant demand for orienting oneself in the world and actively constructing an identity. This struggle is difficult and, Fromm argues, often leads people to find security in relationships of domination or subordination, which require the sacrifice of autonomy. I will argue that what makes teachers and students fundamentally equal, despite their different levels of knowledge or ability, is that they are both engaged in the project of orienting themselves in the world through education. Teachers and students both seek to find security in knowledge, rather than in authoritarian relationships, which allows them to form loving relationships with each other and to support each other's efforts while also respecting each other's autonomy.

The first section of this essay provides a brief overview of Fromm's theory of love and explains some of the strengths of this theory. As I will show, Fromm's conception of love establishes a basis for a universalistic ethic that is not purely rationalistic but that also recognizes the importance of affect. The second section discusses Fromm's applications of his theory of love to the teacher-student relationship and the specific advantages of applying his theory in this context. In the third section I explore the challenges that must be overcome if it is to have any value in a pedagogical context. In the fourth section I show how Fromm's theory can be further developed to overcome the problems that are evident in his formulation of this theory. I also show that resolving these problems further adds to the value of Fromm's theory of love. Finally, in the last section I discuss some of the pedagogical insights that Fromm uncovers with his theory of love.

### **Fromm's Theory of Love**

Fromm argues that the concept of love is invariably misunderstood in popular usage, and even in most philosophical accounts (1963, 1994: 135). Love is frequently described as a type of particularistic orientation toward a specific object of love. According to this view, something or someone is loved because the object is unique and special; it is set apart from the rest of the world, even if only from a subjective viewpoint. This uniqueness makes the object appear to be worthy of being valued above all else. This conception of love also tends to present love as an emotion that *must* by nature be directed narrowly at a single object because the emotion of love is either indivisible or because it is devalued if it is directed at multiple objects. The object of love, being unique and extremely valuable, may likewise be devalued if it is divided or if multiple people are allowed to love it. The result, is that according to the conventional view, love is an essentially exclusionary emotion that links two people or a person and an object while also preventing others from sharing in that relationship.

The popular conception of love appears most clearly in romantic love, which is generally described as a relationship between two people who form a unique affective attachment that cannot be shared with others. Romantic love cannot be directed at those outside the relationship without threatening to destroy or devalue that love, and is therefore an extremely exclusionary conception of love. The love of friendship provides another example of this type of particularistic love. Although this love may be shared between multiple friends, it is nevertheless directed narrowly at select individuals. Like romantic love, love between friends is premised on marginalizing those who are not part of the relationship. Outsiders are excluded from the relationship, and any intrusion by outsiders is regarded as being potentially threatening. Worst of all, from Fromm's point of view, is love for material objects, such as a person's love for a car, a home, or some other possession. This type of love is not only directed at specific objects but reflects an attempt to find fulfillment in the experience of having something rather than in the more psychologically healthy orientation of finding fulfillment in modes of being, which is to say, in lived experience (Fromm 2005). Moreover, love for an object is exclusionary to the extent that only a single person may be able to partake in the loving relationship.

Fromm considers conventional views of particularistic love, whether romantic, friendly, or materialistic, to be deeply problematic. Although he acknowledges that romantic love and the love of friendship exist and that they are important aspects of love, he thinks that they draw the boundaries of love narrowly, including one or several intimate connections while implicitly denying or devaluing links to other people. Fromm objects that these and other instances of particularistic love are really based on misconceptions about what love really is. They mistake some limited manifestations of love with love itself. As he says, "love for a particular 'object' is only the actualization and concentration of lingering love with regard to one person; it is not, as the idea of romantic love would have it, that there is only the one person in the world whom one can love" (Fromm 1994: 135).

Moreover, the pursuit of particularistic love for its own sake and not as a reflection of the universal conception of love encourages the formation of authoritarian relationships. Because particularistic love is directed toward a unique object it encourages jealous guarding of that object from others. It may even provoke suspicion of the object of love itself if that object is a person whose love might be directed at someone else. Those who only love in the particularistic way may attempt to control the object of their affection, thereby leading to authoritarian relationships with the object of love and potential competitors (1994: 136). Although this jealousy and protectiveness may feel like love to some, Fromm insists that the feeling is illusory and that any authoritarian impulses are antithetical to genuine love.

In contrast to particularistic theories of love, Fromm thinks that love is an expansive orientation that must be directed to large groups of people or to humanity in general. As he puts it, "love is not primarily a relationship to a specific person; it is an attitude, an orientation of character which determines the relatedness of a person to the world as a whole" (1963: 46). This type of love is based on the recognition that the attributes of the individuals we care about are actually characteristics shared by others – characteristics that may even be rooted in human nature. This love therefore denies particularity, and pushes us to extend the emotion of love beyond the confines of romantic love or love based on friendship to include all people who share in the qualities that we value.

One of the ways Fromm justifies extending love to all people is by maintaining that love directed at specific people is based on general human characteristics. He argues that what we really love in others are specific characteristics and that we are wrong to think that these characteristics are unique to a single person. Any given characteristic may exist in many people, or, when the characteristics are rooted in human nature, to all people. Fromm thinks that we must recognize that anything we love in another person is in fact something we love in all

others who share that characteristic. As he puts it, “the basic affirmation contained in love is directed toward the beloved person as an incarnation of essentially human qualities. Love for one person implies love for man as such” (Fromm 1994:135). Therefore, Fromm thinks that any feeling of particularistic love should push us to consider what we love in another person and then to recognize those characteristics of value in others and to extend love beyond the immediate object. He urges us to generalize love.

As Fromm describes it, love is a virtue or an activity, rather than a passive state of being or something that is received from others. It is, he argues, an art that a person must master in theory and practice, and that should be cultivated with the aim of achieving excellence. By this account, being a loving person is not simply having an object of love or being an object of love. Rather, it is a matter of developing an orientation toward others and toward humanity as a whole. This orientation exists in the person who expresses love, even when there is no specific object to which it is directed (Fromm 1963).

Fromm's theory of love creates a universal ethical standard that avoids reproducing some of the problems typical of universalist theories. One of the foremost challenges for universalist ethical systems is explaining why people should recognize responsibilities toward others, especially strangers. Establishing some basis for extending ethical responsibilities to those with whom one has no personal attachments, without recourse to rewards, personal benefits, or shared identity, is a serious obstacle. The claim that individuals have a responsibility to treat all people equally, whether they are family and friends or strangers, is one of the most frequent targets of attack by those who maintain that moral universalism is implausible or unfair (Miller 1995). One of the great strengths of Fromm's theory of love is that it is capable of answering this critique. First, Fromm provides self-regarding reasons for thinking that one should love others. He argues that loving in the way he describes is psychologically healthy and that it is the only way in which individuals can enjoy the benefits of non-exploitative interpersonal relationships. Second, he argues that love is essential for the well-being of society, and that societies become self-destructive and harmful to their members when shared values are at odds with the demands of the kind of love he describes (Fromm 1990a).

It is helpful to compare Fromm's theory of love to Kant's theory of universal respect in order to see how Fromm's effort to derive a universalist ethical theory from affective attachments improves on more purely rationalistic theories. Fromm and Kant both advocate universal ethical orientations, but they do so in much different ways. For Kant, universalism is rooted in the concept of respect. In his writings on moral theory, Kant argues that people must be respected in the sense that they are treated as ends in themselves and never merely as means to an end (1996a; 1996b). Kant also emphasizes that respect is a feeling based on rational detachment. Respect must be given to all others regardless of our emotional attitudes toward them, simply because other people are autonomous, rational beings. By contrast, love is a more engaged orientation. Fromm describes love as an orientation that reason should push us to extend to all humans while also recognizing that it is rooted in affect, rather than reason, and that affect can provide a motive force that reason lacks (1963: 29). Thus, Fromm's theory of love is similar to Kant's theory of universal respect in its attempt to specify a universal attitude, but Fromm's recognizes that there must be an affective component to ethical relationships that Kant's emotionless rationality explicitly rejects.

Of course, Fromm's theory is not without its own faults. Foremost among these, as I will show later, is that the theory is inadequately developed. Although Fromm discusses love throughout his work, he invariably does so from a fairly high level of abstraction and usually repeats himself a great deal. Consequently, he fails to develop the theory in detail, to address likely objections, or to say much about how love is displayed in concrete examples.

At times his descriptions of love also contradict themselves. Among the most notable and problematic contradictions is that he alternately describes love being directed toward all people without exception and as being generalized to large groups of people based on shared characteristics that might not necessarily belong to all people. I will turn to some of these challenges in the next section as I focus my attention on Fromm's application of love to the teacher-student relationship.

### Fromm and Pedagogy

Fromm does not provide a substantive theory of pedagogy, but he does use the example of a relationship between teachers and students as one of his primary examples of how love can exist in a hierarchical context without giving way to domination. According to Fromm, the model relationship between teachers and students is one that is based on his concept of love. He illustrates this by contrasting the teacher-student relationship with the relationship between a master and a slave, which is the exemplary case of a hierarchical relationship based on domination. In the master-slave relationship, the master wants something from the slave that the slave would not give voluntarily (Fromm 1994: 187). The slave must be coerced into providing free labor against the slave's will, thereby creating a hierarchy that is sustained through coercion and the slave's loss of autonomy. The master's superior status is both the means of coercing the slave and a mark of the master's success in doing so, making the relationship intrinsically authoritarian. The master-slave relationship is also one of perpetual hierarchy in the sense that the master works to ensure that the slave will remain forever subordinate and unable to become autonomous.

Teachers and students engage in the activity of learning in which the latter has authority over the former, but in which both are voluntary participants in the activity and both aim at the same goal: the improvement of the student (Fromm 1994: 187). The teacher-student relationship also aims at destroying the hierarchy that structures it. The teacher and student are both concerned with elevating the student's status, bringing the student closer to the professor's level of knowledge (Fromm 1994: 187). If successful, this effort ends the relationship and the hierarchy that it embodies, enabling the former student and teacher to relate to each other as equals. Thus, unlike the master-slave relationship, the teacher-student relationship is a voluntary association that is mutually beneficial and that is directed at eliminating hierarchy. The ultimate goal of equality is especially interesting from the teacher's perspective. It means that a good teacher must strive to lose authority over the student and can be judged in terms of how effectively this authority is sacrificed.

Fromm's discussion of the teacher-student relationship is useful for explaining the general orientation that teachers and students should have, especially since he is able to give pedagogy as an activity a universal purpose: decreasing the knowledge or ability gap between teachers and students. From this foundation, one can derive a range of responsibilities that teachers and students have to each other and to themselves. At the most basic level, each is responsible for treating the other in ways that reflect the virtue of love as Fromm describes it. They must see each other not as particular objects of affection, which could lead to jealousy or the exclusion of loving relationships with others. Rather, they must see each other as people who participate in a relationship that is universal in form and that is strengthened when particularistic relationships are avoided.

The responsibility to endorse universal love is symmetrical, yet it is operationalized in different ways in light of the different roles students and teachers have by virtue of their hierarchical relationship. The teacher takes on the responsibility for ensuring that the position of authority is not used for exploitative purposes. That is to say, the teacher does not coerce the student and does not work toward goals other than the student's improvement. The

student cannot be used as a free laborer or in ways that reinforce, rather than diminish, the teacher's authority. From the student's perspective the duties are less serious, but still important. The student must make a concerted effort to overcome the hierarchical relationship by learning from the teacher, and must also maintain his or her autonomy while relying on another person's assistance.

Beyond this fairly brief example, Fromm says little about the relationship between teachers and students specifically. Nevertheless, he is deeply interested in the analogous relationship between therapists and patients, which can provide some additional insight into his thoughts on education. Like the teacher-student relationship, the therapist-patient relationship is based on a non-authoritarian type of hierarchy, in which one person is supposed to facilitate another's acquisition of information and stronger reasoning capacities. To avoid authoritarianism in this context, Fromm recommends psychoanalysis that proceeds through subtle guidance, directing patients' attention toward their problems and developing patients' capacities of critical thinking and introspection. The analyst is supposed to facilitate the patient's efforts at self-discovery and recovery without exercising coercion or heavy influence, thereby intervening in the patient's life and cognition without threatening the patient's autonomy (Fromm 1994).

In his later writings Fromm is critical of Freud's tendency to project his own concerns onto his patients, and argues that this tendency reflects a latent authoritarianism in Freud's thought (1973). He is also critical of mainstream psychoanalysis, which he thinks is primarily directed at encouraging compliance with social norms, including norms that are irrational or destructive. Even when it is not provided in an authoritarian manner, Fromm thinks that therapy with this adaptive goal is complicit in reproducing larger patterns of authoritarianism and coercion in society (Fromm: 1990a). One can extrapolate from this that education of any type must not be directed at projecting the teacher's views onto the students or training the students to uncritically accept the prevailing social order. Such education would, whatever the relationship between student and teacher, promote authoritarianism by socializing the student to be less critical or less autonomous.

Fromm's work has had some influence on theories of pedagogy, especially those that insist that the teacher-student relationship should have an affective dimension (Freire 1992, 1998; Fleming 2012; Webb 2013). His theories of educative relationships more generally, especially the one that exists between psychologists and patients, have also helped to shape research on loving, non-authoritarian relationships (Severin 1973). These appropriations of Fromm's theory of love reflect its usefulness and its potential to be implemented in practice. However, these studies generally fail to develop the theory in more detail than Fromm himself, as they tend to focus more on operationalizing Fromm's theory than developing its nuances. They therefore leave some of the deep theoretical problems in Fromm theory, especially those having to do with the relationship between love and authority, unresolved.

### **Evaluating Fromm's Theory of Love**

Despite its strengths, Fromm's theory of love in the relationship between teachers and students suffers from several limitations. These follow from general problems of vagueness in Fromm's theory of love and his failure to explain how his conception of love should be embodied in specific instances. I will discuss these problems in this section, and in the following section I will explain how his theory can be further developed in ways that overcome these limitations. My goal will be to make Fromm's theory of love in pedagogical relationships more theoretically sound and better able to specify ethical obligations for teachers and students.

The first problem for Fromm's theory of love in the teacher-student context, or in any context in which there is hierarchy, is that the existence of hierarchy seems to contradict Fromm's claim that love requires equality. Throughout his work, Fromm criticizes affective responses that we conventionally call love but that are based on authority or dependency, and he strives to show how the appearance of love in these cases is false. He objects to describing these as instances of love precisely because they rest on inequalities that promote, or even require, domination and subordination. Two of the best examples of this type of love are the love between a mother and her child and the love between a father and his child.

Fromm describes motherly love as the unconditional acceptance of a child. This is a generous type of love, but the child is all too often subsumed under the mother and deprived of autonomy because the child is completely dependent (Fromm 1963: 39). Motherly love is also passive for the object of love, not requiring any effort from the child. This results in the child failing to learn how to love in return and having a weakened capacity for love. Fromm does not deny that motherly love may be called love, but he thinks that it differs significantly from the kind of universal love that can serve as the basis for ethical obligations more generally. Fatherly love is, Fromm thinks, more authoritarian. It is conditional love that depends on a child's adherence to strict rules of behavior (1963: 65). This demands more from the child than being a passive object of affection. Nevertheless, Fromm criticizes this type of love because it is directed at a particular object and because fatherly love has a tendency to deny a child's autonomy through overt coercion. As in motherly love, the hierarchical nature of fatherly love makes it an imperfect reflection of love.

Fromm continually defines his conception of love as an orientation that exists between equals, contrasting it with motherly or fatherly love and with authoritarian relationships that may be mistaken for love. For example, in *Escape from Freedom*, Fromm says that "Love is based on equality and freedom" (1994: 183). In *The Sane Society* he says that for a young child "father and mother are more objects of dependency or fear than of love, which by its very nature is based on equality and independence" (Fromm 1990a: 35). Moreover, throughout his work Fromm emphasizes that equality is a basic condition of being able to love, saying that love can only exist where there is an absence of coercion (1963, 1973, 1994).

One might argue that Fromm does indicate a way out of this problem by saying that the teacher-student relationship is based on equality because equality of knowledge or ability is its ultimate end. However, this response would imply that because equality only exists at the point when the student knows as much as the teachers, teachers and students are only equal when their relationship dissolves. This would in turn mean that love can only exist once the practice of education ceases and that love cannot be the basis of the teacher-student relationship while education is underway. Simply having the goal of equality is inadequate for explaining how a necessarily hierarchical relationship between teachers and students can be based on an egalitarian conception of love.

Thus, Fromm does not clearly articulate how it could be possible for the teacher-student relationship to embody his conception of love as a relationship between equals, nor does there seem to be a way of easily explaining this in terms of ultimate goal of equality. This problem is especially challenging because Fromm cites the teacher-student relationship as a paradigmatic example of a hierarchical relationship shaped by love.

Problems like this one have led some to criticize his understanding of authority and even to think that Fromm is opposed to any type of authority. For example, Schaar argues that, according to Fromm, authority is always unjustified even when it is benevolent and produces good results for those subjected to the authority, as "any act

of submission means a crippling of one's human powers" (1961: 105-6). He goes on to say that "Fromm's view on this comes close to saying that might is always wrong, that there can be no right in an authoritarian-inegalitarian relationship between two men. Where there is a superior-inferior relationship there is evil" (1961: 105-6). This point rests on closely associating authority and authoritarianism, an association that Fromm facilitates by failing to adequately explain his theory of hierarchy in the teacher-student relationship. Nevertheless, as I will argue in the next section, it can be solved by further developing Fromm's theory of love and pedagogy.

The second problem with Fromm's account of love in the teacher-student relationship is with one of the arguments Fromm uses to justify generalizing love beyond the conventional particularistic understanding of love. As I mentioned in the first section, one of the reasons that Fromm thinks that we must extend love beyond narrowly defined relationships is that we can recognize the characteristics we love in individuals as universal characteristics that others share (1990b). Fromm maintains that although the characteristics we value may be instantiated in a single person, they are characteristics that any person could have and that many do, making them universal qualities.

Although all people have the capacity to embody the characteristics that we find loveable, Fromm clearly thinks that some people do not do so in practice, thereby making themselves unlovable. Throughout his writings, Fromm repeatedly cites examples of people who are so loathsome as to be beyond love. This is especially clear when he discusses the psychology of leading Nazis or others with dangerous authoritarian tendencies (Fromm 1973, 1994). Thus, even though Fromm sometimes describes particularistic love being generalized to a love of humanity, what he really seems to mean is that the characteristics that allow us to love others are shared by almost all other humans and that only those people who we consider to be truly monstrous place themselves beyond love. The salient question this raises is: what are the characteristics that allow people in particularistic relationships to generalize their feelings of love such that they apply to most of humanity? Even more importantly, what are the characteristics that allow love in teacher-student relationships to become generalized such that teachers and students can feel the kind of universal love Fromm describes?

The problem is that Fromm does not say exactly what characteristics of teachers and students make them loveable to each other and that would allow individual teachers and students to respond to each other with a kind of universal love that goes beyond particularistic relationships. Moreover, this problem is compounded by the first one. If teacher and student are not equals, then this raises the possibility that their love might not even be based on the same characteristics. The characteristic or characteristics that are the basis for the teacher's love of the student might not be the same as those that are the basis of the student's love for the teacher. This possibility threatens to undermine Fromm's theory of love by allowing universal love to break down into various different, incommensurable different forms of love.

### **Rethinking Fromm's Theory**

In this section I will argue that Fromm's theory of love in a pedagogical context can be further developed and that it can overcome the problems I identified in the previous section. I will do this by drawing on his comments about the human condition to explain how relationships of love can be simultaneously equal and unequal. My argument helps to clarify Fromm's theory of pedagogy and what that theory can contribute to our understanding of education.

The problem of how the student and the teacher can be considered equal must be resolved by asking what they are equal in respect to. Their respective roles depend on an inequality in their levels of knowledge or ability. The teacher must have greater knowledge or ability than the student in order to teach the student. However, I maintain that this inequality is only problematic based on Fromm's conception of egalitarian love if this inequality is the sole basis for the teacher-student relationship. Put differently, an egalitarian loving relationship can exist between teachers and students if their love is not premised on the unequal roles that they play. This not only suggests a way of answering the first problem I raised but also the second. If there is a way in which teachers and students are equal, which exists apart from their unequal roles, then this common ground may also be the characteristic that can serve as the basis for generalizing love beyond particularistic relationships to all people. Thus, both of the problems I raised in the previous section can be answered in the same way: by determining what shared human nature makes teachers and students equal in spite of their unequal levels of knowledge while also serving as the basis for generalizing love.

To discover what this characteristic is, it is important to first consider what is universal in the human condition, as Fromm describes it. Fromm describes human nature in terms of a constant struggle to orient oneself in the world. Humans are, he maintains, unique in our ability to create a distinctive human world. The world we create separates us from nature and from the natural, or primary, bonds that we have from birth or early socialization. Every person must undergo the experience of becoming detached from primary bonds, such as the connection to family members, to a home, and to basic identities, as we grow up and must find our place in the social world. This process of leaving primary bonds forces us to develop new identities to replace those attachments that we are born into. It forces us to abandon the comforts of the life we take to be natural and to make our own choices.

Growing up and developing an identity is simultaneously liberating and potentially dangerous. As Fromm sees it, the loss of primary bonds may be the basis for establishing new connections with others through free choice. These chosen relationships may be of a higher type than our natural relationships with family members if they are based on love and developed without coercion. Losing primary bonds also allows people to choose their own beliefs and values, which is likewise potentially liberating or dangerous, depending on which beliefs and values are chosen. The freedom to choose may be the basis for leaving behind irrational attachments and developing a healthier and more productive belief structure based on the loving orientation Fromm describes. It may also lead those searching for meaning to turn towards ideologies of hate or authoritarianism.

The freedom to choose one's own way of life and one's values is so frightening that it frequently leads people to sacrifice their autonomy in exchange for security. Many people desperately seek out any relationship that can provide a feeling of connectedness, simply because being alone and being self-reliant is psychologically stressful (1994). This may lead people to unhealthy relationships of domination or submission that provide a feeling of safety. Those who wish for relationships or guidance from others as a way of escaping from their own freedom and avoiding the struggle of orienting themselves are prone to either falling under another person's control or developing a sadistic wish to control others.

With this basic human quality in mind, it is possible to return to the problem of explaining how the teacher and student can be considered equal even though their relationship depends on hierarchy. The apparent contradiction can be resolved by distinguishing different senses in which they may be considered equal. Teachers and students are, like all people, equal in the sense that they share engagement in the endless project of orienting themselves in the world once they lose their primary bonds. However, what sets teachers and students apart from

others is their strategy for coping with this detachment. They attempt to orient themselves in the world by learning more about it. The teacher knows more than the student and is in a position to impart that knowledge to the student, thereby making them unequal in how far they have progressed in acquiring knowledge. Nevertheless, they are equal on a more fundamental level because, regardless of their level of knowledge, they are engaged in the same project of overcoming the loss of primary bonds through learning and doing this in ways that avoid the submission to authority or domination of others.

This answers the two problems I raised in the previous section. It is this, the common pursuit of knowledge rather than the possession of knowledge, and the shared struggle of orienting themselves in the world, that make student and teacher equal despite their different levels of knowledge. Teachers and students can recognize in each other the desire for the same kind of understanding of the world and the equalizing effect that this pursuit has, because it is based in a fundamental human need that transcends ephemeral hierarchies between teachers and students that are necessary for learning. Moreover, this fundamental equality – the shared curiosity about specific subjects and the world in general, as well as the shared commitment to pursue knowledge – is the characteristic that teachers and students value in their particularistic relationships. Because teachers and students both value this quality, it can be generalized to give that particularistic love a universal form, with anyone in the role of a teacher or a student being able to love that shared quality in all others who engage in the educational process.

### **Pedagogy and Love**

Thus far, my analysis has focused on resolving some fairly abstract theoretical questions in Fromm's theory of love, and his comments on love in a pedagogical context specifically. This theoretical task is critical for any effort to apply Fromm's theory in practice, as overcoming the challenges inherent in Fromm's theory and further developing his concept of love provides a much stronger foundation for attempts to operationalize that theory. In this section I will discuss some of the important normative implications that arise from understanding the teacher-student relationship as being based on Fromm's concept of love and how these can inform education.

First, Fromm repeatedly cautions against having an acquisitive orientation, which is relating to the world as a repository of objects to be possessed. He maintains that living productively and happily requires that one focus on 'being' rather than 'having,' which is to say, on living actively and being open to new experiences rather than attempting to accumulate as much as possible (2005). Focusing on living as an activity that is intrinsically meaningful, rather than living in service of acquiring possessions is, Fromm argues, difficult because it prevents one from finding security in material well-being. Nevertheless, he maintains that refusing this security and embracing the insecurity of the free search for productive orientation is essential for being psychologically healthy and for being able to love others. By extension, we can reason that in the pedagogical context, the goal of education is not simply, or even primarily, possessing knowledge.

Having a great deal of knowledge, like having material possessions, may help to alleviate the psychic difficulties inherent in being detached from primary ties and developing one's identity. However, acquiring knowledge simply so that it can be possessed threatens to become a purposeless venture of perpetual accumulation. From a pedagogical standpoint, the implication is that education should not merely be designed to impart information but to make students better able to process information and to create new information. In other words, education based on universal love should be directed not only at imparting information, but that its primary goal should be teaching students the various ways in which information shapes who we are and how we act on a more substantive level. This includes teaching how to critically evaluate information and how to produce

new information. The emphasis on being over having also serves as further evidence that the teacher and student's unequal levels of knowledge is less important to their relationship than their equal interest in the activities of learning and producing new information.

Second, when it is developed in the way I suggest, Fromm's theory of love suggests that the primary purpose of education in every context should be teaching that facilitates the project of learning to live without the security of primary bonds. Education must also be directed at preventing students from falling victim to authoritarian relationships that offer security at the cost of autonomy. The teacher-student relationship is linked to the desire to know more about the world in order to orient oneself in it and to cope with life without primary bonds. Education is a necessary precursor to being able to successfully navigate these challenges, and this seems especially true given Fromm's insistence that it is very difficult to avoid falling victim to some type of authoritarian relationship. Consequently, whatever the specific subject matter a teacher attempts to convey, education should somehow be directed at enabling students to further develop their own identities and to become better able to live in the world without being overwhelmed by the loss of primary bonds, and without falling victim to the temptation of finding security in authoritarian relationships.

Third, Fromm's understanding of love in a pedagogical context highlights how important it is that teachers not attempt to exert too strong an influence on the student's development, and that they avoid claiming to be absolute sources of knowledge. Authoritarian influences, whether individuals or ideologies, often purport to have complete certainty. The authoritarian pedagogical stance is that of a person who claims to have the information that can alleviate the student's ignorance and to be unaffected by ignorance. To make this claim to certainty, whether explicitly or tacitly, is to claim an exemption from what Fromm identifies as the human condition – the condition of being cut away from primary bonds and forced to search for orientation in the world. The pretension to certainty can be an extremely attractive quality in a teacher because certainty offers security, but it also eliminates the fundamental equality that can serve as the basis for a loving teacher-student relationship.

This is not merely a theoretical problem. If a teacher purports to have the final answer to all problems, then the teacher threatens to hinder students' autonomous intellectual development. Rather than helping students to discover the world for themselves, the authoritarian pedagogical relationship is premised on making students uncritically accept everything the teacher says. This also places the student in the position of a consumer that can only possess information, rather than the position of an autonomous actor who can use and create information. Based on Fromm's theory of love and pedagogy as I have described, it is possible to see that a much healthier teacher-student relationship can develop if teachers encourage students to think independently and even to dissent. If teachers and students are fundamentally equal in their search for orienting themselves in the world, then they can arrive at different viewpoints even if the teacher knows more than the student.

Finally, although the teacher cannot provide definitive answers in the search for orientation without risk of either becoming authoritarian or destroying the basis for equality, the teacher can facilitate this search for orientation by exposing irrational authorities. Fromm argues that one of the most important parts of overcoming primary attachments is distinguishing those that are irrational or threaten personal autonomy from those that are healthy. This is by no means an easy process, as it requires careful consideration of which relationships and identities promote personal autonomy and which threaten it. However, a good teacher can assist in making this judgment, especially with respect to the teacher's area of expertise. For example, political science teachers can help students evaluate which relationships promote healthy political life and which interfere with it, psychology teachers can help students evaluate their personal relationships, and teachers in the natural sciences can help

students better understand their relationships with the natural world. Thus, whatever the subject matter, there are opportunities for exposing and challenging irrational authorities that would hinder love.

## Conclusion

As I have argued, Fromm provides a strong position from which to theorize the relationship between pedagogy and love. He accounts for how love can serve as a general orientation between teachers and students, rather than a particularistic orientation between pairs of people, and how the tendency of feelings of love to devolve into authoritarian feelings of domination or submission can be avoided. Fromm's theory is incomplete and in need of greater theoretical specificity, but it is one that merits attention and further development because it provides a convincing account of ethical universalism that acknowledges the importance of affect, and that does not attempt to reduce ethical obligations to disinterested rationality. My argument is that love between teachers and students can be grounded in a shared pursuit of knowledge in response to a human feeling of becoming detached from primary bonds. Both teachers and students are equal insofar as they are engaged in a common pursuit to develop their own identities in ways that avoid entanglement in authoritarian relationships. Reflecting on the potential for universal love between students and teachers based on this shared characteristic helps to clarify the ethical obligations each have toward each other and toward themselves.

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