



Humanistic conscience: Identity, 'productivity' and biophilia in Erich Fromm

Giorgio Risari

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Erich Fromm, both a philosopher and a psychoanalyst, always gave the presence of the so-called humanistic conscience in mankind extreme importance in his works, especially in *Man for Himself*, published in 1947. Our psychological and existential identity speaks with its most inner voice, it has a direct link to the inner core of our Self or, to put it in philosophical terms, with our soul. Although it coexists with the 'authoritarian conscience' which Fromm identifies with the Freudian Super-Ego (the sum of all rules and prohibitions derived from the paternal and social authorities), the humanistic conscience plays a fundamental role in our inner life and behavior, acting as a guard, alarm, compass, guide, guardian of our real self, our universal human nature and the uniqueness of our Self. As a whole where all single parts are inferior to the final result, it can assess what we are and what we do. In particular, truth, coherence, authenticity, self-love, self-respect, benevolence, freedom and spontaneity.

The humanistic conscience thus represents the level of development of human potentialities and possibilities, hence the development of the psychological and existential identity we recognize as ours („I am I, I am this“). Therefore the humanistic conscience is a product and a function of the dimension of being (not of having), a dynamism and expression in the field of strictly human possibilities. In such a dimensional existence, mankind finds a self-confirmation and a personal reward, joy and happiness as a result of his 'production', his creating and implement-

ing mankind and personal vitality.

The humanistic conscience is therefore a sign of the level of biophilia, love and interest in life a human person has reached, the flourishing of our physical, psychic, sensorial, social, ethical, spiritual, aesthetic, erotic capacities, thus reaching a corresponding level of „vitality“. This, in turn, is a regeneration of all that is alive, all that exists, all "is-in-being". As a whole, the humanistic conscience is our path towards full human experiences. Mankind only can make life and being self-aware thanks to the gift of thought and conscience. Moreover, Fromm believes the humanistic conscience was also an „affective quality“, that is the existential thought of our being human and individuals in the being of the world.

The humanistic conscience intervenes in our lives when moving away from its path and betraying ourselves with wrong actions. This happens when individuals give up to „alienation“, an alteration of the human essence which leads to adaptation, social conformity, indifference, hostility, destructivity, necrophilia, on the whole to all that is a negation of life and the positivity of being. Fromm thought the humanistic conscience becomes stronger and stronger when a person leads a productive life, which allows him to express his capabilities with regards to the world, thus establishing his identity, his „I am I“ -through love, reason, creativity and freedom in all spheres of man's live.

As a consequence, the presence and activity



of humanistic conscience is a sign of an individual's high productivity, while its absence or weakness highlights „alienation“, the moving away from the core of the true-self. This manifests itself as a sense of guilt, dissatisfaction, restlessness, general uneasiness. Anxiety is the most frequent medical outcome. In order to act this way in our life, though, this conscience has to be a loyal friend, a reliable ally in the difficult „art of life“, and never a cruel judge acting in a tyrannical or authoritarian way. It becomes the symbol of the responsibility an individual has for him, for his individual subjectivity and his universal humanity. Therefore, it brings him closer to the truth on himself and on his life.

It is humility, respect of the truth that brings him closer to what he really is, to the 'humus', the clay mankind is made of and to honesty. As for the latter, if we look at the Latin suffix '-onus', meaning burden, responsibility and weight, by honesty we mean dignity, awareness of the value and moral strength of mankind. The humanistic conscience is therefore a thin but strong thread, sensible to the quality and the quantity of an individual's good and bad actions, since it intuitively recognizes them.

On the other hand, due to its sensibility and fragility, one recognizes the humanistic conscience better when an individual is alone, left to face himself, away from the world's noise or vulgar acquaintances, when we are not prisoners of an empty language and a stereotyped thought and therefore puppets. Human values linked to the humanistic conscience include freedom as a precondition for mankind to be his own cause and result; self-love, as complete acceptance, compassion and benevolence towards oneself; authenticity, as coherence of the external action with the inner truth of our identity which we keep safe in our true-Self and in the individual unconscious: to this regard, Fromm thinks this is derived from the social unconscious, but also a subjective part of the greater

existential humanistic unconscious who has roots in the specific universal conditions of human existence. Other values are identity, unique and a sole prerogative of our Self („I am this, I am what I am“) and last, but not least, the natural and innate drive to realize our psychic and existential identity, that is happiness as the symbol of a fully lived and productive life; an individual is the creator of his own life, not a dice randomly thrown in the world. The more these ethical and existential values and qualities are developed, the more the humanistic conscience becomes stronger and vice versa. An individual can therefore count on the bravery of being, a fundamental and necessary characteristic to face adversities, hard times and the paradoxes of life, but also, as stated by Fromm in *The Revolution of Hope*, (1968), the source of hope, faith and strength: in one word, the courage to be. Still is to notice that all these factors are even helpful therapeutically to find real possibilities of alternatives actions (in exact terms of Fromm "alternativismus"). As a whole, the humanistic conscience is the safe for these human 'jewels' but, as Fromm put it, it needs the support of the ethical, spiritual, religious, philosophical and psychological tradition of the 'masters' of the past to be strengthened.

Mankind still needs these spiritual 'masters', their ideas and their thought, in order to form an ideal model of life which allows us to live at our best and enjoy a complete wellbeing, each person differently. But not only this. Psychoanalysis itself, as a science of the unconscious, needs to derive truths, knowledge and wisdom from this universal heritage which is available to mankind, so that it can face challenges and act as a mean of full development and expression of human powers and as social tool of criticism once again. This way, the humanistic psychoanalysis of Fromm, so strongly believed in, will gain definition and be outlined more and more. In the name of Life and Humanity.