

Bill Warren

## REVISITING FROMM'S *THE SANE SOCIETY* AT THE PRESENT TIME: SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR MENTAL HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION WHEN SEEN WITH A PCP EYE

Bill Warren

University of Newcastle, Australia

This paper discusses the notion of *mental health* from the perspective of the social context in which such a notion has to exist, and has to be fostered or otherwise, by that key social activity in a democracy that is education. In particular, it considers this topic by way of reviewing a thoroughgoing analysis of 'society and sanity' presented over a half century ago by Erich Fromm in his *The Sane Society*. The links to and an implications for a PCP understanding of mental health in the light of the ideas of Fromm and some later thinkers are discussed.

*Keywords:* Erich Fromm, mental health, education, democracy, PCP

### INTRODUCTION

Erich Fromm, developing his ideas out of the initiatives of the renowned Frankfurt School, sought to combine the insights of two theorists whose ideas at first sight – and perhaps even on closer inspection – seem diametrically opposed to one another: that is, Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud. Fromm's *The Sane Society* (1956/1963) was a continuation of ideas expressed in his two earlier works, *The Fear of Freedom* (1942/1984) and *Man for Himself* (1947). These last two works discussed how and why people so easily gave up the freedom that had been so hard won against both direct oppression, as exemplified in a resurgence of totalitarian ideologies in the 1920s, and the persistence of superstitions imposed since the conversion of the western world to a particular view of Christianity around 500 CE. That victory over superstition came in that period known now as the Enlightenment, around 1700 CE – a victory for the idea of *reason*, an idea which continues to the present day to be undermined and its fruits continuing to require vigilant protection against forces that would return us to dogma, a closure of enquiry, and totalitarianism.

In *The Sane Society*, Fromm shifts his focus from the *individual* to consider how a particular form of *social organisation* provides a system-

level escape from freedom, highlighting the experience through the concept of *alienation*. Together, these three works focus the interaction between psychological and social factors of life, and they arguably have an interest to Personal Construct Psychology (PCP). This paper outlines Fromm's argument with particular reference to the third work above (1956/1963), and considers its resonance with an understanding of 'mental health' as such notion is developed within PCP. In turn, the idea of mental health in relation to education is considered; this relation is suggested to take on quite a qualitatively different significance than might be commonly thought, with some possibly radical challenges for PCP adherents.

### FROMM'S THESIS

Fromm (1956/1963) discusses *normative humanism*, which he contrasts with *sociological relativism*, in relation to the notion of mental health-illness as it might be applied to a *society*. In essence, he suggests that in order to be able to speak of a 'sane society' we must be able to speak of an 'insane society'. In turn, this requires "universal criteria for mental health which are valid for the human race as such, and according to which the state of health of each society can

be judged" (p. 12). His argument is that members of our species share basic psychic qualities and when the employment of these in different situations and circumstances is examined in a way which highlights *variation* and *difference*, our thinking about human nature 'writ large', is distracted. That is, we confuse a particular manifestation of it in a particular context, with the universality and commonality that is assumed by the very idea of a *human nature*. Put another way, as he does in his *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973), we should not mistake a particular behaviour (for example, our patently obvious capacity for violence) as telling us something of the *species characteristics* when it may be, rather, the opposite of such a characteristic that is evidenced, and what we see merely the outcome of a deformation of what we 'really are'. Thus, for him, violence and aggressiveness against one's own species is *learned*, not 'natural' or 'innate'. This view is not, of course, unique to Fromm and various social theorists, particularly those of the anarchist tradition, have argued this same point without the help of Marx or Freud, notably Kropotkin (1902).

Fromm's (1964) *normative humanism* assumes, in opposition to relativism, that "there are right and wrong, satisfactory and unsatisfactory solutions to the problem of human existence" (p. 14). He reminds us that 'consensual validation' is no guarantee of the truth or validity of a particular way of understanding the world, and that we must look rather for the laws inherent in human nature and the goals of the unfolding of that human nature. Human beings, Fromm argues, not only transform the world but also themselves: "[They are their] own creation, as it were" (p. 13). However, just as the natural world can only be transformed according to its nature, so, too, human beings can only modify themselves according to their nature. His perspective is generally Marxist, perhaps more so Hegelian, and rests on the belief that just as certainly as we transform our environments, and they transform us, so equally certainly, both us and our environments are, we might say, not *infinitely* malleable. Whilst, amongst other things, malleable we are, there are, that is, inherent limitations to the extent or degree of our malleability. Moreover,

as Freire (1970b) was later to say from a different perspective, while people's consciousness was indeed conditioned by social circumstances, they *could recognise* that it was so conditioned.

Fromm provides some 'markers' of the sanity, or otherwise, of society, prefacing his discussion with the acknowledgement that we, in the West at least, have greater material wealth than any other society in human history. Yet, and he is writing in 1956, we still have wars which kill millions of people, as well as an intense suspicion of other cultures (characterised once as a 'cold war'). We have an economic system which pays farmers to not grow crops in order to 'stabilise the market' in their zone of economic activity while millions starve in another, an economic system that is significantly dependent on the production of weapons of war; the so-called 'military-industrial complex'. We have a ninety percent (90%) literacy rate but the media in relation to which we exercise our literacy skills "fills the minds of men with the cheapest trash, lacking in any sense of reality, with sadistic phantasies which a halfway cultured person would be embarrassed to entertain" (p. 5). We have reduced the average number of working hours from a century previous, but we do not know how to use the free time made available to us. Or, as contemporary critics of the dominance of advanced technology such as Marcuse (1964) would say, our leisure time itself has been invaded by the mindless media offerings of the type just noted by Fromm. Further, Fromm cites some figures, albeit figures he acknowledges to be 'rough', concerning the then increasing number of admissions to psychiatric hospitals. Related to his statistic here is another; that some eighteen percent (18%) of 'rejects' from conscription in the USA (for WWII) were for reasons of mental illness, this suggested to be saying something about the society that produces those draftees. He also identifies some comparative data that he feels provides a further estimation of the health of society; that is, statistics on *suicide*, *homicide*, and *alcoholism*. Fromm's figures show the then highest rates of suicide, homicide, and alcoholism in the Scandinavian countries, and in the United States. His general conclusion, though, having noted the correlation

between suicide, alcoholism, and homicide in these last countries, is that the most democratic, peaceful and prosperous countries in Europe, and the most prosperous in the world (the USA), show the most severe symptoms of mental disturbance as indicated by these three behaviours.

Fromm's substantive thesis is that mental health is shown *not* in the fact that people generally have adjusted to a particular social order (a "*folie a millions*" he calls this), but by the extent to which a particular social order corresponds or does not correspond to the needs of human beings. That is, not their felt needs, but their objectively ascertained needs, and he contrasts these needs with their opposites. Thus, he discusses relatedness *versus* narcissism; transcendence-creativity *versus* destructiveness; rootedness-brotherliness *versus* incest; sense of identity-individuality *versus* herd conformity; reason *versus* irrationality. (As an aside, it is useful to say that these constructs are not merely arbitrarily 'good' or 'bad' when in operation in our social life, but can be shown to lead to a more harmonious social life and to more optimal psychological functioning in individuals. It is difficult to imagine how far *blind conformity* or *irrationality*, for example, would take us in terms of increasing our understanding of the world and of ourselves. Moreover, and at the risk of opening a much bigger debate drawn from the philosophy of science, it is arguable that they contribute to a progressive, rather than a degenerating research program (or *programme*; Lakatos, 1970) in regard to our understanding of at least our psychological and social life.)

In essence, Fromm describes a condition of individuals' characterised by a defect of spontaneity and individuality the origins of which are in their cultural circumstances, which culture, paradoxically, "provides patterns which enable them to live with a defect without becoming ill" (Fromm, 191956/1963, p. 16). He suggests that Spinoza, in his *Ethics* (1677/1967), Chapter IV, Proposition 44, best formulated the problem of "the socially patterned defect", and Fromm brings Spinoza's description up to date:

*Today we come across a person who acts and feels like an automaton; who never*

*experiences anything which is really his; who experiences himself entirely as the person he thinks he is supposed to be; whose artificial smile has replaced genuine laughter; whose meaningless chatter has replaced communicative speech; whose dull despair has taken the place of genuine pain. (p. 16)*

Spinoza was a philosopher who more than any other argued how the classic separation of 'thinking', feeling, and 'willing' was mistaken, and this error is not repeated in PCP and was specifically rejected by Kelly (1955/1991). Rather, as Warren (1990, 1998) attempted to show, Kelly did not accept the tripartite distinction between 'reason', 'emotion' and 'volition' and his views are highly consistent with Spinoza's account of mind. Thus, in the present discussion, any reference to 'reasoning' (thinking) trumping 'feeling' (emotion) is a misunderstanding; it is always a matter of *balance*.

## BEYOND FROMM

Fromm was an early writer to raise the question of the sanity of our social arrangements, shortly following a period in which Europe, and then most of the rest of the West had 'gone mad'. Re-reading Fromm at this distance from the times he was describing, one is impressed by just how equally apt is his analysis to our present times. This is daily evident from even a passing attention to the popular media, but equally in the more sober, formal analyses that appear in scholarly journals and monographs. We could cite many such analyses, most painting but more detail into the broader canvas on which Fromm had sketched his outline, but a few will suffice. Chomsky (1989, 2003), for example, has been a consistent critic of the demise of real democracy in North America and in its exercise of its foreign policy, challenging "the United States to apply to its own actions the moral standards it demands of others" (Chomsky, 2003, p. 142). Hertz (2002) describes the consequences of the silent conversion of the world to a 'global business civilisation' which effectively corrupts and

diminishes democracy (echoing Chomsky, 1989). Saul (2001) stresses how only by reclaiming a balance, an 'equilibrium' between the common qualities that all peoples share, can we keep the excesses of any one of these qualities in check and use them as positive forces in individual and group life. Given that both Saul and Fromm share the humanist perspective, Saul's list of qualities is similar to Fromm's. Saul's six qualities, which he gives in alphabetical order so as not to privilege any particular one, are: Common Sense, Ethics, Imagination, Intuition, Memory, and Reason. Thus, he offers some hope for a resurgence of our humanity, and he has gone on to enlarge that hope (Saul, 2005). In this last work his argument is that the phenomenon that is 'globalisation' might have within it the seeds of its own destruction, just as the taken for granted non-resistant malleability of the human being might be a significant oversight to assume. These analyses were made before the so called 'global financial crisis' and the havoc generated by that crisis need not be catalogued, nor the particular economic efforts to fix it revisited in order to strengthen the point here. That said, and given our focus here is on mental health, we might note James (1988, 2007) who analyses well the negative psychological consequences of our 'capture' by consumerist demands, and Wilkinson and Pickett's (2009) notion of a virus that leads one to adopt values and pursue goals that give us 'influenza' – a mental condition that is tantamount to insanity – which refers to an addiction to a work-ethic that generates the resources that allow us to achieve more and more growth in our/our social group's material wealth, to a point where 'keeping up with the Joneses' becomes an end in itself and despite the patent waste of resources – material and personal – and the futility of such a life.

It can be argued that these last writers chart particular dimensions of a more general phenomenon that is the growth of society governed by advanced technology. While the focus in that work is mainly 'the west', the phenomenon is no less a concern to 'the east' and, indeed, to 'the world', as non-western countries aspire to 'western ways' and globalisation creates 'one world'; 'the east', however, is not directly germane here.

Warren (2002) considered some ideas that have been developed within that field that is *Philosophy of Technology*, there in regard to PCP as an 'applied psychology'. The *Philosophy of Technology* is a broad field encompassing various different perspectives. Feenberg (1991) differentiated three theories of technology: the *instrumental*, the *substantive*, and the *critical*. The first regards technology as simply the expression of humankind's capacity to use the environment and as an activity that is under the control of the common 'brakes' on social forces that are composed of politics and culture. The second considers, rather, that technology has become an autonomous force that is 'self-augmenting' and essentially beyond the capacity of human beings – who are mere 'cogs in its wheels' – to influence. The third, drawing on the work of the Frankfurt School, is both less sanguine that the impacts of technology are benign, and less resigned to the inescapable negative outcomes. *Critical theory* of technology requires that we construe the situation as one in which the real struggle is about the *control* of technology and the *democratisation* of it. Thus, there is, again, some hope, and Feenberg (1991) sees this lying within the possibilities technology itself makes available. This might be seen, for example, in the possibilities for organising and the dissemination of information and ideas 'outside' the parameters set by the dominant hegemony.

These ideas noted, it must be accepted that any attempt to assess the general quality of social life is obviously fraught with difficulties; a major one is the operation of ideology, and of the analyst's own particular ideology. What one person construes in positive terms of being financially secure and 'comfortably off', another construes as one having put selfishness ahead of principle in that others must be poor to allow that selfishness. What one sees as a 'terrorist' another sees as a 'freedom fighter', and the so-called 'evil ones' perceive those who so label them as such, to be themselves the doers of greater evil. Nonetheless the answers to the question of which constructions are 'more true' – or are more progressive and more conducive to co-operation and peace, love, and enquiry, and also, from a different perspective as previously

noted, contribute to a *progressive* as differentiated from *degenerating* research program – are not beyond human reason ('reason' as Spinoza conceives it to be, that is as a composite of thinking, feeling, willing).

Fromm, then, is an interesting early thinker who offers some challenges for the idea of mental health, linking it to the realm of 'the social', writ large and writ deep. It predates and is prescient for more embracing critiques of our contemporary social life, as given in a wide ranging literature in *Philosophy of Technology*, and in more specifically focused analyses exemplified in such thinkers as Chomsky, Hertz, and Saul, as well as James and Wilkinson and Pickett, to note but a few.

## MENTAL HEALTH

In the history of reflection on the idea of mental health – and mental *illness* which, perhaps unfortunately, becomes entangled with the idea of *health* – two general perspectives can be discerned. The first stresses how one operates cognitively, focussing such matters as the effective use of one's intelligence; mental health as 'rational autonomy' is an aspect of this perspective (Edwards, 1981, 1983; Nettler, 1983). There may also be a belief in certain fixed moral standards and principles (the work ethic, self-discipline, emulation of role-model members of the society), and a view of the overall purpose of one's life, perhaps of life in general (likely drawn from the dominant religion). A healthy body, or at least a non-diseased or damaged brain, might also have been important in some quarters. The second perspective gives weight to how one approaches life and the world, stressing interpersonal communication and emotional sensitivity, self-confidence, self-realisation, the ability to present oneself well, to believe in one's self, and to 'self-actualise'

Jahoda (1958), an early important thinker in this field, provided a list of six characteristics that covered both approaches. These were: self-awareness and acceptance, growth and self-actualisation, integration, autonomy, perception of reality, environmental mastery. These charac-

teristics, as well as the more general matter of defining and characterising the notion of mental health/illness were discussed and debated over the next three decades or so; for example, Wootton (1960) challenged the definition, Flew (1973), amongst other things, focused 'madness' and 'badness', and Szasz (1961/1974) brought a radical viewpoint to the debate. Further, Peters (1964), considered the relationship between mental health and education, challenging with the argument that mental health was not an *aim* of education but, rather, a *prerequisite* for it.

Personal Construct Psychology takes a significantly different approach to that of stating particular qualities or characteristics of mental health. It considers its equivalent of mental health, that is, 'optimal psychological functioning', in terms of the individual constantly engaged in the mental and behavioural activity of three 'Cycles', and the validation/invalidation this entails (Winter, 1992, Walker, 2002, Walker & Winter, 2005). These need only to be sketched here for present purposes and for completeness. The *Creativity Cycle* involves a sequence of loosened construction followed by progressive tightening to a position of testing and consequent validation/invalidation. In persons functioning less than optimally, the cycle will not be completed and tightening will not occur, thus no validation/invalidation and no opportunity for change and growth. The person stays stuck and unable to grow in understanding. The *Experience Cycle* involves a sequence of: Anticipation (a prediction is devised), Encounter (the individual gets thoroughly involved in the prediction); Encounter (where the individual is open to the event or situation in all of the dimensions in terms of which it can be experienced); Confirmation-Disconfirmation (the initial prediction is validated or is not); Constructive Revision in which appropriate revisions are made to the original prediction. Non-optimally functioning people are blocked in some way at one or more of the phases of the cycle. The *C-P-C Cycle* involves a narrowing of focus from a more general to a more focused attention. When we construe circumspectly we try to take account of *all* the information presented by a situation, open to its complexity of it. Pre-emption is when we select

from the complex of possibilities we have recognised, a particular element that appears to be the most significant in making sense of the situation. Control is when we make a selection and prediction in terms of a construct pole to be tested in behaviour, and validated or otherwise.

Some related work in PCP drawing-out the last core ideas has had two general dimensions. The first was an account of common psychological problems that people have, common 'mental illnesses'. This focus includes Button (1983, 1985) and especially Landfield's (1980) delineation of so called 'psychotic', 'neurotic' and 'normal' behaviour, as well as Leitner's (1981, 1982) developments of this, as well as more recent work such as that on eating disorders from a PCP perspective (Feixas, 2010). The second challenges the notions of illness and disorder themselves as they underpin the idea of mental illness, and especially the idea of 'diagnosis' such as that of the DSM-IV (for example, Neimeyer & Raskin, 2000).

However, as valuable as the PCP understanding of mental health is, it has been argued (Warren, 1996) that mental health understood in process terms of the person proceeding through all of these cycles, is too 'neutral'. Someone we might intuitively construe as not mentally healthy might be seen to more or less go through these cycles; an Adolf Hitler, for example. What seems to be needed, and can be well argued that PCP is underpinned by, is that social life that is *democratic*; or, better, that a more general *egalitarianism* has to prevail in society at large. The notion of democracy stressed here is taken from Barbu (1956) and turns around his four cardinal psycho-social concepts of the 'democratic mind'. That is, he is less concerned with democracy as a system of functional arrangements like elections, fixed-terms of office for elected officials, the separation of legislative, judicial, and administrative power, and the like, as with the mental outlook that is required by and which flourishes in genuine democracies. In turn, the democratic mind is the more directly political face of a more general *egalitarian outlook*, that is, one that *regards* others as equals, and *treats* them according to their needs. His four concepts are: *critical-mindedness*, *objectivity*, *leisure* and *individual-*

*ity*. The first, *critical-mindedness*, is a capacity to relate to the world with a minimum of emotion (but not and cannot be with a total absence of emotion, as in Spinoza); the democratic mind is characterised by a rational approach. *Objectivity* describes how the critical-mind attempts to deal with *all* of the data or evidence related to a particular choice, to be as realistic and comprehensive as possible. The third element, *leisure*, refers to a sense of ease, an absence of tension and stress, a freedom from real or imagined 'crises', from a need to be vigilant against real or imagined enemies; it encompasses both a *freedom from* and a *freedom to* (Fromm, 1942/1984). The core feature of this frame of mind is *individuality*, which refers to *the sense of difference* from others. It is an outcome of a process of individuation which is a growing into an awareness of one's uniqueness, and the development of a sense of *self*.

Now, it is arguable that these qualities of mind are most difficult to encourage and protect in contemporary society; their significance in non-western society is beyond present interests, but not entirely irrelevant or uninteresting. It can be argued that social conditions in life governed by advanced technology encourage the development of the 'authoritarian personality'. When one revisits the extensive work that charts the structure and functioning of the *authoritarian personality* (Adorno et al, 1950) and the 'closed mind' (Rockeach, 1960), one is struck by similarities between this and major negative-critical themes in *Philosophy of Technology*. The loss of a sense of personal efficacy in technological society can be overcome by adopting any of the ready-made ideologies that protect one from the insecurity that may follow this loss. Being essentially 'blind' to the impacts of advanced technology – as the critics argue we are – we champion the system for satisfying 'false needs', which we do not recognise as 'false' (Marcuse, 1964). To fuse or merge one's self with a higher, more embracing power in the face of life in which one feels essentially powerless and ineffective, may be most attractive. Thus may we develop an authoritarian outlook with its rigidity, closed-mindedness, lack of objectivity and so forth, in

order to feel personally efficacious and to 'belong'.

If the suggestion is accepted that PCP requires and assumes a democratic and/or an egalitarian outlook, there would seem to be some problems for PCP to address in the society described by Fromm a half century ago, and more recently by the thinkers previously noted. It would seem to leave PCP in the precarious position of being irrelevant at best, complicit in supporting the status quo, at worst. The last is in fact what it once might have been praised for *not* doing; that is, it escaped the criticisms of Psychology levelled by Radical Psychology (Brown, 1973) that the discipline of Psychology had become essentially a servant of oppressive social and political forces identifiable at the time. Thus, if those forces prevail, and possibly in a more dangerous form and without significant opposition, then the situation is worse than it might have been back then.

Yet, that PCP can be a liberating psychology is well established. As Bannister and Fransella (1971) note, its aim "is liberation through understanding" (p. 201). Raskin and Epting (1993) argue that the empowering of the client in PCP process oriented diagnosis and therapy allow clients to reclaim responsibility over their lives. Further, as suggested previously (Warren, 2002), the idea of *praxis* as elaborated by Paulo Freire (1970a, 1970b, 1972), is highly significant for understanding PCP as an 'applied psychology', and as a liberating one. *Praxis* refers to the capacity to reflect on one's actions, to grow a 'theory' out of one's practical, daily life. Also derived from Freire's discussions is the notion of *conscientisation*, that critical awareness which arises when we reflect on what we do and recognise the impact of the social conditioning to which we have been subjected; that is, we *can* recognise its impacts on our lives. *Conscientisation* is an overcoming of 'false consciousness', an awareness of the real nature of the situation confronting us; we see things 'as they are' and not how particular interests would insist we see them ('things' and 'as they are', obviously, not in the epistemological sense but as 'states of affairs' in the world). This is always a *critical* awareness of things; 'critical' as in the Oxford English Dic-

tionary's "involving or exercising careful judgment or observation", in contrast to being unquestioning and taking things 'on trust' from authority figures or opinion makers.

The passing reference Kelly (1963/1979) makes to the concept of 'learning', taken by Warren (2002) as interesting because of the resonance with Freire's ideas, is also interesting for some observations under our next subheading. That is, that as far as Kelly was concerned, what he was describing as *psychotherapy* could equally as well be called *learning* as long as that term is understood as that activity which helps us get on with life (1963/1979: 64). The idea of psychotherapy as akin to teaching – that is, teaching in the progressive mode as championed by Dewey, wherein the teacher is a guide and mentor, not a controller or 'the' authority on all things – captures, too, the equality of *regard* between both parties that is in play. Thus, too, would PCP not fall to criticisms of the type discussed by Lasch (1979), for example, where the growth of counselling and therapy is seen as undermining our everyday resilience and coping strategies in the face of a class of 'experts' telling us how to live and relate to others.

## MENTAL HEALTH AND EDUCATION

In an earlier reflection (Warren, 2003) some conceptual moves around the ideas of 'mental health education', 'education for mental health', and 'education and mental health' were engaged. What was intended was to offer some conceptual clarifications along the following lines. First, mental health education was taken as referring to the relatively uncomplicated efforts to inform the public about the common psychological and psychiatric problems and to encourage a non-discriminatory treatment of those suffering from those problems. Education for mental health was taken to concern the direct relationship, if there was one, between what happens in the activity of education and the achievement of that state of mind/behaviour we would accept as 'mentally healthy' in its traditional conceptualisation. As noted above, one position stated in the early days of interest in mental health argued that mental

health was a pre-requisite for education, not an aim of education (Peters, 1964). Peters argued that Jahoda's (1958) criteria for what constituted mental health, could all be subsumed under a notion of 'rationality'; mental health was about acting rationally and this was a *pre-requisite* for education, not an outcome of it.

Of greater interest here is the connection between education 'writ large' and mental health. This requires both a brief digression as well as a return to the large scale critiques of contemporary life already sketched. The digression is to highlight again Brumbaugh's (1973) discussion which identified two main perspectives in the history of educational thought. One, which he called 'education as simple technology', was exemplified in the Sophists of ancient Greece. The Sophists saw education as a process in which knowledge was imparted to the 'empty vessel', and particular skills instilled. That knowledge was to be uncritically received, the recipient of that skills-training to believe that those skills were important to the progress of civilisation, not merely for the service of a particular social-productive system. The second perspective was the approach that Socrates argued, that is 'education as understanding', education as an activity of critical enquiry. Such activity was reflective and reflexive, in that it enquired into every aspect of phenomena confronting one, including one's own motives for enquiry. It had as its 'aim' the growth of understanding of the personal, social, and material world that confronted one; though, education did not have an aim in the customary sense, but was its own aim or end, of intrinsic rather than instrumental value. Of course, we have what we know of Socrates by way of Plato's writing and perhaps Plato 'shaped' Socrates' position to align with his own in his later work. That being as it may, Brumbaugh's discussion is based on the traditional, scholarly understanding of the ideas of Socrates as captured in the earlier Dialogues, where Socrates is clearly a democrat and individualist, but in any case, Brumbaugh is referring to the well accepted Socratic *ideal* of disinterested inquiry.

Brumbaugh also discusses how the view or reality underpinning each perspective – their

fundamental metaphysic – was different. Education as simple technology was underpinned by a 'metaphysic of limitation' which emphasised sameness and conformity of particular things to a 'type'. Education as understanding rested on a 'metaphysic of plenitude', which emphasised difference between things, even things of the same type, and the acceptance of complexity and a world of plurality and interaction. Further, it recognised that any particular thing had, potentially, an *aesthetic* dimension, that spoke to a deeper level of understanding of and within human beings.

Both subsequent and earlier thinkers to Brumbaugh have emphasised that genuine education in the Socratic mode involves and requires a rich cultural-historical grounding, not mere *training*. Of equal stress is the significant relationship between education and the operation of democracy, and between an acceptance of a plurality of views and egalitarianism. The later German concept of *Bildung* was suggested as a most apt concept to convey what is in focus here, despite difficulty in translation of the term. The word signifies a process of intellectual and cultural formation, a process in which the individual is initiated into classical knowledge and humanist themes in the history of ideas. In a thinker for whom this was critical to social cohesion and freedom from alienation, that is, G.W.F. Hegel, the primary purpose of education was to impress on one the importance of focusing not exclusively on ourselves as individuals, but the significance of developing an understanding of the complexity of our life and the context in which it was lived. For him, of course, that understanding reveals an underlying commonality in life, in peoples, and in Life. In turn, the hermeneutic turn in phenomenology was to draw our attention to the significance of the 'text' of human history contained in humankind's written records, architecture, statues and art work, artefacts, technologies, music and song and dance, literature and poetry, and so on, all of which when 'read' or meaning gleaned from them, enhance and enlarge our individual and species understanding (Schleiermacher, 1977; Gadamer, 1960/1975).



Education, then, real education that liberates a person from superstition and ignorance, and from an uncritical acceptance of what is merely ‘consensually validated’, is one aspect of that democratic social organisation and that egalitarian outlook that is a necessary concomitant of optimal psychological functioning. Real education, Socratic education, provides an essential grounding for individuals and groups to maximally understand their lives, life, and Life.

The other aspect of the discussion under this sub-heading, however, is the voices of the critics in relation to education, certainly education in the West, and since the Second World War. We could cite again the critics like Chomsky, Hertz or Saul, or many others like them. However, a quotation from an early critic who was already suspicious of technology in education, Hardison (1972), is most apt: “[T]he short-term signs point toward vocationalism, accountability, and the rise of gadgetry in public education. [in which case] we are moving in the wrong direction ... in terms of our responsibilities” to children and to the future (p. 109). A general ‘dumbing down’ of education and society emerges in various analyses, validating the long-standing libertarian critique that political interests and parties of any political persuasion do not want a genuinely educated populace. Fromm (1956/1963) captures the fascination for intelligence and its shallower corollaries in the popularity of the media Quiz Show and memory training exercises for registering ‘facts’ about the world – which corollaries Brumbaugh (1973) associated with Sophistic education – in his distinction between reason (“man’s capacity for grasping the world through thought”) and intelligence (“man’s ability to manipulate the world with the help of thought”). The former is how we arrive at the truth, the latter an instrument for manipulating the world; “the former is essentially human, the latter belongs to the animal part of man” (p. 64).

Because the notion of mental health in PCP rests on an assumption of social life being democratic, and best characterised psycho-socially in terms of a democratic, or wider egalitarian outlook, and requiring genuine education, it stands in a unique position when these things are not in evidence. Unlike Psychoanalysis or Radi-

cal Behaviourism, perhaps also Cognitive Psychology, a genuine acceptance of PCP would seem to place a particular burden on that acceptance. That is, to be ‘active’ in the interests of democracy and democratic and egalitarian ways of being. Of course, to some extent the individual must ‘fit’ into the social milieu in which he or she finds him or herself, and mental health will always have a component of ‘acquiescence’ to what is or appears to be the case at the individual level; social cohesion and thereby survival requires this. However, that critical scrutiny of ‘the given’ championed by thinkers like Fromm and Marcuse – which scrutiny is the lifeblood of the field that is social and political philosophy – has an analogy in the individual search for meaning that is not merely imposed by others.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The inter-linked observations of the foregoing discussion can be succinctly restated as follows. As suggested elsewhere (Warren, 1996, 1998), PCP assumes an underlying social arrangement that is democratic. Moreover, this arrangement is best understood not in terms of external and procedural arrangements such as personal sovereignty, elections, and the like, but in terms of psychological characteristics. These characteristics are well catalogued by Barbu (1956) in terms of what he calls the four cardinal psychosocial concepts of democracy. Human beings can function optimally when the social conditions (to a significant degree also, the material conditions) are such as to allow, support, encourage, even require for their own optimal functioning, that individuals so function. The underpinning of democratic social organisation is an educated population. Real education, as contrast with ‘training’ is well-captured as an activity in the notion of critical enquiry, and in its ‘content’ in the notion of Bildung. Critical enquiry is about ‘reason’ (problem solving) not intelligence (puzzle-solving), and Bildung, as difficult as it is to capture in its essential meaning, refers to an initiation into and an immersion in the history and culture of human civilisation.

## Revisiting Fromm's The Sane Society

The idea of mental health, or optimal psychological functioning in PCP, arguably assumes not only a democratic social organisation, but also 'real education'. However, there is widespread concern about the general 'dumbing down' of populations in a world in which economic rationalism, corporatism, globalisation, fundamentalism, corruption of the notion of democracy, and the like, dominate our social life and our construing. In order to advance optimal psychological functioning, PCP would appear to require that type of outlook championed by Freire in his idea of conscientisation. That is, PCP as a 'liberation psychology' – as it can reasonably lay claim to be. But, what chance of this is there in the face of the globalisation of fundamentalist ideas of market economy, economic rationalism, and the like, and the closing of the mind in other forms of fundamentalist ideology, of whatever type?

If, then, (1) mental health in PCP rests on a notion of democracy as here understood – or, indeed, even in functional terms of genuine choice and a real ability to be heard and to influence decisions without protest or violence against one – on an egalitarian outlook, and a functioning democracy, which (2) both require genuine education, and (3) real democracy is disappearing along with its psychological correlates, and (4) genuine education is no longer conspicuous, then (5) where do we find ourselves in relation to PCP and mental health? Is one answer that PCP adherents should be or should become social activists if they really wish to promote mental health in individuals or societies?

### REFERENCES

- Adorno, T.W., Frenkel-Brunswick, E., Levison, D.F., & Sanford, R.N. (1950). *The authoritarian personality*. New York: Harper and Row
- Bannister, D. & Fransella, F. (1971). *Inquiring man*. Harmondsworth: Pelican
- Barbu, Z. (1956). *Democracy and dictatorship: Their psychology and patterns of life*. London: Routledge.
- Brown, P. (Ed.). (1973). *Radical psychology*. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Brumbaugh, R.S. (1973). Education and reality: Two revolutions. *Thought*, XXVIII, 5-18.
- Chomsky, N. (1989). *Necessary illusions: thought control in democratic societies*. Boston: South End Press.
- Chomsky, N. (2003). *Power and terror: Post-9/11 talks and interviews*. New York: Seven Stories Press. Edited by John Junkerman Takei Masakazu.
- Edwards, R. B. (1981). Mental health as rational autonomy. *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 6, 309-322.
- Edwards, R. B. (1983). A response to 'being mentally healthy'. *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 8, 199-201.
- Feenberg, A. (1991). *Critical theory of technology*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Feixas, G., Montebruno, C., Dada, G., del Castillo, M., & Compan, V. (2010). Self-construction, cognitive conflict and polarization in bulimia nervosa. *International Journal of Clinical and Health Psychology*, 10, 445-457.
- Flew, Flew, A. (1973). *Crime or disease?* London: MacMillan
- Freire, P. (1970a) The adult literacy process as cultural action for freedom. *Harvard Educational Review*, 40, 205-225.
- Freire, P. (1970b). Cultural action and conscientization. *Harvard Educational Review*, 40(3), 452-477.
- Freire, P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Fromm, E. (1984). *The fear of freedom*. London: Routledge (Ark Paperback). Original work published 1942
- Fromm, E. (1947). *Man for himself: An inquiry into the psychology of ethics*. Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications.
- Fromm, E. (1963). *The sane society*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd. Original work published 1956.
- Fromm, E. (1973). *The anatomy of human destructiveness*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Gadamer, H.G. (1975). *Truth and method*. London: Sheed and Ward. Original work published 1960.
- Hardison, O. B. (1972). *Toward freedom and dignity: The humanities and the idea of humanity*. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press.
- Hertz, N. (2002). *The silent takeover: Global capitalism and the death of democracy*. London: Random House (Arrow Books).
- Jahoda, M. (1958). *Current concepts of positive mental health*. New York: Basic Books.

- James, O. (1988). *Britain on the couch: Why we're unhappier compared with 1950 despite being richer*. London: Random House (Arrow Books).
- James, O. (2007). *Affluenza*. London: Random House (Vermillion)
- Kelly, G.A. (1979). The autobiography of a theory. In Brendan Maher (Ed.). *Clinical Psychology and personality: The selected papers of George Kelly*. Original article published 1969. (pp. 46-65).
- Kropotkin, P. (1902). *Mutual aid*. London: Heinemann.
- Lakatos, I. (1970). Falsificationism and the methodology of scientific research programmes. In I. Lakatos & A. Musgrave, *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*. London: Cambridge University Press. (pp. 91-197).
- Neimeyer, R.A. & Raskin, J. D. (2000). *Constructions of disorder: Meaning-making frameworks for psychotherapy*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- Nettler, G. (1983). On being 'mentally healthy'. *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 8, 197-198.
- Landfield, A. W. (1980). The person as perspectivist, literalist, and chaotic fragmentalist. In A. W. Landfield & L. M. Leitner (Eds.) *Personal Construct Psychology: Psychotherapy and Personality*. New York: Wiley. (pp. 289-320).
- Lasch, C. (1979). *The culture of narcissism: American life in an age of diminishing returns*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Leitner, L. (1981). Psychopathology and the differentiation of values, emotions and behaviours: A repertory grid study. *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 138, 145-153
- Leitner, L. (1982). Literalism, perspectivism, chaotic fragmentalism and psychotherapy techniques. *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 55, 307-317.
- Peters, R.S. (1964). Mental health as an educational aim. In T.H.B. Hollins (Ed.). *The Aims of Education, a Philosophic View*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. (pp. 73-85).
- Raskin, J. D. & Epting, F.R. (1993). Personal construct psychology and the argument against mental illness. *International Journal of Personal Construct Psychology*, 6, 351-369.
- Rockeach, M. (1960). *The open and closed mind*. New York: Basic Books.
- Saul, J.R. (2001). *On equilibrium*. New York: Penguin
- Saul, J.R. (2005). *The collapse of globalism and the reinvention of the world*. Camberwell, Victoria: Viking press.
- Schleiermacher, F. (1977). *Hermeneutics: The handwritten manuscript*. Edited by H. Kimmeler, translated by J. Duke & J. Forstman. Atlanta, Georgia: The Scholars Press.
- Spinoza, B. (1967). *Ethics*. London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd. (Everyman Edition). Original work published 1677.
- Szasz, T. (1974). *The myth of mental illness: Foundations of a theory of personal conduct*. Revised edition, New York: Harper and Row. Original work published 1961
- Walker, B.M. (2002). Nonvalidation vs (in)validation: Implications for theory and practice. In J.D. Raskin, & S.K. Bridges. *Studies in Meaning: Exploring Personal Construct Psychology*. New York: Pace University Press (pp. 49-61)
- Walker, B.M. & Winter, D.A. (2005). Psychological disorder and reconstruction. In D. A. Winter & L.L. Viney (Eds.). *Personal Construct Psychotherapy: Advances in Theory, Practice and Research*. London: Whurr (pp. 21-33).
- Warren, W.G. (Bill). (1990). Is Personal Construct Psychology a Cognitive Psychology? *International Journal of Personal Construct Psychology*, 1990, 393-414.
- Warren, W. G. (Bill). (1992). Personal construct psychology and mental health. *International Journal of Personal Construct Psychology*, 5, 223-238.
- Warren, W.G. (Bill). (1996). The egalitarian outlook as the underpinning of the theory of personal constructs. In D. Kalekin-Fishman & B. M. Walker (Eds.). *The Construction of Group Realities: Culture, Society, and personal Construct Theory*. Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Co. (pp. 103-119).
- Warren, W.G. (Bill). (1998). *Philosophical dimensions of personal construct psychology*. London: Routledge
- Warren, W.G. (Bill). (2002). The notion of 'applied psychology' from a personal construct psychology perspective. In J.D. Raskin, & S.K. Bridges. *Studies in meaning: Exploring Personal Construct Psychology*. New York: Pace University Press (pp. 49-61).
- Warren, W.G. (Bill). (2003). Revisiting mental health and PCP: Contexts and horizons. Paper presented at Fifteenth International Conference on Personal Construct Psychology, Huddersfield, 14-18 July.
- Wilkinson, R.G. & Pickett, K. (2009). *The spirit level: Why more equal societies almost always do better*. London: Allen and lane.
- Winter, D.A. (1992). *Personal construct psychology in clinical practice*. London: Routledge.

## *Revisiting Fromm's The Sane Society*

Wootton, B. (1960). *Social class and social pathology*. London: Greenwood Press.

### **AUTHOR'S NOTE**

A version of this paper was read at the European Conference on Personal Construct Psychology, Kristianstad University, Sweden, 2006. I thank participants for their comments and questions at that reading.

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

*Bill Warren* holds an appointment as a Conjoint Associate Professor in the University of Newcastle, Australia having retired from full-time academic work teaching Philosophy, in 2006. A member of the Colleges of Clinical and Forensic Psychology of the Australian Psychological Society he continues the private clinical practice in

which he has been engaged for some twenty-five years.

*Email:* William.Warren@newcastle.edu.au

### **REFERENCE**

Warren, B. (2012). Revisiting Fromm's *The Sane Society* at the present time: Some implications for mental health and mental health education when seen with a PCP eye. *Personal Construct Theory & Practice*, 9, 4-15, 2012

(Retrieved from <http://www.pcp-net.org/journal/pctp12/warren12.html>)

Received: 21 September 2011 - Accepted: 5 April 2012 – Published: 12 May 2012.