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Welcoming Remarks

Johannes Neumann

“Welcome Remarks”. Opening of the Conference “Humanism and Society” in Heidelberg, March 1990, 4 p.

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As founding president of the International Erich Fromm Society it gives me great pleasure to welcome you here to Heidelberg on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of Erich Fromm's birth. This is the town where he spent ten decisive years of his life. It was in Heidelberg that Erich Fromm wrote his doctoral dissertation under the sociologist Alfred Weber between the years 1920 and 1922. This work was entitled "Judaic Law: The Sociology of Diaspora Jewry". Though it was accepted by the faculty back in 1922 (and so achieved a measure of public standing) it was not till 1989 that Rainer Funk and Bernd Sahler helped it to see the full light of publishing day by putting out a fully edited version. At the time Fromm took out his doctorate, the university had not yet introduced a general publishing requirement for all dissertations submitted. In this, his first full-length treatment, Fromm took up the question of how the individual is ordered into the social hierarchy - also the relationship between the laws governing harmonious social living, on the one hand, and society's key, sustaining institutions like the legal system, the state, religion and ritual, on the other. However, this is not the occasion to examine Fromm's approach here more closely.

Nothing could be more characteristic of the standing Fromm's work has achieved over the years than that today - on what would have been his 90th birthday - it is not only possible but also very meaningful to present this, his fledgeling work to the public here in Heidelberg. This indeed indicates with what astonishing te-

nacity Erich Fromm remained true to the basic premises and orientational thrust of his thought - despite the fact that the formal expressions he gave to it (and its embodiment in theoretical and empirical methodology) underwent constant modification over the years. Both as a thinker and as a human being he remained true to himself over the years.

Here in Heidelberg Fromm's thought not only developed away from its original Talmudic orientation towards more expressly sociological and philosophical methods of enquiry; it was also here that he made his first - and momentous - encounter with psychoanalysis, an encounter which was responsible for transforming what was at first a purely sociological approach into a more socio-psychological one. In order to help preserve the legacy of this dynamic humanist and unorthodox researcher whose lifelong endeavor it was to always to place the human being and humanity in the center of his concern, the International Erich Fromm Society was called into existence on October 12, 1985. Beyond preserving the legacy of Fromm's thought, the society's mandate also extends to doing all it can to encouraging further spread of his ideas, with special attention being paid to thinking through their implications for and applications to the problems of our time - not, indeed, as a closed corpus, but as a living body of thought capable of further extension. Since its inception, the society - which has been officially registered and recognized as a non-profitmaking beneficent association - has endeavored to uphold and disseminate Fromm's ideas to the best of its ability.



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One of the ways this has been done is by setting up the Erich Fromm Archive in Tübingen with the aim of collecting, collating and evaluating in one central place all authentic extant material either stemming from Fromm's own hand or else written on the subject of Fromm by others. This above all involves engaging in an animated dialogue with the scientific body of work of this great humanist, endeavoring to think along the lines Fromm staked out, and taking as an living inspiration for one's own interhuman conduct and scientific work the example Fromm has given us through his own life and thought.

What induced us at the time to go ahead with the foundation of this society was not the imperative alone of providing an appropriate organizational framework for the proper evaluation of the Erich Fromm Archive - though this certainly was a leading consideration. However, we were also resolved to break through the barrier of silence erected over the life and work of Erich Fromm stemming from number of quarters: among these is, firstly, academic psychology with its claim to having a monopoly on empiricism; also, the classical and neo-classical schools of psychoanalysis; and then too, the materialist defenders of an analytical socio-psychology and sociology. We were determined to demolish this barrier of silence and clear the way for those who accept the essential correctness of Fromm's theoretical and methodological approach to no longer have to plug away on their own in heroic solitude. It seemed to us that the provision of a forum of this kind would enable these solo efforts to be coordinated and given public outlet in the form of a mutually beneficial multilogue. Hence, the decision to go ahead with setting up a legally constituted society seemed not just meaningful, but also an imperative of the hour - despite the fact that such a step is not without dangers of its own. One important (though in no way anticipated) gratification has been the society's success in building up very constructive and stable contacts with Italian psychoanalysts. This has meant achieving for Erich Fromm's life and work a beachhead beyond its German and Anglo-Saxon origins that it will be the task of the future to consolidate more fully. We do indeed look forward to future developments in this association!

This congress here in Heidelberg would certainly not have been possible without the personal engagement of Professor Micha Brumlik who, as a staff member of the Seminar for Educational Theory of the University of Heidelberg, has not only been good enough to arrange for the rooms of the seminar to be available for our use, but has also kindly accepted to address us tomorrow on the subject, "Messianic Thinking in the German Jewish Intelligentsia of the Twenties". Doubtless Professor Brumlik's talk will supply us with the background in the sociology of ideas necessary to appreciate the full import of Rainer Funk's own talk on "Humanism in the Life and Work of Erich Fromm" which will follow on immediately after these opening remarks. For a human life - even that of Erich Fromm - can never be completely understood *sui generis*, i.e. as a private psychological creation of the individual alone; we are all of us social beings, which means that we are made what we are in essential respects by our social milieu and the larger world we inhabit. This not only applies to what we actually are, but also to the range of possibilities open to us. The task of orientating us on how Fromm's life and thought fits into the wider intellectual and social milieu it sprang from will also be taken up tomorrow by Ursula Engel, who will be talking on the subject of Frieda Fromm-Reichmann and the so-called Heidelberg "Thorapeutikum". We will see that however much Erich Fromm was a person largely of his own making - and this he was in the highest possible degree - he nonetheless received seminal developmental impulses for some of his key insights from his contacts with this woman and her circle of friends.

Tomorrow's proceedings will open with an address - perhaps I should say, a squaring of the ledger - by Michael Maccoby on the methodology of social character research. We will be seeing the extent to which Fromm's thought has proven to be of the greatest possible value in contemporary empirical research; and how the material results of this empirical research, once these are in, can then be thought through and ordered in terms of his theory of social character. Perhaps I should add that, for all the continuing relevance of Fromm's thought and methods, Michael Maccoby's paper will make it



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clear enough that these too are in need of constant expansion, modification and adaptation in the light of evolving situational realities - a proviso indeed that applies to any thinker, no matter how original he is in his own time.

Tomorrow evening, Hans A. Pestalozzi will be taking Erich Fromm's ideas and approach as a point of departure for developing possible strategies of inducing social change.

As a final word, I would like to thank each and every one of you not only for making the trip to Heidelberg, but also for your keen interest in Erich Fromm. For I remain deeply convinced that his ideas have a beacon-like relevance for contemporary man - inhabiting, as the latter does, a confused and confusing world where the individual can easily lose the way. I

believe they offer us a platform for action. Allow me to wish you a most constructive and fruitful time together. I regret most vividly that I myself will not be able to be present at tomorrow morning's talks and follow-up discussions. Fate has decreed that I should be called away tomorrow morning to another congress; my presence is required for official reasons, so there is nothing for it but for me to bow to the inevitable. The irony is not lost on me that this is not a providential situation to be caught in - indeed one might describe it as deeply "anti-Frommian". But there it is. I have no choice in the matter, but to make my excuses and express the hope that all of you present may derive vital stimulation and insight from the talks and discussions of these next days in Heidelberg.