



THE FROMM-MARCUSE DEBATE REVISITED

by John Rickert

One of the most remarkable facts about the work of Erich Fromm is the extent to which it has been distorted and subsequently repressed by intellectuals on the Left.¹ Although Fromm was a lifelong critic of capitalist society as well as the figure chiefly responsible for the Frankfurt School's integration of Marx and Freud, few studies of Critical Theory examine his work in any detail;² articles on his writings rarely appear in the leading journals of the Left;³ and his death in 1980 has, as far as I know, brought forth no attempt by radical scholars in this country to examine what his legacy might be.⁴

The neglect of Fromm's contribution is due in part to the interpretation placed on his work by his former colleagues in the Frankfurt School--most notably, Herbert Marcuse.⁵ In his famous "Critique of Neo-Freudian Revisionism," Marcuse argued that although Fromm's early work is indeed radical, his later psychology is essentially conformist in character. In rejecting Freud's libido theory and certain elements of his metapsychology, Fromm, H.S. Sullivan, and Karen Horney, Marcuse wrote, had deprived psychoanalysis of its most critical concepts, stripped it of a "conceptual basis outside the established system"⁶ (Eros and Civilization, hereafter cited as EC, p. 6), and in its place offered an idealistic ethic that preached adaptation to the status quo.

Since the renaissance of Critical Theory in the 1960s, Marcuse's⁷ essay has set the tone for the Left's reading of Fromm's work. The aim of the present paper is to challenge this interpretation by



arguing that it fundamentally distorts both the general tenor and specific content of Fromm's thought. In particular, I will contend, in opposition to Marcuse and others, that the rejection of libido theory does not signal Fromm's transformation from a critical to a conformist thinker. On the contrary, from the early 1930s until his death, Fromm developed a consistently radical social psychology, the central aims of which remain unchanged even after libido theory has been abandoned.

In order to support my argument for a radical reevaluation of Fromm's work, I will first outline the central but neglected project that constitutes Fromm's chief contribution to Critical Theory--namely, the development of a Marxist social psychology--and then turn to a detailed examination of Marcuse's essay which will focus on his critique of the revision of Freud's theory as well as of Fromm's values.

II

Early in his career, Fromm saw that psychoanalysis could make an important contribution to social theory--particularly to the conception of society espoused by Marx and Engels. If Freud's psychology were used to supplement historical materialism, the result, Fromm believed, would be a refinement of Marxist theory and hence a more powerful instrument for understanding social phenomena.

The key to this new synthesis lay in the psychoanalytic theory of character. Freud and his followers (notably, Karl Abraham) had tried to show how character is formed and had argued that it is the individual's character structure that largely determines his or her



consciousness.⁹ Fromm's aim is to use these insights--in combination with Marx's theory--to explain the attitudes, actions, and ideologies of social classes and entire societies. In order to carry out this task, however, and arrive at a synthesis of Marx and Freud, certain changes in analytic theory are required. In a series of papers published between 1930-1932,¹⁰ Fromm spells out these requirements in detail.

First, if psychoanalysis is to be extended from an individual to a social psychology, it must shift the focus of its inquiry; for unlike individual analysis, the analytic study of social phenomena does not seek to arrive at a complete picture of the individual's psyche. Rather, it focuses on the character traits common to the members of a group--i.e., on what Fromm calls "the libidinal structure" of society or, later, "the social character."¹¹ Such a shift in subject matter necessarily means that one gains less insight into the total character structure of any particular group member, but it also provides one with a powerful tool for understanding the group as a whole and the role its shared character traits play in the social process.¹²

Second, analytic social psychology assumes that the most influential factor in molding the social character is the social and economic situation in which the group members exist. "The phenomena of social psychology," Fromm writes, "are to be understood as processes involving the active and passive adaptation of the instinctual apparatus to the socio-economic situation....The task of social psychology is to explain the shared, socially relevant psychic attitudes and ideologies--and their unconscious roots in particular--



in terms of the influence of economic conditions on libido striv-
ings." ¹³ In other words, Fromm seeks to integrate into analytic
theory Marx's claim that the economic and social structure of
society is the most powerful force shaping human consciousness.
Hitherto, psychoanalysis had failed to comprehend the influence
of socio-economic conditions on the formation of character. By
integrating one of the basic tenets of historical materialism,
Fromm seeks to rectify this error.

One of the conditions for achieving this integration, however,
is an altered view of the family. If, as Freud claims, character
is essentially formed in early childhood, when the infant's contact
with society is minimal, how is it possible for socio-economic
conditions to affect his or her development so profoundly? The
answer, Fromm believes, is that the family, which constitutes the
child's first social environment, engenders the attitudes, char-
acter traits and ideologies typical of its social class. Freud
had correctly regarded the family constellation as the decisive
influence on the formation of character. But he had failed to see
the extent to which the family itself is shaped by social and eco-
nomic forces. Its attitudes and ideals, in large measure, are
determined by its position in the given social order. These attitudes
and traits it then transmits to the child. The family, then, is both
the product of social conditioning and the "psychological agent of
society," the medium through which the social structure places its
stamp on the character and hence the consciousness of its individual
members.

Once these revisions in analytic theory have been made, the
value of Fromm's synthesis becomes evident. "Man's instinctual



apparatus," Fromm writes, "is one of the 'natural' conditions that forms part of the substructure (Unterbau) of the social process."¹⁴ Knowledge of this factor is necessary, then, for any adequate theory of society. Psychoanalysis can enrich historical materialism precisely at this point: "It can provide a more comprehensive knowledge of one of the factors that is operative¹⁵ in the social process: the nature of man himself."

In particular, psychoanalysis can supplement certain gaps in Marxist theory. Marx had argued that a society's ideological superstructure arises from its material base, but he had failed to indicate precisely how this process comes about. Fromm's theory attempts to provide the explanation: it argues that social character is the mediating link between the economic substructure and the prevailing attitudes and ideologies. Specifically, it claims that human drives adapt to socio-economic conditions; that the product of this process is the social character; and that character is what directly determines consciousness--i.e., the attitudes and ideals dominant in a given society.

In addition, analytic social psychology can tell us something about the psychological appeal--and hence the success or failure--of various ideologies. "It can show that the impact of an idea depends essentially on its unconscious content, which appeals to certain drives; that it is, as it were, the quality and intensity of the libidinal structure of a society which determines the social effect of an ideology."¹⁶

Moreover, Fromm's theory helps to explain why changes in ideology tend to lag behind changes in the economic base. Social character is molded by the given economic structure. But once certain character



traits have developed, they are relatively stable and resistant to change. They will adapt to new social and economic conditions, but they do not change as rapidly as the conditions themselves. "The libidinal structure, from which these character traits develop," Fromm writes, "has a certain inertia; a long period of adaptation to new economic conditions is required before we get a corresponding change in the libidinal structure and its consequent character traits."¹⁷

Finally, Fromm's theory can be used to study empirically the social character of a given society or class, on the basis of which predictions can be made regarding the possibilities for social change. Twice in his career Fromm conducted such empirical investigations. Under the auspices of the Institute of Social Research around 1930, Fromm and his colleagues (Ernest Schachtel, Anna Hartoch, Paul Lazarsfeld, and others) studied the incidence of authoritarian versus democratic-revolutionary character types among German workers and employees. If one knew the deeply rooted political attitudes of these groups, they reasoned, one could predict whether, in the event of Hitler's ascension to power, the workers would become Nazis or fight against Nazism. By developing an "interpretive questionnaire" which enabled the researchers to apply psychoanalytic methods of interpretation to the study of large groups, they sought to pierce below the workers' surface opinions to the political convictions rooted in their character structure.

The study's findings indicated that a minority of the workers showed strongly authoritarian or anti-authoritarian character traits while the vast majority--about seventy-five percent--had an ambivalent character. These findings, Fromm argued, were confirmed by later



historical developments since they roughly coincided with the percentage of German workers and employees who eventually became ardent Nazis, fought against Nazism, or made up part of the larger group that followed neither course of action. (This study, which served as the basis for Fromm's analysis of Nazism in Escape from Freedom, was published in 1980 under the title Arbeiter und Angestellte am Vorabend des Dritten Reiches, W. Bonss, editor and translator.)

In 1970, Fromm and Michael Maccoby, having refined the methodology of the original German study, published their investigation of Social Character in a Mexican Village. The results--which showed a correspondence between the three main types of social character in the village and the distinct socio-economic conditions of each--tended to confirm the central claim of the Marx-Freud synthesis: namely, that the primary factor determining the nature of the social character is the given socio-economic situation.

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Fromm's integration of Marx and Freud underwent only one major revision after its original formulation: Freud's explanation of how character is formed¹⁹ was replaced by Fromm's own theory. Fromm had first developed his project for a Marxist social psychology within the framework of Freud's libido theory. That is, he accepted the view that character is to be explained in connection with the various



phases of libidinal development. Freud and Abraham had argued that in early childhood the sexual instincts pass through a certain line of development, at each stage of which the focus of libidinal satisfaction is shifted from one to another zone of the body. Character traits are viewed as sublimations of or reaction formations against impulses associated with particular erogenous zones. During the anal stage, for example, sexual gratification is centered around the processes of retention and evacuation of the feces. If due to overstimulation, excessive frustration, or certain constitutional factors, the libido becomes fixated at (or regresses to) this stage and so fails to follow the normal course of development, the strivings typical of the anal phase will, usually in disguised form, become part of the individual's character structure. Thus, the traits of parsimony and obstinacy that form part of the syndrome of the anal character, are viewed as sublimations of the infant's original refusal to give up the pleasure of retaining the stool.

With the publication of Escape from Freedom in 1941, Fromm abandoned libido theory altogether, and with it Freud's account of character development. In Section III below, we will discuss the reasons for this change in some detail; at present, however, I want to focus only on the one most relevant to the Marxist social psychology: namely, Fromm's realization that an account of character formation based in libido theory is essentially incompatible with the basic tenets of the Marx-Freud synthesis.

As we have seen, this synthesis rested on two fundamental claims: (1) that a given social group could be characterized by its "libidinal structure" or "social character;" and (2) that the primary influence in molding the social character is the socio-economic situation in which



the group members live.

By 1941, Fromm realized that Freud's theory did not lend itself to either of these assumptions.²⁰ With regard to (1), he saw the following difficulty. Freud's characterology had been developed within the framework of an individual psychology. Thus, while it could--in principle, at least--explain an individual's character structure in terms of libido theory, it found it much more difficult to give an adequate account of social character. Specifically, Freud's theory could not answer in any satisfactory way the question of why a given class should have developed a certain kind of social character.²¹ Confronted with the anal social character of the European lower middle class, for example, Freud's theory would have to assume that "certain early experiences in connection with defecation"²² had caused the libido of most members of that class to become fixated at the anal stage of development. But why such a fixation should have occurred across an entire social class and what connection this fixation might have to the class's role in the social structure, were questions for which Freudian theory had no ready answers.

(2) A similar difficulty plagued Fromm's attempt to reconcile Freud's account of character with the view that social character is essentially formed by the socio-economic structure. For some years, Fromm believed that his papers of the early 1930s had achieved this reconciliation. By the time he published Escape from Freedom, however, he realized that his effort to affirm both the role of economic factors and Freud's instinctually based characterology led to theoretical difficulties he had not foreseen.



Freud's theory had been formulated without having taken into account the influence of the mode of production on the formation of character. Instead, the latter was fully explained in terms of the impact of childhood^{experiences} on the libido's development. Thus, the traits typical of the anal character (parsimony, obstinacy, and orderliness) were viewed not as resulting from adaptation to a particular economic system, but as the outcome of the frustration or overstimulation of impulses associated with the anal stage of libidinal development.

If one were to retain Freud's account of character and at the same time acknowledge the impact of economic forces, one would have to show a connection between the formative early experiences and the material base of society. Specifically, one would have to demonstrate how the latter conditioned the former in order to produce a particular character structure. In terms of the example cited above, it would be incumbent upon one to show how the capitalist mode of production gave rise to certain early experiences which led to the fixation of libido at the anal stage of development, thereby producing an anal character structure. Fromm apparently believed that no convincing connection of this kind could be made. Thus, he concluded that since Freud's theory had originally been formulated without reference to socio-economic factors, when one now tried to integrate them, one saw that the theory had no adequate way of taking them into account.

In response to this dilemma, Fromm developed a theory that could show the connection between the mode of production and the prevailing character traits as well as explain why a particular class



should have a specific kind of social character. Both aims were achieved, and the difficulties of Freud's theory avoided, by denying the libido's role in the formation of character. This meant that the impact of the mode of production was not mediated by the sexual instincts. Rather, the socio-economic structure directly molded human energy and passions in such a way as to produce the traits required for the continued functioning of the given social order. The question of why a particular class should have a specific social character was explained not in the unconvincing terms of Freud's theory, but by saying that the socio-economic situation of that class directly conditioned the character traits found in most of the population.

Specifically, Fromm's new theory argued that in order to meet needs for physical and psychic survival, human beings relate themselves to the world and others through the "process of assimilation and socialization." The particular form these modes of relatedness take--i.e., the specific ways in which the individual satisfies these needs--constitutes his or her character structure. Character, then, is a certain orientation to the world that develops in the process of meeting needs for survival and meaning.

The force that most powerfully shapes character, according to Fromm, is the whole network of social relationships that make up the individual's experience. And the main factor determining the nature and quality of those relationships is the given mode of production and resulting practice of life. A particular social character, then, does not develop because of certain experiences of overstimulation or frustration during one of the phases of libidinal development. Rather, it develops in direct response to the child's



experience of social reality as constituted by the requirements of a particular mode of production and transmitted by the family environment. Capitalism, for example, requires "men who are eager to work, who are disciplined and punctual, whose main interest is monetary gain, and whose ^{main} principle in life is profit as a result of production and exchange." ²⁵ These character traits develop in a capitalist system not because of the vicissitudes of the sexual instincts, but because they are engendered and reinforced by the whole conduct of life in capitalist societies. And once established, the social character of the given capitalist system gives rise to an ideology that stabilizes and reinforces the most "desirable" traits of character.

To sum up: From the beginning, Fromm was convinced of the truth of Marx's claim that social existence as conditioned by the mode of production, determines consciousness. In the early 1930s, Fromm used Freud's theory of character to flesh out this claim in some detail. The socio-economic system, he argued, molds the character structure which in turn directly determines consciousness. By 1941, Fromm realized that Freud's theory could not easily accommodate Marx's insight. Consequently, he put forth a new theory of character formation that could explain the social character specific to a society or class as the result of the given socio-economic conditions. With the abandonment of libido theory, Fromm was able to revise analytic characterology in a Marxist direction.

In concluding this outline of the Marx-Freud synthesis, I want to stress the fact that the theoretical integration of the



early '30s, though it ultimately had to be revised, serves as the basis for all Fromm's later work in social theory and social psychology. In The Dogma of Christ (1930), Fromm traces changes in early Christian dogma to their roots in psychic attitudes that were themselves the result of the early Christians' altered social and economic situation. In Escape from Freedom (1941), he tries to show that the widespread acceptance of Protestantism and Nazism lay in their appeal to strong emotional needs that had been shaped by new economic conditions. In The Sane Society (1955), he locates the sources of the modern individual's alienation and conformity in the contemporary capitalist economy. In the Mexican study (1970), Fromm and Maccoby try to demonstrate how different types of social character and their corresponding ideologies are the product of distinct socio-economic circumstances. In each of these books, spanning a period of forty years, Fromm's main concern remains the same: to explain the dominant character traits, attitudes, and ideologies of a society or class in terms of the adaptation of human drives (regardless of whether they are defined as resulting from "libidinal strivings" or--as in the later Fromm--"existential needs") to the requirements of a specific socio-economic system. The continuity of Fromm's project--both before and after 1941--is a point that deserves special emphasis; for it demonstrates that the abandonment of libido theory in no way alters the basic aim of the Marx-Freud synthesis. Indeed, as we have seen, it is only with the rejection of an instinctually based character theory that this synthesis becomes --for the first time--genuinely possible.



III

Before turning to the substance of Marcuse's arguments against Fromm, one remark should be made about his method. Marcuse proposes to treat the so-called "Neo-Freudians"²⁶ as a unit; consequently, he will "neglect the differences among the various revisionist groups and concentrate on the theoretical attitude common to^{all of} them." (EC, p. 226). Such a procedure, however, is prejudicial to Fromm in two respects: First, one of the chief factors distinguishing Fromm from Sullivan and Horney is that he is a Marxist, very much concerned with integrating Marxism and psychoanalysis and developing a radical critique of capitalist society. By ignoring this difference, Marcuse ignores the most radical aspects of Fromm's work (e.g., the theory of social character) and so avoids confronting substantial evidence contradicting his claim that Fromm is a "conformist" thinker. Secondly, as Fromm himself noted in the course of the debate, the failure to distinguish between the Neo-Freudians enables Marcuse to cite passages from Sullivan and Horney and treat them as if they applied to Fromm as well. As I shall demonstrate below, this practice results in major distortions of Fromm's position.

In the following, I will be concerned with examining Marcuse's critique only in so far as it is directed against Fromm's writings. I will not address the question of whether or not Marcuse accurately represents the views of Sullivan and Horney.

Marcuse advances two related sets of arguments against Fromm's psychology. The first is aimed at his "mutilation" of Freud's theory



while the second attacks his allegedly conformist values.

Marcuse differs fundamentally from Fromm in his belief that psychoanalysis stands in need of no new sociological orientation. Freud's theory is^{already} "in its very substance 'sociological'" (EC, p. 5) in so far as its categories are derived from social experience and it contains an implicit critique of the established order. In his instinct theory and theory of culture, Marcuse writes, Freud demonstrated that civilization arises only through the repression and renunciation of instinctual claims to freedom and happiness; and in so doing, he exposed the depth of the conflict between the biological strivings of human beings and their social institutions. By downplaying the role of the instincts in his own theory of human nature, Fromm has in fact weakened Freud's radical critique and thereby reduced "the social substance of psychoanalysis." (EC, p. 222).

On the face of it, Marcuse's claim is indisputable. Freud's theory does indeed have explosive social implications and Fromm did abandon it early in his career. Is he therefore to be regarded as a "revisionist" thinker who has emasculated what is best in Freud's thought? Marcuse's affirmative answer to this question is unconvincing because it neglects a number of crucial issues that bear directly on his argument: (1) What were Fromm's reasons for rejecting libido theory? (2) Does Fromm's anthropology, even without the instinct theory, retain a critical, oppositional stance? (3) Given the central aims and general tenor of Fromm's thought, does his repudiation of Freud's instinct theory justify the view that he is a conformist, revisionist figure? Let us examine each of these questions in some detail.



(1) Presumably, the first step incumbent upon anyone assessing a revised theory is to examine the evidence on which that revision is based. That Marcuse fails to do so is largely the result of his approach to psychoanalysis. In the introduction to Eros and Civilization, Marcuse draws a sharp distinction between psychoanalytic theory and its empirical basis in therapy, stating that he is concerned exclusively with the implications of the former, not with an attempt to "correct or improve" theory in the light of clinical evidence.²⁷

Such a goal serves a very useful function vis-à-vis the critique of Fromm, Sullivan, and Horney: it enables Marcuse to compare their doctrines with Freud's simply on the basis of each theories' sociological implications rather than in terms of their conformity with the empirical data. By "mov[ing] exclusively in the field of theory," (EC, p. 7) Marcuse avoids confronting the evidence on which the Neo-Freudians' revisions are based and hence the question of whether or not they are empirically justified.

To be sure, Marcuse provides an account of the origins of Fromm's position. To avoid conflict with an increasingly repressive society, he tells us, Fromm redefined his goals for therapy so that they became compatible with prevailing values. This task was accomplished by discarding a materialistic conception of happiness rooted in sexuality in favor of an idealistic one--a move that led, in turn, to a de-emphasis of the instincts in Fromm's theory of human nature. (EC, pp. 222-223.).

If Marcuse's analysis is logically consistent, it is also purely speculative. At no point does he examine the reasons Fromm himself provides--either explicitly or by implication--



for rejecting Freud's views. Had he done so, Marcuse would have been faced with the following justification for Fromm's revisions. First, as we have already noted, Fromm believed that a characterology based in libido theory could not adequately demonstrate the impact of economic conditions on the formation of character. Secondly, Fromm argues that character develops in direct response to the child's interpersonal relationships; the impact of experience--Freud and Abraham to the contrary--is not mediated by the sexual instincts. ²⁸ Passive-receptive attitudes, for example, do not result from the fixation or regression of the libido to the oral phase of development, but in direct reaction to the child's experiences of others. Finally, Fromm believes that the power and intensity of human passions cannot be explained by viewing them as manifestations of instinctual drives. "The most striking feature in human behavior," Fromm writes, "is the tremendous intensity of passions and strivings which man displays. Freud more than anyone else recognized this fact and attempted to explain it in terms of the mechanistic-naturalistic thinking of his time...But brilliant as his assumptions were, they are not convincing in their denial of the fact that a large part of man's passionate strivings cannot be explained by the force of his instincts. Even if man's hunger and thirst are satisfied, 'he' is not satisfied. In contrast to the animal, his most compelling problems are not solved then, they only ²⁹ begin." Only by focusing on imperative needs for meaning that arise from the specific conditions of human existence, Fromm argues, can one understand the depth and intensity of human passion.

Thus we see that Fromm had compelling reasons for rejecting libido theory; reasons which Marcuse either ignores or ^{simply} does not



understand.

(2) The instinct theory is of value to Marcuse because it allows him to ground his social critique in a theory of human nature: psychoanalysis gives him the tools with which to "elucidate...
the repressive controls over the 'nature of man.'" ³⁰ By de-emphasizing the role of the instincts, especially sexuality, Fromm allegedly weakens this critical dimension of Freud's theory.

A question that naturally arises here--but one that Marcuse fails to raise--is whether Fromm appeals to other aspects of human nature to serve this critical function. The answer is that in fact he does.

Fromm's entire social psychology rests on his belief that "human nature" has its own inherent dynamic. "Man," Fromm remarks, "is not a blank sheet of paper on which culture can write its text; he is an entity charged with energy and structured in specific ways, which, while adapting itself, reacts in specific and ascertainable ways to external conditions." ³¹

The most important of these dynamic characteristics is the "tendency to grow, to develop and realize potentialities which man has developed in the course of history." ³² These include, for example, "the faculty of creative and critical thinking and of having differentiated emotional and sensuous experiences." ³³ To the extent to which these potentialities are blocked, the individual is mentally and emotionally crippled. Indeed, mental pathology, in Fromm's view, is often to be understood as resulting from the inhibition of this basic drive. ³⁴

Fromm's belief that capitalism cripples the "species-being" of the human individual and so alienates him from his own humanity



serves as the basis for his radical critique of modern society. Existing social conditions damage the life-affirming potentialities inherent in human nature, thereby generating the various forms of alienation that Fromm analyzes in such detail.

One may, of course, object that compared with Freud's theory of sexuality, Fromm's concept of an "inherent tendency to growth" is both vague and idealistic.³⁵ But even if this claim is granted, that does not alter the fact that Fromm's anthropology serves a critical function: it provides him with a foundation for criticizing the established order for its crippling effects on "the nature of man." Unfortunately, Marcuse simply ignores the radical thrust of Fromm's humanism.

(3) In his effort to portray Fromm as a conformist thinker, Marcuse not only stresses his repudiation of the instinct theory, but also consistently downplays the most radical features of Fromm's thought. The analyses of early Christian, Protestant, and Fascist ideology; of authoritarianism and the culture industry; of the origins of "inner worldly asceticism" and the theory of social character, are never mentioned in Marcuse's essay.

To be sure, Marcuse cites with approval the early paper in which Fromm attempts the integration of Marx and Freud. But he seems to believe that this project collapses--or, at least, loses its critical power--with the abandonment of libido theory. Given this misconception, Marcuse can chastise Fromm for having "forgotten" ideas which are in fact central to the Marx-Freud synthesis. Thus, Marcuse writes:

To be sure, personality has not disappeared: it con-



tinues to flower and is even fostered and educated-- but in such a way that the expressions of personality fit and sustain perfectly the socially desired pattern of behavior and thought. (EC, p. 231).

Yet what do these comments express if not the central claim of Fromm's theory of social character?³⁶

In addition, Marcuse argues that although Fromm's work may appear radical, such appearance is deceptive. "[I]n spite of the outspoken critique of some social institutions, the revisionist sociology accepts the foundation on which these institutions rest." (EC, p. 242.) For in rejecting the instinct theory and with it the theory of culture, Fromm abandoned Freud's effort to question the origins and legitimacy of a repressive civilization.

What Marcuse's argument forgets is that the repudiation of Freud's theory by no means entails acceptance of established institutions as "finished products...given rather than made facts." (EC, p. 250). For if Fromm rejects Freud's theory of culture, he adopts that of Marx and Engels. Objectively given material conditions determine the mode of production and social organization which in turn determines consciousness.

Finally, Marcuse accuses Fromm of a theoretical shift of emphasis away from the primacy of the unconscious, thereby re-orienting psychoanalysis "on the traditional consciousness psychology of pre-Freudian texture." (EC, p. 226). Although this charge has been widely accepted by writers sympathetic to Marcuse,³⁷ the evidence does not bear it out.

From the beginning of his career until his death, Fromm re-



garded the discovery of the unconscious as Freud's "most crea-
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tive and radical achievement;" one that profoundly extended
"our knowledge of man and...our capacity to distinguish
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appearance from reality in human behavior." Indeed, the con-
cept is so central to Fromm's understanding of human psychology
and his conception of psychoanalysis that his work is incon-
ceivable without it. The characterology developed in Man for
Himself (1947), for example, rests on Freud's "dynamic" con-
cept of character, which views the latter as a system of mostly
unconscious strivings that underlie and motivate behavior. The
task of psychoanalysis is to pierce beneath the surface of such
phenomena as dreams, parapraxes, and symptoms to the hidden and
repressed forces that drive the individual to act and think as
he or she does. In The Forgotten Language (1951), Fromm tries
to extend the significance of Freud's concept by arguing that
the unconscious is not only the seat of irrational strivings,
but also of our wisest and deepest insights into reality. On the
basis of this claim, Fromm stresses the sociological significance
of the unconscious by contending that it is precisely because
of the negative impact of social reality that our most penetrating
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insights undergo repression.

In accordance with Freud's later usage of the term, Marcuse
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identifies the unconscious with the id and the primary instincts.
Consequently, he infers that Fromm's de-emphasis of the latter
necessarily entails a de-emphasis of the unconscious as well. And
as is so often the case throughout his "Critique," Marcuse's claim
is sound as far as it goes; the problem is that it does not go far



enough. For if Fromm does not equate the unconscious essentially with repressed instinctual strivings, it is not because he undervalues the concept; rather, it results from the fact that he uses the word in the sense Freud originally gave it: as a descriptive term denoting a quality of certain mental states not identified with any particular contents. The motivation for using the term in this way is to extend the significance of the unconscious so that it is not limited essentially to repressed sexual strivings, but refers to "the whole range of repressed psychic experiences."⁴²⁴³

Thus, Marcuse's charge, though it has some basis in fact, is highly misleading at best.

IV

With regard to Fromm's values, Marcuse argues that although they appear critical, they are in fact repressive and conformist since they are defined in terms of the given reality principle. (EC, pp. 238-39). Although Marcuse cites a good deal of evidence in support of this claim, his argument is finally unconvincing; for it is based on a narrow and error-ridden reading of Fromm's work.

The revisionists' "distinction between good and bad...productive and unproductive," Marcuse writes, "is not derived from any theoretical principle but simply taken from the prevalent ideology." (EC, p. 228). This statement contains two separate claims, the first of which is simply false. Fromm's ethics, like the "libidinal morality" of Eros and Civilization (EC, p. 208), is in fact derived from an extensive theory of human nature. Good and evil are defined on the basis of an understanding of this



"nature" and of what is conducive or harmful to its full development. Indeed, Man for Himself is primarily concerned with the task of arriving at "objectively valid" ethical standards on the basis of a philosophical anthropology.

To substantiate the charge that Fromm's values are ideological, Marcuse identifies Fromm with idealistic ethics, a moral tradition for which reason is "in its very function repressive" (EC, p. 100) of nature both inside and outside the human individual. Here, Marcuse writes, the natural world is viewed merely as an object of domination while all the "higher" moral values are defined in terms of the repression of the sensuous faculties.

To be sure, Fromm identifies with some of the major figures of the Western philosophical tradition, drawing explicitly, for example, on the ethical theory of Aristotle and Spinoza. But what he embraces in this heritage are its emancipatory features: its concern with happiness, human solidarity, and the development of human potentialities. Reason plays a central role in Fromm's thought, but it is for him an instrument of truth and demystification which seeks to apprehend the world as it is in its being rather than manipulate it for instrumental ends.⁴⁴ The call for the "domination of one part of the individual, his nature, by another, his reason,"⁴⁵ is repudiated explicitly. "Idealistic philosophers," Fromm writes, "...

have insisted upon splitting human personality, so that man's nature may be suppressed and guarded by his reason. The result of this split, however, has been that not only the emotional life of man but also his intellectual faculties have been crippled. Reason, by becoming a guard



set to watch its prisoner, nature, has become a prisoner itself; and thus both sides of human personality, reason and emotion, were crippled.⁴⁶

The task of ethics, Fromm argues, is not to repress human strivings, but to create the conditions conducive to human development.⁴⁷ Liberation is defined not in terms of the repression of the instincts, but as the transformation of one's experience of the world in all spheres of one's being: intellectual, emotional and sensuous.⁴⁸

Unlike Marcuse, Fromm does not place sexuality at the very center of his psychology or his conception of liberation, but this by no means makes him a "rabid sexual conservative."⁴⁹ From the papers of the early 1930s through The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness (1973), Fromm views sexuality as a productive force for human freedom and happiness.⁵⁰ Moreover, "legitimate" sexual relations are not defined in terms of behavior that serves procreation. "Sexual desire," Fromm writes,

even when no love is present, is an expression of life and of mutual giving and sharing of pleasure. Sexual acts, however, that are characterized by the fact that one person becomes the object of the other's contempt, of his wish to hurt, his desire to control are the only true sexual perversions; not because they do not serve procreation, but because they pervert a life-serving impulse into a life-strangling one.⁵¹



If Fromm's views on sexuality are "non-repressive," as I suggest, what are we to make of his response to Marcuse's work? In "The Human Implications of Instinctivistic 'Radicalism,'" and several later writings,⁵² Fromm speaks of Marcuse's vision of the release of Eros as irrational, infantile, and regressive. Surely, one might conclude, such remarks express a hostile attitude towards sexuality.

Such an inference, however, would be in error. For most of Fromm's comments about Eros and Civilization bespeak a careless reading of that work. Fromm believes that Marcuse is calling for "the complete and unrestricted satisfaction of...sexual desire,"⁵³ the "immediate gratification" of instinctual needs, the reactivation of sadism in its most hideous forms. But this is simply not the case. Fromm ignores Marcuse's efforts to limit instinctual liberation to the extent necessary for preserving a non-repressive society. He takes no notice of the distinction between basic and surplus repression and the transformation of sexuality into Eros--a process involving the "self-sublimation" of the sexual instincts and the emergence of an "order of gratification" guided by a non-repressive reason.⁵⁴

Even when he is interpreting Marcuse correctly--e.g. in the latter's use of the concept of narcissism--Fromm is objecting to the regressive connotation this concept possesses within the context of Freudian theory. It is unlikely, however, that Fromm would oppose the goal towards which this concept aims--i.e., the notion of a non-alienated relationship between nature and the human individual --if it were stated in terms of another universe of discourse.



What I am suggesting is that Fromm's attack on Marcuse is due in part to (1) his misreading of the latter's work and (2) to his objections to the implications Marcuse's values possess when stated in terms of psychoanalytic theory. With regard to the values themselves, however, the two thinkers are much closer than either of them believes. Indeed, if one places The Sane Society and The Revolution of Hope beside One-Dimensional Man, one is struck again and again by the close resemblance of the two thinkers. Both of them appeal to a theory of human nature and a conception of true human needs as the basis for their critique of advanced industrial society. Both reveal the depth of alienation beneath the surface "happiness" of modern consumerism and expose the ways in which the culture industry manipulates and controls the consciousness of society's members. Both attack the conformist tendencies of contemporary social science and develop critiques of technological irrationality. Both believe in the revolutionary power of art and see in genuine socialism the form of social organization most conducive to the release of human potentialities for freedom and happiness.

Despite his critique of Fromm, the similarities between the two men was not entirely lost on Marcuse. When One-Dimensional Man was published, he asked Fromm to review the book since the latter was "almost the only [person] who would understand him."

The effort to brand Fromm's ethics as ideological finds further expression in Marcuse's treatment of the concept of productivity. This highest of Frommian values, Marcuse claims,



refers mainly to traits that "show forth in good business, administration, service, with reasonable expectation of recognized success." (EC, pp. 236-37). That is to say, Fromm's conception is not different from the "goal of the healthy individual under the performance principle." (EC, p. 236).

It hardly need be said that these remarks grossly misrepresent the meaning of Fromm's formulation; for the latter is not defined in terms of the traits required for "good business" and "recognized success." On the contrary, Fromm's analyses of the origins of the work ethic⁵⁹ and the marketing character⁶⁰ constitute a powerful critique of precisely these values. What productiveness does mean for Fromm is "a fundamental attitude, a mode of relatedness in all realms of human experience, ...cover[ing] mental, emotional and sensory responses to others, to oneself, and to things."⁶¹ It refers to the unfolding of one's inherent potentialities, the realization of one's uniqueness as an individual human being. It is characterized by a state of "inner activity" and responsiveness to the world which results in depth and intensity of feeling.⁶²

Only by playing on the repressive connotations of the term "productiveness" (which, throughout Eros and Civilization, has been linked with the performance principle⁶³) and by simply ignoring Fromm's definition, can Marcuse suggest that the latter partakes of the features of the given reality principle.

Another example of Marcuse's distortion of Fromm's work may be found in his discussion of the Neo-Freudians' concept of mental health. Although at one point, Marcuse admits that Fromm rejects the "therapy of adjustment," (EC, pp. 237-38) he suggests that



this claim is ultimately hollow: in the last analysis, Fromm, along with Sullivan and Horney, conceives of mental health operationally, in terms of "successful adjustment" to the given social order. Marcuse can arrive at this interpretation, however, only by failing to make crucial distinctions between Fromm, Horney and Sullivan and by treating passages from the latter as if they applied to Fromm as well. The most remarkable instance of this practice is his use of a long quotation from H. S. Sullivan in which Sullivan speaks of political radicals as psychopathic personalities. Though Sullivan's views on this matter have nothing in common with Fromm's, Marcuse writes as if they did: Sullivan's remarks are used as the basis for a general denunciation of Neo-Freudian psychology." The passage," Marcuse writes,

illuminates the extent to which the interpersonal theory is fashioned by the values of the status quo...Deep conformity holds sway over this psychology, which suspects all those who 'cut loose from their earlier moorings' and become 'radicals' as neurotic...This 'operational' identification of mental health with 'adjustive success' and progress eliminates all the reservations with which Freud hedged the therapeutic objective of adjustment to an inhuman society...(EC, pp. 233-34).

To attribute such a view to Fromm is to do great violence to the whole spirit of his work. On the basis of his conception of human nature, Fromm attacks those who view society's way of life as "normal" in so far as it is functional and who define neurosis



only in terms of the individual's lack of adjustment to the given order. For Fromm, the standard of mental health and pathology is determined not on the basis of prevailing social attitudes and behavior but from the standpoint of genuine human needs. Indeed, one of the major themes of Fromm's work is the extreme alienation and automaton conformity characteristic of the "normal" individual in modern society. In "Individual and Social Origins of Neurosis" (1944) and later in Man for Himself and The Sane Society, Fromm speaks of "socially patterned defects" across large populations and discusses at length the "pathology of normalcy." Indeed, the last of these works is a detailed investigation into the "pathology of civilized communities."⁶⁵

Finally, Marcuse accuses Fromm of a theoretical shift of emphasis from sociological to spiritual concerns. The "decisive struggle," Marcuse writes, is no longer between society and the individual, but between rational and irrational forces "in the 'soul' of man." (EC, p. 242). Having transformed "the brute fact of societal repression...into a 'moral problem,'" (EC, p. 243) Fromm holds the individual responsible for falling short of his or her potential and speaks of neurosis as a symptom of moral failure.

Although, once again, Marcuse's claim has some basis in fact, it is highly misleading to characterize Fromm's thought in this way without qualification. For Fromm combines his religiosity and moralism with a profound sense of the impact of economic forces on the individual psyche. This is the main point not only of the theory of social character but of his classic studies of modern



society.

In his letter to Martin Jay, Fromm insists that he never saw the problem of change in moralistic terms:

The essential point of Escape from Freedom is to show the socio-economic conditions which determine man's difficulty in achieving freedom to. In The Sane Society I continued the same topic. I have always upheld the same point that man's capacity for freedom, for love, etc., depends almost entirely on the given socio-economic conditions, and that only exceptionally can one find, as I pointed out in The Art of Loving, that there is love in a society whose principle is the very opposite. If one calls my position a moralistic one, it would certainly seem to most people that I think that by good-will and preaching this transformation can be achieved, while my position has always remained the socialist one that this is not so.

66

Moreover, when Fromm speaks of neurosis as a symptom of moral failure, he is referring to the fact that acts of self-betrayal (as evinced, for example, in the marketing character's motto, "I am as you desire me") often result in neurotic conflict as well as his belief that "defeat in the child's fight against irrational authority is at the bottom of every neurosis." The neurotic is a "moral failure" in the sense that he has not become what he might have been; his capacity for autonomous thought and feeling has been crippled. But this term by no means implies a moralistic judgment against the individual or a negation of the indictment of society

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67A



for its part in crushing his humanity.

Fromm's moralism has been a source of irritation not only
68
to Marcuse but to his other critics on the Left. What they have
apparently
all failed to see, however, is that his concern with ethics,
with the crippling of human potentialities, serves as the basis for
his critique of capitalist society.

From the beginning, Fromm espoused a position
that Marcuse eventually came to embrace: namely, that "Morality
is not necessarily and not primarily ideological. In the face of
69
an amoral society, it becomes a political weapon."

V

The origin of the dispute between Marcuse and Fromm can be
traced to the differences between a "philosophical" and "empirical"
approach to psychoanalysis. The philosopher Marcuse finds buried in
Freud's most speculative concepts--especially the instinct theory and
metapsychology--a radically critical theory and seeks to elucidate its
sociological
^ implications ; while Fromm, a practicing
psychoanalyst and social psychologist, embraces those discoveries
that have been confirmed by his clinical experience and rejects
those ideas that in his view do not adequately account for the
70
empirical data.

These differences have important ramifications for each thinker's
conception of human nature, human liberation, and their respective
projects for integrating Marx and Freud. Placing the theory of
sexuality at the center of his system, Marcuse's aim in Eros and
Civilization is to elucidate the "hidden trend in psychoanalysis"
and to demonstrate that instinctual emancipation is not, as Freud



believed, incompatible with civilized life. The account of human nature on which this project is based places great importance on the instincts, conceiving of liberation and repression essentially in instinctual terms.

For Fromm, in contrast, what is most convincing in Freud's thought is not the theory of sexuality nor the metapsychology "but his insistence on the central role of repression and the fundamental significance of the unconscious sector of our mental life."⁷¹ Consequently, in his own marriage of Marx and Freud, Fromm uses these concepts, together with the theory of character, to analyze the phenomena of ideology and false consciousness. In addition, he puts forth a conception of human nature (closer in important respects to Marx than to Freud) that assigns little importance to the instincts in comparison with specifically human passions. In this theory, repression (in the non-technical sense) is equated not primarily with repression of the instincts, but with the creation of "false needs," and the crippling of the capacity for love and reason. Liberation, in contrast, is defined as the realization of one's potentialities, the full expression of one's faculties towards the world.

VI

Under the influence of Marcuse's critique, Fromm's thought was often distorted and repressed in discussions of Critical Theory and the Freudian Left.⁷² The most important and influential case in point is Russell Jacoby's Social Amnesia, a book that



seeks to extend Marcuse's analysis back to Adler and forward to Laing.

Since--with regard to the critique of Fromm, at least-- Jacoby essentially adopts Marcuse's position, his claims are open to many of the same objections. Once again no distinction is drawn between the work of Fromm, Sullivan, and Horney;⁷³ once again we encounter the myth concerning the shift away from the unconscious⁷⁴ and the "explanation" of Fromm's position as resulting from an attempt to achieve immediate therapeutic gains.⁷⁵ Once again the bulk of Fromm's writings are simply ignored or forgotten: His corpus is reduced to the rejection of libido theory, some pastoral remarks in The Art of Loving, and his admittedly unconvincing suggestions for social change. The powerful social critique and the theory of social character are downplayed or passed by altogether.⁷⁶

Jacoby's errors, however, derive not only from Marcuse's essay, but from his own remarkably biased reading of Fromm's work. If Jacoby were to look at Fromm with a less prejudiced eye, he would see the injustice of the claim that the latter seeks to escape not only Freud's theory of the unconscious but his concept of repression as well.⁷⁷ If he were sensitive to Fromm's conception of therapy--if he understood that a commitment to the liberating power of truth is at the heart of Fromm's idea of psychoanalysis--he could not construe the latter's advocacy of compassion for the patient as a "false warmth that is to be turned on and off by command."⁷⁸ If he were acquainted with Fromm's effort as a therapist to attend to the impact of socio-economic forces on the patient's psyche, he would be less likely to make the unequivocal claim



that "Individual therapy must forget the [social] whole so as to
aid its individual victim."⁷⁹

Jacoby's tendentiousness produces the most serious distortions in his remarks on Fromm's social psychology. Jacoby writes, for example, that with the Neo-Freudians, "social structure was adulterated to social friendship patterns."⁸⁰

In so far as this claim applies to Fromm, however, it is simply false. The primary aim of the theory of social character is to demonstrate the impact of social structure on character and consciousness. Indeed, as I indicated in Section II above, this goal constitutes one of the motives behind Fromm's shift from an instinctually based characterology to one stressing "interpersonal relationships." In addition, Jacoby

asserts that whereas Critical Theory "discover[s] society within the psyche of the individual [and] strip[s] away the floss" of individual autonomy,⁸¹ Fromm and the Neo-Freudians, presupposing the existence of the latter, conceive of society "as an external factor, an outside force acting on the individual, but not decisively casting the individual from without

and from within."⁸² Yet all these claims stand in flat contradiction to the content of Fromm's work. With the concept of social character, Fromm shows that society does indeed "decisively cast the individual from without and from within" by molding his or her character in such a way that it serves the ends of the given order. "Character in the dynamic sense of analytic psychology," Fromm writes, "is the specific form in which human energy is shaped by the dynamic adaptation of human needs to the particular mode of existence of a given society. Character in its

turn determines the thinking, feeling, and acting of individuals."⁸³ "It is the function of the social character to shape the energies of the members of society in such a way that their behavior is not a matter of con-



scious decision as to whether or not to follow the social pattern, but one of wanting to act as they have to act and at the same time finding gratification in acting according to the requirements of the culture."
84

If Jacoby is representative of the Left's reception of Fromm's work, Habermas stands as a noteworthy exception. Although he, too, speaks of Fromm as a revisionist figure, he nonetheless insists on granting Fromm his proper place in the history of Critical Theory. In an interview conducted with Marcuse shortly before the latter's death, Habermas remarked:

I would like to know if, retrospectively, you're not doing a disservice to the contribution Fromm made to the rise of Critical Theory as it developed in New YorkWasn't Fromm the first to introduce the program of a Marxist social psychology to the Institute, at the end of the twenties? . . .Wasn't it Fromm, certainly urged on by Horkheimer, who tried to reconcile Marx and Freud in his own fashion, a fashion decisive for Critical Theory? Wasn't it Fromm who made it clear that some trivial psychological assumptions cannot determine the subjective factor, but that the latter . . . must integrate basic conceptualizations of psychoanalysis and Marxism? Isn't the image of Fromm that you're painting now heavily colored by the later dispute with Fromm the revisionist, and isn't his contribution to Critical Theory's formative period underestimated?

To these questions, Marcuse replied:



Yes, I concede that without reservation. And the description I gave was, as you said, colored by the position of the late Fromm...But Fromm's early works, the especially those on Christian dogma[^]..were received ^{and then the first essays in Zeitschrift} 85 as radical Marxist social psychology. That is correct.

VII

When the distortions and misconceptions have been cleared away, it becomes evident that Fromm's work is marked by its basic continuity. Over a period of fifty years, Fromm developed a thorough-going, radical critique of psychoanalysis, directed against its theory, therapy, and what he regarded as the conformist nature of the psychoanalytic movement. 86 The most important element of that critique--and the centerpiece of his thought--was his effort to integrate Marx and Freud. As Habermas suggests and Marcuse concedes, it was Fromm who introduced the Marx-Freud synthesis into Critical Theory. This project was not weakened, but rather, significantly enhanced by the repudiation of Freud's libido theory. Its original formulation in the period 1930-32 serves as the basis for all Fromm's studies of ideology from "The Dogma of Christ" until his death. As late as 1970, Fromm (together with Michael Maccoby) was refining the tools for investigating social phenomena that he had first developed forty years earlier; testing his theory of social character; and trying to demonstrate the truth of Marx's claim that the economic structure of society molds the hearts and minds of its individual



members.

Marxism originally turned to psychoanalysis in an attempt to understand the role of psychological factors in social phenomena. Specifically, it sought an account of the origin and power of ideology, the subjective conditions for social change, and the processes by which society enters the individual's psyche.

One of the primary aims of Fromm's work was to provide the answers to these questions. On a theoretical level, he tried to supplement Marxist theory by arguing that character is the mediating link between the material base and superstructure of society. In his empirical investigations, he provided an analytic technique --namely, the "interpretive questionnaire"--for studying the character of social groups. In so doing, he offered a valuable tool for assessing the impact of socio-economic conditions upon character and of predicting whether the latter would resist or facilitate radical social change.

In distorting and subsequently neglecting his work, Fromm's critics have not only repressed the thought of one of the Left's most passionate and penetrating spokesmen, but have also failed to benefit fully from the insights Fromm has to offer.



NOTES

1

Here I am thinking primarily of the literature on Critical and the Freudian Left Theory. Fromm's work has received a good deal of attention from such Marxist Humanists as the Praxis group in Yugoslavia. Indeed, the latter sponsored an international symposium in Fromm's honor in December 1981.

2

Among the notable exceptions to this trend are: Martin Jay, The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923-1950 (Boston, 1973), especially chapter three; Ken O'Brien, "Death and Revolution: A Re-appraisal of Identity Theory," in On Critical Theory, ed. John O'Neill (New York, 1976); Ron Eyerman, False Consciousness and Ideology in Marxist Theory (Stockholm, 1982), chapter five; and Wolfgang Bonss, who translated and edited Fromm's early study Arbeiter und Angestellte am Vorabend des Dritten Reiches. Eine sozial psychologische Untersuchung (Stuttgart, 1980).

Many works on Critical Theory discuss Fromm in passing but not in detail. One of the best short pieces on Fromm--and one that anticipates a number of points made in the present paper--is Paul Roazen's review of Fromm's To Have or To Be? in The Nation, February 5, 1977, pp. 151-154.

3

Two such articles are: Rudolf J. Siebert, "Fromm's Theory of Religion," Telos, 34 (Winter 1977-78), pp. 111-120 and Michael Maccoby, "Social Character versus the Productive Ideal: The Contribution and Contradiction in Fromm's View of Man," Praxis International, I (April 1982), pp. 70-83.



4 See, however, Raya Dunayevskaya's brief memorial piece, "Erich Fromm: Socialist Humanist," News and Letters, April 1980, p. 10; and Michael Maccoby, "Erich Fromm," in International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (Biographical Supplement), 18 (New York, 1979), pp. 215-220.

5 Marcuse's critique of Fromm was first published under the title "The Social Implications of Freudian Revisionism" in Dissent, II, 3 (1955), pp. 221-240. It was reprinted under its present title, "Critique of Neo-Freudian Revisionism," as the Epilogue to Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud (New York, 1962), pp. 217-251.

Theodor Adorno criticized Fromm in his lecture on "Social Science and Sociological Tendencies in Psychoanalysis." For a summary of this paper, see Jay, The Dialectical Imagination, pp. 103-105.

6 All citations to Eros and Civilization refer to Vintage Books Edition, New York, 1962. Original edition published in 1955.

7 Representative Leftist readings of Fromm are to be found, for example, in Russell Jacoby, Social Amnesia: A Critique of Conformist Psychology from Adler to Laing (Boston, 1975)--discussed in Section VI below--and Paul Robinson, The Freudian Left (New York, 1969).

8 Primarily Jacoby, Social Amnesia.

9 Freud laid the foundation for psychoanalytic characterology in his paper on "Character and Anal Eroticism" (1908) in Collected Papers, II (London, 1953), pp. 45-50. For a discussion of the crucial connection between character and consciousness, see



Erich Fromm, "Appendix: Character and the Social Process" in Escape from Freedom (New York, 1970), pp. 305-310. Original edition published in 1941.

10

These papers include the following: "Die Entwicklung des Christudogmas. Eine psychoanalytische Studie zur sozialpsychologischen Funktion der Religion," in Imago, XVI (1930); "Über Methode und Aufgabe einer Analytischen Sozialpsychologie: Bemerkungen über Psychoanalyse und historischen Materialismus," in Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung, I (1932); and "Die psychoanalytische Charakterologie und ihre Bedeutung für die Sozialpsychologie" in Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung, III (1932). The English translation of the first paper appeared as the title essay in Erich Fromm, The Dogma of Christ and Other Essays on Religion, Psychology and Culture (Greenwich, 1973). The English translations of the two Zeitschrift papers appeared in Erich Fromm, The Crisis of Psychoanalysis: Essays on Freud, Marx, and Social Psychology (New York, 1970) under the respective titles of "The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology: Notes on Psychoanalysis and Historical Materialism" and "Psychoanalytic Characterology and Its Relevance for Social Psychology."

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See Fromm's footnote in "The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology" in The Crisis of Psychoanalysis, p. 133.

12

See Fromm's discussion of this point in The Dogma of Christ, pp. 16-17.

13

Fromm, "The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology," p. 121. Italics deleted.



14 Ibid., p. 127.

15 Ibid., pp. 126-127. Italics deleted.

16 Ibid., p. 128. Thus, Fromm writes in Escape from Freedom, p. 307: "the idea of work and success as the main aims of life were able to become powerful and appealing to modern man on the basis of his aloneness and doubt; but propaganda for the idea of ceaseless effort and striving for success addressed to the Pueblo Indians or to Mexican peasants would fall completely flat."

17 "Psychoanalytic Characterology and Its Relevance for Social Psychology," in The Crisis of Psychoanalysis, p. 149.

18 Fromm restated the nature of the Marx-Freud synthesis many times in his writings. The most important of these statements appear in "Appendix: Character and the Social Process" in Escape from Freedom, pp. 304-327; "Psychoanalytic Characterology and Its Application to the Understanding of Culture" in Culture and Personality, ed. S. S. Sargent and M. W. Smith (New York, 1949), pp. 1-12; "Individual and Social Character" in Beyond the Chains of Illusion (New York, 1962), pp. 76-94; Erich Fromm and Michael Maccoby, Social Character in a Mexican Village (Englewood Cliffs, 1970), chapter one, especially pp. 16-23; and "The Application of Humanist Psychoanalysis to Marx's Theory" in On Disobedience and Other Essays (New York, 1981), pp. 24-40.

19 I want to emphasize the fact, however, that Fromm accepted and deeply admired the other features of Freud's character theory. In Man for Himself (Greenwich, 1969), pp. 65-66, Fromm writes: "The theory presented in the following pages follows Freud's characterology



in essential points: in the assumption that character traits underlie behavior and must be inferred from it; that they constitute forces which, though powerful, the person may be entirely unconscious of. It follows Freud also in the assumption that the fundamental entity in character is not the single character trait but the total character organization from which a number of single character traits follow....The main difference in the theory of character proposed here from that of Freud is that the fundamental basis of character is not seen in various types of libido organization but in specific kinds of a person's relatedness to the world." In addition, it should be noted that Fromm accepted Freud's clinical description of the various character types. He differed in giving these types different names (e.g., Freud's anal character becomes for Fromm the "hoarding" character) and in expanding them to include, e.g., the "marketing orientation."

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Fromm never spells out in any detail the incompatibility of a characterology based in libido theory and the attempt to show the impact of socio-economic conditions on character formation. He merely acknowledges its existence. See the comments from Escape from Freedom in footnote 21 below. See also his remark in Greatness and Limitations of Freud's Thought (New York, 1980), p. 61, that "[Freud] did not arrive at the concept of a 'social character' because on the narrow basis of sex, such a concept could not be developed;" and his statement in "The Application of Humanist Psychoanalysis to Marx's Theory" in On Disobedience, p. 28, that "A condition for the formulation of the concept of social character as being molded by the practice of life in any given society was a revision of Freud's libido theory, which is the basis for his concept of character."



v-A

These remarks are tantamount to a tacit admission--which Fromm never, as far as I know, makes explicit--that the Marx-Freud synthesis of the early '30s did not really succeed since it was couched in terms of libido theory. Only when Freud's instinctually based character theory is replaced by a theory of interpersonal relations does Fromm's Marxist social psychology become genuinely possible.



21

Thus, in Escape from Freedom, p. 321, Fromm writes: "Only from this point of view [i.e., his attempt to explain character formation in terms of interpersonal relations rather than libido theory] can Freud's characterological findings become fruitful for social psychology. As long as we assume, for instance, that the anal character, as it is typical of the European lower middle class, is caused by certain early experiences in connection with defecation, we have hardly any data that lead us to understand why a specific class should have an anal social character. However, if we understand it as one form of relatedness to others, rooted in the character structure and resulting from experiences with the outside world, we have a key for understanding why the whole mode of life of the lower middle class, its narrowness, isolation and hostility, made for the development of this kind of character structure."

22

Fromm, Escape from Freedom, p. 321.

23

In Social Character in a Mexican Village, p. 15, Fromm and Maccoby note the similarities between Fromm's theory of character formation and that of Erik Erikson. They write: "Erikson [in Childhood and Society] has expressed a similar point of view in terms of 'modes,' without emphasizing so clearly the difference from Freud.

"Erikson has demonstrated in regard to the Yurok Indians that character is not determined by libidinal fixations. Erikson shows that the typical Yurok has an anal-hoarding character, including stinginess, suspiciousness and obstinacy...The ideal of the Yurok was to be 'clean,'



'sensible,' and 'restrained.' Yet there is no evidence that these traits can be traced to constraints on anal eroticism. Indeed, Erikson writes that 'there seems to be no specific emphasis on feces or the anal zone...' (p. 178). And 'there is no shame concerning the surface of the human body' (p. 179). Rather, the economic demands of Yurok life as peasant fishermen appear to make what we would term a moderately productive hoarding orientation the one best suited for survival, and Yurok institutions reinforce the ideals that fit this character type. In describing Yurok character, Erikson rejects an essential part of the libido theory, and his results confirm the position earlier taken by Fromm (1941). But he has continued to speak, it seems to us somewhat inconsistently, in terms of instinct and libido theory..."

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Fromm, Man for Himself, p. 67.

25

Fromm, "The Application of Humanist Psychoanalysis to Marx's Theory" in On Disobedience, p. 28.

26

In view of the fact that Fromm repudiated this label on many occasions, its continued application to his work is open to question. In The Crisis of Psychoanalysis, p. 21 and "The Present Crisis of Psychoanalysis," Praxis, III (1967), p. 74, Fromm notes the crucial distinction between his work and that of Sullivan and Horney: While the latter conceived of cultural influences in the "traditional anthropological sense," his focus is specifically Marxist. In the Praxis paper, Fromm writes he "differs from Sullivan and Horney in his concept of culture. He sees society in the dynamic sense of Marxist theory, and tries to understand how a particular practice



of life resulting from the basic elements of social structure, molds human passions in such a way that they become useful for the function of that particular social structure (social character)." (p. 74)

27

"The purpose of this essay," Marcuse writes, "is to contribute to the philosophy of psychoanalysis--not to psychoanalysis itself. It moves exclusively in the field of theory, and it keeps outside the technical discipline which psychoanalysis has become.... Our concern is not with a corrected or improved interpretation of Freudian concepts but with their philosophical and sociological implications. Freud conscientiously distinguished his philosophy from his science; the Neo-Freudians have denied most of the former. On therapeutic grounds, such a denial may be perfectly justified. However, no therapeutic argument should hamper the development of a theoretical construction which aims, not at curing individual sickness, but at diagnosing the general disorder." EC, p. 7.

28

Clearly, these first two objections to libido theory are closely connected. In order to show the impact of economic factors upon social character, Fromm is under a theoretical obligation to revise Freud's account of character development. But at the same time, he apparently thinks that Freud's view is inadequate on empirical grounds. (See *Escape from Freedom*, pp. 318-320). The extent to which the theoretical requirement influenced Fromm's empirical position is, it seems to me, an open question.

With regard to this point, it should be noted, however, that very early on--even before he was aware of the incompatibility of Freud's theory with the claims of the theory of social character--Fromm seems to have found important features of the Freudian



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account of character formation unconvincing. See Fromm's remarks, e.g., in "Psychoanalytic Characterology and Its Relevance for Social Psychology," in which he stresses the importance of object relations, questions the "central role given to the erogenous zones," (p. 137) and speaks of the entire theory as a "rough schema that is hypothetical in many respects. Further analytic research will have to alter many important points and introduce many new ones." (p. 147).

29

Fromm, Man for Himself, p. 54.



- 30 Herbert Marcuse, "A Reply to Erich Fromm," Dissent, III, 1 (1956), p. 80.
- 31 Fromm, Man for Himself, p. 32.
- 32 Fromm, Escape from Freedom, p. 315.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 In Escape from Freedom, p. 207, Fromm writes: "The more the drive toward life is thwarted, the stronger is the drive toward destruction; the more life is realized, the less is the strength of destructiveness. Destructiveness is the outcome of unlived life." This is essentially the position Fromm takes thirty years later in The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness (1973).
- 35 See Otto Fenichel, "Psychoanalytic Remarks on Fromm's Book, 'Escape from Freedom,'" Psychoanalytic Review, XXXI (1944), pp. 133-152.
- 36 Specifically, the view that society molds the social character so that people want to act as they have to act if the given social structure is to continue to function. See, e.g., "Psychoanalytic Characterology and Its Application to the Understanding of Culture" in S. S. Sargent and M. W. Smith, ed. Culture and Personality, p. 5.
- 37 See, e.g., H. Stuart Hughes, The Sea Change: The Migration of Social Thought 1930-1965 (New York, 1975), p. 196.
- 38 Fromm, The Crisis of Psychoanalysis, p. 5.
- 39 Ibid.



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40 published
In his later writings--[^]some years after the debate with Marcuse --Fromm developed the notion of the "social unconscious," a concept referring "to those areas of repression which are common to most members of a society; these commonly repressed elements are those contents which a given society cannot permit its members to be aware of if the society with its specific contradictions is to operate successfully." Erich Fromm, Beyond the Chains of Illusion: My Encounter with Marx and Freud (New York, 1963), p. 95. Original edition published 1962.

41 "The main 'layers' of the mental structure are now [i.e., in the late Freud] designated as id, ego, and superego. The fundamental, oldest, and largest layer is the id, the domain of the unconscious, of the primary instincts." EC, p. 27 .

42 For Freud's discussion of the various senses in which he has used the term "unconscious" in the development of psychoanalysis, see Sigmund Freud, The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis (New York, 1966), pp. 534-536. (Lecture XXXI). See also Clara Thompson's discussion of the same point in her Psychoanalysis: Evolution and Development (New York, 1957), pp. 85-87.

43 Fromm, The Crisis of Psychoanalysis, p. 7.

44 See Fromm's distinction between reason and intelligence in Man for Himself, pp. 108-112. See also his remarks on reason in Erich Fromm, The Sane Society (Greenwich, 1969), pp. 64-65, 152-154; and later discussions in Erich Fromm, "Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism" in Erich Fromm, D.T. Suzuki and Richard DeMartino, Zen Buddhism and



Psychoanalysis (New York, 1970), p. 91 and Erich Fromm, The Revolution of Hope: Toward a Humanized Technology (New York, 1971), p. 42.

45 Fromm, Escape from Freedom, p. 189.

46 Ibid., p. 284.

47 Fromm, Man for Himself, pp. 227-232.

48 Ibid., p. 91. See also Fromm, Escape from Freedom, pp. 204-205, 285 and Fromm, "Psychoanalysis and Zen Buddhism," p. 128.

49 Robinson, The Freudian Left, p. 5.

50 In "The Theory of Mother Right and Its Relevance for Social Psychology" in The Crisis of Psychoanalysis, p. 99, Fromm writes: "Sexuality offers one of the most elementary and powerful opportunities for satisfaction and happiness. If it were permitted to the full extent required for the productive development of the human personality, rather than limited by the need to maintain control over the masses, the fulfillment of this opportunity for happiness would necessarily lead to intensified demands for satisfaction and happiness in other areas of life."

In a letter to Martin Jay written nearly forty years later, Fromm makes a similar point. The claim that in later years, he has become more sexually conservative, he writes, "is not correct. I never doubted that sexuality itself can have a liberating function. I only thought that Reich's conclusion that the sexual revolution would lead to^{the political revolution} was wrong, based on his confusion between Nazi and conservative morality." Letter from Fromm to Martin Jay, dated May 14,



1971.

51

Fromm, The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness, p. 281.

52

Erich Fromm, "The Human Implications of Instinctivistic 'Radicalism'" in Dissent, II, 4 (1955), pp. 342-349; Fromm, The Revolution of Hope, pp. 8-9; Fromm, The Crisis of Psychoanalysis, pp. 14-20, 82; Fromm, The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness, pp. 281, 463-464.

53

Fromm, "The Human Implications of Instinctivistic 'Radicalism,'" p. 346.

54

EC, chapters 9, 10 and 11.

55

For Fromm's critique of the culture industry, see, e.g., Escape from Freedom, pp. 148-156 and The Sane Society, chapter 5.

56 critique of the psychoanalytic movement (footnote 86 below) & his See Fromm's remarks on conformist social science in The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness, p. 261

On the irrational uses of technology, see The Revolution of Hope and Anatomy of Human Destructiveness, pp. 342ff.

57

(Boston, 1978)

Compare Marcuse's The Aesthetic Dimension with Fromm's comments on art in The Revolution of Hope, pp. 75-76.

58

In his letter to Martin Jay of May 14, 1971, Fromm writes: "If Marcuse fully believed what he wrote in this discussion [i.e., the "Critique of Neo-Freudian Revisionism"] about my viewpoint, he would hardly have asked me to write a review of One-Dimensional Man for the New York Times, as being almost the only one who would understand him."



59

Fromm, Escape from Freedom, chapter 3.

60

Fromm, Man for Himself, pp. 75-89.

61

Ibid., p. 91.

62

Ibid., pp. 89-113.

63

See, e.g., EC, pp. 199-202. On this point, see H. P.'s [Henry Pachter?] remarks in his review of The Sane Society in Dissent, III, 1 (1956), p. 88. H. P. writes: "To prepare his own solution, Fromm has introduced the notion of 'productiveness,' avoiding hackneyed expressions like 'creative,' free and spontaneous. His own term is most unfortunate because it can be confused with one of the most outrageously alienated idols of capitalism. Nothing, however, is farther from Fromm's intention than the idea of productiveness for its own sake. If we look into the descriptive part, ...his meaning becomes clear: productiveness is an attitude towards life, the universe and mankind which allows the development of a person's full potentialities; it is what Friedrich Schiller and Huibinga called 'play,' and no sadder indictment of our alienation could be found than this lack of a proper word for our most profound yearning and the central conception of non-alienated self-realization."

64

For a late statement of Fromm's position, see Greatness and Limitations of Freud's Thought, p. 134.

65

The phrase is Freud's. Fromm quotes it in The Sane Society, p. 28.

66

Letter from Fromm to Martin Jay, May 14, 1971.



67

Erich Fromm, "Individual and Social Origins of Neurosis" in American Sociological Review, IX (1944), p.382.

67A

Fromm, Man for Himself, pp. 232-238.

68

See, e.g., Christopher Lasch, The Culture of Narcissism (New York, 1978), pp. 31-32.

69

Herbert Marcuse, An Essay on Liberation (Boston, 1969), p. 8.

70

In Beyond the Chains of Illusion, p. 10, Fromm writes: "As far as my psychological theories are concerned, I have had an excellent observation point. For over thirty-five years I have been a practicing psychoanalyst. I have examined minutely the behavior, the free associations, and the dreams of the people whom I have psychoanalyzed. There is not a single theoretical conclusion about man's psyche, either in this or in my other writings, which is not based on a critical observation of human behavior carried out in the course of this psychoanalytic work."

71

Fromm, Greatness and Limitations of Freud's Thought, p. 133.

72

Thus, Christopher Lasch can devote an essay to "The Freudian Left and the Cultural Revolution" in New Left Review, 29 (1981), without once mentioning Fromm's work--other than by implication, in a disparaging comment on the Neo-Freudians. Similarly, Paul Robinson and H. Stuart Hughes not only purge Fromm from the Freudian Left, but go so far as to speak of him as a "rabid sexual conservative" (Robinson, The Freudian Left, p. 5) and place him on the "Freudian 'Right'" (Hughes, The Sea Change, p. 194) because he



de-emphasizes the role of sexuality.

73

Jacoby, Social Amnesia, p. xx.

74

Ibid., p. 46.

75

Ibid., p. 12.

76

To be sure, Jacoby cites the early papers in which Fromm developed the Marxist social psychology. But in his contrast between Critical Theory and the "conformist" Neo-Freudians, he consistently places Fromm in the latter group. Indeed, he tells us that of the Neo-Freudians he discusses "[w]ithin this book...Fromm [is] the most, important." (p. xx).

77

In Social Amnesia, p. 20, Jacoby writes: "Adler and those who have followed him [in Jacoby's view, the Neo-Freudians] have labored to escape the uncommon concepts of repression, infantile sexuality, and libido..."

78

Ibid., p. 128.

79

Ibid., p. 121.

80

Ibid., p. 133.

81

Ibid., p. 34.

82

Ibid., p. 68.

83

Fromm, Escape from Freedom, p. 305.

84

Fromm, The Sane Society, p. 77.

85

"Theory and Politics: A Discussion with Herbert Marcuse, Juergen



Habermas, Heinz Lubasz, and Telman Spenglar" in Telos, 38 (1978-79) p. 127.

86

For Fromm's critique of the latter, see Erich Fromm, Sigmund Freud's Mission (New York, 1963); "Psychoanalysis--Science or Party Line?" in The Dogma of Christ; the title essay in The Crisis of Psychoanalysis and Greatness and Limitations of Freud's Thought, chapter 5.

87

Together with the theory of social character and the concept of necrophilia, Fromm considered the development of the "interpretive questionnaire" to be his most important contribution to and social psychology psychoanalysis. Personal interview with Michael Maccoby, Washington, D.C., January 1982.