

Rainer Funk
Ursainer Ring 24
D-7400
Tübingen
Germany

1

Russell Jacoby

March 28, 1992

Thanks very much. Unlike Gad Horowitz, who has addressed the content of Russell Jacoby's remarks last night, I would like to speak primarily to several issues raised in his first book *Social Amnesia*. My choice is no accident, of course. Of all Jacoby's books, *Social Amnesia* had the greatest impact on me personally. Since reading it in my early twenties, I have spent most of my life studying the history of psychoanalysis, and I have written a book, called *The Legacy of Erich Fromm*, which deals with a theorist Jacoby criticizes severely.

Before discussing the various areas of disagreement between myself and Russell Jacoby, I'd like to begin by emphasizing those areas where I find myself in total or near total agreement with him. I am not simply doing this as a courtesy to Dr. Jacoby, but to indicate to all of you where I am coming from on a variety of levels. To begin with, I'd like to mention Russell Jacoby's most recent book, *The Last Intellectuals*. Except for the absence of references to women, which Marsha Hewitt drew to my attention, I have no quarrel with the basic thesis of his book. The disappearance of public intellectuals is a sad and seemingly inevitable process, and has dire repercussions for academia, because the general lack of public debate and awareness *outside* the academic domain fosters mediocrity and conformist thought within it.

Furthermore, and along the same lines, I share Russell Jacoby's wariness about recent trends in academe itself. The recent ascendancy of Lacanian psychoanalysis, and of post-structuralist, deconstructionist and postmodernist thinking has generated to some fascinating work. Yet as





Marx declared, the philosophers have interpreted the world; the point is to *change* it, and despite their novelty and seeming audacity, the interpretative strategies generated by the academic avant-garde sometimes seem calibrated to dazzle and intrigue other theory-addicts, who talk a revolutionary line, but conduct their lives within the conventional parameters of university life, and seldom venture out into the real world of politics. Finally, there is a sad and slightly sinister undertone to certain tendencies ideas with that most Orwellian of current catch phrases, political correctness. Even people who are generally sympathetic here occasionally get disturbing intimations of conformist tendencies masquerading as revolutionary and anti-imperialist analysis.

On a different note, I would like to applaud Russell Jacoby for attempting to critique contemporary psychology from the standpoint of critical, dialectical, historical thought. I don't always agree with his conclusions. But my reservations about his *specific* formulations don't detract from my awareness that he actually *made* the effort, and that his efforts in this direction far surpass those of his contemporaries.

On a more personal note, I'd like to voice my appreciation for Jacoby's remarks in *Social Amnesia* about the the doctrinaire pronouncements of many leftists, with their categorical denunciations of monogamy and the family. As someone who spent most of his adolescence involved with radical therapy groups and communes of one sort and another, I can attest to the truth of his statement that in groups like these the endless talk about human relationships often masked a pervasive sense of envy, and an attempt to impose a new pattern of conformity that devalued intimate and sustained friendships in the interests of facilitating the tyranny of the group, while masking this emotional and intellectual intimidation in the



jargon of therapy. Significantly, Jacoby's lucid critique of the radical therapy movement of yesteryear has an almost antiquarian interest nowadays. While denunciations of monogamy and the family and "bourgeois individualism" can still be found in isolated pockets of academia, by and large, the left, sensing defeat, has retreated on this front, with the result that the kind of dialectical reflection on personal intimacy and family solidarity that Jacoby promoted, which has ample precedent in critical theory, has almost ground to a halt.

Finally, I'd like to give my endorsement to Russell Jacoby's strictures against confusing therapy with radical politics or social change. The efforts psychotherapists make when we try to mend shattered lives, or heal the effects of long forgotten traumas, may indeed be worthy, and worthy of respect. But they are not going to change the world. Insofar as we put our client's interests first, we must help them to make the best of a bad situation, and this often means helping them to adapt, and where possible, indeed, to *thrive* within a society based on domination, exploitation and mystification. There is no getting around that fact. And while we may confront them with unpleasant truths about themselves or their families, and try and guide them toward important lifestyle changes, getting patients to think critically about the prevailing ideology or state of the world in general is not part of the therapeutic agenda. And rightly so.

However, I am not entirely satisfied with Jacoby's account of the relationship between theory and therapy. To begin with, we occasionally encounter people who -- with no prompting from us, hopefully -- are already involved in the politics of social change, or are struggling in an as yet inarticulate and often barely conscious way to understand the real linkages between their personal hells and the social contradictions that



envelop them. If we encourage such exploration in the context of therapy without adopting a sectarian line, or brainwashing patients with our own political point of view, we are contributing in a small way to social change. By contrast, if a therapist dismisses these emergent or insistent preoccupations as evidence of some underlying neurotic fixation, or a displacement onto society of family dynamics, more often than not he or she is actively trying to stifle a radical impulse, however feeble or disorganized. One thing we can do, whether as therapists and as patients, is to protest the reactionary and fundamentally anti-therapeutic effects of these interventions, which are still remarkably commonplace, and actively or tacitly endorsed by the majority of the mental health establishment.

On a less positive note, I think Jacoby's attempts to vindicate the autonomy of theory overlooks the pitfalls of trying to apply psychoanalytic concepts to social critique without any experience in the clinical setting, whether as patient or therapist. Jacoby says, for example, that one of the most radical and neglected features of Freud's work is his theory of repression, and he credits Marcuse with deepening this aspect of Freudian theory. Yet in his introduction to *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse says that throughout his book, the words "Repression" and "repressive" are used in the non-technical sense to designate both conscious and unconscious, external and internal processes of restraint, constraint and suppression".

Unfortunately, what is lost in Marcuse's usage is the knowledge of what these terms actually signified for Freud. In clinical discourse, repression refers specifically to an *unconscious* mental process whereby certain representations -- be they thoughts, feelings, wishes, memories or fantasies -- are deliberately thrust out of awareness, and rendered inaccessible to conscious introspection, but which strive to achieve



expression through dreams, parapraxes, body language and so on. Indeed, Freud's concept of repression entails a triple or threefold evasion of consciousness, involving 1) a specific mental content or representation that is denied access to consciousness, 2) the mechanism whereby this act of self-censorship is accomplished, and finally, 3) the *motive* for repression, which presumably brings the whole process into being, which is unconscious as well. Therefore, in its original sense, the word repression referred to an intrapsychic process wherein content, process and motive are all consigned to oblivion -- at least so far as consciousness is concerned. Marcuse notwithstanding, it has nothing to do with conscious or external processes of restraint, constraint and suppression. Nor does sublimation, which is also performe an unconscious process.

Furthermore, according to Freud, conscious, voluntary restraint exercised autonomously is *not* the same as repression. And after a moment's reflection, it is not difficult to see why. A conscious and deliberate delay in the expression of satisfaction of an impulse in deference to the demands of reality -- much as it may frustrate or disappoint us momentarily -- does nothing to diminish our actual *capacity* for pleasure or authenticity under more favorable circumstances, nor does it block the entry of a specific thought, feeling or memory into consciousness, as repression does. Granted, external constraints may be *internalized* if the person lacks the ego-strength to resist identification with the aggressor, or find a suitable opportunity for instinctual gratification in some other setting. But again, that process of internalization and its intrapsychic sequelae are *unconscious* processes, not conscious ones. The fact that conscious constraint and unconscious self-censorship may have a common origin in the requirements of adaptation to reality does not justify



confounding them as Marcuse did. Characterizing the exercise of conscious constraint in deference to reality as "repressive" is really a value judgement masquerading as a theoretical advance, and not one that Freud would have likely endorsed.

Now in view of all Russell Jacoby has written, it may seem perverse or even provocative of me to say so: but I am inclined to include Marcuse's indiscriminate use of the word repression among the many Adlerian deviations from analytic orthodoxy that Jacoby himself criticizes so insistently. After all, it collapses the depth dimension, or what is really unconscious, into the domain of consciousness, and vice versa.

Nevertheless, I hesitate to characterize Marcuse's revisionist usage as neo-Adlerian, for the simple reason that I think Jacoby himself uses this word indiscriminately. Let me furnish an example. On p. 29 of *Social Amnesia* (paperback edition), Jacoby includes Fromm among the theorists whom he condemns as neo-Adlerian. In so doing, as I've argued in my book, he overlooks the important fact that Fromm actually had more in common with Jung and Rank than with Adler. Unlike Adler, Jung and Rank did not praise common-sense and conformity. On the contrary, they were outspoken if somewhat muddled and mystical critics of conformist psychology, who championed the struggles of people to achieve mental and emotional autonomy by transcending collective mythologies. Unfortunately, they both lapsed into a sweeping subjectivism that Fromm lost no opportunity of criticizing throughout the late 1940's and 50's.

Meanwhile, on the *clinical* level, Jung and Rank explored different modalities of repression than those that preoccupied Freudian orthodoxy. They explored the vicissitudes of the mother-infant bond, or the pre-Oedipal situation, and made that the nucleus of neurotic disturbance, and



the fulcrum of the many irrational social processes that underlie religion and mythology. Granted, they put much less emphasis on specifically sexual needs and processes than Freud had, because many of the needs, feelings and experiences of pre-Oedipal development have comparatively little to do with genital or sexual strivings, and much more to do with simple survival, security and individuation. Though their contributions to social psychology have been largely forgotten, there is now general agreement that the pre-Oedipal domain they first charted in defiance of Freud's strictures constitutes an important dimension of neurotic disturbance.

Needless to say, I am not offering a blanket endorsement of Jung and Rank here. What I am saying, however, is that they are terribly important to the history of psychoanalysis, and that Jacoby dismissed them by simply not discussing them. It just won't do to lump every disagreeable tendency in analytic theory under one all embracing category, neo-Adlerianism.

Another feature of Fromm's work that was utterly disjunctive with Jacoby's characterization is his bitter quarrel with Harry Stack Sullivan. Following in Adler's footsteps, Sullivan argued that the chief or defining characteristic of mental health is "consensual validation", or the extent to which the individual relinquishes his or her world of personal beliefs and satisfactions to enter into a world of "consensually validated" ones -- in short, the world of "common sense". By contrast, Fromm argued that consensual validation as such has nothing to do with mental health, and that under most circumstances, it signifies nothing more than the individual embracing what he called a socially patterned defect. The theoretical differences between Fromm and Sullivan rocked the William Alanson White Institute throughout the late 1940's, 50's and 60's. It took all the diplomatic skill of Clara Thompson to help contain, mediate and



diffuse these differences, and prevent a schism. This fact wasn't widely publicized, then or now, but if you don't believe me, just ask any insider or eyewitness to these proceedings.

The point of this digression on was to establish once again that there are many features of Fromm's work that don't accord with Jacoby's characterization of him as a neo-Adlerian. Here is another example. On p. 30 of *Social Amnesia*, Jacoby continues his critique of Adler and the neo-Freudians by pointing to the loss of the critique of the individual that is vividly inscribed in Freudian thought and critical theory. Jacoby says that "To critical theory, psychoanalysis demonstrates the degree to which the individual is de-individualized by society. It uncovers the compulsions and regressions that maim and mutilate the individual. From this perspective the formulations of the revisionists are already concessions to liberal ideology".

While I agree with this characterization as it applies to Adler and Sullivan, and to several exponents of humanistic psychology whom Fromm heartily despised, I don't think that this is an apt or accurate description of Fromm. Let me cite section 1 of chapter 7 in *Escape From Freedom*, where Fromm contrasts the prevailing illusion of autonomous thought and action in monopoly capitalism with the underlying reality of abject conformity and slavish dependence. Throughout his life, Fromm insisted on the radical disjunction between our *conscious* convictions about exercising free choice and free speech and the deeply repressed *unconscious* experience of being powerless and dependent, at the mercy of market forces and anonymous authority, which is the basis of modern conformity and what he later termed the marketing character. In this, he was at one with his erstwhile



colleagues in the Frankfort School; though by that point, of course, neither he nor they were particularly anxious to draw attention to that point.

Finally, there is one more point I'd like to discuss. Much as I admire uncompromising consistency of Jacoby's vision, I take exception to the way he handles the problems of ethics and identity from both a clinical and theoretical standpoint. According to Jacoby, all discussion of a patient's identity, goals and values implies a superficial psychology of consciousness; an evasion of the depth dimension of sexuality and inner conflict. And along the same lines, like the younger Erich Fromm, he commends Freud for insisting that all ethical ideals are the products of sublimation or reaction formation, or in short, of some secondary transformation of essentially amoral libidinal or pregenital strivings.

Though it may simply reflect my personal bias, this characterization doesn't accord with my experience. In therapy, values and goals *can* be treated superficially, from the standpoint of consciousness. And more often than not, they are, perhaps. But the problems of ascertaining, embracing or rejecting specific ethical values can also be addressed in ways that tap into unconscious dynamics. Our conscious goals, values and sense of identity may be radically disjunctive with our unconscious goals and strivings, and with who we really are. For example, it is one thing for a man to preach a good feminist line, and quite another for him to make his actions conform with his stated values, no matter how subjectively sincere. The proverbial gap between theory and practice is often a product, not of conscious insincerity or opportunism, or of mere theoretical inconsistency, but of an inability to square one's conscious belief and actions with one's *unconscious* goals and values, and to relinquish a fictive or idealized self-image that masks the underlying truth about oneself.



In cases like this, of course, there is little evidence of mental suffering or disturbance generated *internally* so long as the man's mythology about himself goes unchallenged. And accordingly, there is little incentive to change, unless external circumstances compel the person to re-examine their conscience and beliefs. Moreover, in this particular example, the disparity between a man's conscious convictions and his unconscious values tells in favor of his *conscious* orientation. But it often works the other way around. Sometimes a person's *unconscious* goals and values are far more human than their conscious ones, and where this is true, the possibilities for anguish and internal conflict are potentially endless. In instances like these, mental suffering intervenes as a form of self-punishment for sacrificing the truth, for playing the game, and betraying the better part of oneself for greed, ambition or simple security.

A very vivid example of this phenomena can be found in Shakespeare's tragedy *Macbeth*, which Freud analysed in an essay entitled "Some Character Types Met With in Psycho-Analytic Work", published in 1915. The second section of this paper is devoted to a category of persons designated "Those Wrecked By Success", who appear to achieve a long standing goal that was ardently wished for, and then mysteriously proceed to fall apart. Freud's discussion involves literary and historical sources that would take us too far afield to rehearse right now. So I would simply point out that he comes to an abrupt halt when attempting to discern the motives that drove Lady Macbeth mad. In his own words, Freud said "What . . . these motives can have been, which in so short a space of time could turn the hesitating, ambitious man into an unbridled tyrant, and his steely hearted-instigator into a sick woman gnawed by remorse, it is, in my view, impossible to divine."



Well, to be fair, Freud's analysis had much to commend it. But in truth, he missed the point of the play. Shakespeare makes it clear that in order to incite her husband to murder, Lady Macbeth strenuously attempts to extinguish or disown what is left of her humanistic conscience, symbolized by the references to maternal tenderness and breast-feeding in Act I, in scenes 5 and 7, which Freud himself cites in his textual exegesis. She succeeds temporarily, but at great cost, and when her efforts to repress her conscience finally fail, she goes mad. Her husband, by contrast, narrowly escapes psychosis, but acquires a taste for infanticide, and an ultimately fatal character disorder.

Judging from his remarks on *Macbeth*, Freud seemed incapable of conceiving of an innate human yearning for justice, compassion and the preservation and enhancement of life, or what Fromm termed a humanistic conscience. And as a result, he never thematized the problem of *existential guilt* with the depth and precision it deserves, and the analytic literature on this widespread phenomenon is extremely sparse. In other words, Freud failed to discriminate between super-ego anxiety, which emanates from internalized prohibitions, and existential guilt, which reflects the person's deep-rooted response to their actual choices in life, conscious and unconscious. Instead, Freud insisted that all manifestations of conscience and remorse represent a product of internalized prohibitions, like the super-ego, or a secondary transformation of some other amoral striving, be it sadism, greed or libido.

Of course, some might object that Freud did recognize the principle of solidarity in the form of Eros, which supposedly binds organic life together in ever larger and more complex unities. While I appreciate the beauty of the Eros metaphor, there is really no way of demonstrating Freud's



contention that the striving for communion and solidarity with others is a secondary transformation of libido, or of crude sexual energy. In fact, there are a number of reasons to doubt it. Remember that in Freud's own work, Eros is not to be confused with libido, which Freud construed, rightly or wrongly, as an invidious passion that actually *separates* couples from the rest of the community. To state the issue bluntly, how is an invidious striving that creates exclusivity and isolation from the rest of the collective transformed into its opposite?

Granted, this theoretical proposition, which entails the transformation of something into its opposite, appears to be a dialectical one. But is it a materialist or an idealist dialectic? As a simple precaution, I submit that unless or until some sort of physiological or biochemical process to mediate this miraculous transformation is actually discovered that we be skeptical, or at least reserve judgement on this point.

Finally, there is another objectionable feature to Freud's notion of Eros; one that is not the least bit dialectical. Freud supposed that the secondary transformation of libido into the sublimated energy that supposedly binds communities together occasions a dramatic depletion of our sexual energies; one that impairs our capacity for sensuous enjoyment. In short, Freud was proposing that the more deeply we experience and express our sense of solidarity and community, the more sexless we become. I doubt the validity of this proposition on the grounds of experience. After all, where is the *evidence* for this assertion. Worse still, Freud took the dubious step of insisting that Eros is a product of specifically *civilized* sexual mores, and therefore of a *second* nature, and not a basic or innate feature of our species endowment that precedes and frequently overrides the promptings of socialization. This presumably implies that "uncivilized" people, while



sexier, no doubt, are less capable of Eros. In the absence of compelling evidence, this could easily be construed as ethnocentrism on Freud's part.

In short, despite its attractiveness, Eros, which is all Freud offers us by way of explaining the phenomenon of human solidarity, such as it is, is extremely problematic. It remains a hypothesis, pure supposition, that is not merely unprovable, in a positivistic sense, but has little to commend it *a priori* on experiential or biological grounds. In all likelihood, I think that the Eros concept is not a product of clinical experience, or of disinterested biological research, or even of a materialist outlook, dialectical or otherwise. It is, quite simply, a legacy of Plato and Empedocles that Freud grafted inconsistently onto his materialistic psychobiology, which was always dialectical by default, rather than design, and is now woefully out of date, and dreadfully in need of a thorough overhaul.

By contrast with Prof. Jacoby, and Prof. Freud, I submit that human beings are endowed, albeit in differing degrees, with an innate sense of conscience, and a yearning for justice and solidarity with other human beings, as well as with instinctual drives and tensions of various kinds. As far as I can tell, these strivings for justice and solidarity with others are the product of what Fromm termed existential needs, and not the result of the secondary transformation of physiological or tissue needs, or drives in the Freudian sense, which according to Freud, should atrophy or dry up as the person becomes more "civilized". But like the Freudian drives, our humanistic conscience can be repressed, and in the process, of course, can generate all kinds of symptomatology, ranging from stomach ulcers all the way to frank psychosis.

Whether or not strivings for justice, solidarity and communion with the species unfold and develop as they ought to ideally depends on a



variety of factors, including the character of parents and caretakers, and stimulus and example of loving friends, and the wider socio-economic reality that mediates interpersonal relationships. Following Marx, Fromm frequently observed that in most societies, prevailing economic structures constrain people to satisfy their material needs and desires in ways that violate their fundamental *human* needs, which they then express in an alienated way in religious longing and the hope of a better world beyond. I think there is great validity in these ideas, which Fromm championed to the end. Unfortunately, none of this registers in Jacoby's narrative. Instead we get an idealized picture of Freud, purged of his sexism, authoritarianism and ethnocentrism, and a caricature of Fromm, who appears so frighteningly superficial he seems scarcely worth reading.

Having said all that, I'd like to end by reminding all of you where I began. Despite its flaws, *Social Amnesia* is a brave and important book, and I applaud Jacoby's continuing efforts to make analytic theory relevant to contemporary politics. At the same time, however, I am mindful of the fact that ever since Fromm's departure from the Institute in 1938, most of those who identify with the Frankfurt School have adopted an overprotective and often uncritical attitude toward Freud's theories, which are riddled with oversights and contradictions of various kinds. As a result of the almost religious veneration accorded to Freud, words like "deviance" and "revisionism" have acquired an emotional resonance akin to the concept of "heresy" among the faithful, which has rendered it all but impossible to effect much dialogue or real communication between the Frommian and Marcusean points of view.

Personally, I am convinced that Freud's genius is robust enough to withstand criticism from any quarter, and that critical theory could expand



its horizons appreciably if it would allow itself to "deviate" a little by countenancing some of the criticisms of Freud made by Fromm and several others. I would like to express the hope, however naive or misguided it may sound, that in years to come, we can abandon our identifications with the schisms and orthodoxies of the past, and move forward toward an historic *aufhebung* that incorporates the best of both perspectives. I think that critical theory can only gain in clarity and strength from this process.