



BOOK REVIEWS

Daniel Burston. *The Legacy of Erich Fromm.* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1991) (Reviewed by Louise E. Hoffman)

Dr. Burston's study of Erich Fromm is thoughtful, wide-ranging, and critically balanced, though not flawless. Its virtues are welcome, though, as most works on Fromm have been written either by his disciples (such as Rainer Funk),¹ or by his critics (such as John Schaar),² while public discussion of him has oscillated between the poles of lay enthusiasm and behavioral professionals' frequent dismissal of him as a shallow popularizer and traitor to orthodox Freudianism.

The publisher's claim on the book's jacket that "This is the first full-scale intellectual biography [of Fromm] in English" is somewhat exaggerated, particularly in view of the works of Funk and Schaar (whose perspectives are broad and critically mixed) and of a later one by Gerhard P. Knapp,³ which Burston unaccountably neither refers to nor cites. His reference list includes other works from 1989 and 1990, but omits this later work, as well as Knapp's earlier work on Fromm.⁴ Funk (1982) still offers the most comprehensive Fromm bibliography as well as a more substantial discussion of ethics and dialectics in his thought. Yet Burston does offer a more comprehensive and up-to-date assessment than Schaar, more biographical information than Funk, and a deeper understanding than Knapp of Fromm's place in the history of ideas in general and the history of psychology in particular. In choosing a broad frame of reference for his subject, Burston is consistent with most of the best recent work in the history of psychology.

He is a judicious and forthright critic, identifying Fromm's weaknesses (shallowness, illogic, and contradictions in some of his thinking, moralism in his therapeutic posture) while also acknowledging his strengths (intellectual and moral passion, a critical revision of Freudian thought that anticipated many others, and a comprehensive humanistic vision). He emphasizes that labelling Fromm with a single category—Freudo-Marxist, neo-Freudian, or any other—undermines any full attempt to understand him and his work.

Burston's most useful contribution is his discussion of Fromm as a clinician (Chapter 3). Although Fromm's clinical activity lasted throughout his career and he insisted that it underlay all of his writing, most commentators have ignored or dismissed it. It is true that he rarely wrote specifically on clinical topics, instead submerging these reflections in broader sociological and humanist analyses; for this very reason, Burston's efforts to disentangle and examine them separately are valuable. Surely thoughtful psychoanalysts cannot divorce their therapeutic experiences from other reflections on human nature and social dynamics. Significant portions of this chapter are devoted to the work of other analysts—Sigmund Freud, Wilhelm Reich, Carl Jung, the object-relations school—but these sections serve to place Fromm within the context of contemporary clinical controversies. Frustratingly, though, Burston scarcely deals with his therapeutic methods and the nature of his practice; perhaps his sources do not allow him to do so.

There are other problems with this work. Its basis in unpublished sources is rather thin. Usually this flaw is not blatant, since Burston is mainly concerned with Fromm's published ideas and their impact; but it does appear on occasion, sometimes in relatively



unimportant ways (e.g., regarding Fromm's middle name: Burston gives it as "Pinchas," whereas Knapp asserts, on information from the Frankfurt city archives, that it was "Seligmann"), sometimes more substantively (e.g., the lack of unpublished sources on Fromm's clinical work steers this chapter toward conceptual issues and away from method).

Also, the chronology of Fromm's life is sometimes obscured. Chapter 1 is by no means a comprehensive outline of his activities and, like other chapters on particular themes, it jumps back and forth in time. The brief Introduction to Funk's 1982 work is clearer and in some ways more detailed. Even in Burston's biographical chapter, the reader is sometimes confused by vague language (e.g., p. 15: *what* was Fromm doing under Karl Landauer's supervision?, chronological vagueness (e.g., we're never told the year of his marriage to Frieda Fromm-Reichmann), and omission of many institutional connections (such as his professorship at Bennington College) and political activities (e.g., co-founding SANE). These *lacunae* are not critical, but they are frustrating. Despite Burston's explicit – and appropriate – emphasis on his subject's ideas rather than the circumstances of his life, one could wish for a stronger sense of the geographical, political, and institutional context in which he lived.

There are other flaws. Burston offers little discussion of Fromm's autobiography, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion*,⁵ or of how his view of Fromm's life and work compares to Fromm's own or those of other scholars. Occasionally explanation is wanted (e.g., p. 78: why does Fromm reconsider the death instinct?). The section on Fromm's research into the social character of German workers, 1929–1930, fails to mention that the resulting study was finally published in 1980.⁶ It also seems to assume the correctness of Fromm's argument that Nazism appealed primarily to the lower middle classes, although most German historians have for some time rejected it.⁷ Burston's references to Wilhelm Reich's *Mass Psychology of Fascism* cite the third edition, revised after Reich's conversion to orgone theory, whereas it was the first two editions of 1933 that were influential among contemporary Freudo-Marxists.⁸ In analyzing Fromm's work during the 1930s and his relations with the Institute of Social Research, Burston makes no mention of his important contribution to the Institute's 1936 study of "authority and the family."⁹ Finally, Fromm's major works are not indexed at all.

These criticisms notwithstanding, however, Daniel Burston has written a fine intellectual biography that identifies the main strands in Fromm's thought, traces their sources in the European intellectual tradition, analyzes their relationship to the ideas of other psychoanalytic thinkers, and assesses their continuing significance. Along with Fromm's own refusal to abide by disciplinary boundaries, Burston's keen critical sense and broad perspective should draw readers interested in the history of a number of the behavioral and social sciences as well as in the intellectual history of Germany and the U.S.

NOTES

1. Rainer Funk, *Erich Fromm: The Courage to Be Human* (New York: Continuum, 1982), and *Erich Fromm* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1984).
2. John H. Schaar, *Escape from Authority: The Perspectives of Erich Fromm* (New York: Basic Books, 1961).
3. Gerhard P. Knapp, *The Art of Living: Erich Fromm's Life and Works* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989).
4. Gerhard P. Knapp, *Erich Fromm* (Berlin: Colloquium, 1982).
5. Erich Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion: My Encounter with Marx and Freud* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962).



6. Erich Fromm, *Arbeiter und Angestellte am Vorabend des Dritten Reiches: Eine sozialpsychologische Untersuchung*, Ed. Wolfgang Bonss, trans. Wolfgang Bonss et al. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1980); published in English as *The Working Class in Weimar Germany: A Psychological and Sociological Study*, Ed. Wolfgang Bonss, trans. Barbara Weinberger (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).
7. See, for instance, Richard F. Hamilton's exhaustive analysis in *Who Voted for Hitler?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982).
8. The third edition was the first – and is still the only – edition of this work published in English, so Burston is not alone in this error. It has appeared in two translations: one by Theodore P. Wolfe (New York: Orgone Institute Press, 1946), and one by Vincent R. Carfagno (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1970). The earlier editions appeared as *Massenpsychologie des Faschismus: Zur Sexualökonomie der politischen Reaktion und zur proletarischen Sexualpolitik* (Kopenhagen: Verlag für Sexualpolitik, 1933).
9. Erich Fromm, "Sozialpsychologischer Teil," in Max Horkheimer, Ed., *Studien über Autorität und Familie: Forschungsberichte aus dem Institut für Sozialforschung* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1936), pp. 77-135.

Professor Burston Responds:

Louise Hoffman is a diligent and learned critic; the best I've had, really, or am likely to have for some time to come. Nevertheless, she goes "over the top" on a few points. To begin with, my unfortunate neglect of Gerhard Knapp's book is really quite straightforward. I wasn't aware of its existence until after my book went to press. Furthermore, she complains that I neglect to explain *why* Fromm reconsidered the death instinct on p. 78, though I do so in considerable detail from a variety of perspectives, in chapters three, eight and nine. To the reader, this conveys the impression that I don't even tackle this dreadfully important subject. And to me, the author, it suggests that she did not read the pertinent chapters carefully, or that they did not register for some inexplicable reason.

Meanwhile, I share Hoffman's frustration regarding the paucity of information on Fromm's clinical practices. But the fault is largely Fromm's. The published record is riddled with ambiguity regarding his clinical technique, and nothing I found in the unpublished work or the "oral tradition" among Fromm's friends and followers did anything to clarify the situation appreciably. In view of circumstances, sticking to the published record was probably the wisest policy.

Contrary to any impression I may have given the reader, I do not assume the correctness of the Reich-Fromm thesis regarding the prevalence of fascism among the lower-middle class in Weimar, Germany. However, since it is usually rejected out of hand, I thought it only fair to Fromm to present the evidence and argument on its behalf in the best possible light, and in the overarching context of his evolving concept of social character, which has fallen into undeserved obscurity among social psychologists. (I do indicate this study was published posthumously, somewhere!) Apart from these reservations, however, Hoffman's criticisms are amply justified.

Margaret Schabas. *A World Ruled by Number: William Stanley Jevons and the Rise of Mathematical Economics.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990. \$29.95 (cloth) (Reviewed by S. L. Zabell)



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