

then I have carried the bourgeois "preconditionless" science *ad absurdum*, have done authentic scientific work of my own and have thereby done a service to the working-class movement and not to political reaction; for Marxist science is nothing other than the incorruptible exposure of relations and connections as they really are.

A clear understanding of methodology in allocating a place to psychoanalysis in historical research is of decisive importance for the outcome of every investigation. It is important therefore to dwell in some detail on the criticism of my views as expressed in "Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis" which Erich Fromm advances in his paper "Über Methode und Aufgaben einer analytischen Sozialpsychologie" (On the Method and Tasks of an Analytical Social Psychology).<sup>67</sup> Fromm writes:

An attempt must be made to find the secret meaning and cause of irrational ways of behavior in social life as they so strikingly occur, not only in religion and popular custom, but also in politics and education . . . If it [psychoanalysis] has found the clue to an understanding of human behavior in the life of the instincts, in the unconscious, then it must also be entitled and able to impart essential knowledge about the background causes of social behavior. For "society," too, consists of separate individuals who cannot be subject to any other psychological laws than those which psychoanalysis has discovered in the individual. It seems incorrect to us, therefore, when W. Reich prescribes for psychoanalysis only the sphere of personal psychology and contests, as a matter of principle, its applicability to social phenomena such as politics, class consciousness, etc. The fact that a phenomenon is dealt with by sociology certainly does not mean that it cannot be the object of psychoanalysis (just as it is wrong to believe that a subject which is examined from the viewpoint of physics cannot also be examined from that of chemistry). It merely means that this phenomenon is an object for psychology—and, in particular, for social psychology, whose

<sup>67</sup> *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 1932, 1–2.



task consists in determining the social background causes and functions of psychical phenomena—only insofar as psychical facts are involved.

It is unfortunate that Fromm quotes only what I said psychoanalysis could *not* do and not what I very clearly stated about the role it should, and alone can, perform in sociological research—namely, that of showing how material facts are transformed into ideas inside the human head. That psychoanalysis and it alone can explain irrational ways of behavior (such as every kind of religiosity and mysticism) is clear, because psychoanalysis alone is capable of investigating the instinctual reactions of the unconscious. But it can do this in the right way only if it does not merely “take account of the economic factors,” but is clearly aware that the unconscious structures which are thus reacting irrationally are themselves the product of historical socio-economic processes, and that, therefore, they cannot be ascribed to unconscious mechanisms as opposed to economic causes, but only viewed as forces mediating between social being and human modes of reaction. But when Fromm goes further and asserts that psychoanalysis has something “essential” to impart about the “background causes of social behavior” because society is composed of separate individuals, this is a wrong use of words which opens the way to abuses of psychology which Fromm himself would condemn. Insofar as we understand “social behavior” to mean the behavior of human beings in social life, to oppose personal to social behavior has no meaning, since there exists no behavior other than social behavior. Even behavior in a daydream is social behavior, conditioned by social realities as well as characterized by fantasy relations to objects. To make the point finally clear (we hope), we must take up Fromm’s criticism in conjunction with the official psychoanalytical sociology. We are not talking about fine points but about quite crude issues. There are plenty of instances of human social behavior in which the unconscious instinctual mechanisms interposed in human action, which psychoanalysis has described and which are of decisive importance in other phenomena, play virtually no part at all. The point I want to make is that, say, the behavior of people with small savings after a bank failure or a

peasants’ uprising after a sudden drop in wheat prices cannot be explained by unconscious libidinous motives or as a case of rebellion against the father. It is important to realize that in such cases psychology can indeed have something to say about the effects of the behavior, but not about its causes or background. The essential point is that capitalism cannot be explained by the anal-sadistic structure of man, but that this structure can be explained by the sexual order of the patriarchal system. And society consists not only of separate individuals (that would be a crowd, not society) but of a multiplicity of individuals whose life and thoughts are determined by production relations which act between and upon them and which are totally independent of both their will and their instincts—with the important rider that production relations, precisely, can modify the instinctual structure at certain essential points, e.g., in the ideological and structural reproduction of the economic system. When we say, therefore, that we can throw light on background causes, we must be very clear which background causes we mean. The essential point, the point on which we differ from the trends in current “social psychology,” is that we are aware of the limitations of psychology and of the areas in which it is dependent on other disciplines; we know we can only clarify the mediating, connecting links between basis and superstructure, only the “metabolism” taking place between nature and man as represented in the psyche. The fact that in so doing we can also elucidate the way in which ideology reacts back upon the basis through production relations which have become transformed into structure is purely a side benefit—though a decisively important one. Why is it so extraordinarily important to draw such precise boundaries? Because this is the borderline between the idealist and dialectical-materialist use of psychology in the social sphere. The fruits which the latter promises to yield merit the most painstaking and careful precision in formulating our approach. This approach can be summed up as follows: we cannot say anything about the background causes of human behavior in the extra-psychical sphere—about the economic laws which determine the social process and the laws of physiology which govern the instinctual apparatus—without immediately embracing metaphysics.

There is one further point on which I am obliged to contra-

dict Fromm and others who approve of my views on other matters. Fromm considers that I am wrong to deny that the psychoanalytical method can be applied to social phenomena, such as strikes, etc. Other Marxist friends have argued that the psychoanalytical method *can* be applied to social phenomena because in its fundamental features it is a dialectical-materialist method. Fromm himself says that my attitude as expressed in my sociological-empirical works has undergone a "welcome" change. This is not the case. I avoid applying the psychoanalytical method to social phenomena as much as I ever did, and for the following reason, which I can now for the first time formulate with precision. It is true that we use the method of dialectical materialism to examine social phenomena; it is true that psychoanalysis is a dialectical-materialist method of examination; therefore, the abstract logician might conclude, the psychoanalytical method can "logically" be applied to social phenomena, and no harm done. At this point my friends unconsciously fall into abstract idealist-logical thinking. They are right, according to the laws of abstract logic; they are seriously mistaken, according to the laws of dialectics. A quibble? No, a very simple matter of fact. The method of dialectical materialism is the same wherever we apply it; that much is true. The principles of the unity of opposites, the transformation of quantity into quality, etc., remain the same everywhere. And yet, materialist dialectics is one thing in chemistry and another thing in sociology and again in psychology. For the method of examination is not suspended in air; it is determined in its specific nature by the subject to which it is applied. It is here that the truth of the principle of the unity of consciousness and being is fully revealed. And so the special case of the materialist dialectic of the sociological method is not exchangeable against the other special case of the psychological method. Anyone who argues that sociological questions can be correctly dealt with by the psychoanalytical method is saying at the same time, whether he means to or not, that capitalism could be explained by the methods of chemical analysis. The arguments for this would be the same as those advanced for the validity of the psychoanalytical method applied to social situations; for the social process, unquestionably, involves matter as

well as man. Consequently, if it lends itself so directly to psychological investigation, why not to chemical investigation too? The example shows where Fromm's attitude would lead if consistently pursued. Fromm is mistaken when he says that the psychoanalysts have come to wrong conclusions in the sociological sphere because, in sociology, they diverged from the analytical method. No, they were completely consistent in applying to social phenomena, such as capitalism or monogamy, the method of interpretation of meaningful psychical content, and the method of tracing psychical phenomena to unconscious instinct mechanisms. And that is precisely why they failed, because society has no psyche, no instinct, no superego, as Freud assumes in *Civilization and Its Discontents*; the real facts, which must serve as the basis for any special application of materialist dialectics, were thus transferred into processes of another kind, in which they do not objectively occur, and the result was nonsense. Nor is it correct to assume, as Fromm does, that the same subject can be examined simultaneously from the point of view of chemistry and physics. Physics cannot determine chemical composition any more than chemistry can determine the speed of fall; what happens is that two different methods, both of which are dialectical-materialist, are used to examine two different properties or functions of the same object. Exactly the same applies to sociology. Only scientific jugglers of a certain well-known type can explain the same social phenomenon by means of psychology and by means of sociology and economics. That is eclecticism of the worst kind. To examine different functions of the same phenomenon by the appropriate methods and, in the process, to elucidate the mutual coordination and interdependence of these functions—that is dialectical materialism properly applied. Fromm is wrong when he says that social psychology "determines the social background causes and functions of psychical phenomena." An example: the social background and function of religion, morality, etc., are sociological-economic functions of a class relationship, the production relation between worker and capitalist; this production relation is determined by private ownership of the means of production, by differences between the use value and the exchange value of labor power as a commodity,

