

Escape from Evidence? Popper, Social Science, and Psychoanalytic Social Theory

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Slava Sadovnikov's recent Popperian critique of Erich Fromm's *Escape from Freedom* in the pages of *Dialogue* (2004) raises important issues for contemporary social theory and social science. Sadovnikov's essay is thoughtful, well written, and vitally important given the unfortunate rise of hostility to evidence and rational debate that we see in contemporary scholarly discourse, particularly from within what might be called the "critical humanities." Sadovnikov and I agree on much, something worth stressing before moving to the very significant points of disagreement.

First, we share the opposition to anti-science drivel, which Alan Sokal exposed in his brilliant *Social Text* hoax; fashionable nonsense does indeed represent a serious threat to scholarly standards and contemporary democratic politics. We both, furthermore, reject hero worship and the quasi-religious invocation of the authority of "great thinkers" in the social sciences. Social science "classics" from the past, in my view, must be examined critically in the light of contemporary research and empirical evidence (see Alford 1998; Turner 2000; Turner, Beeghley, and Powers 1981).

We also agree that Popper is an underrated philosopher of science, particularly within the social sciences, where far too many scholars uncritically accept the simplistic versions of Kuhn's philosophy of science and the Adornian/Habermasian critique of Popper's alleged "positivism" (see Fuller 2000, 2003).

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Finally, Sadovnikov and I both view Erich Fromm's *Escape from Freedom* as a book with serious empirical limitations. While Sadovnikov accurately quotes my argument in my earlier work (1996), saying that *Escape from Freedom* "has never been more relevant" and "provides a useful theoretical micro-foundation for contemporary work on nationalism, the politics of identity and the roots of war and violence," he does not spell out or even refer to the many concrete criticisms made in my extended revisit of *Escape from Freedom*, and thus leaves the reader with an exaggerated and distorted view of my position. For me, the key contribution of *Escape from Freedom* is Fromm's theoretical argument for a psychoanalytically informed sociology of emotions and *not* his historical sociology.

More importantly, the case Sadovnikov makes against *Escape from Freedom* and in support of a Popperian approach to historical research has three major limitations. First, Sadovnikov's account of *Escape from Freedom* is outside the context of Fromm's overall work and research agenda. As a result, he gives Fromm more credit than he deserves for *Escape from Freedom*, but underestimates the importance of Fromm's larger theoretical contributions. Second, in order to address *Escape from Freedom* as a social science "classic," we must be more conceptually clear about what we mean by the notion of a social science "classic." Finally, there is an issue of evidence and double standards in Sadovnikov's essay, particularly with regards to the work of historians and the writings of Hayek. I will spell out each of these three points, and then end this intervention with thoughts on how social science and social theory might address the questions Sadovnikov has thoughtfully and passionately put on the table for us, particularly with regard to the role of psychoanalysis in sociology.

***Escape from Freedom* in Context**

It is with some trepidation that I make the case that Sadovnikov's essay is flawed by not having put his discussion of *Escape from Freedom* into the context of Fromm's other works. In recent postmodern times, it is often frustrating to attempt to critique fashionable new theories. One is often told that one cannot fairly critique the argument in any one of, say, Foucault's books without having read all of his work. This discourse can isolate "great thinkers" from normal academic and intellectual debate in which arguments should be made based on evidence. In my view, scholars must be willing to put their work in the intellectual public domain for rational debate open to "non-believers." Fromm does, it must be said, have his uncritical followers who will often defend his every intellectual statement and political position while dogmatically making the case that one needs to understand Fromm's work fully on his own terms. My argument here is not that Sadovnikov is wrong about *Escape from Freedom* because he is not an expert on Fromm. Since Fromm is a "forgotten intellectual" and has neither celebrity status nor legions of academic interpreters, it is reasonable

to ask that Sadovnikov's critique go further in placing *Escape from Freedom* into the context of Fromm's larger academic agenda (see McLaughlin 1998). Without addressing this context, Sadovnikov misses the core point of the book.

Let me be more specific. *Escape from Freedom* was not the height of Fromm's scholarly accomplishment, as most commentators suggest; rather, it simply marked his entry into modern intellectual debate. *Escape from Freedom* is Fromm's most influential text, but not his most useful to contemporary academic debate—at least not in the way Sadovnikov discusses the issues. The book is sophisticated, thoughtful, and reads well, even today. Theoretically, in my view, it holds much promise. Nonetheless, to treat this book as a text to be “tested” with a Popperian logic gives Fromm's argument and skills as a historian far too much credit. Fromm's book is simply not a strong piece of historical sociology, and thus is not a good test for Sadovnikov's Popperian argument for debating historical events in terms of falsifiable propositions.¹ Fromm, of course, was not trained as a historian but had a Ph.D. in sociology and was a psychoanalyst trained in Germany during the 1920s and 1930s. He was a member of the Frankfurt School network of “critical theorists” during that time. Fleeing Nazi Germany, he ended up in Chicago and then New York as a practising analyst and researcher with the Frankfurt School, then based at Columbia University. It was there that Fromm wrote *Escape from Freedom* in 1941, in part to expound his views on the Nazi threat to the United States public.²

The political and public intellectual nature of the book helps explain the many flaws in its historical methodology. Fromm's discussion of Nazism was written, after all, at the time of the events and his historical analysis did not involve original archival research. These limitations show in the analysis. For one thing, *Escape from Freedom* was based on the then widely accepted notion that the Nazi movement was a lower-middle-class phenomenon, a position clearly problematic (see Hamilton 1996). Contemporary research has raised fundamental questions about this part of Fromm's thesis, as I have spelled out at length (1996). Since 1941 there have been generations of detailed scholarly histories of the Nazi era, as well as scores of comparative historical research on fascism and right-wing and left-wing authoritarianism within historical sociology. Reading Fromm is not a useful way to engage in historical research on Nazism. Historians, quite rightly, will stress the volumes of specialized research on the topic, and I myself would start with books such as those of sociologist Michael Mann (2004, 2005).

How then should professional sociologists today relate to *Escape from Freedom*? I personally would teach (and have taught) Fromm's *Escape from Freedom* to undergraduates in order to expose them to a provocative and well-written argument, while emphasizing the serious limitations of

Fromm's sociological evidence and historical details. I might also assign the book in a graduate class in sociological theory. I would never, however, teach *Escape from Freedom* in a graduate class on political sociology, historical sociology, or Nazism. Sadovnikov's critique of *Escape from Freedom* as a work of historical sociology is a case of someone barging through an open door, as far as I am concerned. In contrast, I see *Escape from Freedom* as an example of a "public intellectual" intervention on Nazism in 1941 and the first comprehensive statement of a theory of social character, something developed in greater depth during the remainder of Fromm's career. A closer look at the broader intellectual biography of Fromm allows us to evaluate the theory of social character and Fromm's use of Marx and Freud in a less polarized way.

Some intellectual history is thus in order. Contrary to the origin myths promoted by contemporary partisans of the "critical theory" perspective, Fromm was a central figure in the early research of the Frankfurt School—*Escape from Freedom* must be understood in that light. Despite the case that Sadovnikov makes that Fromm was not committed to the empirical testing of social science, *Escape from Freedom* emerged from a research project in the 1930s when Fromm was part of the "critical theory" network we now call the Frankfurt School. Fromm's work from this period was not published until the early 1980s, in a book called *The Working Class in Weimar Germany*, but was part of a research tradition that led to *The Authoritarian Personality* study (Adorno 1950).³ Fromm's *Escape from Freedom* should be considered as a preliminary report on his larger research agenda on the relationship between character and social structure, something that led to *Social Character in a Mexican Village*, originally published in 1970 (Fromm and Maccoby 1996), and *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (Fromm 1973).

The origins of this Frankfurt School research from the 1930s came from attempts to deal with obvious problems in traditional Marxist theory. Marx, of course, had predicted the occurrence of left-wing, working-class-led revolutions in advanced industrial societies in conditions flowing from the economic and social contradictions of capitalist societies. Various critical theorists—Horkheimer, Fromm, Adorno, Marcuse, and Pollock, in particular—comprised a group of interdisciplinary radicals who were attempting to use Freud, German idealist philosophical traditions, and the emerging research in the social sciences of the early twentieth century to help explain a serious problem for Marxist theory: Why were Germans by the millions marching right with Hitler and not left, and all in the midst of just the kind of economic and political global crisis that historical materialism predicted would lead to socialist revolution?

The network of thinkers now known as the Frankfurt School tried to answer this anomaly in Marxist theory with a variety of research and theorizing (mostly theorizing, it must be said!) dealing with culture, philoso-

phy, and psychology (see Bronner 1994; Jay 1973; Wiggershaus 1986). This diverse group of scholars tackled many projects: Marcuse worked on Hegel, Adorno wrote about music, Pollock was concerned with political economic issues, and Horkheimer, and later Adorno, worked extensively on the philosophical origins of Nazism in Enlightenment rationality. Fromm had joined this Institute at Frankfurt University in the early 1930s to work on the most empirically oriented project: a detailed survey of the social psychological attitudes of German workers. It was thought, at the time, that traditional social surveys stayed too much on the surface of political attitudes—Fromm and Horkheimer, in particular, wanted to adapt psychoanalytic theory using an “interpretive questionnaire” to test for the deeper emotional roots of the appeal of the Nazi movement.

This project was a failure.⁴ From the perspective of contemporary research methods, the research design was flawed. The practical realities of a Germany in deep crisis were not ideal for such a project. Moreover, while today it is fashionable to praise interdisciplinary work and criticize the narrowness of traditional disciplinary-based scholarship, it may be the case that an interdisciplinary network of critical theorists funded by a wealthy sponsor (Felix Weil, the radical son of a wealthy grain merchant who had made a fortune in Argentina) did not provide the best foundation for a study of this nature. Modern bureaucratic interdisciplinary research institutions and academic research teams within a disciplinary context may, in fact, turn out to do better empirical research than that which was promised by the Frankfurt School’s innovative but rather authoritarian structure. Most importantly, the use of psychoanalysis in social science research is extremely difficult, and the worker’s project of the Frankfurt School was a ground-breaking but flawed early attempt. Fromm broke with the critical theorists in the late 1930s over the details of their research project, over differences in interpreting Freudian theory, and partly because (ironically, for a network of Marxists!) of the very materialist concerns of money. Sadovnikov’s polemic shows only the most cursory awareness of this intellectual history, and thus misrepresents Fromm’s view of the relationship between theory and empirical evidence.

If Sadovnikov’s knowledge of the prehistory of *Escape from Freedom* is incomplete, his overlooking Fromm’s later intellectual agenda is seriously problematic. It is unfair, ultimately, for Sadovnikov to critique Fromm for not presenting a “testable” version of Freudian theory in 1941 without referring to or discussing the massive research project he co-wrote and published in 1970 that was designed to do just that. *Social Character in a Mexican Village* (Fromm and Maccoby 1996) is based on years of historical, qualitative, and quantitative research, and provides evidence both for and against his larger theoretical argument for the concept of social character. Fromm and Maccoby made an empirically backed argument that the social and individual character of Mexican peasants plays an

independent role in behaviour.⁵ They collected data for the exact percentage of cane production for forty individuals, detailed analysis of the character of the peasants, and deductive predictions of what they expected to find in terms of trade-offs between money, security, and workload.

Despite the various limitations that go along with any serious piece of empirical research, *Social Character in a Mexican Village* was, at least in principle, designed to move away from the sort of circular and untestable theoretical arguments most often made by his Frankfurt School colleagues and many contemporary critical theorists. Fromm's attempts to test psychoanalytic theory with what he called an "an interpretive questionnaire" may not meet contemporary standards of empirical validity, but for Sadovnikov to dismiss Fromm's commitment to evidence without a serious discussion of this book is misleading.

There is an irony in Sadovnikov's critique of Fromm, for he is focusing his analytic demolition job on the scholar from within the broad "critical theory" and "psychoanalytic sociology" camp who was the most empirically oriented. Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse, in particular, had no real interest or concern with testing their theories with empirical evidence. Adorno, of course, would later lead the charge against "positivism" when he returned to Germany for a famous debate with Popper himself over the issue.⁶ In that period of time Fromm was doing research that involved questionnaires, historical analysis of Mexican society, and statistical tests. In the research that led up to *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (Fromm 1973), furthermore, Fromm consulted with experts in archaeology, neuroscience, evolutionary psychology, anthropology, and history in order to develop an academically credible adaptation of the theory of social character he first offered in *Escape from Freedom*. While Sadovnikov does discuss Fromm's *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, it is only to critique the analysis offered there of Hitler's psychological pathology as a continuation of the argument on sadomasochism in *Escape from Freedom*. *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* is an important book precisely because Fromm went to such lengths to engage the most up-to-date social and natural science knowledge about human beings, refusing to build a psychoanalytic orthodoxy set off from the rest of the human sciences with a true-believer logic.

Fromm also made important contributions to the political sociology of character. Fromm was right to argue that the debacle of twentieth-century communism and the horrors of Nazism could not be understood without analysis of the pathologies of Stalin and Hitler, just as these political tragedies cannot be reduced to personalities. Character matters in the political and social sphere, and one can study and debate these issues without descending into simplistic psycho-history. There has been ample work on the modern social character within politics and sociology, works that might never have been written without Fromm's pioneering writings (see

McLaughlin 2001a). For these various reasons, *Escape from Freedom* remains an important book.

In contemporary intellectual life, Freudian thought has become somewhat marginalized largely because of the true-believer logic imbedded in the very structure and culture of the psychoanalytic movement. Fromm, more than any other prominent Freudian, played a courageous role in opposing dogma from within the tradition (see Burston 1991; Roazen 1996). Furthermore, the most influential version of psychoanalytic theory within the humanities and social sciences tends to be the least empirical, the most speculative, and virulently anti-positivist-oriented versions—particularly in the school represented by the French rebel Lacan. Fromm, in contrast, was strongly critical of the versions of psychoanalytic thought promoted by Lacan, Marcuse, and Adorno precisely because of their relative inattention to empirical evidence. Sadovnikov exaggerates the influence of Freudian social thought in social science today and offers no systematic evidence for his suggestion that these theories are influential in sociology. Moreover, to the extent that psychoanalytic ideas have been successful in dialoguing with mainstream sociology, it has often been in a form that is remarkably similar to the neo-Freudian version of the tradition promoted by Fromm with such energy (see Burston 1991; McLaughlin 1998, 2001b; Roazen 1996).

What Is a Sociological Classic?

The difference between Sadovnikov's view and my own on the value of *Escape from Freedom* revolves around the larger question of the role of "classics" in social science research and teaching. From my perspective, some books are "classics" not because they are "true" or "proven" or even that they have endured Popperian tests of "falsifiability." Instead, social science classics are valuable because they raise important intellectual and theoretical questions, and are worth returning to in the context of larger continuing debates with the social sciences.

Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, first published in 1904-1905, for example, is worth reading not because his thesis about the relationship of Protestantism to capitalism is correct—from my perspective it almost certainly is not—but because it provides a model for an approach to social science that some have called "interpretive sociology" and because it attempts to theorize large historical processes by asking big questions in ways that are often not addressed in highly professionalized and specialized modern social sciences. Moreover, Weber reminds us that religion, culture, and meaning matter in social life, which runs against the tendency of various forms of structural sociology (including neo-Marxism) and rational-choice theory to deny or leave untheorized these aspects of social reality. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is empirically flawed, but it is still worth serious intellectual consideration, contrary to Sadovnikov's Popperian argument.

There are other classics in the social sciences that might not pass Sadvnikov's Popperian standards but nonetheless remain important contributions to social and political thought. Durkheim's *Suicide* in 1897 helped pioneer the use of multivariate techniques within the social sciences and played an important role in putting issues of social solidarity and civil society at the centre of sociological research. Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1966) created a rich tradition of comparative-historical research in sociology and political science concerned with the sociological basis for a democratic society. Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* in 1959 and *Asylums* in 1961 helped created productive research programs on the micro dynamics of social interaction, the organizational and symbolic creation of deviance, and the social construction of mental health. Each of these classics are empirically grounded and theoretically rich, even though contemporary research has moved beyond the limitations of the analysis offered in each individual work of intellectual craftsmanship (Alford 1998). To restrict social science work to research that is strictly framed in Popperian terms would be to deprive the intellectual community of some of the most interesting, creative, and productive sources of inspiration and insight.

Following this general logic, *Escape from Freedom* is valuable today for the work's insistence that a theory of emotional dynamics, irrationality, and passions be central to sociological analysis. Fromm's theoretical contributions are indispensable against both the claims of contemporary rational-choice theorists who de-emphasize human irrationality and the proponents of atheoretical historical narratives who tell particular historical stories without an agenda for cumulative theory building. There is no reasonable way to falsify the various competing theoretical camps in contemporary social science, since each approach bases itself on core assumptions and concepts that are not, ultimately, testable in a purely scientific way. For me, a social science that matters will have to live with competing paradigms and research traditions, including rational-choice theories, exchange theories, micro-interpretive theories like symbolic interactionism, and macro-comparative historical sociology. This eclectic approach might not be satisfying to a Popperian purist, but it is the position on the role of classics in the social sciences to which I hold, building on perspective outlined with admirable clarity and insight in Peter Baehr's *Founder, Classics, Canons: Modern Disputes Over the Origins and Appraisal of Sociology's Heritage* (2002).

In the present political environment, as we debate the social origins of terrorism, virulent worldwide anti-Americanism, and widespread political, cultural, and religious hatreds, a purely rational-choice model of human action is clearly inadequate. The last thing we need, however, is a return to simplistic psycho-history of a Bush or a Blair combined with simplistic "orientalist" analysis of the Arab or Islamic mind. Only schol-

ars with a disciplined knowledge of history, politics, and sociology can undertake the use of psychoanalysis in politics in a useful way—these ideas should be used to add to structural explanations, not substitute for them (as Fromm argued in the quotations Sadovnikov offers in his analysis). *Escape from Freedom* helps us highlight the very human sources of destructiveness and violence, and his revision of psychoanalysis directs our attention to the rationalizations, projections, and double standards we often see in debates about foreign policy, violent conflict, and civil wars. Is it not the case that contemporary proponents of American dominance in the world present the United States as uniquely good and moral, conveniently forgetting the violence, racism, and military aggression in the country's history? European and Canadian anti-Americanism is riddled with similar rationalizations, as is the case made against the United States by anti-democratic dictators throughout the world (Markovits 2004; Markovits and Hellerman 2001). *Escape from Freedom* was a pioneering effort in helping us use depth psychology in a politically sophisticated way.

If *Escape from Freedom* is read as much for the questions it poses as for the answers it provides, is it not the case that we are seeing today many sociological, cultural, and political dynamics that have parallels to the Nazi era? The fall of Communism in the former Soviet Union was one of the great victories for freedom in the modern world, but the emergence of markets and democracy in the wake of these events also gave rise to countervailing trends towards authoritarian rule, political dogmatism, and cultural chaos. And are there not elements of an “escape from freedom” in the contemporary resurgence of Islamism? And within North America and the new Europe today, new cultural freedoms, the breakdown of traditional family forms, and the ethical and religious diversity that comes with openness and immigration has created a widespread sense of crisis and confusion. Fromm's *Escape from Freedom*, alongside the argument in Benedict Anderson's influential *Imagined Communities* (1983), is useful for highlighting the centrality of the ever-present search for meaning and the desire for transcendence in human beings as well as focusing our attention on the often deadly dialectical tensions between individualism and community in modernity.

Evidence and Double Standards: Beyond Popperian Orthodoxy

Over and above these differences regarding Fromm's scholarship and the generic role of “classics” in the social sciences, there are two further issues worth discussing with regards to Sadovnikov's essay. Despite his argument for evidence, Sadovnikov treats the legitimate issues he raises about *Escape from Freedom* as essentially philosophical questions regarding whether Fromm did or did not apply Popperian logic to his research design. Sadovnikov fails to address the far more serious question about

how Fromm's basic argument holds up to empirical research on Nazism done since 1941. The fact that Sadovnikov refers to almost none of the massive empirical literature on Nazism done since Hitler's death weakens his argument.

In addition, there is evidence of a double standard when Sadovnikov argues that F. A. Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*, published in 1944, is a model for social science analysis that follows Popperian principles in ways that *Escape from Freedom* did not. Sadovnikov's actual published essay, notably, says very little about the specifics of Hayek's argument regarding Nazism, over and above the obvious. *The Road to Serfdom*, in fact, has very little to say about the social origins of Nazism, and is not cited by contemporary historians of the period. Hayek's book is no more a work of historical sociology on Nazism than *Escape from Freedom*, and *The Road to Serfdom* contains numerous non-falsifiable claims, political polemics, and ideological assumptions. A recent addition (Hayek 1994) contains a glowing introduction by Milton Friedman, the conservative American economist and free-market public intellectual. Friedman's introduction does not make the case for the scientific status of Hayek's work or for the book's scholarship on Nazism, instead it highlights its general intellectual and political value, as one might expect.

I would argue that *The Road to Serfdom* and *Escape from Freedom* are classic works of mid-twentieth-century intellectual life worth re-reading and debating. Both books, however, are a hybrid form of scholarship that combines social criticism and social science analysis. Neither work, however, is "scientific" in the narrow Popperian definition. Sadovnikov betrays some of his own ideological bias by making the case for Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* as a serious analysis of Nazism while critiquing the Freudian-Marxist Fromm with such vigour. It makes far more sense to view both *The Road to Serfdom* and *Escape from Freedom* as well-written and ideologically motivated interventions into public debate and social scientific theory. Sadovnikov agrees with Hayek politically, but, obviously, not with Fromm. Despite the generally high standards of his philosophical discourse, Sadovnikov has let these ideological differences shape his assessment of the relative merit of the two books.

Whither Psychoanalysis in Social Science?

Beyond our divergent readings of Fromm, what are the larger issues on which Sadovnikov and I disagree? What philosophy of science should provide the foundation for our work in the social sciences today? What is the place for Freudian ideas in social science? Sadovnikov makes the case for a Popperian perspective on the scientific status of social science without adequate discussion of competing theoretical views. From my perspective, a "critical-realist" orientation modified by Robert Alford's stress on the need for integrated multi-method research provides a more solid founda-

tion for social science research than outdated Popperian positivism (Alford 1998). Attempts to disprove theories are essential for progress in social science, but making this the only criteria for social science research is not credible.

Psychoanalysis still retains a significant, albeit modest, role in social science research. Contrary to Sadvnikov, psychoanalysis is relatively marginal in sociology, despite the continuing influence of such Freudian-influenced scholars as Talcott Parsons, Dennis Wrong, and the feminist Nancy Chodorow. This is not a particular problem, in my view, for the perspective is best seen as a complement for, and not an alternative to, more traditional sociological perspectives that are more empirically testable and deal centrally with structural and social dynamics over and above emotions. I will conclude this intervention with three ways in which psychoanalytic insights can add to social science, drawing from examples from contemporary sociology.

The most sociologically useful psychoanalytic concept, according to former American Sociological Association President Neil Smelser, is the notion of ambivalence. As Smelser puts it, “many elements of Freud’s psychoanalytic theories have been discredited: eros and thanatos, universal dream language, the psychosexual stages of development, the primal horde. . . . [Yet the] principle of ambivalence . . . remains a cornerstone of psychoanalytic thought” and has much to offer contemporary empirical social science (Smelser 1998, p. 5).

The dominant conceptual paradigm of rational-choice theory within economics, parts of political science, and increasingly even sociology, suggests that individuals know what they want, feel one way about various options and goals, and are oriented to the world by rational calculation. This is a powerful analytic model that can help explain much of market behaviour and elements of political action, but it falls apart, Smelser reminds us, in sociological environments marked by deep emotional commitments and high costs for “exits” from relationships. Deep feelings of ambivalence emerge in families, intimate relationships between lovers and close friends, *gemeinschaft*-like neighbourhoods, and institutions such as “mental institutions, military camps, prisons, and private schools . . . monasteries, convents, [and] psychoanalytic institutes” (ibid. p. 9). In these closed-off institutions, the costs for exiting relationships create ambivalent feelings, as in the case of academic departments where members are held together by tenure, bonds of affection, and animosity.

The Freudian notion of ambivalence provides a useful conceptual tool that sociologists can use to develop a more sophisticated model for understanding human action than the neo-classical economic model that does not take into account conflicting emotions or a sociological structuralism that does not capture the emotional dynamics of group life. Freudians, of course, did not invent the notion of ambivalence, and contemporary aca-

demographic psychologists and neuro-scientists can add much to our analysis. Nonetheless, Smelser makes a compelling case that the psychoanalytic tradition has developed powerful analytic tools that sociologists and social scientists can use in productive ways. The great strength of Smelser's argument is that it moves us away from paradigm wars, where we try to disprove either the rational-choice or psychoanalytic accounts of the human actor. Far more sensible is the case Smelser makes for seeing both cold-blooded rational calculation *and* deeply conflicted emotional ambivalence as important aspects of human motivation. This allows us to focus on the relationship between sociological context and emotional dynamics in a sophisticated way that allows us to move beyond either/or thinking, preserving psychoanalytic insights while avoiding Freudian dogmatism.

If Smelser has provided a sociological manifesto for the sensible use of Freudian theories, there are a variety of sub-fields within the discipline where psychoanalytic perspective can be of some use. Sociological theories of creativity, in particular, can gain much from psychoanalytic concepts. Michael Farrell (2001), in particular, has developed a powerful theory that helps explain the emergence of diverse networks of innovators like the French Impressionists, the American Fugitive Poets, the Group of Seven Canadian artists, and the Ultras who brought the vote to women in the United States. Collaborative circles are essentially networks of intellectuals, scholars, artists, activists, or various cultural/political/scientific innovators who create a new vision for work in the particular field they operate in. They usually consist of a few individuals in the inner core of a larger circle. They tend to be made up of relative equals in terms of status and various sociological characteristics and share a common culture and intellectual interests. Collaborative circles tend to form in what Farrell calls "magnet places"—sites such as New York, Paris, or New Orleans where creative innovators and ambitious young people gather. For a variety of reasons, the members of the circle have come to be cut off from powerful mentors in their particular field, and the collaborative circles form to sustain creative work in the relative absence of mentor/protégé relationships.

Farrell argues for three major theoretical entry points in developing his account of collaborative circles and the role they play in sustaining intellectual innovation. First, drawing from research on small groups, he suggests that there is a life-course history to collaborative circles that can roughly be understood to play out in seven stages over a cycle of between ten and fifteen years: formation, rebellion, quest, creative work, collective action, individualization, and reunion. In addition, drawing from small-group research, as well as scholarship on delinquent gangs, Farrell argues that there are particular roles played within the group at different stages of the group process: the peacemaker, the lightning rod, the manager, etc. Third, and most important for our purposes here, Farrell draws on Kohut's self-psychology (an influential revision of psychoanalysis that

moves away from orthodox Freudian theory, substituting a focus on the self for an orthodox Freudian concern with libido) to emphasize the psychological dynamics that operate in collaborative circles.

Farrell usefully utilizes psychoanalytic insights when he stresses how creative thinkers merge their identities during the quest/creative-work stages as they search for the confidence, emotional support, and exchange of ideas required to break from intellectual orthodoxies to create a new intellectual/cultural vision for work in their respective discipline or form of cultural production. Central to Farrell's theory is the use of Kohut's notions of "mirroring" and "idealized self-objects." Mirroring is the process by which young children are provided a healthy "mirror" by their parents so that they can be encouraged in their early actions and words, developing a cohesive self and a sense of confidence. A lack of appropriate and responsive "mirroring" can leave a child with a sense of self that is plagued "with guilt, low self-esteem, depression, or rage" (*ibid.*, p. 153). According to Kohut's theory, someone who experienced a fragmented self in childhood can develop a stronger self-system and healthy narcissism later in life through idealizing a significant person who possesses desirable strengths, abilities, and admirable qualities (Farrell 2001, p. 54). Farrell cites the example of Afro-American political activist Jesse Jackson, who used Martin Luther King, Jr. as an "idealized self-object" in ways that allowed him to transcend feelings of hopelessness and despair rooted in his early childhood in order to act constructively in the world of politics (*ibid.*, p. 154).

Farrell's theory of collaborative circles utilizes Kohut's theory to show how networks of creative thinkers, often organized into smaller units of "collaborative pairs," engage in acts of "instrumental intimacy" involving adult versions of both "mirroring" and "idealization." Creating a new form of art, literature, political activity, or science involves, at least in part, the rebellious breaking from established orthodoxies. Young creative thinkers must try out new ideas, and their early efforts at intellectual creativity require a level of support and encouragement that is roughly equivalent to that required for the emotional mirroring outlined in Kohut's theory of child development. An intellectual self, of course, is very different from the self required for early childhood emotional development. Farrell, however, uses his case studies on such creative endeavour as found in impressionism, the American Fugitive poets, the Rye circle of writers, the early Freudians, and the Ultras to make a compelling case that creative and innovative work requires something roughly equivalent to good parental mirroring, involving someone who can "appreciate the struggle to create, to reflect back to the other that his creative work is appreciated and understood, and to have one's reactions unclouded by jealousy, rivalry, cynicism, or the desire to control" (Farrell 2001, p. 155).

In addition, a central requirement of intellectual creativity is the idealization of a self-object, which comes to represent admirable qualities that provide energy and grounding for an integrated, less dependent, autonomous self that is essential for intellectual creativity that breaks from established cultural, scientific, or intellectual orthodoxies. It is the breakdown of this idealization in the later stages of the collaborative circles that leads to such bitter conflict in highly creative networks, just as the breakdown of idealization in romance can lead to such hatred. Farrell makes a compelling case that the psychological dynamics that go on in collaborative pairs such as Monet and Bazille, Renoir and Sisley, Freud and Fleiss, Marx and Engels (and more recently, perhaps, Simon and Garfunkel and Lennon and McCartney) are important aspects of the creative processes.

A final example of the use of psychoanalysis in social science comes from the large and lively social movement literature within sociology where there has emerged a new interest in integrating psychoanalytic ideas (Goodwin 1997; Jasper 1997). Rejecting the dominance of highly rationalistic theories of “resource mobilization” and “political opportunity theory,” scholars have recently argued for the importance of emotions and biography for theories of collective action and political mobilization. In the 1950s, it was common to dismiss social movements as irrational crowd behaviour, often drawing on crude Freudian theory to dismiss popular contention as irrational (Jasper 1997, p. 23). These simplistic ideas undermined the use of psychological theories in the study of social movements, but we now know that people join movements not simply for strategic reasons, but because of emotional identifications with participants and the “frames” articulated by movement leaders (*ibid.*, p. 9). Emotional appeals, deep hatreds, and passionate commitments are central to political action: James Jasper’s stress on biography, emotions, and culture complements purely organizational and political dynamics to the study of contentious politics.

Psychoanalytic thinking does not, to be sure, own the study of emotions, and the best sociologists writing on the topic today draw from cognitive psychology, evolutionary research, and new developments in neurosciences (Katz 1999; Turner 2000). A separate and self-contained “psychoanalytic sociology” is outdated and unviable, yet quality sociological analysis of social movements does draw selectively and productively from the Freudian tradition’s vast research into the relationship between psyche and society.

A Modest Depth Psychology

Sadovnikov might not view these sociological works and theoretical traditions as “scientific,” according to his version of Popperian orthodoxy. Yet these psychoanalytically influenced research programs are empirically grounded, theoretically cumulative, and illuminate important aspects of

social reality. What distinguishes the work of Smelser, Farrell, and Jasper from earlier Freudian-influenced scholars is not, I believe, fundamentally different philosophical approaches to social science, but organizational and professional dynamics. That is to say, these sociologists draw on Freudian insights without being beholden institutionally and professionally to the dogmatic structures embedded in psychoanalytic institutes and their training procedures. Each of these scholars offer their research and interpretations for dialogue among the social scientific community according to the standards of evidence held to within various research programs within diverse academic traditions.

Escape from Freedom, despite its limitations, can help contemporary scholars draw out some of the core insights of the Freudian tradition while encouraging a serious engagement with political sociology, history, and political theory. Fromm's account of the greatness and limitations of Freud's thought is compelling, and he does a far better job of avoiding psychological reductionism than any other major psychoanalytic thinker. Rooted in existentialist theory, as well as Weberian/Marxist sociology, Fromm's theoretical agenda first mapped out in *Escape from Freedom* touches on and engages in some of the core debates in the social sciences today while insisting on empirical evidence. And Fromm's role as a public intellectual and a scholar puts the book at the very centre of some of the most vital issues of political theory and democratic politics today.

Despite the philosophical sophistication and intellectual energy of Sadovnikov's essay and the value of its insistence on evidence, the social sciences would be impoverished if his narrow Popperian vision of purely scientific scholarship were to gain exclusive dominance in our contemporary universities. Popper, it must be said, shared some of the dogmatic aspects of the Freudian and Marxist traditions he opposed. Popper's insistence on falsifiability is important, and, like Fromm's psychoanalytic sociology, it deserves serious reconsideration. In contrast to Sadovnikov, however, I would prefer a more eclectic and ultimately more open version of the philosophy of the social sciences and a more balanced and less ideological discussion of the merits and flaws of such intellectual classics as *Escape from Freedom* and *The Road to Serfdom*.⁷

Notes

- 1 A far better discussion of the issues Sadovnikov raises can be found in such classics as Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1966) or more recent works of historical sociology and the various debates on general theory in historical sociology published in *The American Journal of Sociology*. For a discussion and critique of the historical-comparative logic from the perspective of a multivariate scientific perspective, see Alford 1998.
- 2 A more cynical view would be that he wrote the book to gain media attention and to kick-start his academic and public intellectual career after long psycho-

analytic training and his acrimonious break with the Frankfurt School network where he gave up tenure in exchange for a substantial monetary payment. Probably the biggest change in my views over the past ten years is that I give more emphasis to the careerist elements in public intellectual life, something not unique to the narrow academics often critiqued by public intellectuals (Townsend 2006).

- 3 My reading of the massive debate on *The Authoritarian Personality* is that it has most often been criticized as being wrong, not untestable. For discussion of the broader issues of the scientific status of Freud, see Grünbaum 1983 and 1993. For a longer discussion on Fromm's relationship to Adorno's *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950), see Burston 1991 and McLaughlin 1999.
- 4 Hamilton writes that the Fromm study is "marred throughout by Fromm's persistent reading of his interpretation into his results . . . flagrantly ahistorical . . . and flawed by unrepresentative sampling procedures" (1986, pp. 82-83). While Hamilton is right in the specifics, I do think useful insights came out of this research tradition and led to *The Authoritarian Personality* and related attempts to combine sociology and psychoanalysis. José Brunner takes a position closer to mine when he argues that the Fromm study is both of historical importance and contemporary relevance to social science. According to Brunner, the Weimar study is "the first opinion survey which applied modern psychological methods to the investigation of electoral and political behaviour" (1994, p. 631). Brunner further argues that "despite questions of authorship, purpose, ideological biases, and technical problems, it warrants attention not only as a historical document; it also constitutes a provocative example of empirical research which can still provide food for thought for today's students of political psychology" (ibid.). Hamilton (1996) is overly harsh, but it should be remembered that he is consistent and holds to the same high standards as all "great" thinkers, including Marx, Weber, and Foucault.
- 5 Unlike many scholars who use psychoanalysis, Fromm and Maccoby outlined a very detailed historical account of the Mexican village they studied, tracing the economic, cultural, and political context that had emerged from the destruction of the hacienda system in the wake of the Mexican revolution. They presented detailed tables on land ownership, on crops grown only by certain social groups, and on the social standing of groups of ancestors of supporters of such political figures as Zapata. This history continued to influence the village of the 1950s and 1960s. As Fromm and Maccoby suggest, "The identification of cane with hacienda domination, and of rice and vegetables with independence lasts to this day, if not in the conscious minds of the villagers, then in the attitudes associated with the planting of these crops" (1996, p. 34).
- 6 While Popper and Fromm disagreed on many issues, they shared the view that much of the work of the Frankfurt School in general, and Adorno in particular, was intellectually problematic. Popper's essay "Reason or Revolution" (1994) ranks alongside C. Wright Mills's attack on "grand theory" in *The Sociological Imagination* (1959). Just as Mills translates the convoluted prose of the "great"

American sociological theorist Talcott Parsons into banal common sense, Popper's harsh critique of Adorno's prose and his positions in the "positivist" debate is devastating. Adorno, like far too many philosophically oriented German intellectuals, manages to "state the utmost trivialities in high-sounding language" (Popper 1994, p. 71). Fromm, in a letter to Marxist philosopher Raya Dunayekaya on October 2, 1976, agreed with this view, calling Adorno "a puffed up phrase-maker with no conviction and nothing to say." Contemporary debates about "public intellectuals," "bad writing," or the need for clear prose have divided academics in recent years, and on these contentious and important issues Sadovnikov and I are generally on the same side.

7 I would like to thank Sina Rahmani and Tony Puddephatt for helpful comments on this response. And I would like to dedicate the essay to Paul Roazen, the historian of an open and non-dogmatic psychoanalysis. Paul Roazen died unexpectedly in the fall of 2005 after a long career at York University in Toronto. Roazen's work reshaped how we think about the role of Freudian ideas and institutions in contemporary intellectual history and political and social theory. My earlier writings on Fromm were a sociological elaboration of some of Roazen's insights that he forged by his many years of archival and interview research and his courageous public intellectual interventions.

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