



---

Greenson\_R\_R\_1946

## Review of Otto Fenichel's Psychoanalytic Remarks on Fromm's Book *Escape from Freedom*

Ralph R. Greenson

Source: Psychoanalytic Quarterly, Vol. 15, pp. 396-397.

This important paper by Fenichel may be roughly divided into two parts. The first is devoted to a condensed and systematic psychoanalytic frame of reference as a basis for understanding the psychological aspects of social, political and economic trends and institutions. In the second part Fenichel critically evaluates Fromm's theses and findings with reference to the preceding outline.

Fenichel's approach is based on the fact that there is a dynamic interplay of forces between the individual and his culture.

He stresses the dependence of self-esteem on external rewards and punishments, and the transition from external influences to the internalized superego which is itself further influenced by external authority and social pressures.

Fenichel points out the importance of the hope of reparticipation in projected omnipotence and indicates how this striving has been manipulated by many social institutions, religions and governments. He believes that satisfactions and frustrations—particularly the way in which children are directed to react to these satisfactions and frustrations—are the two main sources of institutionalized character formation.

Fenichel is of the opinion that all these premises may be developed from the basic

concepts of Freud's Libido Theory. It is true that in his writings Freud did stress the biological factors and did write relatively little about political and economic institutions, but by no means did Freud ever deny their significance as an important element in the personal history.

Fenichel feels that Fromm, in attempting to reevaluate the importance of sociological factors, distorts the significance of the biological factors. Fromm denies the genetic derivatives of the partial instincts and minimizes the significance of satisfactions and frustrations. He considers character and attitudes purely as adaptation phenomenon against loneliness and fails to realize that character and attitudes may be subservient to instinctual gratifications or may represent the failure of adaptation as well. Fromm criticizes Freud by claiming that Freud denied that love and hatred, lust

for power and yearning for submission, enjoyment of sensuous pleasure and the fear of it, are all products of the social process. He apparently overlooks the fact that psychoanalytic technique attempts to undo the effect of social processes on precisely these strivings and trace them back to their infantile and biological roots. Fromm also seems to have forgotten Freud's Ego and the Id, in which Freud showed that the superego includes not only an externalized



Property of the Erich Fromm Document Center. For personal use only. Citation or publication of material prohibited without express written permission of the copyright holder.

Eigentum des Erich Fromm Dokumentationszentrums. Nutzung nur für persönliche Zwecke. Veröffentlichungen – auch von Teilen – bedürfen der schriftlichen Erlaubnis des Rechteinhabers.

authority but ideals as well. He attempts an asexual theory of sadism and masochism by explaining that these people are trying to get rid of their individual selves and thus avoid loneliness. In this group he includes the suicides but neglects to mention the psychology of mourning and melancholia. The Oedipus complex he considers merely a conflict between the urge to be dependent and the quest for freedom. Fromm stresses the inherent tendencies in man to grow and create, but denies the innate character of the biologically rooted instincts. He feels that Freud was mistaken in attributing all the ideals of man to something 'mean' and he believes that ideals

like truth, justice and freedom can be 'genuine'.

In summarizing, Fenichel states that Fromm has done a detailed job of describing the relationship of certain psychological processes to certain cultural conditions. Nevertheless, Fenichel believes that in attempting to correct and avoid the mistakes and omissions, that psychoanalysis admittedly has made, Fromm abandons psychoanalysis completely.

Fromm's psychoanalysis is incorrect and his sociology tends towards idealism.