



Bacciagaluppi_M_1989

Report from Locarno

Marco Bacciagaluppi

„Report from Locarno,“ in: *Academy Forum*, , New York (The American Academy of Psychoanalysis) Vol. 33 (No. 1/2, 1989), pp. 13f.

Copyright © 1989 and 2011 by Dr. Marco Bacciagaluppi, Via Pellini 4, I-20125 Milano / Italien - E-Mail: m.bacciagaluppi[at-symbol]marcobacciagaluppi.com.

Forum readers and members of the Academy should be particularly interested in hearing about a recent symposium on Erich Fromm, one of the founding fathers of the interpersonal-cultural approach in psychoanalysis. Organized by the International Erich Fromm Society (Ursrainer Ring 24, D-72076 Tuebingen, German Federal Republic), the meeting was titled „Erich Fromm—Life and Work“ and took place on May 12-14, 1988 in Locarno, the Italian Swiss city where Fromm spent the last years of his life and where he died in 1980. Its association with Fromm was not Locarno's only qualification as a setting for this symposium. Locarno is a crossroads between Germanic and Latin cultures and therefore reflects Fromm's international spirit, yet it retains the rustic charm of a small Lombard town—it was an outpost of the Duke of Milan before it was occupied by the German Swiss in the 16th century.

After the inaugural address by the President of the International Erich Fromm Society, Prof. Johannes Neumann, the program was introduced by Rainer Funk (Fromm's literary executor and President-Elect of the Society), who showed photographs spanning Fromm's life, from his childhood and youthful years in Germany, through his mature activity in the U.S. and Mexico, to his last years in Switzerland.

The first paper, on „Erich Fromm in Mexico: 1950-1973,“ was presented by Jorge Silva-Garcia, one of Fromm's pupils and collaborators in Mexico. He described Fromm's intense activity in Mexico, which led to the founding of: the Mexican Psycho-analytic Society in 1956, the International Federation of Psycho-analytic Societies in 1961, and the Mexican Psychoanalytic Institute in 1963. Silva-Garcia also succeeded in conveying the experience of working with Fromm. For example, he noted how through „his self-analysis, his increasing capacity to love, his joy of living and his creative life,“ Fromm became „a kindly, amiable, simple man.“

All the other papers were grouped around three main themes: Fromm's relationship to: 1) the Jewish tradition; 2) Marx; and 3) Freud. In connection with the first theme, Bernd Sahler (Frankfurt) talked about Fromm's unpublished 1922 dissertation on Jewish law. In this dissertation, Fromm viewed Jewish law as the social „cement“ binding together Diaspora Judaism. He then examined three changes undergone by Jewish law in the course of history: the Karaitest, Reform Judaism, and Hasidic Judaism. The first two were attempts at integration with the wider society. Only Hasidism retained the spirit of the Jewish law and exemplified a collective self-liberating movement.

Rainer Funk presented a related paper on „the Jewish roots of Erich Fromm's hu-



manistic thinking.“ Funk pointed out that Fromm’s ancestors and teachers came from conservative Jewish circles. It was typical of them to practice an integrally „lived-out“ religiousness, in opposition to Reform Judaism, which was an attempt to adapt to the wider society. Funk suggests that this background led to Fromm’s consistently critical view of the social majority and to his non-theistic humanism. In Fromm’s later development, an integrating function is performed not by the religious ethos but by the social character. The opposition is no longer that between the religious ethos and the wider society, but that between productive and non-productive character orientations. In connection with the second theme, Erich Klein-Landskron (Frankfurt) spoke about „Erich Fromm’s Understanding of Karl Marx.“ He emphasized from the start that Fromm was no orthodox Marxist. Actually, Fromm did not study Marx’ systematically until halfway through his life, when his own theoretical system was already firmly established. On the other hand, the very fact that Fromm was never fully involved with Marxism enabled him to become one of its most productive continuators. Fromm was mostly interested in the concept of alienation set forth in Marx’s youthful writings. Fromm’s materialism is circumscribed. For Fromm a materialistic description of man is only pertinent to the extent that man has failed to make use of his productive powers. Productive man overcomes his materialistic dependency.

The third theme was discussed by Romano Biancoli (Bologna) and myself. Our talks were illustrated with excerpts from a 1963 filmed interview with Fromm. Biancoli, in his paper on „Erich Fromm and His Critique of Sigmund Freud,“ drew a systematic comparison of Freud and Fromm on five theoretical points: love, characterology, narcissism, infantile sexuality, and transference. In connection with the first points Biancoli stressed that the twin concepts of life and death instinct in Freud do not correspond to those of biophilia and necrophilia in Fromm: „In Freud we are dealing with two instincts, in Fromm only biophilia has a biological basis.“ As regards characterology, Biancoli pointed out that whereas Freud only bases himself on clinical data, Fromm uses a dual vantage point: „clinical observation and socio-historical observation are both present.“ As regards narcissism: „Narcissism lies in the having mode.... One does not pass mechanically or hydraulically from the having mode to the being mode. ...The being mode is not contrasted with the having mode, it transcends it.“

The title of my paper was „Erich Fromm’s Views on Psychoanalytic ‘Technique.’“ As Fromm wrote very little on this subject I had to rely on unpublished sources and on reports by people who worked with Fromm. I discussed 12 technical points and drew a comparison with Freud’s technical papers, as well as with recent psychoanalytic contributions by Gill, Green-berg, Hirsch, and Hoffmann. I think that the point on which Fromm differed most sharply from Freud was the analyst’s „participation with“ the patient’s struggle for liberation. On the other hand, I believe Fromm differs from the most radical group of psychoanalysts on the inevitability of „participating in“ the patient’s problems.

On the last evening of the symposium, excerpts from an unpublished chapter of *To Have or to Be?* were read. The title of the chapter is „Steps into Being.“ It concerns the question of how an orientation toward being can be acquired. Fromm describes the following steps: awareness of the bodily and psychic states, concentrating on one’s self, meditating and self-analysis. Fromm preferred not to publish this chapter so as to avoid



Propriety 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.

the readers thinking that the being mode could be acquired without changing socio-economic conditions. A large store of other writings by Fromm still await publication.

Only two participants from the U.S. were present at the symposium: Ruth Berenda and Mariano Enderle. In view of the close links between Fromm and the U.S., the International Erich Fromm Society hopes that more American participants will be present at future meetings.