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A Congress to Commemorate Erich Fromm

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In his welcoming remarks Professor Johannes Neumann, the founding President of the Fromm Society, pointed out that in Heidelberg Fromm's thought developed away from its original Talmudic orientation towards more expressly sociological and philosophical methods of inquiry. It is there that Fromm wrote his doctoral dissertation on „Judaic Law: The Sociology of Diaspora Jewry.“ Professor Neumann also stated that one important aim in setting up the Fromm Society—in addition to providing a framework for the proper utilization of the Erich Fromm Archives—was to break through the barrier of silence which seems to have been erected around the life and work of this important individual. [008] The keynote speech was delivered by Rainer Funk, Fromm's literary executor and current President of the Fromm Society, on „Humanism in the Life and Work of Erich Fromm.“ Funk stated that a thread running through Fromm's life and work is the concept of humanism. He indicated two sources of Fromm's humanism, both connected with the town of Heidelberg. The first was the Jewish humanism of Salmon Baruch Rabinkov, Fromm's Talmudic teacher in Heidelberg; and the second was the humanistic dimension in psychoanalysis, to which Fromm was introduced by Frieda Fromm-Reichmann (also in Heidelberg).

According to Fromm, the humanistic dimension in psychoanalysis consists in the assumption that „all men share the same unconscious strivings,“ and that „there exists an essential human core.“ This is confirmed by the existence of the universal language of dreams. Only if we take our unconscious into account do we regain our wholeness. Funk pointed out that this represents a clean break with earlier humanist thinking.

In discussing Fromm's specific conception of humanism Funk stressed two points: 1) that what binds us together are historical and existential dichotomies; and 2) every society promotes some of the possibilities latent in the human unconscious—thus giving rise to the „social character“—and represses the others. As Fromm said: „Our conscious mind represents mainly our own society and culture, while our unconscious represents the universal man in each of us.“ Thus experiencing the unconscious is a basic human experience. In Funk's words, „only in his unconscious is man able to experience the whole of humanity.“

As evidence of Rabinkov's profound influence on Fromm, Funk noted that Fromm could be described in the very phrases that Fromm and his fellow students used to describe Rabinkov: „an unlimited urge for independence“; „an immediate openness, concern, [and] readiness to participate“; and „he was entirely himself.“

Another highlight of the meeting was the paper by Michael Maccoby, „Erich Fromm's Methods of Social Character Research,“ which explored the important conceptual tools pro-



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vided by Fromm for empirical research. In his lifetime, Fromm contributed to two major research projects. The first was carried out in Germany before World War II in conjunction with the Frankfurt school of sociology. The second took place in Mexico after the War and was published in a book co-written by Fromm and Maccoby entitled *Social Character of a Mexican Village*.

The Mexican study was based on a key theoretical concept of Fromm's: the social character. Produced by the interaction of basic human strivings and socioeconomic conditions, this is the dominant character structure of the society. The study was also based on use of another of Fromm's ideas, the interpretive questionnaire, which takes into account the unconscious aspects of personality.

Three types of social character were discovered in the Mexican village, and each was found to be linked to a specific socioeconomic situation: the unproductive-receptive character type was the outcome of feudal society; the productive-hoarding type was characteristic of the free peasant land-owner; and the productive-exploitative type was representative of modern society. When socioeconomic conditions change, the previously dominant social character may no longer be adaptive, and hitherto minority character types are selected. The resultant strains may produce social pathology such as alcoholism and violence.

The Congress included three more papers. In his talk on „Messianic Thinking in the Jewish Intelligentsia of the Twenties“ Professor Micha Brumlik, of the Seminar for Educational Theory of the University of Heidelberg, suggested that theological themes influenced both the Frankfurt School and Fromm's own thinking. Ursula Engel spoke about the therapeutic institution that Frieda Fromm-Reichmann opened in Heidelberg in 1924 and in which Erich Fromm was also involved. This institution was characterized by the attempt to blend psychoanalysis and an Orthodox Jewish religious lifestyle. Finally, Hans Pestalozzi gave a provocative lecture on „Strategies of Social Change,“ in which he pointed out that none of the measures suggested by Fromm to lead us away from the destructive developments of our civilization have been carried out. He maintained that „it was naive to believe that there could be a positive development within our system,“ and concluded that „by refusing to adjust to this system you eventually will change the system.“

Aside from Maccoby, the only American participant was Harriet Lutzky, who teaches psychoanalysis in France. It is to be hoped that a shared interest in Fromm and in alternative approaches to psychoanalysis may increasingly bring Americans and Europeans together