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The Indispensability of Erich Fromm: The Rehabilitation of a "Forgotten" Psychoanalyst

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"Some human beings affect you so deeply that your life is forever changed."
– Gérard D. Khoury, "A Crucial Encounter"

"Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, *against* totalitarianism and *for* democratic socialism, as I understand it. ... It is simply a question of which side one takes and what approach one follows."
– George Orwell, "Why I Write"

1

It always begins for me with an act of reading. Winnicott's *Playing and Reality* (1971), Ferenczi's *Clinical Diary* (Dupont, 1985), Groddeck's *Book of the It* (1923), Nina Coltart's "Slouching towards Bethlehem" (1986), or – to go back to the beginning – Ernest Jones's (1953-1957) biography of Freud and, even before that, Norman O. Brown's *Life Against Death* (1959): all these have been, for me, life-changing experiences, the most passionate love affairs in my lifelong romance with psychoanalysis. To this list must now be added Erich Fromm's *Escape from Freedom* (1941). I confess that I had never read *Escape from Freedom*, and my knowledge of Fromm's work was largely confined to a sense of general agreement with his perspective on Freud, until

two years ago when, spurred on by Adrienne Harris's review (2014) of Lawrence Friedman's (2013) biography of Fromm in the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, I moved *Escape from Freedom* to the top of my "must-read" list. The result was the intellectual equivalent of falling in love, the familiar feeling that here was something for which I had been searching without realizing it, after which I would never look at psychoanalysis – or at life – in the same way again.

Although Fromm was new to me when I belatedly discovered him in 2014, to engage seriously with an author is inevitably to enter into the tradition of the reception of his work that has preceded one's own encounter. Even as I hope to have something original to say about Fromm, I realize that my contribution is part of a collective project of restoring the luster to



his unjustly tarnished reputation, whose dedicated participants include Marco Bacciagaluppi and Ferenc Erős and that owes everything to Rainer Funk, Fromm's literary executor and supremely faithful custodian of his legacy.

The more I immersed myself in Fromm, the more I was struck by how much my long-standing concerns have overlapped with his and how much I would have benefited had I heeded his writings sooner. Shortly before beginning this odyssey, I had published an essay (Rudnytsky, 2014) comparing Freud to the character of God in Milton's *Paradise Lost* in which I depicted them both as patriarchal fathers who impose a double bind on their followers that forces them to choose between the equally unpalatable alternatives of obedience and subordination, on the one hand, and rebellion and rejection, on the other. No sooner had I read *Escape from Freedom*, where Fromm sets forth his concept of the authoritarian character, than I realized that here was the vital missing piece to my puzzle, the capstone to my edifice, which I had failed to insert when I had the chance. I then went back to *Sigmund Freud's Mission* (1959b) and saw that Fromm had actually a chapter in that book titled "Freud's Authoritarianism," so it was simply due to my not having sufficiently appreciated his importance that I had neglected to make use of him in my essay on Milton.¹

Similarly, although I cited Fromm in a chapter on Little Hans in *Reading Psychoanalysis* (Rudnytsky, 2002, p. 40), it was only on rereading his essay (1968b) on Freud's case history that I realized how closely my critique of Freud for his underrating of environmental factors as well as his patriarchal bias had been anticipated by Fromm and that I ought to have acknowledged more explicitly the extent to

¹ I have since drawn on Fromm's ideas in a paper examining the Freud-Ferenczi relationship (Rudnytsky, 2015b), as well as in a paper (Rudnytsky, 2015a) that considers his reliance on Burckhart's thesis concerning Renaissance individualism in *Escape from Freedom*.

which I was following in his footsteps. By the same token, my sole mention of Fromm in *Rescuing Psychoanalysis from Freud and Other Essays in Re-Vision* is in the introduction where I name him as one of the "noblest spirits of psychoanalysis" (Rudnytsky, 2011, p. xxiii), but only recently did I learn that the title of my book had been foreshadowed by Fromm (1992c) in the posthumously published volume *The Revision of Psychoanalysis*.

Finally, in my research for *Mutual Analysis* (Rudnytsky, 2017), I was led first to Fromm's (1958) refutation of Jones's impugning of the sanity of Rank and Ferenczi in his biography of Freud, and from there to the pertinent correspondence in the Fromm Archives in Tübingen, which was made available to me in digital form with characteristic generosity by Funk. From this correspondence I could see that Fromm had been in contact not only with those who had known Ferenczi in his final years – especially Clara Thompson and Izette de Forest, both of whom became Fromm's analysands after having been in analysis with Ferenczi in Budapest – but also with those who had known Rank, including Jessie Taft, Fay B. Karpf, and Harry Bone, as well as with Carl and Sylva Grossman, who had known Groddeck in Baden-Baden. The Grossmans (1965) later published the first biography of Groddeck, while Karpf (1953) and Taft (1958) were the authors of the first books on Rank, as was de Forest (1954) on Ferenczi. I suddenly had the epiphany that Rank, Ferenczi, and Groddeck were the same figures I had brought together in *Reading Psychoanalysis* and celebrated for having inaugurated the "relational turn" in psychoanalysis in their landmark works of 1923 and 1924. It was uncanny to realize that, as early as the 1950s, Fromm had been the foremost advocate for the identical triad of first-generation analysts to whom I had independently gravitated nearly a half-century later.

It might seem perverse to claim that the reputation of a writer whose books sold literally millions of copies and who became one of



America's most famous public intellectuals might be in need of rehabilitation. And yet, as Neil McLaughlin (1998a; 1998b) has documented in two seminal articles, Fromm has indeed become "forgotten" insofar as he was not only "hated within the Freudian establishment with a special passion" for being "a unique combination of a Freudian revisionist, Marxist social thinker, and popular writer" but he has also remained "far more marginal to contemporary Freudian thought" (1998b, p. 116) than have the other two leading representatives of neo-Freudianism, Karen Horney and Harry Stack Sullivan. To Fromm belongs the distinction of having been attacked on all sides, including by his former colleagues in the Frankfurt School; and in finding himself "caught in no man's land," as McLaughlin (1998a) has elucidated, the trajectory of Fromm's reputation makes him the antithesis not only of Jacques Derrida, the Pied Piper of deconstruction, who so successfully courted the centers of American intellectual power and prestige beginning in the late 1960s, but likewise of Orwell, who "was also famous and relatively marginal to the academy," but who, paradoxically, "gained support from intellectuals who had little in common with his democratic socialism," whereas "Fromm's strongest enemies were often intellectuals who essentially shared his basic socialist political perspective" (p. 227).

Although I have borrowed McLaughlin's designation of Fromm as "forgotten," I refer to him not as a "forgotten intellectual" but rather as a "forgotten *psychoanalyst*." It is not to dispute Kieran Durkin's (2014) thesis that "radical humanism" constitutes the unifying principle of Fromm's thought, "irrespective of the differences that obtain between periods" (p. 3), to claim that Fromm's sense of himself as a psychoanalyst was at the core of his professional identity and stamped the successive iterations of his humanist project. Indeed, it was above all Fromm's identity as a psychoanalyst that made him a lightning rod for criticism and caused the decline of his reputation. It is not by coincidence that Max Horkheimer, on be-

half of the supposed radicals of the Frankfurt School, and the psychoanalytically orthodox Karl Menninger should have come together from opposite sides of the ideological spectrum to denigrate Fromm's credentials as a psychoanalyst. Even though Fromm "considered himself a psychoanalyst," Menninger wrote in a review of *Escape from Freedom*, he was in reality a "distinguished sociologist" who with a "curious presumptuousness" had merely exercised his right to apply "psychoanalytic theory to sociological problems" (quoted in McLaughlin, 1998b, pp. 123-124), just as Horkheimer described Fromm in a 1949 letter to the publishers of the *Philosophical Review* as "the head of one of the 'revisionist' schools of psychoanalysis" who had "tried to 'sociologize' deep psychology, thereby ... making it more superficial" (quoted in Funk, 1999a, p. 101).

In contrast to Sullivan and Horney, who died in 1949 and 1952 respectively, moreover, Fromm was not only a leading neo-Freudian "revisionist." He was also the most acute analyst of psychoanalytic politics in the heyday of Freud-worship and someone who fought a series of courageous private and public battles with the representatives of the Freud establishment. Even more than Fromm's controversial engagements with the theory of psychoanalysis, it was his attempts to expose and counteract the ossification of Freud's legacy into a quasi-religious movement that led to his becoming a *persona non grata*. My wager in this paper is that, more than thirty-five years after Fromm's death, the psychoanalytic profession has finally reached a point where his heroism can be recognized and the same qualities that once made him an outcast can be appreciated as those that render his rediscovery indispensable to securing our future.

Just as Fromm (1959a) recommended that in clinical work "the first thing one should do is to *form an idea of what this person was meant to be*, and what his neurosis has done to the person that he was meant to be" (p. 30), so, too, in undertaking what he beautifully called



(1992b) a "literary psychoanalysis" of Freud he was guided by the principle that "every creative thinker sees further than he is able to express or is aware of," which makes it incumbent on a commentator to recognize how that thinker may be at once "*ahead of himself*" and limited by the personally or culturally determined blind spots that lead to "distortions in the author's thinking" (pp. 22-23). In applying Fromm's own method to Fromm himself, I will be seeking to disentangle what in *Escape from Freedom* (1941) he terms "the genuine growth of the self" that constitutes the "unfolding of a nucleus that is peculiar for this one person and only for him" from those places in his work where "the growth on the basis of the self is blocked," resulting in the superimposition of a "pseudo self" that is "essentially the incorporation of extraneous patterns of thinking and feeling" (p. 290). If Fromm's language here inevitably reminds us of Winnicott, that may provide a clue to the perspective from which I will be paying tribute to Fromm's enduring greatness while not failing to point out what I regard as the limitations of his thought.

2

There is no better place to begin a study of Fromm's writings on psychoanalysis than with his paper "The Social Determination of Psychoanalytic Therapy," published in 1935 in Horkheimer's *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* and not translated into English until 2000.² Here we have what we may designate as Fromm's starting point and springboard, which propels him into his first period that reaches its culmination in *Escape from Freedom*.

By the time Fromm published this paper, he had moved to the United States and his first marriage, to Frieda Reichmann, eleven years his senior, had dissolved, though they were not divorced until the 1940s, and he had begun his prolonged but conflict-ridden affair

² The English translation by Ernst Falzeder renders the title as "Social Determinants," but Fromm actually uses the singular noun *Bedingtheit*.

with Horney, who was not eleven but fifteen years older than Fromm. As is notorious, Reichmann had been Fromm's analyst in Heidelberg when they began the affair that led to their marriage in 1926, the same year in which they became founding members of the Southwest German Psychoanalytic Working Group, a satellite of the German Psychoanalytic Society in Berlin. Other integral members of this collective, which evolved in 1929 into the Psychoanalytic Institute of Frankfurt, included Heinrich Meng and Karl Landauer. It is an indication of the extent of Fromm's dependency on Reichmann at this period in his life that he emulated her in subsequently obtaining analysis from Wilhelm Wittenberg in Munich as well as from Hanns Sachs in Berlin, where Reichmann subsidized his analytic training. Between his voluntarily undertaken analysis with Wittenberg and his required training analysis with Sachs, Fromm also had some form of therapeutic contact with Landauer in Frankfurt.

Extremely illuminating information about Fromm's experience with the German Psychoanalytic Society has recently been unearthed by Michael Schröter. It has long been known that, after two years as an associate member, Fromm in 1932 had been elected a full member of the German Society, entitling him to membership in the International Psychoanalytical Association (Roazen, 2001, p. 9). What Schröter (2015) has gleaned from a letter of May 19, 1928 from Max Eitingon to Landauer, which he found in the Eitingon papers housed in the Israel State Archives in Jerusalem, however, is that even before he became an associate member Fromm lectured "as a guest" at meetings of the German Society first in 1927 and again in 1928, but neither of these presentations – "Healing of a Case of Pulmonary Tuberculosis during Psychoanalytic Treatment" and "Psychology of the Petty Bourgeois" – was well received by the triumvirate of Eitingon, Sachs, and Sándor Radó. These lectures, moreover, were manifestly efforts by Fromm to gain membership in the German Psychoanalytic Society, to which he was entitled to apply by virtue of his affiliation with the



Southwest German Working Group, on the basis of his personal analyses with Reichmann, Landauer, and Wittenberg as well as intellectual immersion in the field. Fromm, however, was twice deferred and finally left with no alternative but to go to Berlin for formal training, including his didactic analysis with Sachs, which he appears to have commenced in February 1929. In September 1930 – the same year in which he joined the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research – he gave a formal membership lecture, "On the Belief in the Omnipotence of Thoughts," leading to his election as an associate member of the German Society in October and at last qualifying him to practice as a psychoanalyst.

By 1935, therefore, Fromm was in impeccable standing in the world of psychoanalysis. But though he had not yet commenced the overt political battles that would result in his leading the charge against Jones and in the publication of *Sigmund Freud's Mission*, Fromm had traveled what Schröter (2015) terms a "thorny way" on his training journey, which evinced "certain parallels" (p. 4) with the obstacles encountered by Reichmann, who earlier in the decade had likewise been advised of the insufficiency of her analysis with Wittenberg (who was not a training analyst) and obligated to commute from Heidelberg to Berlin for an approved analysis with Sachs before being recognized as a psychoanalyst in 1927. As Gail A. Hornstein (2000) has written in her fine biography of Fromm-Reichmann, "Frieda seems to have barely tolerated Sachs," who was the personification of the unresponsive classical analyst, and she must have considered his "worshipful attitude" toward Freud – symbolized by his placing a bust of Freud on a pedestal so that it faced his patients on the analytic couch – to be "ridiculous" (p. 33). Thus, as Schröter (2015) has argued, although Fromm in "The Social Determination of Psychoanalytic Therapy" "made reference to Freud's writings, he (also) in subterranean fashion settled the score with his own training analyst," and the new direction charted by Fromm in his psychoanalytic writings of the mid-1930s "could

to that extent have been owed to a critical reflection on his analytic experiences in Berlin" (p. 6).

Indeed, Fromm's revolutionary spirit is on full display in "The Social Determination of Psychoanalytic Therapy," and we see him here at his most farsighted and visionary, with only the slightest hint of an opacity that becomes a greater cause for concern in his later writings. But if Fromm's intellectual radicalism received a negative impetus from his struggle with Sachs and the German Psychoanalytic Society, an equally powerful motive on the positive side is not far to seek. Through his connection with Reichmann, Fromm had come into frequent contact with Groddeck (another member of the Southwest German Psychoanalytic Working Group) in Baden-Baden, where he likewise met Ferenczi.

According to the Grossmans (1965), who heard the story from Fromm himself, in September 1926, shortly before Ferenczi was to leave for the United States, Fromm was present "when Groddeck delivered a forthright attack on the method of psychoanalytical training," to which "Ferenczi made no defense" (p. 164). The joint influence of these master spirits, both of whom had died within the past two years, infuses Fromm's 1935 paper and largely accounts for his capacity to formulate such a lucid and trenchant critique of Freud even while the latter was still alive. Ironically, as Schröter (2015) observes, despite appearing in Horkheimer's journal, "this essay not only provoked the objection of analytic colleagues such as Fenichel and Landauer, it also marked the beginning of Fromm's scientific alienation from the Institute of Social Research" (p. 6). According to Theodor Adorno, the text was "sentimental and outright false" and it placed him "in the paradoxical situation of defending Freud" (quoted p. 6). In crystallizing Fromm's perspective on psychoanalysis, therefore, "The Social Determination of Psychoanalytic Therapy" also cast him for the first time in his quintessential role as an independent thinker caught in the crossfire between



the loyalists of the Frankfurt School, on the one hand, and of the Freudian movement, on the other.

Although Fromm (1935) praises as "one of Freud's most magnificent achievements" the creation of a "situation of radical openness and truthfulness" (p. 151) in the analytic relationship, the main thrust of his paper is to show how Freud fell short of this ideal in practice by evincing "the social taboos of the bourgeoisie, hidden behind the idea of tolerance" (p. 154). Despite his occasional willingness to criticize "bourgeois sexual morality" (p. 155), Fromm maintains, Freud expects the patient "to act according to the bourgeois norm," which "means to fulfill the ideals of the present society and to respect its taboos" (p. 157). To illustrate how Freud "regards, down to the least detail, the capitalistic attitude as the natural healthy one," Fromm cites his admonition that the patient should be required to "pay for the hours allotted to him by agreement, even when he is prevented by illness or other reasons from coming into analysis" (p. 157). In adopting this stance, Fromm continues, Freud does not take into account "that the analyst gains free time for himself by the patient's not coming" and he thereby mistakenly equates "the capitalist character in its most developed form" with a supposedly "natural and human" attitude, such that "all deviations from this norm are regarded as 'neurotic'" (p. 157). By this specious reasoning, if a person fails to behave "in the socially accepted way," such as by joining a "radical party" or by entering "upon a marriage not according in age or social class with the bourgeois norm," or "even if he questions the Freudian theory, this just proves that he has unanalyzed complexes – and resistances to boot if he contradicts this diagnosis of the analyst" (p. 157).

In addition to "questioning the Freudian theory," Fromm himself was politically radical and his marriage to Reichmann, not to mention his affair with Horney, was not in keeping with the "bourgeois norm." There may thus be a per-

sonal motive to his indictment of Freud for "the unconscious authoritarian, patricentric attitude usually hidden behind 'tolerance'" (p. 159). Not only does Fromm identify Freud as an authoritarian character, but (as I have argued is also true of Milton's God) he observes that this patriarchal constellation manifests itself with special clarity in his "attitude toward his followers, whose only choice is between complete subordination or the prospect of a ruthless fight of their teacher against them, entailing also pecuniary consequences" (p. 158).

Having introduced Freud's relations to his followers into the discussion, Fromm turns his attention to the conflict "between Freud and his closest circle on the one hand, and 'oppositional' analysts on the other" (p. 159). As "typical representatives of this oppositional attitude" (p. 159) he instances Groddeck and Ferenczi and proceeds to honor the memory of these two men whom he had personally known. Although Groddeck "despised science," refused to express himself in "systematic theoretical form," and espoused a "reactionary stance in social matters," Fromm credits Groddeck's "feudal" outlook with liberating him from "the hidden prudery so typical of Freud" and enabling him to adopt an attitude toward patients that "was not soft, but full of humanity and friendliness" (p. 159). For Groddeck, in contrast to Freud, "the patient was at the center, and it was the analyst's task to serve him" (p. 159). Fromm's antipathy to Groddeck's "lack of rational and scientific inclination and rigor" leads him greatly to underestimate *The Book of the It* by alleging that Groddeck's "literary legacy can in no way give an impression of the importance of his personality," but he counterbalances this by testifying that "his impact was above all a personal one" and that Ferenczi's intellectual development "can only be understood in light of the strong influence Groddeck exercised on him" (p. 159).

The one paragraph that Fromm devotes to Groddeck serves as a prelude to his far more



extended discussion of Ferenczi. With exquisite sensitivity, Fromm teases out how, "during the last years of his life," Ferenczi "more and more moved away from Freud," as well as how Freud's "peculiar character" – that is, his authoritarianism – "let this theoretical difference turn into a personal tragedy" (p. 159) for Ferenczi. Because Ferenczi, unlike Groddeck, was "soft and anxious," Fromm explains, "he never dared to place himself in open opposition to Freud, and the more he realized that his views on the inadequacies of the Freudian technique had to lead to a personal confrontation with the latter, the more difficult his personal situation became" (p. 159). Ferenczi's inhibition "made him hide the antagonism among assurances of his loyalty," so that "it may be scarcely comprehensible, when reading Ferenczi's works, that the slight nuances in which Ferenczi expressed his deviation from Freud could be the expression of a conflict" (p. 159). Agreeing with Ferenczi that the analyst should show the patient "a certain amount of love," Fromm argues that it is precisely "the self-evidence of Ferenczi's demands" and the diffidence with which he expressed his opposition to Freud that demonstrate most vividly "the peculiarity of the Freudian position" (p. 159).

In "The Social Determination of Psychoanalytic Therapy," Fromm proves himself to be at once a masterful analyst of the Freud-Ferenczi relationship and authentically Ferenczian in his own thinking. Like Ferenczi, Fromm connects the "lack of ... unconditional affirmation in the average bourgeois family" with the patient's longing "for an unconditional acknowledgment of his claims to happiness and well-being" that is "necessary for his recovery" (p. 158). Without using the word "trauma," he understands that when a person does not receive "unconditional affirmation" in childhood it must leave deep wounds, as a result of which "he needs an environment in which he is certain of the unconditional and unshakable affirmation of his claims to happiness and well-being" (p. 158) in order to heal. If such a vulnerable patient goes to "an analyst of the

patricentric character type," by whom he is treated not with love but rather with a "frequently unconscious" hostility, this "not only makes all therapeutic success impossible but also represents a serious danger to the patient's psychic health" (p. 159). In contrast to the still widespread tendency to minimize the divergences between Freud and Ferenczi, Fromm accurately sees them as antithetical incarnations of a psychoanalytic identity and he takes Ferenczi's critique of Freud to its radical conclusion: "His difference with Freud is fundamental: the difference between a humane, philanthropic attitude, affirming the analysand's unqualified right to happiness – and a patricentric-authoritarian, deep down misanthropic, 'tolerance'" (p. 162).

The brilliance of this paper sets a standard against which Fromm's subsequent writings on Freud can be measured. But it nonetheless contains a "distortion" that impedes Fromm from reaching what my "literary psychoanalysis" would envision to be the full potential of his own thought. Ironically, this blind spot involves his famous concept of "social character" and it is encapsulated in the sentence: "Freud's personality and the characteristic features of his theory are ultimately to be understood not from individual but from general social conditions" (p. 163). Although this formulation has the great virtue of enabling Fromm to explain how Freud's outlook is indeed prototypical of the "patricentric-authoritarian" attitudes of bourgeois society, which are likewise an expression of "the capitalist character in its most developed form," it has the equally great defect of leaving Fromm with no way of explaining how Ferenczi, who belonged to the same social class as Freud, somehow arrived at a "humane, philanthropic" world-view that is diametrically opposed to Freud's ostensibly benevolent but "deep down misanthropic 'tolerance.'"

Fromm is aware of the problem, but his solution remains unsatisfactory. After asserting that "from a sociological point of view, Freud's attitude is the logical one," whereas "Ferenczi



was an outsider" who "was in opposition to the fundamental structure of his class," Fromm asks us to believe that Ferenczi "was not aware of his opposition" (p. 163). But though Ferenczi may have been cautious about expressing his disagreements with Freud openly, there can be no doubt that he was cognizant of the extent to which they had parted ways, as can be seen not only in his *Clinical Diary* and in his correspondence with Freud but also in his final sequence of papers from "The Principle of Relaxation and Neocatharsis" (1930) to "Confusion of Tongues" (1933). The fact, as Fromm (1935) says, that "Ferenczi succumbed in this struggle" (p. 163) with Freud is irrelevant both to whether he was aware of his status as "an outsider" psychoanalytically and sociologically and to how his differences from Freud are to be explained. All Fromm can say on the latter point is that "the example of Ferenczi shows ... that the Freudian attitude need not be that of all analysts," and that what he here calls (for what I believe to be the first time in his writings) the "social character structure" is no more than an "average standard" from which "a number of individuals" will differ to a greater or lesser extent for reasons "stemming from the individual fate of the person in question" (p. 163).³

Even in introducing his concept of "social character structure," therefore, which receives systematic exposition in the appendix to *Escape from Freedom*, Fromm has no alternative but to have recourse to "the individual fate of the person" to account for how two men who

³ See the useful review of the history of this concept by Funk (1998), who traces its roots to Fromm's doctoral dissertation under Alfred Weber at Heidelberg and notes the occurrence of the phrase "socially typical character" (p. 221) in a paper of 1937. As Funk concedes, everything that makes any particular "person different from, and unique among, other persons living under the same circumstances (his or her special and often traumatic childhood experiences) is ... of secondary interest" (p. 221) from Fromm's standpoint, a perspective that I argue must be reversed if one employs the psychoanalytic lenses of Ferenczi and Winnicott.

ought to have the same "social character" turn out not merely to show "gradual differences" but to be as "radically different" (p. 163) from each other as are Freud and Ferenczi. The problem is that while Fromm acknowledges the importance of attending to "individual fates," he does not integrate this realization into his theory, as is clear when he asserts that "Freud's personality and the characteristic features of his theory are ultimately to be understood not from individual but from general social conditions." Instead of developing his concept of social character as a further dimension of what we would define today as a relational psychoanalytic perspective, Fromm too often leaps over individual experience altogether and goes directly to a collective level of analysis. On the other hand, he acknowledges earlier in "The Social Determination of Psychoanalytic Therapy" that "it is difficult to prove the existence of a judgmental attitude," such as we find exhibited by Freud, "since it is essentially unconscious," but "the most important source for such a proof is a study of the personality in question" (p. 154). By Fromm's own admission, what is required to understand Freud – or anyone else, for that matter – is an analytically informed biography that attends to both the individual and the social contexts of its subject, but Fromm begs the reader's indulgence by pleading, "it is not possible to make such an attempt in this paper" (p. 154).

There is so much to admire in "The Social Determination of Psychoanalytic Therapy" that the limitations I have pinpointed in Fromm's initial deployment of the concept of social character are no more than a minor blemish on what I regard as one of the greatest papers in the psychoanalytic literature. But this defect serves as a barometer that allows us to gauge whether Fromm is living up to his potential or succumbing to a "distortion in his thinking." Whenever Fromm integrates his social level of analysis with a respect for the uniqueness of individual experience he is magnificent, but when he subsumes the individual entirely into the social, he falls flat. We see him at his best in *Man for Himself* (1949), where he concludes



by affirming that "our *moral* problem ... lies in the fact that we have lost the sense of the significance and uniqueness of the individual" (p. 248), or in the previously quoted passage from *Escape from Freedom* (1941) where Fromm emphasizes that "the genuine growth of the self" means "the unfolding of a nucleus that is peculiar for this one person and only for him," whereas "the development of the automaton ... is not an organic growth" (p. 290).

Without having read Winnicott, Fromm here soars on extended wings as an object relations psychoanalyst. By the same token, although Ferenczi has disappeared from the pages of *Escape from Freedom*, we can nonetheless sense his presence when Fromm upholds the view that "every neurosis" is "essentially an adaptation to such external conditions (particularly those of early childhood) as are in themselves irrational and, generally speaking, unfavorable to the growth and development of the child" (pp. 30-31). This Fromm, who affirms the uniqueness of the individual and the effects of traumas in "early childhood" while bringing to bear his own unsurpassed dissection of larger social formations and defense of radical humanism against the perennial perils of authoritarianism – this is the true Fromm, whose vicissitudes I shall endeavor to chart in his subsequent works on Freud and psychoanalysis.

3

At the outset of "The Social Determination of Psychoanalytic Therapy," Fromm (1935) observes that repressions take place "when an impulse is condemned not only by a single person, or even by several individuals, but by the social group" to which a person belongs, and that "the danger of isolation and of the loss of social support" is a greater source of anxiety than is "losing the love of the individual most important to the person in question" (p. 149). In 1935, as we have seen, Fromm was a member of the International Psychoanalytical Association, and he had only begun to part ways with his colleagues in the Institute for

Social Research, so he still enjoyed the "social support" of both these professional communities, but his warning concerning the "danger of isolation" takes on a prophetic quality when one turns to the second phase of his writings on psychoanalysis, culminating in 1959 with *Sigmund Freud's Mission*.

The crucial facts are laid out in one of the finest papers by the late Paul Roazen (2001), where he avoids the rambling and disorganization that afflicts so much of his writing. In 1936, after the forced resignation of the Jewish members of the German Psychoanalytic Society, Fromm, as an émigré lay analyst living in New York, accepted an offer from Jones that he become a "Nansen" or direct member of the IPA. So matters stood throughout the 1940s, during which Fromm participated in two acts of secession. In 1941, together with Thompson, Sullivan, and others, he joined Horney, who had resigned from the New York Psychoanalytic Society after being stripped of her position as a training analyst, in founding the American Institute for Psychoanalysis. Then, in 1943, Fromm was himself joined by Thompson, Sullivan, and others in breaking away from Horney's group and founding what became the William Alanson White Institute after Horney – in a vendetta against Fromm and a repetition of her own experience of banishment – refused to permit Fromm to teach clinical seminars because of his lack of a medical degree.

The turning point came in 1953 when Fromm, who had been living in Mexico since 1950, discovered, in Roazen's (2001) words, "that he had somehow been dropped from being a direct member of the IPA" (p. 31). A correspondence ensued with Ruth Eissler, Secretary of the IPA and wife of Kurt Eissler, who was then in the process of founding the Freud Archives. Eissler informed Fromm that he would have to apply for reinstatement of his membership and go before a screening committee consisting of the President of the American Psychoanalytic Association, the Chairman of the Board on Professional Standards, and an



American member of the Central Executive of the IPA. Seeking clarification, Fromm replied on June 29, "According to what principles is such a screening carried out? Would, for instance, the fact that my psychoanalytic views do not correspond to the views of the majority be one of the factors to be taken into consideration at the screening, and a reason for denial of membership?" (quoted p. 33).

Eissler rejoined on July 27 that she could not anticipate what the screening committee might recommend, but, speaking personally, she "would assume that anyone who does not stand on the basic principles of psychoanalysis would anyway not be greatly interested in becoming a member of the International Psychoanalytic Association" (quoted p. 34). Having been taunted in this fashion, Fromm struck back in a letter of August 26 that ended their exchange:

I am sure you realize that the main issue is just what we mean by "basic principles" of psychoanalysis. I consider myself as sharing these principles, but the question is, how broadly or how narrowly the International Psychoanalytic Association interprets them. It is also not quite a question of wanting to become a member of the International Psychoanalytic Association, but rather, of the reasons for being dropped from membership. (quoted p. 34)

Fromm never disclosed this dispute with the psychoanalytic establishment, preferring to wage his personal battles behind the scenes. Nonetheless, it is clear that Fromm's involvement in the founding of two unapproved institutes in New York as well as an autonomous training program in Mexico, combined with the revisionist spirit of his writings, had made him toxic to the reigning powers of whom Ruth Eissler was the mouthpiece. Had he gone forward with his application for reinstatement, Fromm would surely have met with rejection because he did not "stand on the basic principles of psychoanalysis" as defined by the authorities. Accordingly, the author of *Escape*

from Freedom chose to embrace the "positive freedom" of his independent status, even at the cost of being marginalized. This experience, however, must have been traumatic for Fromm and motivated him to continue his fight against the world of organized psychoanalysis vicariously by taking up the cudgels on behalf of Rank and Ferenczi against the slanders of Jones.

Accordingly, in "Psychoanalysis: Science or Party Line?" (1958), when Fromm deplores how the psychoanalytic movement has too often "exhibited a fanaticism usually found only in religious and political bureaucracies" and charges that Jones's labeling of Rank and Ferenczi as psychotic "introduces into science a method which thus far we have expected to find only in Stalinist 'history'" (pp. 131-132), what might seem to be hyperbole becomes comprehensible in light of the fact that Fromm himself had been purged from the psychoanalytic "party." It is a measure of the distance Fromm has traveled since 1935 that although Ferenczi continues to figure prominently in his argument, he no longer does so because of his ideas or because he offers an alternative to Freud, but solely because Ferenczi, like Rank, was victimized by the politics of exclusion of psychoanalysis, while Groddeck drops out entirely.

With respect to the pivotal question of how psychoanalysis, in its essence "*a theory and a therapy*," could "*be transformed into this kind of a fanatical movement*," Fromm initially observes that the explanation "is to be found only by an examination of Freud's motives in developing the psychoanalytic movement" (p. 140). This is consistent with his statement in "The Social Determination of Psychoanalytic Therapy" that one must undertake "a study of the personality in question," but Fromm in the concluding paragraph of his 1958 paper shifts the blame by saying that it is "the bureaucracy, which inherited Freud's mantle" but "little of his greatness and real radicalism" (p. 143), that is responsible for causing psychoanalysis to abandon "its original daring in the search



for truth" (p. 144). There is a recurring tension between Fromm's perception of Freud's patriarchal character and his tendency to surrender to what Daniel Burston (1991) terms "Freud piety" (p. 1) by absolving Freud of culpability for the crimes committed in his name by his apparatchiks. Just as when Fromm skips over "the individual fate of the person" and goes immediately to a collective level of analysis, this retreat from his insight into Freud's tragic flaws into an arraignment of his followers constitutes a major blind spot that distorts Fromm's thinking.

According to Friedman (2013), *Sigmund Freud's Mission* "was more an extended philippic than a closely reasoned or well-researched manuscript," in which "conclusions were postulated without much evidence or reasoning" (p. 222), just as Fromm "often exaggerated" his "differences with Freud" (p. 81). These statements exemplify the condescending attitude that pervades Friedman's biography, depriving it of the essential quality that Fromm (1959a) calls "central relatedness," notwithstanding its utility as a professionally conducted tour through his life and works.⁴

Indeed, far from lacking "evidence or reasoning," *Sigmund Freud's Mission* is a masterpiece that takes its place alongside "The Social Determination of Psychoanalytic Therapy" as a second summit rising above the range of his psychoanalytic writings.

Fromm begins his monograph (1959b) by agreeing with Freud that psychoanalysis "was his creation," from which it follows ineluctably that "the origin of psychoanalysis is to be sought in Freud's personality" (p. 1). The book is, therefore, the "study of the personality in question" that Fromm in 1935 had discerned

would be necessary in order to explain the "judgmental attitude" that is unconsciously present in Freud's works. By virtue of his focus on Freud's "personality," Fromm avoids the pitfall of resorting prematurely to the concept of social character when a more nuanced individual level of analysis is required. At the same time, Fromm preserves what is unique about his approach when he exposes how Freud's view of human nature relies on the assumption that people "remain basically isolated beings, just as the vendor and buyer on the market do," and how he "speaks of love as a man of his time speaks of property or capital" (pp. 104-105). Fromm drives home the implications of his earlier argument that Freud fuses a "bourgeois sexual morality" with his acceptance of "the capitalistic attitude as the natural healthy one" in the apothegm that Freud's "concept of Homo sexualis was a deepened and enlarged version of the economist's concept of Homo economicus" (p. 106).

At the heart of *Sigmund Freud's Mission* is Fromm's analysis of Freud's "intolerance and authoritarianism," of which "the most drastic example ... can be found in his relationship to Ferenczi" (p. 68). Fromm repeatedly takes aim at "the idolizing and unanalytic approach of Jones's biography" (p. 20), highlighting the "psychological naïveté" of his denial of "any authoritarian tendency in Freud" (p. 71). As Fromm contends, it was only with "people who idolized him and never disagreed" that Freud was "kind and tolerant," so that while he could be "a loving father" to his "submissive sons," he became "a stern, authoritarian one to those who dared to disagree" (p. 71). Utilizing his core idea in *Escape from Freedom* of the authoritarian character as a sadomasochistic structure, Fromm argues that since neither the sadist nor the masochist is able to tolerate genuine freedom, "there is an *unconscious* dependence in which a dominant person is dependent on those who depend on him" (p. 52). Hence, it is precisely *because* Freud "was so dependent on unconditional affirmation and agreement by others" (p. 71) that he unleashed his sadism against those

⁴ In addition to his patronizing tone, Friedman (2013) erroneously claims that "there is a good possibility that Fromm met Freud" at one of Groddeck's "convivial gatherings in Baden Baden" (p. 24), since it is an established fact that Freud never accepted any of Groddeck's invitations that he visit him there.



who did not gratify his need for complete validation, though Jones was unable to see the despotic side of Freud's character. Fromm again draws on *Escape from Freedom* (1941), where he had explained that "the authoritarian character is never a 'revolutionary'" but is rather always a "'rebel'" who seeks "to overcome his own feeling of powerlessness by fighting authority, although the longing for submission remains present, whether consciously or unconsciously" (p. 192), when he asserts in *Sigmund Freud's Mission* (1959b) that Freud "was a rebel and not a revolutionary" because a "rebel" is one "who fights existing authorities but who himself wants to be an authority," whereas a revolutionary "achieves true independence and he overcomes the yearning for domination of others" (p. 64).

To bolster his claim that Freud's relationship to Ferenczi constitutes the "most drastic example" of Freud's authoritarianism, Fromm cites a personal communication he had received from Izette de Forest as he was preparing his refutation of Jones's allegations concerning Ferenczi's and Rank's supposed psychoses. De Forest's communication contained Ferenczi's narrative of his final meeting with Freud in Vienna prior to the 1932 Wiesbaden Congress, in which Freud rejected the ideas expounded in his "Confusion of Tongues" paper and icily turned his back on Ferenczi and refused to shake his hand at the conclusion of their interview. In a footnote, Fromm hails "Confusion of Tongues" as "a paper of extraordinary profundity and brilliance – one of the most valuable papers in the whole psychoanalytic literature" (p. 70n3). Fromm, however, does not engage with the substance of Ferenczi's paper, just as he had dealt only with the political aspect of Ferenczi's conflict with Freud in "Psychoanalysis – Science or Party Line?" Similarly, although he had written privately in 1957 to Carl and Sylva Grossman that Groddeck's "teaching influenced me more than that of other teachers I had" (quoted in Funk, 1999a, p. 62), Fromm does not mention Groddeck in either his rejoinder to Jones or *Sigmund Freud's Mission*. Thus, although

Fromm continued to revere both Ferenczi and Groddeck on a personal level and the case of Ferenczi remained central to his critique of Freud, it is clear that Fromm's theoretical views were no longer deeply influenced by these two instigators of the relational turn, as they had been in "The Social Determination of Psychoanalytic Therapy."

This shift away from his earlier outlook helps to explain why, even though Fromm (1959b) correctly perceives that "dependency and insecurity are central elements in the structure of Freud's character, and of his neurosis" (p. 23), he misunderstands how Freud acquired these traits. According to Fromm, "the attachment to Mother, even the very satisfactory one which implies indisputable confidence in Mother's love, has not only the positive side of giving absolute self-confidence, it also has the negative side of creating a feeling of dependency" (p. 23). But Freud's "dependency and insecurity" did not arise because he had a "very satisfactory" attachment to his mother. On the contrary, it arose because Freud's attachment to his mother was extremely *insecure*. Fromm's error goes beyond taking at face value Freud's idealized picture of his relationship to his mother and extends to his conception of motherly love in general. Fromm asserts categorically: "Mother's love is by definition unconditional. She does not love her child, as the Father does, *because* he merits it, *because* of what he has done, but *because he is* her child. Motherly admiration for the son is unconditional too" (p. 21). This dichotomy between maternal and paternal love, which forms a leitmotiv in Fromm's writings, is indebted to Bachofen. In his early essay "The Theory of Mother Right and Its Relevance for Social Psychology" (1934), Fromm appends the qualification that he is "talking about paternal or maternal love in an ideal sense" (p. 130n24), which goes some way to meet the objections to his formulation. But when Fromm forgets that he is trading at best in ideal types, if not essentialist stereotypes, and simply assumes that Freud's mother must have loved him unconditionally because



"mother's love is by definition unconditional," he blinds himself to the frequency with which maternal love proves to be ambivalent and conditional, and even mutates into the hate analyzed by Winnicott with such acuity in "Hate in the Counter-Transference" (1949).

Fromm is remembered by Edward S. Tauber (2009) as having been "always a private person" (p. 131) and by Bernard Landis (2009) as "intensely private" (p. 137). Before his death in 1980, he directed his third wife, Annis Freeman Fromm, to destroy his personal letters, and none of his correspondence before 1934 has been preserved (Friedman, 2013, p. xxvii). Nowhere does Fromm engage in the kind of intimate self-analysis that we find in Freud, Ferenczi, and Groddeck. Not even in the opening chapter of *Beyond the Chains of Illusion* (1962), where Fromm describes himself as "having been an only child, with an anxious and moody father and a depression-prone mother" and confesses his infatuation as a twelve-year-old with a painter of twenty-five who broke off an engagement and committed suicide after the death of her father, leaving instructions in her will that "she wanted to be buried together" (pp. 3-4) with him, does he lift the curtain more than an inch or two on his inner world. Ironically, although Fromm confesses that he "had never heard of an Oedipus complex or of incestuous fixations between daughter and father" (p. 4), he does not consider the possibility that Freud's theories might be no less pertinent to his own adolescent fascination with the painter than they are to the painter's morbid obsession with her father.

Fromm's insistence that "mother's love" and "motherly admiration" are "by definition unconditional," which is reflected in his incoherent account of Freud's relationship to his mother, is – along with his tendency to retreat from an individual level of analysis and to shift the blame onto Freud's followers for the tragic flaws in Freud's character – a third major blind spot that impedes "the genuine growth of the self" in Fromm's writings. He sums up his view

of Freud near the end of *Sigmund Freud's Mission* (1959b):

We find him a man deeply in need of motherly love, admiration, and protection, full of self-confidence when these are bestowed on him, depressed and hopeless when they are missing. This insecurity, both emotionally and materially, makes him seek to control others who depend on him, so he can depend on them. (p. 122)

In place of a self-analysis, Fromm in this character study of Freud has painted a portrait of his own dark twin. For he, too, was indubitably "deeply in need of motherly love," as his series of real or fantasied involvements with older women, from the painter to Reichmann and Horney, attests. Like the painter, Fromm's second wife, Henny Gurland, who had witnessed the suicide of Walter Benjamin when she and her son had set out to cross the border between France and Spain with him in 1940, almost certainly ended her own illness-plagued life by suicide in Mexico in 1952 (Friedman, 2013, p. 141).

Thus, the conclusion becomes irresistible that Fromm is projecting into his theories his own excessively idealized picture of his relationship to *his* mother, Rosa Krause Fromm. But whereas Freud's ambivalent attachment to his mother led him to become an authoritarian, Fromm was able to fight his way to a humanistic ethics, though not without occasionally succumbing to the temptations exerted by the narcissistic and controlling side of his own nature. As Fromm wrote of Freud, in "Psychoanalysis: Science or Party Line?" (1958), he "was – and wanted to be – one of the great cultural-ethical leaders of the twentieth century" (p. 143). Only when he, like Freud, succeeded in meeting the emotional needs of his mother could he bask in the glow of her adoration. And only in fleeting moments, as when Fromm observes in *Man for Himself* (1949) of "an oversolicitous, dominating mother" that "while she consciously believes that she is particularly fond of her child, she has actually a



deeply repressed hostility toward the object of her concern" (p. 131), does he represent the true state of affairs, though he was never able to connect this insight either with Freud's childhood experience or with his own.⁵

The covert personal agenda that animated Fromm's attack on Jones's "Stalinist" rewriting of history in "Psychoanalysis: Science or Party Line?" continues to be felt in *Sigmund Freud's Mission* (1959b). Critical as Fromm is of Jones's "psychological naïveté," he reserves his greatest scorn in the book for Sachs's "frankly idolizing" (p. 67) attitude toward Freud. Thus, what Schröter terms the "subterranean" current of resentment toward his training analyst, and indeed toward his entire ordeal in Berlin, in "The Social Determination of Psychoanalytic Therapy" here comes to the surface, compounded by Fromm's antipathy toward the international psychoanalytic establishment by which he had in the interim been rejected. Sachs's "symbiotic, quasi-religious attachment" to Freud, Fromm notes, which meant that he "never rebelled against or criticized" his deity, "becomes pathetically evident" (p. 72) in his memoir, *Freud: Master and Friend* (1944), when Sachs recalls the one time in his life when he deliberately did something that incurred Freud's displeasure, leaving Sachs feeling ashamed of himself for years. By the same token, when Fromm laments in the concluding chapter of *Sigmund Freud's Mission* (1959b) how psychoanalysis has been taken over by a "hierarchy" that "gains its prestige from the 'correct' interpretation of the dogma, and the power to judge who is and who is not a faithful adherent of the religion" (p. 112), his language echoes that in his final letter to Ruth Eissler, where he avers that the "main issue is just what we mean by 'basic principles' of psychoanalysis" and "how broadly or how nar-

⁵ Fromm repeats this sentence, and the one following it in which he explains that such a mother "is overconcerned not because she loves the child too much, but because she has to compensate for her lack of capacity to love him at all" (p. 131), verbatim in *The Art of Loving* (1956a, p. 61).

rowly the International Psychoanalytic Association interprets them." That Fromm's struggle against authoritarianism in psychoanalysis may ultimately have been an attempt to free himself from what Friedman (2013) terms the "emotional cage" (p. 218) into which he had been placed by his mother is not rendered less plausible by the fact that this interpretation could not have been offered by Fromm himself.

4

Whereas the second phase of Fromm's writings on psychoanalysis began with the discovery that he had been dropped from membership in the International Psychoanalytical Association, the third and final phase, conversely, is inaugurated by his participation in the founding of the International Federation of Psychoanalytic Societies, which took place in 1962. As Funk (1999b) has documented, the "strongest motive," in Fromm's view, for establishing an organization that would serve as an alternative to the IPA "was to counteract the bureaucratic attitude of the orthodox Freudians against all who did not share the libido theory" (p. 3). Ironically, however, in his 1961 paper given at a conference in Düsseldorf, "Fundamental Positions of Psychoanalysis," Fromm cautioned his dissident colleagues that "the future of psychoanalysis does not lie in new schools that have to prove that Freud was wrong" (quoted in Funk, 1999b, p. 4). On the contrary, he continued, "the future of psychoanalytic theory and therapy lies in continuing research of the unconscious psychic reality and in developing and keeping up of Freud's radical and critical thinking" (p. 4). In the abstract to his paper, Fromm was even more effusive, insisting not only that Freud "laid the foundation for psychoanalytic theory and therapy" but also that "every development of our science is an advancement of Freud's insights and not a construction of new theories which are *opposed* to Freud's" (p. 4).

Fromm here reaches a position 180 degrees from that in "The Social Determination of Psy-



choanalytic Therapy" and most of *Sigmund Freud's Mission*. No longer do we hear about Freud's authoritarianism or how "the example of Ferenczi shows ... that the Freudian attitude need not be that of all analysts." On the contrary, Fromm warns against trying "to prove that Freud was wrong" and regards "every development" in psychoanalysis as "an advancement of Freud's insights." It is as though, having been expelled from the IPA and left with no alternative but to cast in his lot with other marginal analysts, Fromm's latent "Freud piety" came to the forefront and he continued the process begun at the end of *Sigmund Freud's Mission* of shifting the blame for the totalitarian tendencies of the psychoanalytic movement away from Freud himself and onto the bureaucrats who "inherited Freud's mantle" but "little of his greatness and real radicalism."

Fromm's nearly complete repudiation in his final phase of his earlier critique of Freud enlarges one of his nascent blind spots and compounds the "distortion in his thinking." His confusion is apparent when, immediately after having decried the tendency to propose "new theories which are *opposed* to Freud's," he affirms in the abstract to "Fundamental Positions of Psychoanalysis" that "libido theory is replaced by the different forms of being related to the world; instead of the concept of sexuality (in respect to the pleasure-unpleasure principle) the male-female polarity, its satisfaction and distortion, becomes the center of attention" (qtd. in Funk, 1999b, p. 4). On the one hand, Fromm inveighs against trying to prove that Freud was wrong and against advancing theories that are opposed to his; on the other, he argues that the libido theory must be "replaced." This contradiction is compounded by the heterosexism lurking in his reference to "the male-female polarity." Although seemingly innocuous in this context, it becomes troubling when Fromm posits in *The Art of Loving* (1956a) that "the male-female polarity" is "the basis for creativity," whereas "the homosexual deviation is a failure to attain this polarized union, and thus the homosexual

suffers from the pain of never-resolved separateness" (p. 34). Were Fromm alive today, I have no doubt he would agree that his stigmatizing of homosexuality as a "deviation" from the heterosexual norm is one of the clearest instances in which the "radical and critical" energies of his own thought were constricted by his acquiescence in the prevalent cultural prejudices of his time.

The question of where to pin the blame for "the sterility of orthodox psychoanalytic thought" (p. 22) is central to Fromm's essay "The Crisis of Psychoanalysis" (1970a), which forms a bridge between *Sigmund Freud's Mission* and *Greatness and Limitations of Freud's Thought* (1980), published in the year of his death. Rather than being the symptom of a virus present from its beginnings, Fromm holds that the "main reason" for the crisis of contemporary psychoanalysis lies in its "change from a radical to a conformist theory" (p. 16). This change is laid at the doorstep of Freud's "orthodox disciples," who failed to develop his "most potent and revolutionary ideas" and chose instead to "emphasize those theories that could most easily be co-opted by the consumer society" (p. 18). Although Fromm concedes that Freud elevated to leadership positions those of his followers who possessed the "one outstanding quality" of "unquestionable loyalty to him and the movement," even though he must have realized that they lacked "the capacity for radical criticism," Fromm does not see this behavior as casting any reflection on Freud's character but simply uses it to make the point that it resulted in the taking over of psychoanalysis by "bureaucrats," whose pettiness is exemplified by the aspersions cast by Jones on Ferenczi and Rank in what Fromm acidly terms his "court biography" (p. 19) of Freud.

Thus, Fromm portrays Freud in "The Crisis of Psychoanalysis" as having been at heart a "radical thinker" whose greatest defect was his inability to transcend "the prejudices and philosophy of his historical period and class" (p. 17), while Fromm faults his sycophants for



their failure "to develop the theory by liberating its basic findings from their time-bound narrowness into a wider and more radical framework" (p. 18). The example of Ferenczi again figures prominently, but rather than dwelling, as he had in "The Social Determination of Psychoanalytic Therapy," on Ferenczi's insurmountable personal and theoretical differences with Freud, or, as he did in *Sigmund Freud's Mission*, on the "intolerance and authoritarianism" displayed by Freud in their relationship, Fromm trains his ire in an extended footnote on a "tortuous and submissive" 1958 letter by Michael Balint in the *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, where, even in attempting to set the record straight concerning Ferenczi's alleged mental illness, he treats Jones so deferentially that the missive sounds as though it "had been written in a dictatorial system in order to avoid severe consequences for freedom or life" (p. 22n10). Fromm's censure of Balint, to say nothing of Jones, is justified, but he pulls up the weed without getting at the root. It is no longer Freud but the Ruth Eisslers of the psychoanalytic world who bear the brunt of Fromm's scorn since "the analysts who submitted" in the way that Balint did to Jones "were not forced by anyone to do so" (p. 22). After all, he continues, "the worst that could have happened to them would have been expulsion from the organization, and, in fact, there were a few who took the 'bold' step without any harmful effect, except that of being stigmatized by the bureaucracy as not being psychoanalysts" (p. 22). A barely suppressed note of self-congratulation almost drowns out the throb of lingering pain in Fromm's mockery of the threat of excommunication that had been executed on him nearly two decades earlier.

The downward slide from his earlier writings on psychoanalysis that I have tracked in Fromm's Düsseldorf paper and "The Crisis of Psychoanalysis" reaches its nadir in *Greatness and Limitations of Freud's Thought* (1980). Resuming the question of how psychoanalysis betrayed its radical inspiration and became a conformist theory, Fromm again places the

blame on the "pedestrian men" who "built the movement" and "needed a dogma" in which to believe. As he summarizes, "Freud the scientist became to some extent the prisoner of Freud the leader of the movement; or to put it differently, Freud the teacher became the prisoner of his faithful, but uncreative disciples" (p. 132).⁶

By depicting Freud as the "prisoner of his disciples," Fromm forgets that his concept of the authoritarian character turns on its being a sadomasochistic structure involving "an *unconscious* dependence in which a dominant person is dependent on those who depend on him." In place of his scintillating formulation that Freud's narcissism made him "dependent on unconditional affirmation and agreement by others," so that the psychoanalytic movement became a magnified projection of his personality, Fromm substitutes a wholly undialectical view of Freud as the hapless victim of the mediocrity of his followers.

As with the blurring of his formerly keen insight that "the origin of psychoanalysis is to be sought in Freud's personality," Fromm shows himself at his least impressive in other ways in *Greatness and Limitations of Freud's Thought*. Rather than integrating the concept of social character with an analysis of what he termed in *Escape from Freedom* "the individual basis of the personality," he calls for "the transformation of individual psychology into social psychology" and claims that individual psychology can be reduced "to the knowledge of small variations brought about by the individual and idiosyncratic circumstances which influence the basic socially determined character structure" (p. 63). As I have maintained, this posture leaves Fromm with no way of explaining the vast differences between individuals who belong to the same social class, as exemplified by what he himself had at one time acknowledged to be the "fundamental"

⁶ Fromm here repeats verbatim not merely the final sentence but the entire final paragraph of the appendix to *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973, pp. 527-528).



opposition between Ferenczi's "humane, philanthropic attitude" and Freud's "deep down misanthropic 'tolerance.'"

Fromm's minimizing of the importance of attending to the uniqueness of every individual and his or her experience is reflected in his inconsistent stance toward childhood. On the one hand, he recommends in *Greatness and Limitations of Freud's Thought* that the analyst should aim "to reconstruct a picture of the character of the child when it was born in order to study which of the traits he finds in the analysand are part of the original nature and which are acquired through influential circumstances" (p. 65). From this it follows that "the roots of neurotic developments" and "a sense of false identity" most often lie in parental pressures, whereas "genuine identity rests upon an awareness of one's suchness in terms of the person one is born" (pp. 65-66). This is excellent and very much in the spirit of Winnicott. On the other hand, in criticizing Freud for his failure "to see that the human being, from earliest childhood on, lives in several circles: the narrowest one is his family, the next one is his class, the third one is the society in which he lives," while the fourth is "the biological condition of being human in which he participates" (p. 60), Fromm overlooks that the family is itself a system that can (in typical cases) be further subdivided into the dyad formed by the mother and baby and the triad formed by the mother, the father, and the growing child. For Fromm, the family is significant insofar as it "constitutes an 'agency of society' whose function it is to transmit the character of society to the infant even before it has any direct contact with society" (p. 61). This is a compelling mode of analysis, but it needs to be supplemented by a vector going in the opposite direction, from the countless interactions between, in Winnicott's (1967) words, "any one baby and the human (and therefore fallible) mother-figure who," with any luck, "is essentially adaptive because of love" (p. 100) to all the larger circles in which that primary dyad is embedded.

Fromm's remoteness from early experience has consequences for his approach to clinical work. Unlike most analysts, Fromm does not regard transference as the mainspring of the therapeutic process. Rather, he describes it in *Greatness and Limitations of Freud's Thought* (1980) as "the voluntary dependence of a person on other persons in authority" (p. 41), and hence as something to be surmounted, if not avoided altogether. As Michael Maccoby (1996) has remarked based on his years as Fromm's analyst, Fromm's "focus on feelings about the analyst in the here and now ... short-circuited the process of working through the transference feelings and their origins" (p. 77). This devaluing of the transference is connected to Fromm's (1980) abandonment of the couch because it leads to the "infantilization of the analysand" (p. 40) and to his conviction that "the more real the analyst is to the analysand and the more he loses his phantom-like character, the easier it is for the analysand to give up the posture of helplessness and to cope with reality" (p. 43). Fromm here departs entirely from Winnicott's (1955) conviction that deeply disturbed patients must be permitted to undergo a "regression to dependence" in which the analyst temporarily takes over the functions of the ego so that their primitive anxieties can be accessed, just as he departs from Ferenczi's belief that the analyst must be prepared to enter into the patient's reliving of past traumas. Rejecting the principle that the analyst should strive to be as unobtrusive as possible with patients in a regressed state, which means assuming a "phantomlike character," Fromm urges the analyst to become "more real" in order to induce the analysand to renounce the "posture of helplessness" and "cope with reality" in a mature fashion.

Although my critique of Fromm for neglecting childhood experience is directed primarily at the work of his final period, it points up a weakness that dates back to *Escape from Freedom* (1941). There, Fromm defines "the ties that connect the child with its mother" as "primary ties," and he argues that they "im-



ply a lack of individuality but they also give security and orientation to the individual" (p. 40). Fromm compares this bond to that of "the medieval man with the Church and his social caste," and it leads him to celebrate achieving "the stage of complete individuation" in which "the individual is free from these primary ties" and "confronted with a new task: to orient and root himself in the world and to find security in other ways than those which were characteristic of his preindividualistic existence" (p. 40). For Fromm, any attempt to "reverse, psychologically, the process of individuation" is no less futile than it would be for the child to aim to "return to the mother's womb physically," and all such retreats before the challenge of freedom "necessarily assume the character of submission, in which the basic contradiction between the authority and the child who submits to it is never eliminated" (p. 45).

The difficulties with Fromm's conceptual framework have been articulated by Mauricio Cortina (1996) from the standpoint of attachment theory. Not only, as Cortina observes, did Fromm, like Margaret Mahler, rely on the assumption that "the roots of human development could be traced to a primitive undifferentiated infant-mother bond" (p. 109), but this dubious premise led him to suppose that the only way to achieve "individuation and growth" was "by severing the symbiotic ties to primary caregivers," which "creates a false dichotomy by conceptualizing development as a choice between progressive and regressive solutions" (p. 94). Instead of appreciating that secure attachments foster independence and autonomy, so that to live a productive and fulfilled life requires the cultivation rather than the sundering of these "primary ties," Fromm saw all forms of dependence as inherently regressive. As Cortina (2015) elaborates in a subsequent paper, he therefore could not provide either his patients or his readers "with an empathic understanding of the developmental pathways that derailed their ability to develop loving relations, or explain why they became anxiously attached or panicked about being abandoned" (pp. 411-412).

Fromm's negative view of early attachments as inimical to individuation is the counterpart to his depiction of maternal love and admiration as "by definition unconditional." Once again, there may well be grounds for connecting these blind spots to an unanalyzed imperative felt by Fromm to extricate himself from his own oppressive "primary ties" to his mother. Like Nicodemus, Fromm asks literal-mindedly, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" (John 3:4). To this, Ferenczi and Groddeck, Winnicott and Balint, would all respond by proclaiming that only by allowing for a symbolic regression to the state of "preindividualistic existence" is it possible for once-broken souls to achieve a rebirth through psychoanalysis.

5

Following Fromm's lead, I have sought in this "literary psychoanalysis" to distinguish "what is essential and lasting" from "what is time-conditioned and socially contingent" (1980, p. 22) in his writings on Freud, but with the proviso that we must be prepared to look for personal as well as social causes for his blind spots. While noting the decline that becomes evident as he moves further from his original sources of inspiration in Ferenczi and Groddeck, my focus has been on Fromm's superlative analysis of Freud's authoritarian character in his 1935 essay, "The Social Determination of Psychoanalytic Therapy," as well as in his rebuttals of Jones first in "Psychoanalysis: Science or Party Line?" and then in *Sigmund Freud's Mission*. More than any other analyst of his era, Fromm not only dissected the politics of the psychoanalytic movement on the plane of theory but he exemplified in his life what it means to be an independent psychoanalyst, and even if he had done nothing else these feats alone would be enough to make him indispensable to future generations of psychoanalysts.

But the task of disentangling "what is essential and lasting" in human nature from what is



"time-conditioned and socially contingent" is likewise central to Fromm's commitment to radical humanism. His overarching aim throughout all the phases of his thought may be defined as one of exposing false universals, as when Freud imports the "bourgeois norm" into his theoretical constructs and clinical practice, so that these may be discarded and replaced with true universals, which in turn furnish a touchstone by which we may recognize what is alienated and pathological. It is characteristic of Fromm's genius that he should have advanced this argument on two distinct but converging fronts. The first is philosophical and derives from his allegiance to Marxism. As he writes in "Marx's Contribution to the Knowledge of Man" (1968a), whereas "modern academic and experimental psychology" studies "alienated man" with "alienated and alienating methods," "Marx's psychology, being based on the full awareness of the fact of alienation, was able to transcend this type of approach because it did not take the alienated man for the natural man, for man as such" (p. 63). Like Freud, Fromm continues, Marx views man as motivated by "passions or drives," of which he is "largely unaware," though unlike Freud's "model of an isolated *homme machine*," Marx starts with a recognition of "the primacy of man's *relatedness* to the world, to man, and to nature" (p. 64). Although only implicit in *Man for Himself* (1949), Marx's philosophical anthropology provides the foundation for Fromm's eloquent defense in that work of "the validity of humanistic ethics" and for his insistence that "our knowledge of human nature does not lead to ethical relativism" but rather "to the conviction that the sources of norms for ethical conduct are to be found in man's nature itself" (p. 7). Integral to Fromm's case is the conviction that the source of morality lies in "the character structure of the mature and integrated personality," so that neither "self-renunciation nor selfishness but self-love, not the negation of the individual but the affirmation of his truly human self, are the supreme values of humanistic ethics" (p. 7).

A corollary to Fromm's powerful and persuasive argument is that "by necessity the criteria in authoritarian ethics are fundamentally different from those in humanistic ethics" (p. 8). This dichotomy, which at one time he would have equated with the choice between Freud and Ferenczi, makes Fromm truly the George Orwell of psychoanalysis, not only because of his courage but because Orwell (1947) took a virtually identical stand in affirming that all of his writing since the Spanish civil war had been aimed "directly or indirectly, *against* totalitarianism and *for* democratic socialism," and that "it is simply a question of which side one takes and what approach one follows" (p. 318). Indeed, there could be no better distillation of Fromm's entire body of work than Orwell's (1944) reflection that "the connection between sadism, masochism, success-worship, power-worship, nationalism and totalitarianism is a huge subject whose edges have barely been scratched" (p. 151), though had Orwell read *Escape from Freedom* (1941), where Fromm calls for "the elimination of the secret rule" of the oligarchs and its replacement by "democratic socialism" (p. 299), he might have been moved to acknowledge that Fromm had not merely "scratched the edges" of this "huge subject" but had explored it in great depth.

Both Fromm and Orwell understood that the conflict between authoritarianism and humanism is not merely an academic exercise but one in which the future of the human race and life on this planet is at stake. Just as Fromm was prepared to wager that "our knowledge of human nature does not lead to ethical relativism," so, too, Orwell (1943) took up the cudgels against "the abandonment of the idea that history *could* be truthfully written" – a dangerous trend he presciently detected in twentieth-century thought that became enshrined in postmodernism – and warned that "it is just this common basis of agreement, with its implications that human beings are all one species of animal, that totalitarianism destroys" (pp. 204-205). In view of their far-reaching affinity, it is fitting that Fromm (1961) should have written an afterword to *1984* in which he



hailed Orwell for "brilliantly and imaginatively" unmasking "the illusion of the assumption that democracy can continue to exist in a world preparing for nuclear war" (p. 282), as well as for showing that "in a system in which the concept of truth as an objective judgment concerning reality is abolished" we are left in a fog of "doublethink" where "the person is no longer saying the opposite of what he thinks, but he thinks the opposite of what is true" (pp. 264-265) – a perfect description of the mind of Donald Trump. It is thus not surprising to learn that, in imparting to Gérard Khoury (2009) "his conviction that ideas are strong enough to move mountains, even though they may seem helplessly far from daily life concerns," Fromm should have exhorted him "to follow a very large reading program spanning writers from pre-Socratic philosophers to George Orwell" (p. 165).

But as Orwell's observation that "human beings are all one species of animal" makes plain, the claim that there is such a thing as human nature does not depend solely on philosophy, and in Fromm's later work his advocacy of radical humanism is increasingly grounded in natural science. This is nowhere more evident than in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973) where Fromm sets out to answer the questions, "What is man's nature? What is it by virtue of which he is man?," but instead of going down the path of "metaphysical speculations, like those of Heidegger and Sartre," he proposes to "shift the principle of explanation of human passions ... to a *sociobiological* and historical principle" and thereby to demonstrate that "the essence of each individual is identical with the existence of the species" (p. 27). As he elaborates later in his treatise, it is "precisely from an evolutionary standpoint" that he seeks to resuscitate the traditional belief that "there is something called human nature, something that constitutes the essence of man," and "the main argument in favor of the assumption of the existence of a human nature is that we can define the essence of *Homo sapiens* in morphological, anatomical, physiological, and neuro-

logical terms," from which it follows, "unless we regress to a view that considers mind and body as separate realms, that the species man must be definable mentally as well as physically" (pp. 247-248).

It is impossible to contemplate Fromm's endorsement of a "sociobiological explanation" of human nature without being reminded of Edward O. Wilson's *Sociobiology: A New Synthesis* (1975), just as Fromm's use of the term "biophilia" (p. 406) in the *Anatomy* (1973) foreshadows Wilson's (1984) book of that title.⁷

Indeed, in undertaking to define the "essence of man" from an "evolutionary standpoint," Fromm has the same lofty aim as does the great biologist in *On Human Nature* (1978), in which Wilson defines his program as "the uncompromising application of evolutionary theory to all aspects of human existence" (p. x). Regrettably, however, in chastising Fromm for his idiosyncratic reliance on Freud's concept of the death instinct, Wilson mistakenly describes him as subscribing to "an even more pessimistic view" (p. 101) of man than Korard Lorenz, and he nowhere acknowledges that Fromm has not merely predicted the main lines of his argument but coined two of his signature ideas.

In *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973), Fromm completes his intellectual odyssey from philosophical anthropology to sociobiology. Of all his works it is the most undeservedly "forgotten" and consequently most in need of being rediscovered by a new generation of readers. Fromm's achievement is even more astounding when one recognizes that, like *Escape from Freedom*, it is merely the torso of an even more ambitious project that he was never able to bring to completion. Com-

⁷ See also *The Revision of Psychoanalysis* (1992c), where Fromm rejects the "false dichotomy" according to which his work has been classified "as 'culturally' rather than 'biologically' oriented," and maintains, "My approach has always been a sociobiological one" (p. 4).



plementing Fromm's meticulously detailed scholarship in an extraordinary array of fields, from ethology and paleontology to modern history, is the methodological rigor that leads him to recognize an obligation "to check my conclusions with the main data from other fields to make certain that my hypotheses did not contradict them and to determine whether, as was my hope, they confirmed my hypothesis" (p. 15). This is the proper scientific method in the service of a work of social science, and in making such a commitment Fromm is the antithesis to Freud, who displayed his hubris by choosing to disregard the findings from neighboring disciplines whenever the evidence proved incompatible with his articles of psychoanalytic faith. Just as Fromm was a sociobiologist before Wilson, he again displayed his prescience when he took it upon himself to investigate "the relationship of psychology, the science of the mind, to neuroscience, the sciences of the brain" (p. 112), and thereby anticipated the emergence of the contemporary discipline of neuropsychology.

Any doubt that psychoanalysis formed the core of Fromm's professional identity and his intellectual foundation must be dispelled by *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973). Unlike Wilson, Fromm insists that his brand of sociobiology "is based on the theory of psychoanalysis," though he uses the term to refer not to the "classic theory" of Freud but rather to "a certain revision of it" that dispenses with the "libido theory" (p. 28). Just as Fromm showed himself to be a gifted polemicist in his ripostes to Jones, as well as in his recurring jousts (1955; 1956b; 1970a, pp. 26-31; 1992a) with Herbert Marcuse, so, too, he opens his argument for a psychoanalytic understanding of the distinction between benign and malignant aggression with a refutation of both the "neoinstinctivism" of Lorenz and the behaviorism of B. F. Skinner. In addition to expressing his solidarity with Adolf Meyer, Sullivan, Fromm-Reichmann, and Theodore Lidz on the American side, while criticizing Horney for using "somewhat superficial categories" (1973, p. 110), Fromm explicitly aligns himself

with the British school of object relations theory. Not only does he couple Bowlby in a footnote with Ferenczi (who is here mentioned for the only time in the book) as one of the "few analysts" who have gone beyond Freud's "old concept" of the Oedipus complex and "seen the real nature of the fixation to the mother" (p. 261n10; see also p. 237n21 and p. 522n34), but he also invokes "the names of Winnicott, Fairbairn, Balint, and Guntrip," as well as of R. D. Laing, as kindred spirits who have joined him in transforming psychoanalysis "from a theory and therapy of instinctual frustration and control into a 'theory and therapy that encourages the rebirth and growth of an authentic self within an authentic relationship'" (p. 110).

The latter part of the preceding sentence is a quotation from Harry Guntrip's paper, "The Promise of Psychoanalysis" (1971), published two years earlier in a Festschrift for Fromm edited by Landis and Tauber, and it appears to be thanks to Guntrip that Fromm became aware of his affinity with the analysts of the British school, though (apart from his critique of Balint's fecklessness) he gives no sign of ever having read any of them with the exception of Bowlby. After hailing Fromm for having made "the most trenchant criticisms of instinct theory in order to widen the purview of psychoanalysis" (p. 48), Guntrip credits him with understanding that "it is when the parents inhibit the child's development and thwart his growth so that the child is unable to stand on his own feet" (p. 49) that the most basic issues of living arise.

Accordingly, Guntrip defines the aim of psychoanalytic therapy as "the liberation of the person from the emotional traumata of the past and the development of his creative potentials," which means that "the analytic work and the analytic relationship must set about to repair the damage done by past faulty relationships day by day, often from the very beginning" (p. 49). For this to occur what is required is "not the patient's 'reparation' for his destructive impulses," as Melanie Klein would



have it, but rather "the analyst's 'repairing' the mother's failure to give basic ego support" (p. 54).

By situating Fromm in the context of object relations theory, Guntrip brings out the full "creative potentials" of his thought. In light of the emphasis placed by contemporary analysts on "man's struggle to *be* himself," Guntrip insists that this concern is indeed the "business of science," so that the "real question" becomes, "not 'Is psychoanalysis a science?' but 'What kind of science is it?'" (p. 46). Guntrip answers his own question by invoking Peter B. Medawar's "account of the scientific method and the hierarchical structure of knowledge," in which knowledge is compared to a multi-storied building where "the ground floor is physics and chemistry, the successive tiers rising above it are physiology, neurology and biology, then sociology," with "psychology as the topmost tier" and "the study of 'personal mind' as the highest phenomenon of which we know" (p. 48). Quoting Medawar's caution that "'in each plane or tier in the hierarchy of science new notions or or ideas seem to emerge that are inexplicable in the language or with the conceptual resources of the tier below,'" so that "'we cannot 'interpret' sociology in terms of biology, or biology in terms of physics,'" Guntrip appends the proviso – "nor, we must add, psychology in terms of any lower-tier science" (p. 48).⁸

Had "this view of scientific theory" been "available to Freud," Guntrip imagines, he might have been able to jettison his model of sex and aggression as governed by "drive control apparatuses" in favor of a study "of whole persons in intensely personal relationships," such as "it fell to Erich Fromm" to undertake and that lends credence to "a more affirmative view of man than the pessimistic one of classical Freudian theory" (p. 48).

Just as Guntrip reveals Fromm to have been an

object relations psychoanalyst, Fromm (1973), conversely, echoes Guntrip in recognizing that "not only the neurosciences but many other fields need to be integrated to create a *science of man*," which concerns itself with "man as a total biologically and historically evolving human being who can be understood only if we see the interconnectedness between all his aspects, if we look at him as a process within a complex system with many subsystems" (p. 115n3). Having confessed at the outset of this paper how uncanny it was for me to discover that Fromm had anticipated so many of the directions I had taken in my own work, including my collocation of Rank, Ferenczi, and Groddeck as the initiators of the relational turn in psychoanalysis, I am once again startled in closing to see my own image mirrored in the arguments that psychoanalysis holds out the promise of being a comprehensive "*science of man*" ranging from the "ground floor" of physics and chemistry to the irreducible subjectivity of hermeneutics. For it was just such a conception of "the hierarchical structure of knowledge" that I set forth in "Psychoanalysis and the Dream of Consilience," the last chapter of my book *Reading Psychoanalysis* (Rudnytsky, 2002), where I took the term "consilience" from Wilson's (1998) sublime blueprint of the "unity of knowledge," though I had no inkling at the time that what I thought was solely my dream had previously been dreamt by Guntrip and Fromm.

As announced by his title "The Promise of Psychoanalysis," Guntrip (1971) seeks to dispel the rumors of the death of psychoanalysis, which have not abated in the intervening decades, and instead to persuade his readers that "a psychoanalysis which is closely related to the realities of everyday living, that penetrates to the depths of suffering beings, has nothing to fear for the future and will flourish" (p. 45). Sharing Guntrip's optimism, I hope to have made it clear why I believe that the rehabilitation of Erich Fromm – the analyst of the authoritarian character, the spokesman for radical humanism, and my fellow dreamer of consilience – is indispensable to this renewal of

⁸ Guntrip's quotation is taken from Medawar's *Induction and Intuition in Scientific Thought* (1969), with no page numbers given.



the promise of our field. And what could be more fitting than that this once marginalized and "forgotten" giant, has, with the support of the Karl Schlecht Foundation, at last found an institutional home at the International Psychoanalytic University in Berlin, the city where he first became a psychoanalyst?

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