



Part I:

The Socio-Psychological Insights and Philosophical-Anthropological Ideas of Erich Fromm

1. Social Psychology

The Questioning of Freud's Concept of Man

*The Molding of Man by Socioeconomic Conditions:
The Sociopsychological Method*

Erich Fromm has no doubts on this matter: Sigmund Freud „is the founder of a truly scientific psychology, and his discovery of unconscious processes and of the dynamic nature of character traits is a unique contribution to the science of man which has altered the picture of man for all time to come.“¹ Yet Freud's psychoanalysis is just a „contribution“ to the science of man, and Fromm's critique of Freud relates precisely to Freud's claim that he can define man scientifically, which here means psychoanalytically.

For „as the motor of human behavior, [psychoanalysis] has shown drives and needs which are fed by physiologically anchored 'drives' which are themselves not directly observable.“² Initially,

Freud had postulated two groups of drives: self-preservation and sexual drives.³ The latter are fed by the energy inherent in them, the libido, which is of a relatively constant quality. „This libido causes painful tension, which is reduced only by the act of physical release; to this liberation from painful tension Freud gave the name of 'pleasure.' ... This dynamism which leads from tension to release of tension to renewed tension, from pain to pleasure to pain, Freud called the 'pleasure principle.'“⁴ This principle is so central to man that it essentially defines him, which means that man fundamentally tends toward the maximal pleasurable release of tensions. According to Freud, man develops his social nature, his culture, his religion and science, only secondarily and {014} modificatorily--that is, by way of reaction formation or sublimation. This occurs in partnership with the „reality principle,“ which opposes the individual's pleasure principle and embodies the demands of reality and society, insisting on the renunciation or postponement of pleasure so that greater displeasure may be avoided

¹ E. Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion* (1962a), p. 12. For the perspective of psychoanalysts on Fromm's reception and critique of Freud, see especially the studies by R. G. Mandolini Guardo, *De Freud a Fromm, Historia generale del Psiconalisis*, pp. 418-466; D. Wyss, *Die tiefenpsychologischen Schulen von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, pp. 188-195; E. Wiesenhütter, *Freud und seine Kritiker*, pp. 53-58; F. Heigl, *Die humanistische Psychoanalyse Erich Fromms*.

² E. Fromm, „Über Methode and Aufgabe einer analytischen Sozialpsychologie“ (1932a), p. 28.

³ Though Freud later developed a different polarity of drives, namely, Eros and Destrudo, this change in his doctrine of drives can be ignored for the purposes of our discussion here. But see the discussion on the death instinct on p. 49f.

⁴ E. Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion* (1962a), pp. 31f. See also Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973a), pp. 443-445.



or greater future pleasure gained.⁵ If these two principles cannot be brought into a tolerable equilibrium, neurotic or psychotic phenomena result. „The active and passive adaptation of biological facts, the drives, to social facts is the core concept of psychoanalysis.”⁶

In a number of ways, Freud failed to develop this insight. While it is true that in his late works⁷ he deals more intensively with the social conditions that generate the psychic structure and development, he continues to view man as a self-sufficient individual who is governed by the pleasure principle and limited and modified by the reality principle.

Erich Fromm's first objection to this understanding of man is addressed to Freud's nonchalant acceptance of society's structure and demands as givens.⁸ Fromm proposes to follow Karl Marx in examining social structure as determined by economic factors. If such a determination of social structure is discoverable, it must be asked whether psychic structure is not also shaped by socio-economic conditions through the family as the „psychological agency of society.”⁹ If so, socio-economic conditions rather than libidinous energy have the primary shaping influence. In that case, it would not be the structure of drives that determines man's nature and behavior; instead, „in the interplay of interacting psychic drives and economic conditions, the latter have primacy.”¹⁰ In connection with the

elaboration of his sociopsychological method, Fromm posits this dominance of the „socioeconomic” structure over the libidinous structure of drives. Viewed superficially, this method represents a fusion of Marxist social theory and Freudian psychoanalysis; concretely, it involves the application of psychoanalytic insights to social phenomena. In contrast to Sigmund Freud, Theodore Reik, and others who view social entities as structured by psychic mechanisms and laws that resemble those at work in the individual, and who analyze the psychic structure of social entities in analogy to the structural regularities of the individual psyche, Fromm maintains that the psychic structure of {015} social entities must be understood through their social structure—that is, through their „socioeconomic” situation.¹¹ The difference thus does not lie in the psychoanalytic method itself but in the absence of a sociological starting point, a lack that subsequently becomes methodologically relevant. It is in his reinterpretation of the Oedipus complex that Fromm's different understanding of the psychic structure of social entities becomes apparent.¹²

In Freud's psychology, the phase of the Oedipus complex is of central importance to a successful maturation process. The male child develops sexual desires for his mother, which simultaneously occasion hatred of the father as rival and avenger. This phase must be passed through if further psychological maturation—the rise of the superego, the development of guilt feelings and of conscience, the ca-

⁵ See E. Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion* (1962a), pp. 31f; and Fromm, „Über Methode und Aufgabe einer analytischen Sozialpsychologie (1932a), p. 29.

⁶ „Über Methode und Aufgabe,” (1932a), p. 31.

⁷ See especially *The Future of an Illusion and Civilization and Its Discontents*.

⁸ It is only toward contemporary sexual morality that Freud's position is truly critical. See E. Fromm, „The Human Implications of Instinctivistic 'Radicalism' ” (1955b), esp. p. 344.

⁹ See especially E. Fromm, „Sozialpsychologischer Teil” (1936a), pp. 88f; and Fromm, „Über Methode und Aufgabe einer analytischen Sozialpsychologie” (1932a), pp. 35f.

¹⁰ „Über Methode und Aufgabe,” (1932a), p. 39.

¹¹ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 37f.

¹² On the following, see E. Fromm, „Oedipus in Innsbruck” (1930d); Fromm, „Introduction,” in P. Mullahy, *Oedipus: Myth and Complex* (1948a); and the writings of P. Mullahy; E. Fromm, „The Oedipus Complex and the Oedipus Myth” (1949b); *The Forgotten Language* (1951a), pp. 196-231; R. de la Fuente-Muniz, „Fromm's Approach to the Study of Personality,” pp. 13f; E. Fromm, *Sigmund Freud's Mission* (1959a), pp. 10-18; M. Birnbach, *Neo-Freudian Social Philosophy*, pp. 46-48; E. Fromm et al., „The Oedipus Complex: Comments in 'The Case of Little Hans' ” (1966k); E. Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human destructiveness* (1973a), pp. 358-365.



capacity for genuine love, and so on--is to occur. Neurotic symptoms in later life are essentially traceable to an unsuccessfully negotiated oedipal phase.

Fromm raises the following objection to this Freudian view: „The absolutizing of the Oedipus complex led Freud to base the whole development of mankind on the mechanism of father hatred and the resultant reactions,¹³ without any regard for the material living conditions of the group under study.“¹⁴ Such regard for „material living conditions“ was made possible by Johann Jakob Bachofen’s investigations of matriarchy.¹⁵ Viewing Greek mythology and religion as the expression of a shift from a matriarchally to a patriarchally organized and defined social structure and religion, Fromm¹⁶ interprets the Oedipus myth as an element of the entire trilogy (*Oedipus Rex*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Antigone*), „as a symbol not of the incestuous love between mother and son but as the rebellion of the son against the authority of the father in the patriarchal family.“¹⁷ Comparative research in cultural anthropology¹⁸ confirms Fromm’s interpretation in the sense that it shows that the Oedipus complex in psychic development is an important element only in clearly patriarchal social structures, where it is primarily the expression of an authority conflict and only secondarily a sexual, incestuous

fixation.

Fromm’s reinterpretation of the Oedipus complex suggests not only that Freud interpreted his phylogenetic knowledge incorrectly, but also that he was mistaken in his ontogenetic interpretation of the Oedipal phase in the child. While the sexual, incestuous {016} fixation of the child often plays a significant role, the element that produces the Oedipus complex is actually the conflict between the father’s demand that he be obeyed and the contrary interests of the son, a conflict that is provoked by the patriarchal social structure.¹⁹ More importantly, here, Fromm’s insights make clear that both the psychic structure of the individual and that of social entities is properly grasped only when seen against the background of social structure (which here means the effect of influences that prevail in a matriarchal or a patriarchal society).²⁰

¹³ Cf. S. Freud, *Totem and Tabu*.

¹⁴ E. Fromm, „Über Methode and Aufgabe einer analytischen Sozialpsychologie“ (1932a), p. 38.

¹⁵ J. J. Bachofen, *Mother Right*. Cf. the studies by L. H. Morgan, *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity, and Ancient Society*; R. Briffault, *The Mothers*. See also E. Fromm, „Robert Briffaults Werk über das Mutterrecht“ (1933a); „Die sozialpsychologische Bedeutung der Mutterrechtstheorie“ (1934a); „The Significance of the Theory of Mother Right for Today“ (1970f); A. Turel, *Bachofen-Freud. Zur Emanzipation des Mannes vom Reich der Mütter*. On the history of the influence of Bachofen’s *Mother Right*, see H: J. Heinrichs, ed., *Materialien zu Bachofens ‘Das Mutterrecht.’*

¹⁶ Extensively in E. Fromm, „The Oedipus Complex and the Oedipus Myth“ (1949b).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

¹⁸ By Bronislaw Malinowski, Ruth Benedict, and Margaret Mead, for example.

¹⁹ In his „Die sozialpsychologische Bedeutung der Mutterrechtstheorie“ (1934a), p. 221, Fromm writes as follows: „The patricentric type is characterized by a complex in which a rigorous superego, guilt feelings, docile love toward paternal authority, the desire to dominate weaker individuals, the acceptance of suffering as punishment for one’s own feelings and an incapacity for happiness are dominant. The matricentric complex, on the other hand, is characterized by a feeling of optimistic confidence in an unconditional maternal love, minor guilt feelings, reduced strength of the superego and greater capacity for happiness and pleasure. At the same time, the development of the motherly qualities of compassion and love for the weaker and those in need of help is seen as an ideal.“

²⁰ On Fromm’s critique of Sigmund Freud’s ontogenetic interpretation of the Oedipus complex, see E. Fromm, „The Oedipus Complex and the Oedipus Myth“ (1949b), pp. 356-358; and P. Mullahy, *Oedipus Myth and Complex*, p. 277f. This view of Fromm’s has important consequences for therapy. In „The Oedipus Complex and the Oedipus Myth“ (1949b), p. 358, Fromm emphasizes: „While Freud assumes that the conflict arising from the child’s incestuous strivings is rooted in his nature and thus unavoidable, we believe that in a cultural situation in which respect for the integrity of every individual-hence of every child-is realized the Oedipus complex will belong to the past.“ There is a further consequence for self-understanding



For the analysis of social phenomena, this leads to the following sociopsychological method: „the phenomena of social psychology can be understood as processes involving the active and passive adaptation of the instinctual apparatus to the socio-economic situation. In certain fundamental respects, the instinctual apparatus itself is a biological given; but it is highly modifiable. The role of primary formative factor goes to the economic conditions. The family is the essential medium through which the economic situation exerts its formative influence on the individual's psyche. The task of social psychology is to explain the shared, socially relevant, psychic attitudes and ideologies--and their unconscious roots in particular--in terms of the influence of economic conditions on libido strivings.”²¹

If economic conditions are the primary shaping factors, a view of psychic facts that differs from Freud's must result. Fromm shows „that a psychological agency like the super ego and the ego, a mechanism such as repression or sado-masochistic impulses which condition man's feelings, thinking and acting decisively are not 'natural' things but are ultimately conditioned in part by man's existence, the mode of production and the social structure resulting from it.”²²

The Shaping of Man by His Relation to the World: The Formation of Character

Fromm elaborated his thesis that psychic agencies, mechanisms, and structures are shaped by socio-economic conditions in the doctrine of the genesis of character. According to Fromm, character is not formed by the phases of libidinal development but

and the reciprocal attribution of sexual roles by man and woman. On, this matter, see Rainer Funk's essay „Der Fluch, kein Mann zu sein, Psychoanalyse im Widerstreit,” which states Fromm's views.

²¹ E. Fromm, „Ober Methode and Aufgabe einer analytischen Sozialpsychologie“ (1932a), pp. 39f.

²² E. Fromm, „Sozialpsychologischer Teil“ (1936a), p. 92.

is a psychic entity that is created by the various ways in which man relates to the world. From a formal point of view, what is involved here is the opposition between Freud's biologically and Fromm's {017} sociologically oriented characterology. Both believe „that character traits underlie behavior and must be inferred from it.”²³ Both also agree „that the fundamental entity in character is not the single character trait but the total organization from which a number of single character traits follow.”²⁴

But in their understanding of the genesis of character Freud and Fromm decisively differ. Freud's theory of character is based on two observations.²⁵ He notes that character traits are relatively constant passionate strivings that cannot simply be abandoned as learned forms of behavior may be. He also became convinced that all innate passions except the drive for self-preservation have their roots in sexual and libidinous desires.²⁶ Freud's libido theory combines these two observations and „explained various character traits as sublimation of (or reaction formation against) the various kinds of pre-genital libido.”²⁷ The libido was assumed to de-

²³ E. Fromm, *Man for Himself* (1947a), p. 57.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ On the following, cf. especially E. Fromm, „Psychoanalytic Characterology and Its Application to the Understanding of Culture,” (1949c).

²⁶ Cf. Fromm, „Psychoanalytic Characterology and Its Application to the Understanding of Culture“ (1949c), pp. 81f.; *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973a), pp. 79f.

²⁷ Cf. E. Fromm, „Psychoanalytic Characterology“ (1949c), p. 82. See also C. Thompson, *Die Psychoanalyse*, pp. 76f: „According to Freud, three things can happen to the libido during the formation of the character. Part of the libido which persists in a pregenital phase may remain unchanged throughout the entire life of the adult. The result of such a process was referred to as a perversion and not considered a genuine character development. The other two possibilities are the development of reaction formations against the drive and the sublimation of the drive. These two latter are responsible for the character and it was assumed that this was the way human beings mature.



velop from primitive pre-genital forms to the mature genital orientation and the various character orientations were explained as outcomes of those different phases of libido development."²⁸

Freud makes the most extensive use of this theory in his analysis of the anal character, which he describes as „pedantic, parsimonious and stubborn.“ It appears when the anal phase of libidinal development is beset by special difficulties in what is referred to as toilet training.²⁹ Traits such as parsimony, punctuality, orderliness, and stubbornness are not chance qualities but are anchored in the specific instinctual structure of the individual as it developed during the anal phase.³⁰ In corresponding fashion, traits that typically relate to other phases of libidinal development can also be determined.

Fromm elaborates a wholly different perspective. For him, the development of character is not tied primarily to libidinal development, its sublimations, and reaction formations. Nor does he subscribe to the causal relation between erogenous zones (mouth, anus, genitals) and a given character structure that the Freudian theory postulates.³¹ Character is not formed by the various phases of libido development but rather by the various ways man relates to his world: „(1) by acquiring and assimilating things, and (2) by relating himself to people (and himself).“³² The first, Fromm calls the process of assimilation; the second, the process of socialization.³³

Fromm's comments on the sociopsychological

Since man was considered to be primarily a creature of the libido, it was only by way of reaction formation and sublimation that he would become a social being.“

²⁸ E. Fromm, „Psychoanalytic Characterology and Its Application to the Understanding of Culture“ (1949c), p. 82.

²⁹ Cf. C. Thompson, *Die Psychoanalyse*, p. 78.

³⁰ Cf. E. Fromm, „Sozialpsychologischer Teil“ (1936a), pp. 113-115.

³¹ Cf. E. Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (1941 a), p. 291.

³² E. Fromm, *Man for Himself* (1947a), p. 58.

³³ Ibid.

method show that {018} he developed this important new approach because he ascribed primary influence to socioeconomic conditions rather than to libidinous strivings.³⁴ The critique of Freud's image of man that this fundamental decision entails makes Fromm's new approach to the understanding of the genesis of character appear as no more than a logical consequence: „Freud's essential principle is to look upon man as an entity, a closed system endowed by nature with certain physiologically conditioned drives, and to interpret the development of his character as a reaction to satisfactions and frustrations of these drives; whereas, in our opinion, the fundamental approach to human personality is the understanding of man's relation to the world, to others, to nature, and to himself. We believe that man is *primarily* a social being and not, as Freud assumes, primarily self-sufficient and only secondarily in need of others in order to satisfy his instinctual needs. In this sense, we believe that individual psychology is fundamentally social psychology or, in Sullivan's terms, the psychology of interpersonal relationships; the key problem of psychology is that of the particular kind of relatedness of the individual toward the world, not that of satisfaction or frustration of single instinctual desires. The problem of what happens to man's instinctual desires has to be understood as one part of the total problem of his relationship toward the world and not as *the* problem of human personality. Therefore, in our approach, the needs and desires that center about the individual's relations to others, such as love, hatred, tenderness, symbiosis, are the fundamental psychological phenomena, while with Freud they are only secondary results from frustrations or satisfactions of instinctive needs.“³⁵

³⁴ See p. 14f.

³⁵ E. Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (1941a), p. 290. The connection between character traits and erogenous zones during the development of the libido that Freud observed is not rejected by Fromm. Such a connection does, in fact, exist, but it is not causal: character traits are the expression of the character orientation that was acquired through assimilation and socialization. Cf. E. Fromm and R. I. Evans, *Dialogue*



For this reason, Fromm defines character as „the (relatively permanent) form in which human energy³⁶ is canalized in the process of assimilation and socialization.“³⁷

The „social character“ as mediation between the socioeconomic structure and the ideas and ideals that prevail in a society

If it is true that man's character is formed by socio-economic conditions, it must be asked in what „medium“ the mediation {019} between socioeconomic conditions and psychic and intellectual phenomena takes place.

Fromm received the initial impetus toward the solution of this question from Marx's distinction between the „constant drives“ (the sexual drive and hunger fall into this category) whose form and direction, though nothing else, social conditions can change, and the „relative drives“ or „desires“ that owe their origin to a particular type of social organization.³⁸ „Here Marx already linked the relative appetites with social structure and conditions of

with Erich Fromm (1966f), pp. 3f; C. Thompson, *Die Psychoanalyse*, p. 84; more extensively in E. Fromm, „Sex and Character“ (1948b), pp. 47-58.

³⁶ Here Fromm deliberately avoids the concept „libidinal forces,“ which he used in his early writings and took over from Freud, because he wants to make it clear that his understanding of character has nothing to do with Freud's libido theory. The concept „human energy“ becomes „psychic energy“ shortly after this quotation, and thus comes close to what C. G. Jung meant by „psychic energy.“ In a note to the translation of his essay „Über Methode and Aufgabe einer analytischen Sozialpsychologie“ in *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis* (1970a), Fromm uses the term „passionate forces“ rather than „libidinal forces.

³⁷ E. Fromm, *The Heart of Man* (1964a), p. 59; cf. *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973a), p. 226: „Character is the relatively permanent system of all noninstinctual strivings through which man relates himself to the human and natural world.“

³⁸ Cf. E. Fromm, „Marx's Contribution to the Knowledge of Man“ (1968h), p. 65.

production, and communication, and thus laid the foundation for a dynamic psychology which understands most human appetites--and that means a large part of human motivation--as being determined by the process of production.“³⁹

Only the sociopsychological method, which gains an insight into the instinctual structure of a group because it has a precise knowledge of the fate of this group, can discover such a shaping influence and make it accessible to scientific formulation.⁴⁰ „The value of social-psychological investigation, therefore, cannot lie in the fact that we acquire from it a full insight into the psychic peculiarities of the individual members, but only in the fact that we can establish those common psychic tendencies that play a decisive role in their social development.“⁴¹

As long as Fromm subscribed to Freud's libido theory, he usually referred to these tendencies or „certain psychic attitudes common to members of a group“⁴² as „libidinal structure“: „The libidinal

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ The concept „structure of drives“ here still has the same meaning it has in Freud's libido theory.

⁴¹ E. Fromm, „Die Entwicklung des Christusdogmas“ (1930a), is quoted here from the reprint in (*The Dogma of Christ and Other Essays* [1963a]). In this, his first sociopsychological work, Fromm attempts to understand the „ideas and ideologies,“ by which he means belief in Christ up to the Nicene Creed, by looking at men and their social and economic conditions and not by interpreting men by their „ideas and ideologies.“ In contrast to all previous attempts (such as T. Reik's *Dogma und Zwangsidee*), the psychoanalytical interpretation of the development of the dogma of Christ becomes possible only on the basis of an analysis of the „socioeconomic situation of those social groups that adopted and passed on the Christian doctrine.“ And it is only through the knowledge of the common psychic characteristics of this group that were molded in this fashion that an adequate understanding of the „ideas and ideologies“ becomes possible. Cf. Fromm, *The Dogma of Christ* (1963a), pp. viif.

⁴² E. Fromm, *The Dogma of Christ and Other Essays* (1963a), p. 9.



structure of a society is the medium through which the economy exerts its influence on man's intellectual and mental manifestations."⁴³ After he had rejected Freud's libido theory and developed his own view of the genesis of character, Fromm stopped using the term „libidinal structure“ and spoke of „social character“ instead.⁴⁴

To explain the psychic attitudes shared by a society, one must assume a formation process of psychic energy. „This process of transforming general psychic energy into specific psychosocial energy is mediated by the social character.“⁴⁵ By „social character,“ Fromm means „the core of the character common to most members of a culture, in contra-

distinction to the individual character, in which people belonging to the same culture differ from each other.“⁴⁶ What is of interest, therefore, is not individual {020} peculiarities, which make the individual unique and which are the result of chance factors of birth (such constitutional factors as temperament) and particular life experiences.⁴⁷ Rather, research into the social character tells us „how human energy is channelled and operates as a productive force in a given social order.“⁴⁸ If the energy of most members of a social group takes the same direction, it follows that their motivations are the same and that they are receptive to the same ideas and ideals.⁴⁹ From a formal point of view, social character is something like the „transmission belt between the economic structure of society and the prevailing ideas.“⁵⁰ „It is not only the 'economic basis' which creates a certain social character which in turn creates certain ideas. The ideas, once created, also influence the social character and, indirectly, the social economic structure.“⁵¹ The social character thus mediates in both directions,⁵² and the

⁴³ E. Fromm, „Über Methode und Aufgabe einer analytischen Sozialpsychologie“ (1932a), p. 53; cf. Fromm, „Die psychoanalytische Charakterologie und ihre Bedeutung für die Sozialpsychologie“ (1932b), especially p. 267f; *To Have or to Be?* (1976a), p. 133.

⁴⁴ On what follows, see especially E. Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (1941 a), pp. 277-299; „Sex and Character“ (1948b); „Psychoanalytic Characterology and Its Application to the Understanding of Culture“ (1949c); „The Human Implications of Instinctivistic 'Radicalism'“ (1955b); *The Sane Society* (1955a), pp. 78-83; *Beyond the Chains of Illusion* (1962a), pp. 78-87; „The Application of Humanist Psychoanalysis to Marx's Theory“ (1965c); E. Fromm and M. Maccoby, *Social Character in a Mexican Village* (1970b), pp. 16-19 and pp. 230-236; E. Fromm, *To Have or to Be?* (1976a), pp. 133-135; *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973a), pp. 252f. The following are some of the titles in the secondary literature: G. B. Hammond, *Man in Estrangement*, pp. 25-31; M. Birnbach, *Neo-Freudian Social Philosophy*, pp. 81-83; D. Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd*; U. Essbach-Kreuzer, *Die Theorien des Sozialcharakters in den Arbeiten von Erich Fromm*. Negative criticism: J. H. Schaar, *Escape from Authority*, pp. 89-98; O. Fenichel, *Psychoanalyse und Gesellschaft bei Erich Fromm*. In her essay „Aufklärung und Radikalismus-Kritik der psychologischen Anthropologie Fromms,“ Agnes Heller suggests that her own judgment is flawless, but considering her inadequate nuances, certain imputations, and obtrusive labeling, her claim must be questioned.

⁴⁵ E. Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973a), p. 253.

⁴⁶ E. Fromm, „Sex and Character“ (1948b), p. 309; „Psychoanalytic Characterology and Its Application to the Understanding of Culture“ (1949c), p. 84; *Beyond the Chains of Illusion* (1962a), p. 78.

⁴⁷ Cf. Fromm and Maccoby, *Social Character in a Mexican Village* (1970b).

⁴⁸ *Escape from Freedom* (1941 a), p. 278.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Beyond the Chains of Illusion* (1962a), pp. 77f.

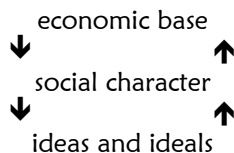
⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 86f.

⁵² When Fromm assumes that the social character has a mediating function, he is also attempting to solve the problem of the mediation of base and superstructure, which is so vigorously argued in Marxism. He emphasizes that „in the concept of the social character, the connection between the economic basis and the superstructure is understood in their interaction“ (Fromm and Maccoby, *Social Character in a Mexican Village* [1970b], p. 18n.); see also Fromm, „The Application of Humanist Psychoanalysis to Marx's Theory“ (1965c), p. 212. For a reaction to this attempted solution, see A. Schaff, *Marxismus und das menschliche Individuum*, pp. 53-57 and 130f. Fromm used this model of the social character repeatedly: in the histo-



concept of social character can be clarified in the following way:⁵³



The real meaning of the social character lies in the fact that this concept makes possible a new understanding of social processes. Fromm defines its function as follows: „Every society is structuralized and operates in certain ways which are necessitated by a number of objective conditions; such conditions are the methods of production and distribution which in turn depend on raw material, industrial techniques, climate, etc.; furthermore political and geographical factors and cultural traditions and influences to which society is exposed. There is no „society“ in general but only specific social structures which operate in different and ascertainable ways. Although these social structures do change in the course of historical development, they are relatively fixed at any given historical period and society can exist only by operating within the framework of its particular structure. The members of the society and/or the various classes or status groups within it have to behave in such a way as to be able to function in the sense required by {021} society. It is the function of the social character to shape the energies of the members of society in such a way that their behavior is not left to conscious decisions whether or not to follow the social pattern but that *people want to act as they have to act* and at the

rial analyses of the link between Protestantism and early capitalism (in *Escape from Freedom*) and with reference to the 19th and 20th centuries (in *The Sane Society* [1955a]). „Die Entwicklung des Christusdogmas“ (1930a) is basically done in the same way, even though its formulations are still those of Freud’s libido theory.

⁵³ Cf. Fromm, „The Application of Humanist Psychoanalysis to Marx’s Theory“ (1965c), p. 212; *Beyond the Chains of Illusion* (1962a), p. 87.

same time find gratification in acting according to the requirements of the culture. In other words, the social character has the function of molding human energy for the purpose of the functioning of a given society.“⁵⁴

The individual who, being a member of a given society, has been shaped by the character of that society is spared all confrontation with the society’s demands because he wishes to think, feel, and act as he must (and is happy in so doing because he is behaving in what is, for him, a psychologically satisfactory manner).⁵⁵ The social character is the essential stabilizing (system-maintaining) factor for the survival of the society and its underlying economic base because „the energies of people are molded in ways that make them into productive forces that are indispensable for the functioning of that society.“⁵⁶ The social character of an individual or a society is molded largely by the socioeconomic conditions of a given society.⁵⁷ But where man’s na-

⁵⁴ E. Fromm, „On Psychoanalytic Characterology and Its Application to the Understanding of Culture“ (1949c), pp. 84f; *Beyond the Chains of Illusion* (1962a), pp. 78f; *The Sane Society* (1955a), p. 79.

⁵⁵ Cf. Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (1941 a), pp. 282f. This element of satisfaction that is present because someone whose action is determined by the social character of his group wishes to do what he must do also explains why people can yet-and sometimes only-be happy under political arrangements that suppress them, even though ideology and brainwashing are needed. Conversely, where we find an intent to change social conditions, the function of the social character explains why consciousness of the class situation and the progress of socialism in the Communist states, for example, does not result quasi-automatically in the change Marxists hope for. Cf. Fromm, „The Application of Humanist Psychoanalysis to Marx’s Theory“ (1965c), pp. 211f.

⁵⁶ Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (1941a), p. 283.

⁵⁷ There is a contradiction between the sociological insight that the character structure is shaped by the role the individual must play in his culture, and the psychoanalytic insight according to which an individual’s character is essentially shaped during childhood, although the child hardly has any contact with culture



tural, fundamental needs are concerned, this formative influence encounters limits.

When one considers the factors that shape the social character, one observes the interplay of the following elements:⁵⁸

1. Social and economic factors, which have a certain preponderance because it is difficult to change them.
2. Religious, political, and philosophical views („ideas and ideals“), which, though rooted in the social character, also define and stabilize it.
3. Fundamental human needs such as those for relatedness, rootedness, and transcendence, which all must be satisfied and are indispensable to successful human life, play an active role in this interplay.⁵⁹

As long as the interaction between these elements remains harmonious and stable, the social character has a predominantly stabilizing function. But if conditions change so that a discrepancy develops between the factors that determine social character and the already existing social character, the social character becomes an element of disintegration, „dynamite instead of a social mortar, as it

and society during those years. This contradiction is resolved when the family is seen as the „psychic agency of society.“ The family fulfills this task in two ways: (1) by the influence the character of the parents has on that of the child; (2) by the pedagogic methods used in a given culture. Cf. Fromm, „On Psychoanalytic Characterology and Its Application to the Understanding of Culture“ (1949c), pp. 86f; *The Sane Society* (1955a), p. 82.

⁵⁸ Cf. Fromm, „On Psychoanalytic Characterology and Its Application to the Understanding of Culture (1949c), pp. 85f.

⁵⁹ For a discussion and grounding of these needs, see p. 60-66. Cf. Fromm, *Beyond the Chains of Illusion* (1962a), pp. 81: „If a social order neglects or frustrates the basic human needs beyond a certain threshold, the members of such a society will try to change the social order so as to make it more suitable to their human needs. If this change is not possible, the outcome will probably be that such a society will collapse, because of its lack of vitality and its destructiveness.“

were.“⁶⁰ {022}

The concept of a social character thus explains „how psychic energy in general is transformed into the specific form of psychic energy which every society needs to employ for its functioning.“⁶¹ Social character includes „the functional aspect of character—the part of character structure which has developed to make culture or society proceed and operate.“⁶² A misunderstanding of this significance of the social character is the cause of a good many false interpretations of Fromm’s social psychology.⁶³

⁶⁰ Fromm, „On Psychoanalytic Characterology and Its Application to the Understanding of Culture (1949c), p. 6. Cf. Fromm, „The Application of Humanist Psychoanalysis to Marx’s Theory“ (1965c), p. 213: „Social change and revolution are caused not only by new productive forces which conflict with older forms of social organization, but also by the conflict between inhuman social conditions and unalterable human needs.“ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 219.

⁶¹ Fromm and Maccoby, *Social Character in a Mexican Village* (1970b), p. 17.

⁶² E. Fromm in the discussion on „Psychoanalytic Characterology and Its Application to the Understanding of Culture“ (1949c), p. 10.

⁶³ An erroneous interpretation of Fromm’s social psychology is almost pervasive in the German reception and critique of Fromm. In his *Gesellschaft und Charakter*, Ronald Wiegand proposes to demonstrate the sociological implications of the neopsychoanalysis „that was practiced by Erich Fromm, Karen Horney and Harry Stack Sullivan“ (!). But instead of tracing Fromm’s independent development of the sociopsychological method, he observes that „Fromm is hampered in his analyses of religious experiences“ and interprets this „as the after effect of his strongly religious childhood which even in Fromm’s psychoanalytic training was not wholly dispelled“ (p. 34). This essentially unqualified claim that is proved nowhere—Wiegand calls it „an argument that is surely not improper“—becomes the hub for a further judgment of Fromm that deteriorates in part into pure imputation (as, for example on pp. 50 and 341). The repetition of allegations (on pp. 47, 49, 334f, 340f) does not do away with tendentious peculiarity of the book but at most permits one to infer that the author worked in a scientifically irresponsible fashion. A reading



All of Fromm's sociopsychological research aims at discovering various kinds of social character within the context of the factors that determine it; he then wishes to confront this social character with the teleological ideas entailed in a humanistic concept of man and history. These ideas themselves are largely determined by the results of his sociopsychological analyses.

of Bruno W. Reimann's *Psychoanalyse und Gesellschaftstheorie* yields a similar result. The polemical attacks (e.g., pp. 111f) and obvious distortions of Fromm's insights follow the criticism of Herbert Marcuse (see „Introduction,” note 13) and are based on a fundamental misunderstanding and incomprehension of what Fromm means by „character“ and „social character.“ It is therefore not surprising that Reimann should feel that Fromm's attempt „to reconstruct the deformation processes of capitalist society remains abstract because it rests on a distortion of psychoanalytic theory and, lacking stringent analytical categories, is incapable of showing the negative mediation of concrete human nature with restrictive social patterns and patterns of domination ... Fromm's approach makes it impossible to lay hold of the psychic deformations of the social subject under oppressive social conditions. This becomes possible only when the category of the unconscious is not surrendered and the unconscious is reconstructed as a socially mediated potential, the libidinal component being retained“ (pp. 112f)! Helmut Dahmer's critique of Fromm is wholly the product of his commitment to Wilhelm Reich's theories. See, e.g., H. Dahmer, *Psychoanalyse als kritische Theorie; Libido und Gesellschaft, Studien über Freud and die Freudsche Linke*. In contrast to these interpretations of Fromm's social psychology in the German language, all of which misunderstand the concept of character and therefore perpetuate a caricature of Fromm's sociopsychological method, it is pleasing to note that Predrag Vranicki's study in Vol. 2 of his *Geschichte des Marxismus* (pp. 865-877) attempts to understand Fromm's statements without prejudice. In spite of the critical distance in his judgment, a similar effort was made by U. Essbach-Kreuzer in „Die Theorie des Sozialcharakters in den Arbeiten von Erich Fromm.“

Summary: The critique of Freud's concept of man

Freud's concept of man can be described as a physiological and mechanical one: „Freud's man is the physiologically driven and motivated '*homme machine*.'“⁶⁴ The mechanistic element in this concept found its most conspicuous expression in Freud's theory of instincts, according to which man is a primarily self-enclosed unit driven by two forces: the instinct for self-preservation (ego drives) and sexuality (sexual drives--in Freud, comprising everything that relates to the senses).⁶⁵ These two basic drives are anchored in chemical and physiological processes and obey their own laws; they demand optimal satisfaction.

Viewed as a being controlled by the dynamics of his libido development, man is fundamentally unrelated: his relation to those who make up his environment, to society, culture, and history, is not primary. His „social being“ is seen as the product of his striving for optimal satisfaction and as only a secondary phenomenon. Man must use others (mother, father, and other persons) as objects; that is, he „is forced by his drives into relationships with others“⁶⁶ in order to satisfy his libidinal interests. Only the limits imposed on his libidinal interests by the individuals used to satisfy them produces, by sublimation and reaction formation, social attitudes that make possible a productive life with others, culture, and {023} history. Thus both phylogenetically and ontogenetically, sociality, character qualities, society, and cultural manifestations such as art, religion, technique, and science are the products of

⁶⁴ E. Fromm, „Freud's Model of Man and Its Social Determinants“ (1970d), p. 31. On what follows, see also *Escape from Freedom* (1941a), pp. 289-296; *Sigmund Freud's Mission* (1959a), pp. 95-104; „The Human Implications of Instinctivistic Radicalism“ (1955b); „A Counter-Rebuttal to Herbert Marcuse“ (1956b); R. de la Fuente Muniz, „Fromm's Approach to the Study of Personality,“ pp. 7-14.

⁶⁵ On the revision of this doctrine of drives by the introduction of the death instinct, see pp. 23-25 and 49f.

⁶⁶ Fromm, „Freud's Model of Man and Its Social Determinants“ (1970d), p.31.



physiologically determined instinctual action--“nothing but“ frustrations of the primarily libidinal striving for satisfaction.

The primary striving for satisfaction that the pleasure principle postulates is based on the need to eliminate displeasure; that is, it is based on a want, a lack.⁶⁷ This means, on the one hand, that pleasure is not something that comes from plenitude and leads to the intensification and enhancement of human experience but is the necessity of a physiologically determined process. On the other hand, love and tenderness are surplus phenomena that can play no role in Freud's system. Although the term „pleasure principle“ conjures up fulfillment, joy, happiness, these goals cannot be realized in Freud's system because his pleasure principle, which determines man, is a principle of want.

Closely connected is Freud's rejection of the view that man is a morally good being.⁶⁸ „Man develops exclusively under the influence of his self interest which demands the optimal satisfaction of his libidinal impulses, always on the condition that they do not endanger his interest in self-preservation (reality principle).“⁶⁹ Man's driving force is his egoism. Conscience is not a constructive impetus toward altruism but merely the internalization of the reality principle that curtails egoistic libidinal strivings for satisfaction.

The picture of history that this concept of man implies is characterized by both an optimism concerning the possibilities of progress and a tragic aspect.⁷⁰ Man's capacity to suppress his drives makes possible spiritual and intellectual development and greater cultural achievements. Freud differs from Herbert Marcuse in opting for the partial suppression of drives that makes culture possible, and he harbors an optimism that implies the necessity of renunciation (this is the tragic element). For Freud, there can be no free society, but only a civilized

⁶⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 33; *Escape from Freedom* (1941 a), pp. 294f.

⁶⁸ Cf. Fromm, „Freud's Model of Man“ (1970d), pp. 39f.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

one that is purchased by the suppression of instincts.

Freud's introduction of the death instinct into his system caused a fundamental change in his concept of history and of man. The death drive is posited as the root of human destructiveness in both its directions--that is, by man against himself and by man against {024} the outside world.⁷¹ Presumably because of the impression the catastrophe of World War I made on him, Freud discarded the ego drives and libidinal drives and proceeded to postulate an opposition between the life instinct (Eros), which comprised both ego and sex drives, and the death instinct (Thanatos). He became convinced⁷² there was a drive in man that had the same importance as the drive serving the preservation of life, so that both drives are constantly active as tendencies, combat each other, and merge, „until finally the death instinct proves to be the stronger force and has its ultimate triumph in the death of the individual.“⁷³ An essential point in Freud's new theory that must be examined critically is the assumption that the destructive tendency that is posited with the death instinct is grounded in man's nature, and is thus a biologically rooted element inherent in all

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁷² Cf. Fromm and Evans, *Dialogue with Erich Fromm* (1966f), pp. 67f. It is principally in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that Freud develops his new view. In that book, he asserts that there is a phylogenetic principle whose principal task is to restore an earlier state and ultimately to take organic life back to its original form of inorganic existence: „If it is true that-at some immeasurably remote time and in a manner we cannot conceive-life once proceeded out of inorganic matter, then, according to our presumption, an instinct must have arisen which sought to do away with life once more and to reestablish the inorganic state. If we recognize in this instinct the self-destructiveness of our hypothesis, we may regard the selfdestructiveness as an expression of a'death instinct' which cannot fail to be present in every vital process“ (*New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, Vol. XXII, p. 107).

⁷³ E. Fromm, „Freud's Model of Man and Its Social Determinants“ (1970d), p. 34.



life.”⁷⁴

Freud developed the implications of this theory for the concept of man only partially and hesitantly, for he was uncertain how to verify his hypothesis.⁷⁵ He was also unable to establish a connection with his earlier theory of drives in which the libido theory had been the decisive component. The following aspects of his changed image of man can nonetheless be observed:

The self-sufficient and asocial quality of man as defined by the libido theory now becomes his aggressive and destructive nature: „*homo homini lupus*.”⁷⁶ The manifest realities of profound hatred, an irrational destructive urge, and destructive aggressivity in human beings find an apparent solution. But the actual import is that man must resign from the task of determining his own fate. „On the basis of his instinctive orientation and also of a profound conviction of the wickedness of human nature, Freud is prone to interpret all ‘ideal’ motives in man as the result of something ‘mean.’”⁷⁷ As a result, all man’s striving for constructive values for love, truth, freedom, right-is ultimately an illusion, love’s labor lost, for „Man is only a battlefield on which the life and death instincts fight against each other. He can never liberate himself decisively from the tragic alternative of destroying others or him-

self.”⁷⁸ Human history and society and culture also take on a tragic quality. Freud himself acknowledges, „As a result of this primary hostility of man for man, society is constantly threatened by disintegration.”⁷⁹ According to Fromm, „the skeptical enlightenment philosopher, overwhelmed by the collapse of his world, became {025} the total skeptic who looked at the fate of man in history as unmitigated tragedy.”⁸⁰

Some of Fromm’s most important arguments against Freud’s view of man and history are summarized in the following paragraphs.

Concerning the knowledge of man’s nature and of social processes, Fromm’s sociopsychological starting point, shaped by Marxism and sociology, is fundamental. In contrast to Freud, Fromm begins with the „sociobiological“ question: „What kind of ties to the world, persons and things must-and can-man develop in order to survive, given his specific equipment and the nature of the world around him?”⁸¹ This question presupposes that man is primarily a social being, molded phylogenetically and ontogenetically by the social conditions in which he lives. „The ideological, religious, economic and political forces that operate in the social process have a dynamism of their own. A product of man, they also create man.”⁸²

The fundamental difference between Freud and Fromm is found in their opposing views of psychic energy and its function in the shaping of man. For Freud, the libido is a psychic energy that develops as an instinct according to its own, physiologically determined law, so that the development of man’s character remains tied to the phase-by-phase development and psychic energy of the libido, and social processes depend on the lat-

⁷⁴ Cf. the appendix „Freud’s Theory of Aggressiveness and Destructiveness“ in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973a), pp. 439-478.

⁷⁵ Verification is presumably difficult because while Freud wished to see the life and death instincts as biological entities intrinsic to man’s nature, he could show no physiological base for such an assumption. In the case of the earlier libido theory, on the other hand, it was precisely the fact that it was anchored in the chemical and physiological and that the development of the libido was tied to physical erogenous zones that could be cited in support of the correctness of the theory. Cf. Fromm, „The Present Crisis of Psychoanalysis“ (1967d), pp. 72f.

⁷⁶ Cf. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Vol. XXI, p. 111.

⁷⁷ E. Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (1941 a), p. 294.

⁷⁸ E. Fromm, „Freud’s Model of Man“ (1970d), p. 45.

⁷⁹ S. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Vol. XXI, p. 112.

⁸⁰ E. Fromm, „Freud’s Model of Man“ (1970d), p. 45.

⁸¹ Fromm and Maccoby, *Social Character in a Mexican Village* (1970b), p. 14.

⁸² R. de la Fuente-Muniz, „Fromm’s Approach to the Study of Personality,“ p. 8.



ter. Fromm, on the other hand, believes that what makes man specifically human is his relative independence from the instincts. Against the libido theory, he sets the vision of an individual and social character that makes possible a new understanding of social processes and therefore of the things that shape man.

A further important insight of Fromm's, which has been hardly touched upon so far, leads to an even more fundamental critique of Freud: the analysis of the social character of certain socioeconomic structures with their corresponding ideas and ideologies yielded a set of criteria for evaluating the concept of man, of history, and of the world that had a determining influence on Freud's psychoanalytic insights.⁸³

In Freud's concept of man as a primarily isolated, egoistic being who is forced into relatedness because he seeks optimal satisfaction, Fromm recognized a parallel to the *homo economicus* of {026} nineteenth-century bourgeois market economy, a being who can satisfy his economic needs only through exchange in the marketplace. „In both variants, the persons essentially remain strangers to the other, being related only by the common aim of drive satisfaction.“⁸⁴ Fromm subjects Freud's theory of a duality of life instinct and death instinct to a sustained critique.⁸⁵ In part, he objects to Freud's lumping together of hostility, aggression, destruction, and sadism under the death instinct, because reactive aggressiveness, for example, stands

wholly in the service of the preservation of life. Much more important is Fromm's critique of the instinctual nature of Thanatos. For Fromm, the death instinct is no biological necessity. While Eros must be viewed as the biologically normal goal of development, the death instinct should be seen as the expression of the failure of normal development and „in this sense as a pathological though deeply rooted striving.“⁸⁶ The affinity for death is therefore a secondary pathological phenomenon,⁸⁷ that occurs when the conditions of life make a biophilous unfolding impossible:⁸⁸ „The only basic biological drive Fromm recognizes in man is the drive to live and to grow.“⁸⁹

This view formulates Fromm's critique of the concept of instinct in a general way, a critique that will be set forth more explicitly when we examine Fromm's view of character as a substitute for animal instinct and discuss the debate concerning an aggressive drive that was provoked by behavioral research.⁹⁰ {027}

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 462.

⁸⁷ Cf. E. Fromm, „Zur Theorie and Strategie des Friedens“ (1970h), pp. 30, 24; *The Heart of Man* (1964a), pp. 48-51.

⁸⁸ E. Fromm, *The Heart of Man* (1964a), pp. 50: „This duality ... is one between the primary and most fundamental tendency of life-to persevere in life-and its contradiction, which comes into being when man fails in this goal.“

⁸⁹ R. de la Fuente-Muniz, „Fromm's Approach to the Study of Personality,“ p. 8.

⁹⁰ See pp. 29-31 and 142-145.

⁸³ Cf. Fromm, „Freud's Model of Man“ (1970d); *Sigmund Freud's Mission* (1959a), pp. 95-104; *The Heart of Man* (1964a), pp. 48-51.

⁸⁴ E. Fromm, „Freud's Model of Man“ (1970d), p. 31.

⁸⁵ Very extensively in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973a), pp. 439-478.