

Erich Fromm in Hebrew Bible Research

With a Side Glance at Religious Studies

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Abstract: Erich Fromm, the author of *You Shall Be as Gods* and many other well-known works, not only made references to the Hebrew Bible in his writing but also provided lengthy interpretations of the biblical texts themselves. In this paper, I aim to evaluate the influence of the works of Erich Fromm on how exegetes and other scientists interpret the Hebrew Bible. In the conclusion of this paper, I call for further research on the possible applications of Erich Fromm's ideas on Hebrew Bible interpretations. I suggest that Erich Fromm's ideas could help to solve problems of the psalms, vengeance and violence in the Bible, and I also claim that the application of Fromm's model of social character could contribute (from a psychodynamic perspective) to ongoing research on Israel's religious history as well as our understanding of religious symbol systems in general.

The Impact of Erich Fromm on Hebrew Bible Studies

Erich Fromm was a psychotherapist and author of socio-psychoanalytical and philosophical books on a wide range of topics. He achieved the height of his reputation in the 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s, though his influence declined in later years (on Fromm's rise and fall as a famous intellectual, cf. McLaughlin 1998). Fromm was not a Hebrew Bible scholar; however, in his youth, he was trained in the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud by Rabbinic scholars such as Ludwig Krause and Nehemia Anton Nobel. Later,

whilst studying at Heidelberg University, Fromm continued his Jewish studies under the supervision of the Chassidic Salman Baruch Rabinkow and became influenced by the ideas of the Neo-Kantian thinker Hermann Cohen. He also completed a dissertation on Karaite Judaism under the supervision of sociologist Alfred Weber, the younger brother of Max Weber (On these early biographical aspects see, cf. Funk 2000a, pp. 6–58; Akrap 2011, pp. 33–70; Friedman 2013, pp. 3–27.).

Taking these early biographical facts into account, it is no surprise that Fromm not only referred to the Hebrew Bible in his socio-psychoanalytical and philosophical works but also provided lengthy interpretations of the biblical texts themselves. Although Fromm's impact on Hebrew Bible scholars and Hebrew Bible research is less than one might expect, it is still present, and, in the following paper, I aim to evaluate how Fromm's works influenced exegetes and other scientists in their interpretations of the Hebrew Bible. I will conclude the paper with a call for further research on the possible applications of Erich Fromm's ideas on Hebrew Bible interpretation.

The work of an important scholar impacts an academic field in various ways: firstly, it might prompt the writing of PhD dissertations or other secondary literature works that outline, reiterate and critically evaluate its ideas. Secondly, it might be the subject of critical reviews in academic journals or other types of literature. Thirdly, it might be cited or used as a basis for discussion in other scholarly articles or books. And, finally, it might serve as a catalyst or a guide for further research in a given area. Let us now explore each of these in relation to Erich Fromm's work.

The Impact of Erich Fromm's Bible Studies on Dissertations and Similar Secondary Works

Erich Fromm's contributions to the study of the Hebrew Bible prompted the writing of dissertations and similar secondary works, the majority of which outline and evaluate his interpretations of the bible and other religious topics. The following list comprises dissertations and books on these topics (but not research articles; an example of a recent article is Schimmel 2009; cf. also Gertel 2014):

- Jon Stanley Glen (1966). Erich Fromm. *A Protestant Critique*. Philadelphia (Westminster Press)
- Rainer Funk (1982). Erich Fromm. *The Courage to Be human*. With a Postscript by Erich Fromm. New York (Continuum); German edition 1978
- Joerg Jeremias (1983). *Die Theorie der Projektion im religionskritischen Denken Sigmund Freuds und Erich Fromms*, Dissertation. Universität Oldenburg
- Juergen Hardeck (1992). *Vernunft & Liebe. Religion im Werk von Erich Fromm*. Frankfurt am Main und Berlin (Ullstein)
- Svante Lundgren (1998). *Fight Against Idols. Erich Fromm on Religion, Judaism and the Bible*. Frankfurt am Main (Peter Lang).
- Domagoj Akrap (2011). *Erich Fromm – ein jüdischer Denker. Jüdisches Erbe, Tradition, Religion*. Münster (LIT-Verlag).

Given that Erich Fromm was neither a scholar in Hebrew Bible studies nor religious sciences, at first glance, this list may appear impressive. Although all of the above dissertations and books deal in part with Erich Fromm's views on the Hebrew Bible, not one work, however, is written by an Old Testament/Hebrew Bible scholar nor focuses exclusively on the Hebrew Bible. Moreover, none of the above authors explicitly applies Fromm's insights to the Hebrew Bible. For this reason, we could argue that the impact of this list on Hebrew Bible research itself and its scientific community is relatively small.

Erich Fromm's *You Shall Be as Gods* (1966) in Book Reviews by Hebrew Bible Academics and Other Scholars

Alongside his books and articles that include references to or interpretations of the Hebrew Bible, Fromm's main work on the Old Testament and its Jewish and Christian traditions is his monograph *You Shall Be as Gods: A Radical Interpretation of the Old Testament and Its Tradition*, which was published in 1966 in New York. In this book, Fromm presents his thoughts on "authoritarian" and "humanistic" religions by interpreting the bible's history of ideas about God and Man. Here he presents his thoughts on

Jan Dietrich

negative theology and his view that it was already present in the Hebrew Bible. Furthermore, he explores Man as a maker of history, Man's ability and reluctance to engage in revolution, the prophet's critique of adultery as alienation, the idea of the Sabbath, and the messianic hope for peace. He also introduces his concept of X-experience, presents his interpretation of sin and repentance, and propounds a new psychodynamic classification of the psalms, which includes an appendix on the function and meaning of psalm 22 in the passion of Jesus.

Upon publication, this book did not escape the attention of Old Testament scholars, especially from the United States, and the number of reviews it received demonstrates the influence it exerted (at least in its first years – hence the overviews presented in this paper are not exhaustive). In general, most Old Testament scholars were skeptical. They criticized Fromm for combining historical-critical insights and the application of hermeneutics too easily and in such a way that neither was recognizable in its own right. For example, Eugene H. Maly, once Professor of Sacred Scripture at Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Cincinnati, Ohio, expressed the following view in *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*:

the entire picture rests on an interpretation of the Hebrew Bible that can be termed at best eclectic and at worst eisegetical. (...) Rather than an interpretation of the OT the book is an interpretation of certain passages which are manipulated to support a preconceived hypothesis (Maly 1967, pp. 620–1).

In his review for the *Pittsburgh Perspective*, Donald E. Gowan, Professor Emeritus of Old Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, recognizes Fromm's knowledge and insights:

This is a well-written work, clearly and carefully done; it was written by a man who knows his source material well, so does not contain the kind of blunders which often appear when men who are not biblical scholars interpret the Bible in terms of their own specialties; and it contains some excellent insights into man's predicament, based, no doubt, on Fromm's own special field of competence, yet very often in full accord with the Bible's understanding of man (Gowan 1967, p. 29).

Gowan, however, accuses Fromm of imposing his own line of thoughts on the Old Testament scriptures:

The impression which this work makes on an OT specialist is that we have here no interpretation of the OT, but a scheme whose origin has nothing to do with the Bible at all, into which a few Bible stories and rabbinic sayings have been fitted. The result of doing so has been in almost every case to make them say something their authors did not want to say (Gowan 1967, p. 32).

He criticizes Fromm's main idea – namely, that Man's task is the Becoming of God – by identifying biblical accounts that Fromm fails to mention:

The result to which Fromm comes is not something unknown to the biblical authors; it is clear that some of them had already considered some such position (though obviously in a much less sophisticated form), and had rejected it. This is what is meant by Isa. 14:1–21, Ezek. 28:1–19, 31:1–18, and Dan. 4. Fromm is certainly correct in finding in the OT a real exaltation of humanity; man is, for the OT writers 'almost God,' but for them the 'almost' is an indispensable part of the affirmation. They do not take the final step with Fromm, not because evolution has not progressed far enough, but because they *have* considered that possibility and have concluded that to take it would be to destroy their humanity. (...) The reviewer must conclude, then, that this very interesting book is not really an interpretation of the OT and its tradition, but a philosophical statement with illustrations from religious traditions. For if the theism of the OT and Judaism is done away with, its humanism is gone as well (Gowan 1967, pp. 32–3).

Fromm's book was not only reviewed by Old Testament scholars; academics from other disciplines also criticized his method of imposing his own ethical views on the scriptures. Irving Block, Professor emeritus of Philosophy at the University of Western Ontario in London, Canada, expressed the following critique in the orthodox Jewish journal *Tradition*:

What is puzzling about Fromm's exegesis is his selectivity: he selects some things from the Bible to illustrate his view, but ignores others that do not fall in line. Or if he does not ignore them he calls them "archaic" – arguing that the final editor, an ancient humanist, who left the archaic passages in the

text for some reason or other (p. 89). Fromm appears to assume the following: Since humanism is good and authoritarianism is bad, and all admit the Bible to be essentially good, therefore the Bible must be essentially humanistic and all traces of authoritarianism must be due to earlier “bad” influences (archaic). This kind of reasoning needs no comment (Block 1968, p. 133).

However, as a thinker himself, Irvin Block recognizes the significance of Fromm’s own insights:

Yet there are some good features of the book. Fromm’s discussion of idolatry is the best and, I think, the finest description of the Jewish notion of idolatry in English. (...) However, to utilize it [radical humanism; J.D.] as a tool in interpreting and understanding the Torah and Judaism is as clear an example of *elbonoh she Torah* – the willful misuse of Torah – that one might find (Block 1968, p. 137).

As late as 1999, Rabbi Elliot B. Gertel expressed a somewhat similar view in the journal *Judaism*:

Like Jewish homiletics of all ages, Fromm’s interpretations of Scripture range from brilliant insights into the plain meaning of the Bible to shameless forcing of the biblical text, in Fromm’s case, to fit psychoanalytic dogmas. (...) But Fromm’s best insights into the bible more than compensate for any forced characterizations we might encounter. *You Shall Be As Gods* contains many important interpretations of biblical texts; and there is not a knowledgeable Jewish preacher who at one time or another has not cited Fromm’s brilliant defense of the Sabbath in *The Forgotten Language* (Gertel 1999, p. 431).

On page 437, Gertel (1999) reminds the reader of Petuchowski’s evaluation of Fromm’s *The Art of Loving* (cf. Petuchowski 1956) and adds: “Jakob J. Petuchowski could refer to *The Art of Loving* as “Erich Fromm’s Midrash on Love.” Fromm is capable of distorting the Bible in some of his midrashim” (cf. also Schimmel 2009, p. 12.).

Arthur Hertzberg, a conservative Polish-American Rabbi, even makes claims about Fromm’s psychological motivation for writing the book. According to Herzberg, Fromm desperately needed the book as a form of self-defense in order to prove to himself and others that his own worldviews

were not heretical but within the wider stream of Jewish thinking. (Akrap 2011 and Schimmel 2009 also aim to present Erich Fromm as a Jewish thinker and not a heretic.) In the journal *Book Week*, Hertzberg states:

The Bible deserves to be taken seriously and to be confronted in all its complexities. Precisely because quotations from it, from the Talmud, and from Hasidic sources come fluently to Fromm's pen, he creates the illusion that a sane, contemporary mind has now produced a new understanding of the Jewish past. What he has really done is a piece of *ex-parte* pleading, a lawyer's brief in defense of his own present before the bar of his own past. Like Paul before him, he seems to want to believe that he is not a rebel but an heir – but to go further with this thought would mean to turn the tables on Fromm and analyze him as he has attempted to analyze the biblical God (Hertzberg 1967, p. 5).

Reviews of Fromm's *You Shall Be as Gods* (Fromm 1966a) also appear in other theological and religious scientific journals (cf. e.g. Isaak 1967; Thornton 1967; Hay 1967; Midgley 1968; Duba 1968; Maître 1981). Instead of exploring these in more detail, let us now turn to the question of whether Fromm's work impacted on scholarly contributions (beyond review articles) to the Theology of the Old Testament and other literary and hermeneutical Hebrew Bible studies.

Fromm's Impact on Scholarly Contributions to the Theology of the Old Testament and Other Literary and Hermeneutical Hebrew Bible Studies

A scholar could be said to impact a given academic discipline if his/her work is cited and discussed in main works by other scholars in the field. In this respect, we have to acknowledge that, although Fromm's work is present, it is not as significant as one might expect. On a few occasions, Fromm's works are cited in passing references by major scholarly papers in the field of Old Testament Theology. For example, Walter Brueggemann, Professor emeritus of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary and one of the leading American theologians on Old Testament theology, occasionally builds upon Erich Fromm's insights in his own monographs. In

his book *Interpretation and Obedience* (1991), Brueggemann writes about alienation in sexuality and economics and, in this context, also mentions *Escape from Freedom* (Fromm 1941a) and *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (Fromm 1973a) in a footnote (Brueggemann 1991, p. 257 fn 7). In another of his books, *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism*, Brueggemann cites Fromm's *Escape from Freedom* during a passage in which he explores Psalm 78's emphasis on the god of life and compares this to modern society's love of death (Brueggemann 1993, p. 124). Similarly, during a passage in *Theology of the Old Testament* that centers on interpersonal relationships, John W. Rogerson, Professor emeritus of Old Testament at Sheffield University, briefly claims that "human beings share characteristics that can be classified with various personality types or traits", which he follows with a footnote reference to Fromm's *Man for Himself* (1947a) (Rogerson 2010, p. 64).

Other Old Testament scholars occasionally quote and build upon Fromm in journal articles. For example, in an article on Old Testament's reception history, Bernhard Lang, Professor emeritus of Old Testament and Religious Science at Paderborn University, examines Kant and Schiller and interprets the fall as a fortunate event that allowed humanity to begin to develop its own capacity for reason. During this passage, Lang mentions Fromm's *You Shall Be as Gods* as a follower of this idea of the Enlightenment (Lang 2014, pp. 313–4 with fn. 30).

Aside from Old Testament Theology, Fromm's work also received a limited amount of attention from the representatives of hermeneutical approaches to the Hebrew Bible. Uwe Steffen's book *Jona und der Fisch. Der Mythos von Tod und Wiedergeburt* devotes two pages to outlining Fromm's view in Fromm's *The Forgotten Language* (1951a) (Steffen 1985, pp. 28–9). The book *The Hebrew Bible in Literary Criticism*, edited by the poet Alex Preminger and the Hebrew Bible scholar Edward L. Greenstein, centers on all forms of literary comments on the Bible and therefore also cites extensively Fromm's *The Forgotten Language* (1951a) in its chapter on the book of Jonah (Preminger & Greenstein 1986, p. 470) and from Fromm's *You Shall Be as Gods* (1966a) in its chapter on Psalms (Preminger & Greenstein 1986, pp. 534–5). More recently, Roger E. van Harn and Brent A. Strawn edited the book *Psalms for Preaching and Worship: a lectionary commentary*. In a passage on Form-Criticism and the Lament Psalms, they present

various theories to explain the shift from petition and complaint to confession of trust and vow of praise in the Lament Psalms. Here, it is not only the old theory of the oracle of salvation and newer theories that are mentioned; we also find a passage that presents and appreciates Erich Fromm's psychodynamic approach in *You Shall Be as Gods* (Harn & Strawn 2009, pp. 9–12). Overall, we have to acknowledge that Fromm's impact on Old Testament Theology and other literary and hermeneutical approaches does not amount to more than passing references of varying lengths. For this reason, I would now like to examine Fromm's impact on descriptive and historical-exegetical Hebrew Bible studies.

Erich Fromm's Impact on Descriptive and Historical-Exegetical Hebrew Bible studies

Erich Fromm is not usually regarded as a scholar interested in descriptive historical clarification for its own sake. In his book *The Right Chorale: Studies in Biblical Law and Interpretation*, Bernard M. Levenson, Professor of Classical and Near Eastern Studies and of Law at the University of Minnesota, refers briefly to Fromm's *You Shall Be as Gods* in a passage on non-philological and non-historical-critical attempts to restore meaning to the biblical text (Levenson 2008, p. 14 with fn 10). Even though experts do not regard Fromm as a scholar concerned with mere description and clarification, it is evident that exegetical contributions do occasionally appeal to Erich Fromm's works, albeit mostly in the form of passing references (we will discuss the few exceptions later in this paper). This is primarily because the majority of scholars only refer to Fromm's later works and explicit references to the Bible and do not consider Fromm's earlier works presenting his socio-psychodynamic model as applicable to historical research. (In the last section, I will refer back to this point and try to show how Fromm's model might be used in historical research on biblical and other historical texts.)

Rüdiger Lux, Professor emeritus of Old Testament at the University of Leipzig, also includes a chapter on the history of research in his book on Jonah. In a subchapter on the history of the psychology of religion, he briefly outlines Fromm's views in *Man for Himself* (1947a) as well as *The*

Forgotten Language (1951a) (Lux 1994, p. 26). In the final chapter of his book *Myth and History in the Bible*, Giovanni Garbini, Professor emeritus of Semitic studies at the University of Rome, writes the following:

The new religion deletes any trace of myth; with the well-chosen expression of Hermann Cohen, we could define it a “religion of reason”; the complex philosophical elaboration of this scholar, together with the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible offered by Erich Fromm in a fascinating book [*You Shall Be as Gods*; J.D.], are somehow the best comment to the over-hasty description of the Sadducees written by Flavius Josephus: “the Sadducees (...) affirm that men have the power of choice between good and evil and that, according to his own will, each one goes towards the former or the latter” (Garbini 2003, pp. 138–9).

While Erich Fromm’s works are only mentioned in passing in the aforementioned books, they are addressed in more detail by psychologists interested in the Hebrew Bible as well as biblical scholars willing to apply psychological approaches to the biblical texts. Fromm only features minimally in the footnotes of Drewermann’s opus magnum *Tiefenpsychologie und Exegese* (cf. Drewermann 1991. Vol. 1, p. 32, 257, 262; Vol. 2, p. 587). Albert Rabin, once Professor of psychology at Michigan State University, examines Fromm’s works extensively in his book *Psychological Issues in Biblical Lore: Explorations in the Old Testament*. He does so in three ways. Firstly, when addressing the Bible’s contemplations of death, Rabin cites Fromm’s *Man for Himself* regarding Man’s capacity to contemplate his own death (Rabin 1998, p. 38). Secondly, when dealing with the Bible’s Song of Songs, Rabin again refers to *Man for Himself* (1947a), this time citing its view on love (Rabin 1998, p. 48). Thirdly, when discussing dreams in the Hebrew Bible, Rabin cites Fromm’s *The Forgotten Language* (1951a) on several occasions (Rabin 1998, pp. 172, 176, 179).

In his book *Psychological Biblical Criticism*, Andrew Kille, an American writer and teacher educated in theology and Bible studies, engages at length with Erich Fromm’s ideas (Kille 2001, pp. 109–24). He compares Fromm’s interpretation of the Eden narrative in *You Shall Be as Gods* with Lynn Bechtel’s interpretation in which the Eden narrative represents the individual’s process of maturation and transition from childhood via adolescence to adulthood (Kille 2001, p. 114). Although Kille acknowledges that

Fromm's work lives up to Paul Ricœur's criteria for adequate psychological explanations, he ultimately prefers Bechtel's interpretation to Fromm's, since, in Kille's opinion, Fromm's theory "ignores details that do not fit. His theory is predominant; he subordinates the text to theory" (Kille 2001, p. 120); and, for this reason, he prefers Bechtel's interpretation. In this way, Kille takes up a criticism presented in the above review articles on Fromm's *You Shall Be as Gods*. In his critique, Kille continues to state that,

Although both Fromm and Bechtel agree that the traditional 'sin and fall' model for interpreting Genesis 2–3 is misleading, Fromm's exegesis still owes much to that very model. He asserts that the act of disobedience entails no cosmic alteration in human nature or the world, but that the essence of the tale is still to be found in disobedience/rebellion and punishment by a jealous God (Kille 2001, p. 122).

A full appreciation and application of Fromm's *To Have Or to Be?* (1976a) is found in an article on *Haben oder Sein? Anmerkungen zur Anthropologie des Buches Kobolet* by Rüdiger Bartelmus, Professor emeritus of the Old Testament at the University of Greifswald. In this article, Bartelmus applies Fromm's differentiation of attitudes behind Man's actions as *to have* or *to be* to the understanding of the anthropology of the book of Ecclesiastes. In the face of death as man's destiny, Ecclesiastes presents two different attitudes: Man can aim *to have* (to have things, to have work to do, a frantic activeness as a way of striving after wind) or Man can try *to be* (to rejoice, to enjoy, to relish as a way of living in accordance with Man's share in this world) (cf. Bartelmus 1990.)

More recently, I took up Fromm's emphasis on Hebrew *emunah* (steadfastness, veracity), which can be found in several of Fromm's works – for example, *Man for Himself* (1947a) and *To Have Or to Be?* (1976a) – and I applied Fromm's view of *The Art of Loving* (1956a) to "the art of friendship", which can be found in the Old Testament and ancient Near Eastern sources. My aim was to demonstrate that friendship should also be regarded as an art of living that builds intensively upon trustworthiness, steadfastness, and veracity (*emunah*) (cf. Dietrich 2013a).

In the next section, I will examine whether Hebrew Bible studies could benefit from a further application of Fromm's Ideas.

Possible Benefits for Hebrew Bible Studies from a Further Application of Fromm's Ideas

Erich Fromm and the Psalms

It could be suggested that Fromm's genre criticism could be applied to the problem of the change of mood in the lament psalms. Writing in 1998, Svante Lundgren remarks that such an application has not been undertaken:

If Fromm thought that his analysis of the different moods in which the psalms were written would influence biblical scholarship he was wrong. In no major commentary on the Psalms written after 1966 is his theory even mentioned. The classification of the psalms is still made in the footsteps of Gunkel, and no non-theologian is allowed to disturb that. Nobody can expect Fromm's classification to become the standard one or to replace Gunkel's, but as an additional theory one might expect it to be mentioned, discussed, and criticized. But the exegetical reaction was silence (Lundgren 1998, p. 150–1).

However, more recently (as described above), Roger E. van Harn and Brent A. Strawn took up Fromm's "genre criticism" in their book *Psalms for Preaching and Worship*, since, in their opinion, Fromm's "genre-criticism" helps to shed light on the change of mood in the many psalms of lamentation (Harn & Strawn 2009, pp. 9–12). Although presenting insightful ideas, these authors unfortunately fail to combine Fromm's ideas with modern performative explanations. Such a connection could help to further explain the so-called *Stimmungsumschwung*, as it could effectively combine psychodynamic and performative approaches without needing to build upon problematic explanations such as the oracles of salvation. In the following section, the psalms continue to play a role as I address the problem of violence in the Hebrew Bible.

Erich Fromm and the Problem of Violence in the Hebrew Bible

Since Jan Assmann's book *The Price of Monotheism* (2010), there has been an ongoing discussion surrounding the inherent intolerance of monothe-

ism in its differentiation between true and false. This debate recently re-emerged on the German webpage *perlentaucher.de* and in the subsequent publication *Die Gewalt des einen Gottes* (cf. Schieder 2014). This might raise the question of whether and how Erich Fromm's differentiation between authoritarian and humanistic religions might fit into the ongoing debate about violence and intolerance in the Old Testament. There are two points I would like to make here. Firstly, we must remember that, in his essay *Im Schatten des Sinai*, Peter Sloterdijk takes up Exodus 32 as an example of Israel's intolerant and totalitarian view (Sloterdijk 2013). But he was not the first to do this. In his 1983 work *Die Theorie der Projektion*, Jörg Jeremias already called Erich Fromm's perspectives on idolatry intolerant and appealed to Exodus 32 as the most violent example of intolerant monotheism. Fromm, according to Jeremias, never escaped the typical "Jewish intolerance" towards polytheistic religions and its images (Jeremias 1983, pp. 325–404).

Secondly, I would like to suggest that one could take up Erich Fromm's emphasis on *different attitudes* behind official doctrines and deeds in an attempt to expose the overly "idealistic" nature of the ongoing discussion (in the sense that it is Man's ideas that govern history) and in an attempt to demonstrate that Fromm's differentiation between authoritarian and humanistic religion runs through all existing societies and religions, including monotheism. From this perspective, Fromm's "fight against idols" might be worth considering (whilst avoiding a flat identification with the Old Testament fight against idolatry and images). Furthermore, the application of Fromm's differentiation between defensive and malignant aggression might help to solve the problems of violence in the psalms of revenge. In this case, Fromm's differentiation could reveal that the Psalmist's wishes for revenge are more defensive than malignant: It is the ongoing "enemy" attacks the Psalmist attempts to fight, which expresses his wish for "revenge" in situations of an ongoing attack (On the so-called Psalms of revenge, cf. e.g. Zenger 1994; Dietrich 2013b).

In the final section, I will address Erich Fromm's theoretic model in an attempt to deepen our understanding of religious symbol systems, including the Hebrew Bible's.

The Legacy and Application of Erich Fromm's Socio-Psychoanalytic Model

The perspectives and approaches of the so-called ‘non-orthodox Neo-Freudians’, such as Erich Fromm, Karen Horney, or Harry Stack Sullivan, all emphasize the importance of inter-personal relationships and cultural and social circumstances as exercising major influences on the self. It is particularly evident with regards to Fromm’s concept of social character (cf. Funk 1998) that cultural and social influences and dependencies on Man’s mind play a major role; and, with the rejection of Freudian libido-theory, Fromm’s focus on psychic needs as well as psychic mechanisms, are open-ended with regard to finding various historical expressions in culture and society. (On these psychic needs and mechanisms that are open-ended for historically divergent cultural and social actualizations and forms, see below). Therefore, I would like to argue that, pertaining to psychoanalytic models, Fromm’s concept of social character complements cultural-historical, social-historical, and religious-historical research – including Hebrew Bible research – more than other psychoanalytic models. (In this way, Fromm’s theoretic model is not affected by the critique of Drewermann’s depth analysis by Lohfink & Pesch 1987. On sound historical-psychological approaches in regard to New Testament scriptures, see Berger 2003; Gemünden 2009.)

In recent years, the history of religion has re-emerged as a main discipline within Hebrew Bible studies. In these instances, evolutionary thinking has come back in full by the name of religious history of ancient Palestine/Israel (e.g. Albertz 1994; Keel & Uehlinger 1998) as well as pertaining to religious history in general (e.g. Bellah 2011), thereby including theoretic approaches and models from related sciences (on some of these, see below). In these instances, Fromm’s differentiation of steadfast character orientations could be effectively applied not only to Ecclesiastes (as Bartelmus (1990) did commendably) but also to numerous biblical books and extra-biblical sources, which would not only apply *To Have Or to Be?* (Fromm 1976a), but, by utilization of Fromm’s model of non-orthodox social psychoanalysis, would also include his differentiation of character orientations. So, although some may not wish to appeal to Fromm’s concrete interpretations of biblical texts, we could instead appeal to his theoretical model to pro-

vide new insights. In doing so, however, we should be aware of frameworks that resemble Fromm's. In recent decades, various theoretical models and approaches to reveal attitudes and mentalities in history and society have been developed. In historiography, this includes the so-called *history of mentalities* by Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch; in sociology, this includes the concept of *habitus* by Pierre Bourdieu; and, in cultural anthropology, this includes the classical definition of religion by Clifford Geertz.

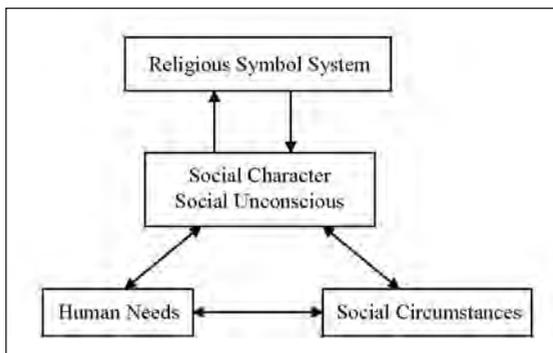
According to Geertz' definition in his *Religions as a cultural system*, a *religion* is

- (1) a system of symbols which acts to
- (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by
- (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and
- (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that
- (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic (Geertz 1993, p. 90).

It is clear that Erich Fromm's socio-psychoanalytic model identifies similar aspects and that, from the perspective of psychodynamic sociology and the differentiation of social character orientations, it might effectively complement Geertz' approach and other approaches mentioned above. While these frameworks have the potential to focus on reflective as well as non-reflective attitudes and mentalities, Fromm's psychodynamic approach can contribute by examining socially shared unconscious aspects of *habitus*, mentalities, orientations and "long-lasting moods and motivations" (Geertz 1993, p. 90). Furthermore, his theoretic model helps to explain how these shared, long-lasting and socially conditioned character orientations come into being¹ and how they are maintained²; and it does so without referring

- 1 With his model, Fromm wished to show the way in which social circumstances enter the human mind (and, in turn, influence the religious symbol system), in this way solving problems of Marx' concept of basis and superstructure. Fromm's model is not a crude form of Marxism but is open to the fact that ideas are important factors (though not the most important factors) in governing history.
- 2 Geertz' "aura of factuality" arises because, according to Fromm, socially conditioned and shared, long-lasting moods and character orientations help people to think and do what they have to think and do, according to culture's and society's expectations.

back to instinctual drive theories, which are less insightful regarding history's divergent developments and cultural as well as social variability. In my article *Religion und Gesellschafts-Charakter*, I aimed to show how Fromm's socio-psychoanalytic model is connected to his non-orthodox thinking about the human condition with its psychic needs and socially shared character orientations. I also aimed to apply this model to the history of religions in exegesis and religious studies. The following diagram indicates how Fromm's model could be applied to religious symbol systems in general and in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Dietrich 2000, p. 200):



According to Fromm, Man is not determined by Freudian drives as instinctual sources, but (alongside basic physiological needs such as hunger, thirst, sleep, and sexuality) by psychic needs that find diverging expressions as passionate strivings in history's different cultures and societies. First and foremost, these include the need for relatedness, the need for rootedness, effectiveness, identity experience, and for a frame of orientation and an object of devotion.³ As these strivings find various expressions in history and become long-lasting attitudes conditioned by society's cultural, social, and economic systems, important components of Man's longings become social character orientations shared by many members of the group or even

3 For a critical evaluation of Fromm's view of the human condition, cf., e.g., Thomson 2009, pp. 25–49, esp. 45–9. In any case, "Fromm's philosophical anthropology was closely tied to his interpretation of the Old Testament" (Burston 1991, p. 94).

the given society. These psychodynamic (i.e. conscious as well as preconscious and unconscious) character orientations find their expression in the given culture's religious symbol systems. In this way, religion is not only the expression of Man's conscious feeling, thinking and acting but also an expression of man's unconscious but socially dependent character orientations. In regard to expressions of the social unconscious, religious symbols can, according to Fromm, do three things. Firstly, they can elude the linguistic community's verbal filter in giving symbolic expression to experiences for which everyday language has no words. Secondly, they can elude the community's filter of logic in giving expression to "un-logical" ways of feeling and thinking found in associations and emotions. And, thirdly, they can express and also elude society's taboos in giving expression to otherwise unapproved moods and orientations; for example, on special feast days or in "secret" (e.g. apocalyptic) scriptures. Religion might, therefore, provide unveiled expression to experience – even preconscious and unconscious experience – but it might also provide veiled, concealed and "domesticated" (that is, socially conditioned) expression of suppressed experiences via psychic mechanisms such as rationalization, repression, transference, or reaction formation that are open-ended to different historical formations. In this way, religion is never a direct expression of society, as Marx and Engels claimed, but is always mediated through Man's mind, including his unconscious ways of striving and thinking in a way that religion is influenced by but also retroacts on society and social character. Two of my previous articles, *Religion und Gesellschafts-Character* and *Cultural Traumata in the Ancient Near East* provide historical examples taken from texts of the Hebrew Bible and from the ancient Near Eastern cultures.

Conclusion

Over the course of his life as a therapist, scholar, and writer, Erich Fromm was influenced by the ideas and texts of the Hebrew Bible and by the ways in which his Jewish teachers taught him the scriptures. His main work on the Hebrew Bible, *You Shall Be as Gods* (Fromm 1966a), received several reviews by Old Testament and other scholars, the majority of which criticized his anachronistic merging of historical and hermeneutical aspects. Fromm

also made many references to the Hebrew Bible in other works, and these works have also received attention in the form of passing references or sporadic applications by Hebrew Bible scholars. In general, however, it is fair to say that his impact on Hebrew Bible studies, especially in today's academic community, is minimal. Nevertheless, even if some scholars doubt the scientific fruitfulness of Fromm's own interpretations of and references to the Hebrew Bible, it could be argued that his own competence as a Jewish specialist in sociology and psychoanalysis could help to further Hebrew Bible studies from a socio-psychodynamic perspective. This could be possible on different levels: While some of Fromm's individual psychodynamic insights may help to solve particular exegetical or theological problems (for example, problems of the psalms, of vengeance and violence in the Bible), his non-orthodox sociological-psychoanalytic model might foster studies in religious history, thereby contributing a socio-psychodynamic perspective to the scientific community's "thick descriptions" of historical mentalities, socially bound forms of habitus, and long-lasting moods and orientations that all find expression in religious symbol systems, including the Bible's.

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