

# Fact and Fiction about Erich Fromm's Life and Work

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*Abstract:* Many authors have written about Erich Fromm since Rainer Funk published a German Collected Works of Erich Fromm in 1980/1981. Regrettably, however, there have also been many (intentional?) misunderstandings and misinterpretations as well as conscious distortions by former colleagues of the Institute for Social Research as well as by many practitioners of the school of orthodox psychoanalysis; these have often been adopted uncritically by their disciples and various authors and have continued to exert their influence until to the present day. In my paper I shall discuss some of the main mistakes, that I found, made in biographies on Erich Fromm and in publications about Fromm's role at the Institute for Social Research and histories of his contributions to psychoanalysis.

Many authors have written about Erich Fromm since Rainer Funk published the Collected Works of Erich Fromm in 1980/1981. Regrettably, however, there have also been many misunderstandings and misinterpretations as well as conscious distortions by former colleagues of the Institute for Social Research as well as many practitioners of the school of orthodox psychoanalysis; these have often been adopted uncritically by their disciples and various authors and have continued to exert their influence until the present day. The central question for me has always been: What is provable and what is not? Everything else is moot. In my contributions to Fromm research, I have compared Fromm's statements with those of his critics and have presented different points of view in order to arrive at the most realis-

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tic overall picture possible in the light of different perspectives, to make the differences clear, and to give the reasons for these different points of view. I have published my results in numerous books and have also presented them at various events sponsored by the International Erich Fromm Society.

By training, Fromm was a sociologist and psychoanalyst. Inasmuch as his interdisciplinary approach is difficult to categorize, he is often described as a “social philosopher”. It would be more correct, however, to call him a “social psychologist”, since the focus of his publications was clearly on a psychoanalytically molded social psychology. In addition, he worked with others both as a therapist and as a trainer in psychoanalysis for nearly fifty years, and in doing so made a considerable contribution to the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud. Last but not least – and this is something which we can judge better in historical hindsight than during his lifetime – he was one of the most influential as well as one of the clearest-eyed social critics of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the appraisals of his significance remain astonishingly disparate.<sup>1</sup> In spite of many publications, it therefore remains necessary even today to strip away the many misunderstandings of Fromm in order to come to a realistic impression of his life. I wish and must limit myself in my chapter here to just a few issues which are misunderstood – or misrepresented – with particular frequency.

## Life and Work

After finishing my dissertation in 1989 on “*Religion in the Works of Erich Fromm*”, I found it necessary to write the following: “We still do not have enough detailed knowledge for a clear picture of Erich Fromm the human being” (Hardeck 1990, p. 207; cf. Hardeck 1992, p. 243). This has changed

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<sup>1</sup> One indication of this is what was written on his one hundredth birthday, in the year 2000, in German feuilletons about him. Whereas Richard Herzinger, for example, wrote in the *Tagesspiegel* on 23 March 2000 that he was in every sense of the word to be taken seriously, if not as a major social scientist who had left his stamp on the history of one of the most important intellectual movements of the last century; Michael Rutschky in the German publication *taz* found in Fromm only “intellectual lack of substance” and “puffed-up, book-long sermons about good will” (*taz* 18 March, 2000). Lorenz Jaeger in the *FAZ* (26 February 2000) even found a “neurosis in the name of God”.

a great deal in the meantime. Today we have an abundance of information, most of which is now to be found in the collections of the Fromm Archive except for a few of Fromm's letters. For that reason, it is now possible to see Fromm's life more realistically. What is more, Rainer Funk's publications invariably give us utterly reliable biographical details. But good treatments of Fromm's life and works were available, for example, from Daniel Burston (1991) and Helmut Wehr (1990) even before Funk presented his Illustrated Biography in the year 2000, along with many important details to which he gained access only after his biographical introduction in Volume I of the Collected Works and his illustrated *Erich Fromm* monograph of 1983 (Funk 1983), Alfred Lévy's *Erich Fromm* (2002), written from the perspective of an Adlerian, contains not only many correct interpretations, but unfortunately also some misinterpretations. For example, Lévy writes that Fromm had hoped for a renaissance of the matriarchy (Levy 2002, p. 95–6), instead of a dialectic synthesis of patriarchy and matriarchy; in addition, he accused Fromm of saying nothing about some of the people who had formative influences on his life, such as Wilhelm Reich; Fromm not only knew Reich personally, but was also familiar with his Freudo-Marxian school of psychoanalysis and wrote about him in various books. And Reich himself writes in his memoirs that he quickly gave up the desire to convert Fromm to his – Reich's – way of thinking (Reich 1976, p. 137). Nevertheless, Fromm adopted ideas from Reich for his own therapeutic work just as gratefully as he did from many other psychoanalysts. For a person as open as Fromm, this practice was a matter of course.

In addition, Lévy is one of the authors who have failed to understand Fromm's concept of religion and who wish to explain Fromm's religious bent as the result of an inferiority complex, like that typical of religious persons (Levy 2002, p. 217). This understanding is reductionistic in the bad sense of the word. Fromm himself, in my view, provides many clear-cut indications about the nature of this "underlying sense of religion". In addition to his account of his relationship with his parents and his socialization in a completely Jewish environment, these include a "disquiet about the existential dichotomies of life", his longing to experience a world which he perceived as dysfunctional as being once again whole and pristine – and a deep-seated longing to overcome his own loneliness (Fromm 1966a, p. 58).

In 2013 the American historian Lawrence J. Friedman set down what is

known about Fromm's life in an impressive, 400-page biography – including many quotations from Fromm's private letters (from the Fromm Archive) and an abundance of information gathered from interviews with persons who knew Fromm well (Friedman 2013). There is no doubt that Friedman's biography is excellent, a milestone in Fromm research. No other book presents more details from Fromm's life. On the other hand, however, and regrettably, the book also contains new errors and superfluous speculations. One major flaw in the book flows from Friedman's lack of German language skills, and the need for him to rely on a German speaking collaborator. As a result, he is lacking important information which he could have found, for example in the publications of Wolfgang Bonss (1984), Rolf Wiggershaus (1994), Helmut Wehr (1990), Burkhard Bierhoff (1991), Rainer Funk (above all 1983 and 2000), and myself (1993 and 2005). Thankfully, some of his most glaring factual errors have been carefully corrected by the translator team of Maren Klostermann, Maja Uebele-Pfaff and Christoph Trunk with the advisory assistance of Rainer Funk. For this reason, the German translation (Friedman 2013a) deviates – and rightly so – in some places from the American original, without, of course, changing Friedman's book in any essential way. Fromm is, by the way, just as much a prophet of reason and enlightenment as he is one of love. In the second place, Friedman shows a strong affinity for gossip and speculations about Fromm's private life, even without documentary evidence to support this.

Friedman succeeds well in summarizing Fromm's most important works in compact form. On the other hand, the same works lose a good deal of their original substance in the process. If we put aside the political climate of the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, it becomes clear that Friedman scrupulously avoids almost all discussion of the topics treated by Fromm, and also spends little time on the respective secondary literature and the reception history of Fromm's ideas. This does not mean, however, that it was Friedman's aim to circumvent these issues. His primary focus was on Fromm as a person. On the other hand, the picture which he paints of Fromm is not quite the same as that of Rainer Funk, who, after all, knows Fromm better than anyone else, or the one which I myself have gained during the course of my many years of studying Fromm. Friedman believes that he can identify numerous areas of discontinuity in Fromm. Funk and I, on the other hand, believe that we have solid reasons for per-

ceiving a continuity which permeates Fromm's life and work to an astonishing degree.

Perhaps Friedman merely wishes in fact to say that Fromm was himself affected by the many salient sojourns of his life, and by the fact that he thought and wrote in three languages and explored so many different areas of thought. Nevertheless, it is often difficult to avoid the impression (above all at the end of his "Prologue") that Friedman is attempting to present Fromm in the final analysis as a pathological case, a sort of multiple personality – and should this in fact be his assertion, then I find it impossible to understand why. In addition, Friedman is neither a psychologist nor a psychoanalyst, but rather a historian. For that reason, it seems to me that he should be more cautious in his ventures into the area of "psychologizing".

## Fromm's Role at the Institute for Social Research

Certain critics of Fromm wish to untether a "critical", "scientific" Fromm, the author of publications during his years at the Institute for Social Research in the 1930s (often also the Fromm of the *Escape from Freedom*, i.e. the writer of the early 1940s) from a later, uncritical, allegedly "unscientific" moral prophet, while at the same time acknowledging the importance of his methods and results in "Psychoanalytic Social Psychology", his theory of the "social character", and his view of the family as the "agency of society". They appear not to know, or even to suppress the fact that it was Fromm and not Adorno who developed and described the concept of the "authoritarian character" and presented the very first empirical, socio-psychological study in Germany about the attitudes of workers and salaried employees.

Numerous critics who have attempted to distinguish between the "scientific" and the later Fromm have failed to recognize the fact that while his terminology changed, his personal convictions did not, nor did his skill in illusion-less analysis. When, for example, Gerhard P. Knapp writes in his *Erich Fromm* that "his works from these years display a keen edge of argumentation, a realism and not least a precision of literary style which Fromm had in no way possessed in earlier years and never attained again thereafter (...) [because he] was challenged by the surroundings of the Institute to give his best" (Knapp 1982, p. 27) he attributes too much importance – with all

due respect for Fromm's achievements there – to a Freudo-Marxian jargon which was in part still not fully developed and which Fromm apparently felt it necessary to use in his writings in order to achieve recognition.

In his book *The Frankfurt School*, Rolf Wiggershaus (1994) became the first author to truly and accurately describe the role of Erich Fromm at the Institute for Social Research. Martin Jay (1976) had taken a first step in this direction in his *Dialectic Imagination. The History of the Frankfurt School and of the Institute for Social Research 1923–1950*, but clearly shared certain pre-assumptions of the Frankfurt School regarding Fromm and was not in possession of all the facts. Wiggershaus was followed – with further revealing and detailed knowledge about “intentional taciturnity” (Burkhardt Bierhoff) and re-evaluations of Fromm's important role for the school of Critical Theory – by Burkhardt Bierhoff (1991) and Helmut Johach (1991), Daniel Burston (1991), Rainer Funk (2000), and myself (Hardeck 2005), inasmuch as I now had access to Horkheimer's complete correspondence with Fromm, Adorno and Karl Landauer (M. Horkheimer 1995; 1996). The same is true of Lawrence Friedman (2013), who gives a good picture of the developments leading up to Fromm's departure from the Institute and in doing so goes into an intensive study of the correspondence.

Horkheimer and Adorno even went so far as to falsify the Institute's history in order to cast a veil of silence over Fromm's role there. In the “Preface” to their publication of lectures from the series “Freud Today” at the universities of Frankfurt and Heidelberg in 1956, Horkheimer and Adorno wrote the following: “Since its founding in the years before 1933, the Institute has included psychoanalysis in its work, and this in its strict Freudian form” (quoted from Horkheimer 1996, Vol. 19, pp. 17–20). This is correct. But then the text goes on: “From the very beginning, a psychoanalytic department was an integral part of the Institute and was headed by Karl Landauer, the student of Freud who died in Bergen-Belsen.” This is untrue. The department was headed from 1930 to 1939 by Erich Fromm.

The next sentence proceeds: “The Journal for Social Research contained in its first issue a programmatic essay about the tasks of analytic Social psychology” (Horkheimer 1932, reprint 1980). To quote the preface of the reprint: “The – often very long – papers are not devoted foremost to empirical research in sociology – as the title might seem to indicate – but rather to social philosophy above all, and to sociology, political theory, political

economics, the sociology of art and literature, and to philosophical and social anthropology” (p. 3.). However, Theodor W. Adorno's five articles in total in the Institute journal up to 1940 deal exclusively with the sociology of music: *Zur gesellschaftlichen Lage der Musik* (1932), *Über Jazz* (1936), *Über den Fetischcharakter in der Musik und die Regression des Hörens* (1938), *Fragmente über Wagner* (1939) and, with George Simpson, *On Popular Music* (1940/41). This is correct. It was written by Erich Fromm – a fact which, however, was not mentioned.

Not admitting the relevance of Fromm's work is continued when the many years of “empirical studies at the Institute” are elaborated upon (Horkheimer 1932, reprint 1980, p. 18), but without connecting them with *Studies on Authority and Family*<sup>2</sup> – a volume which is named there and appeared in 1936 in Paris (Horkheimer 1936). Nor is there any mention of Erich Fromm's and Hilde Weiss's preliminary results from 1929 on – that is, even before Fromm joined the Institute for Social Research! – which are contained in that volume. These included the concept for a socio-psychological study which was then developed independently and carried out on an empirical basis by Fromm as a member of the Institute concerning the attitudes of workers and salaried employees (Fromm 1980a).

As Wolfgang Bonss correctly states, for some eight to nine years – that is, “as long as Fromm's role as an expert remained unquestioned in the Institute, work was carried on there for the most part more or less openly on the basis of concepts which he had developed” (Bonss 1979, p. 29). In his trail-blazing description of the history of the Institute, Martin Jay was the first

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2 *Studien über Autorität und Familie* is a joint work of the Institute for Social Research which was published as a collection of papers in 1936 in Paris by Felix Alcán. It contains the following dedication: “The Institute dedicates its first report on joint research to FELIX WEIL, our loyal friend”. The theoretical sections form the *first section*: “General Remarks” (Max Horkheimer); “Socio-Psychological Section” (Erich Fromm); “History of Ideas” (Herbert Marcuse). Erich Fromm introduces in the *second section* the results of empirical data acquisition (among workers and salaried employees, on sexual mores, etc.). The *third section* contains individual studies and literature reviews by, among others, Karl A. Wittfogel (*Wirtschaftsgeschichtliche Grundlagen der Entwicklung der Familienautorität*), Paul Honigsheim (*Materialien zur Beziehung zwischen Familie und Asozialität von Jugendlichen*), Marie Jahoda (*Autorität und Erziehung in der Familie, Schule und Jugendbewegung Österreichs*) and Hans Mayer (*Autorität und Familie in der Theorie des Anarchismus*). The sociologist and historian Alfred Meusel also contributed an article.



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to find that Fromm emerged “soon as the most important figure” (Jay 1976, p. 115) there and that direction of the socio-psychological department of the Institute was officially transferred to him for the rest of his life. Curiously, *The Authoritarian Personality*, a study from the year 1950 (Adorno et al. 1950), was ascribed foremost to Theodor W. Adorno because of his theoretical contribution to the results of the study workgroup; that it was indebted in large part to preparatory work was indeed mentioned here – but again without admitting that it was Erich Fromm, who carried out that work.

And finally, the name “Fromm” is not heard even when he is primarily meant, namely when at the end of the short “Preface” written by Horkheimer himself we read:

The psychoanalytic revisionism of the various schools of thought, a revisionism which advocates allegedly Freudian exaggerations in contrast to a greater focus on so-called social factors, has not merely softened the greatest discoveries of Freud regarding the role of early childhood, of suppression, even the central concept of the unconscious.

This misrepresents Fromm’s views on psychoanalysis, but Horkheimer goes further when he writes, “but over and above that he [Fromm] suffered an attrition of critical acuity with his preoccupation with the trivial character of human understanding, remaining allied with social conformism.” (Horkheimer 1996. Vol. 19, p. 19). This is a reproach made by Fromm’s former colleagues, who cling fast to it in spite of all evidence to the contrary.

Horkheimer, Adorno, and later Marcuse and the supporters of orthodox psychoanalysis accused Fromm of “revisionism”. As soon as this term is thrown into the ring, one thing becomes clear: the issue is no longer one of learning, but rather one of battles of belief. Revisionism, as is well known, is not an issue of learning. Quite the contrary: the primary task of learning is to review a theory, to improve it, to change it, and to discard it if necessary. At that time, however, battles of beliefs raged fiercely, driven by the desire for pre-eminence of interpretation, and naturally by vanity as well, and by a struggle for position, wealth, power and influence.

From today’s vantage point it is clear that Horkheimer and Adorno – acting on the basis of timidity and opportunism – avoided a conflict with



the psychoanalytic orthodoxy which was in the process of development. They also feared that the individual, without the resistance provided by the core drives which were Freud's starting point, might be defenseless and totally malleable in the face of manipulation. In the end, they found increasingly that Freudian pessimism was the only appropriate attitude given their view of the irreversibly painful and obtuse situation of human beings. Therefore, they rejected the illusory "idealism" and "conformism" of Fromm, who in their eyes was still laughably bent on improving the world.

There is yet another historical *mélange* which heirs of the Frankfurt School have passed on down to the present day, as I was able to see incontrovertibly at an exposition at the University of Frankfurt just a few years ago: in contrast to most pictures painted by Horkheimer, Adorno and others, Theodor W. Adorno did not become a member of the Institute until 1938, not before that time.<sup>3</sup> It is also difficult to understand why both of the biographies presented upon Adorno's one-hundredth birthday, namely that of Detlev Claussen (2003) and that of Stefan Müller-Dohm (2003), ignore the pertinent literature about the constellation of topics concerning Fromm/Horkheimer/Adorno, and why Fromm is almost never mentioned in these publications.

The fact that his colleagues at the Institute, all of whom were not, after all, psychoanalysts, suddenly came to the defense of orthodox psychoanalysis against Fromm, was justly assessed by him as follows: "Partly this had to do with the influence of Adorno, whom I had criticized very sharply from the very beginning of his appearance in New York" – as Fromm wrote in a letter to Martin Jay (Fromm 1992, p. 254). In fact, Fromm and Adorno – quite apart from the many areas in which their convictions parted ways – simply disliked each other. Adorno had once secretly ridiculed Fromm in Frankfurt as a "professional Jew", while Fromm for his part detested Adorno's "aesthetic elitism". Moreover, both were highly narcissistic at this point in their lives, and both were courting Horkheimer's favors.

3 "In spite of his friendly and even collegial relationships with Horkheimer, Pollock, Löwenthal and Fromm, Adorno was not an official member of the Institute for Social Research either before or after he became a professor. His ideas were simply different from those of Horkheimer and the members of the Institute in many fundamental respects. Nevertheless Adorno continuously published articles intermittently in the Institute's journal from the first issue on." (Müller-Dohm 2003, p. 230)

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Fromm keenly sensed Adorno's efforts to supplant him in Horkheimer's inner circle. And it is a fact that Horkheimer's correspondence from 1935 on clearly reveals that and how Adorno was seeking to squeeze others of the Institute in order to supplant them. At first it was Herbert Marcuse, but then he began to undermine Fromm's position of trust with Horkheimer in the form of subtle criticism. Because of its "lopsided assessment of authority, and due to its "middle-class, individualistic demand for more 'goodness'", for example, Adorno found that Fromm's essay of 1935 on *The Social Determinants of Psychoanalytic Theory* (Fromm 1935a) represented "in reality a threat to the basic line taken by the journal". In addition, he saw himself put in the

paradoxical situation of being forced to defend Freud. It is both sentimental and directly in error, a mixture of social democracy and anarchism, and above all there is a painful lack of dialectical sensitivity. He makes things too easy on himself with his concept of authority, without which, after all, neither Lenin's avant-garde nor dictatorship are conceivable. I would urgently advise him to read Lenin. Astonishing, how allegedly infallible "Popes" level their criticisms at Freud! No, even if we and others on the left dare to criticize Freud, certain things are not permissible, like the simplistic argument about a "lack of goodness (Letter from Adorno to Horkheimer of 21 March 1936, quoted by Wiggershaus 1988, p. 299).

Horkheimer had always been an admirer of Adorno's genius and stylistic brilliance. He was also fascinated by Adorno's aggressiveness and his "hate-honed perspective on his own times" (Letter from Horkheimer to Adorno of 8 December 1936. Horkheimer 1995, Vol. 16) as he confessed in a letter to him. He felt that Fromm lacked this aggressiveness.

Adorno was successful, over the course of time, in appealing ever more effectively to Horkheimer's philosophic streak, with the result that Horkheimer grew increasingly disenchanted with the Frommian approach of linking psychoanalysis with the social sciences. Clearly a plotter to be feared, Adorno was able to write the following, eloquently and even brilliantly, to Horkheimer, for example on 23 March 1937:

The position presently occupied by Fromm is of greatest importance; precisely for that reason, however, as it appears to me, it is exigent upon him to

be especially careful not to steamroll the relationships between psychology and society down to an Adlerian level. I find traces of this in the essay (Adorno's letter to Horkheimer of 23 March 1937. Horkheimer 1995, Vol. 16).

Horkheimer's growing skepticism about Fromm's revision of Freud, in which Fromm replaced the drive theory with one based on relationships, was – presumably without Fromm's knowledge – reinforced not only by Adorno, but also by the psychoanalyst Karl Landauer, with whom Horkheimer corresponded frequently until his tragic death in a German concentration camp in 1943. Landauer had voiced especially negative opinions about a book by Karen Horney and her psychoanalytic approach. Horney had permanently made herself an outcast among orthodox analysts with her best-selling books *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time* (Horney 1937) and *New Ways in Psychoanalysis* (Horney 1939). As her lover at that time and also influenced by her views, Erich Fromm was automatically put into the same boat with her.

Fromm departed from the Institute for Social Research “by his own choice” in 1939. The assertion that he was fired is just one more legend among the many told later. In the light of the research findings of Jay (1976), Bonss (1984) and Wiggershaus (1994), Fromm's role at the Institute for Social Research needs to be completely reassessed. For a long time it was the case that Marcuse's and Adorno's views of Fromm distorted the judgments of influential intellectuals to such a degree that even today it is still nearly impossible to get a hearing for a more factual evaluation (cf. in Internationale Erich-Fromm-Gesellschaft 1991 the comments of Rickert, Wehr, Bierhoff, Johach and Weber).

In his *Theory of Communicative Action*, Jürgen Habermas (1981) indeed attempted to return to the interdisciplinary approach of Critical Theory, but not to the cultural pessimism of Horkheimer and Adorno. Although he made various timid attempts at the time to rehabilitate Fromm as in the following quote, he did not persevere in them thereafter, as John Rickert (1986, p. 399) quite rightly summed up.

In distorting and subsequently neglecting his work, Fromm's critics have not only repressed the thought of one of the left's most passionate and penetrating

spokesmen, they have also failed to benefit fully from the insights Fromm has to offer.”

## Psychoanalysis

Fromm’s writings are permeated with a life-long, respectful, thorough, but also critical dialogue with the person and the thought of Sigmund Freud. As Fromm himself wrote in 1971 to Martin Jay: “I have never left Freudianism” (Fromm 1992, p. 251). Only in his later years did the magnitude of Erich Fromm’s significance for psychoanalytic theory truly become clear. For a long time he was accused of “revisionism”, and his approach was rejected. He was, in fact, even expelled from the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA) in the 1950s. To be sure, this also shows that the psychoanalytic world for a long time resembled a sect more than a field of learning.

Fromm was merely ahead of his time with most of his “re-visions” and his departures from Freud; since then, the times have caught up with him again step by step. In addition, only through the posthumous publications made available by Rainer Funk did it become clear that Fromm, the largely unknown therapist, was ahead of his time in this area as well in many other respects. Here too, his positions have now been accepted for the most part. Fromm repeatedly undertook to re-calibrate the theoretical structure of Freud’s thought. In my view, this was his great talent. By himself, he is not a great initiator or discoverer. But he is indeed the master of a holistic understanding which remains uncorrupted by interests or illusions; he presents a clear-eyed body of insights which are unhampered by specialized or ideological blinders. Fromm carries out philosophical anthropology with an empirical basis and a solid footing in therapeutic experience. He himself views this as his contribution to “a science of man”.

In his book *The Legacy of Erich Fromm* (unfortunately still available only in English), Daniel Burston (1991) comes to the conclusion that Fromm from the beginning was always merely in a justifiable position of “loyal opposition” to Freud and that it was thanks to him that psychoanalysis opened itself to interdisciplinary perspectives.

The Freiburg analyst Johannes Cremerius wrote in the 1980s:

One of the curious aspects of this story is that Freud himself was relegated more and more to the camp of dissidents at the same time that the Psychoanalytic Institute of Berlin and then that of London increasingly donned the straitjacket of orthodoxy. For example, his third and final conceptualization of the psychic event, the formulation of structural theory of 1923, was not adopted by many analysts [a fact to which Fromm had also referred repeatedly]. They clung to the earlier positions of his theory and thus also to earlier forms of treatment techniques. In addition, these institutes instituted a rigorism of training which he, Fromm, resolutely countered with a bold, more liberal point of view. And finally (...) he did not hold fast to the basic principles of treatment techniques which he himself had promulgated between 1910 and 1914 (Cremerius 1986, p. 30).

To continue with Cremerius: psychoanalysis opened up in the forty years since Freud's death:

All are contained and tolerated under the same roof: the theory of Melanie Klein, the supporters of dasein analysis, the theories on the pre-oedipal phase of development and its meaning for the aetiology and therapy of neuroses, etc. – and this would also include and tolerate those who have exited from it by their own choice, such as the supporters of the cultural, interpersonal school of psychoanalysis (Horney, Fromm, Thompson, Sullivan et al.). Viewed from today's standpoint, the latter name appears far less removed from Freud's "foundational ideas" and far less "dissident" than those of other groups which remained under that same roof (Cremerius 1986, p. 32).

While the last part of this quote is quite true, it is simply inaccurate to say that the "Neo-Freudians" departed from the psychoanalytic society of their own free will. They did not do so; rather, they were ostracized and thrown out. After its promising beginning, unfortunately, the essay of Cremerius, after its very good depiction of the heterogenic situation which developed over the course of time within the Psychoanalytic Association, characteristically loses itself in the old reproaches of the "Frankfurt School" of adaptational psychology against the "Neo-Freudians".

In the last twenty years, however, a strong tendency has now finally become noticeable in the old trench warfare: there are many analysts who wish to bury the battleaxes, and to view the different perspectives as mutually enhancing rather than apodictic pronouncements of truth. Tzvetan

Todorov, who has written a book about general anthropology which is well worth reading, distinguishes between two “subtraditions”: The one, which can be traced back to Ferenczi, objects to Freud’s “father orientation” and emphasizes the relationships which are formed in the “pre-oedipal phase between mother and child”; in reaching back to Bachofen’s speculations about the “rights of the mother”, it discovers conflict-free relationships at the wellspring of the life of the individual. No matter how deeply one manages to penetrate into the human spirit, one will never find a being in isolation but only a complex of relationships with other beings” (Todorov 1998, p. 54). He names Alice and Michael Balint as the most important representatives of this direction.

The other subtradition has its origin in Erich Fromm’s marxistic criticism of Freudian teaching and Freudians, of Karen Horney’s social, culturalistic and feministic criticism, and finally of the interpersonal psychiatry of H.S. Sullivan. (...). These were then joined by certain psychologists of the “self” who also built up a close collaboration with the ethnologists. (...) Fromm also channeled attention to another aspect of the Freudian model: the recourse to the economic model [of the 19th century] (Todorov 1998, p. 55).

Although Todeorov is quite right in this, he fails to perceive that Fromm must legitimately be counted among the progenitors of both groups.

In point of fact, Fromm must also be regarded as a patriarch of the “self-psychology” which is so popular today and of which Heinz Kohut is regarded as the founder. From *Escape from Freedom* (Fromm 1941a) to his fully developed narcissism concept in *The Heart of Man* (Fromm 1964a), he – and many other psychoanalysts, – provided an abundance of ideas upon which Kohut later drew upon (allegedly on his own). The Kohut biographer Ralf J. Butzer writes about this as follows (Butzer 1997, p. 147):

The general impression [with Kohut] is that self-psychology expresses fully new, never-before glimpsed aspects and that Kohut’s thought is characterized by great originality. But a vague suspicion about this may well arise in the form of a question for persons acquainted with the psychoanalytic literature: is Kohut not acquainted with the groundwork-laying writings of famous theoreticians like M. Balint, W.R.D. Fairbairn, H. Guntrip or D.W. Winnicott, or does there a method to his silence about them?

Cremerius goes so far as to accuse Kohut of “intellectual theft” inasmuch as he helped himself to large portions from the works of Eissler and Karen Horney without naming the sources of his discoveries (Cremerius 1986, p. 30). This list could be lengthened with further names, including those of such classic authors as Ferenczi, Jung, Adler, Lou Salome, Otto Rank, Sullivan and – last but not least – Erich Fromm. As is illustrated by the distinction between “benign” (Fromm) or “non-destructive” (Kohut) aggression and “hostile destructivity” (Kohut), Kohut’s findings are astonishingly similar to those of Fromm.

## The Psychology of religion

The topic of religion has a large and important place in Fromm’s works. Many of his critics were at a loss to understand Fromm’s interest in religion. For the most part, they experienced it as his “regression to childhood” (Rattner) or even as a form of “counter-enlightenment” (Wiegand). The social climate from the 1960s to the 1980s made religion appear to many intellectuals as an anachronism which was to be quickly disposed of. They were clearly mistaken.

Fromm, the religious psychologist, has indeed something important to say. Until today, however, this has lacked either acknowledgement or an appropriate reception in the fields of both theology and religious studies. Fromm begins by building a viable synthesis of the religio-psychological ideas of Freud and Jung which he supplements with his own corrections and insights. He provides important impulses, especially with his character orientations, his concept of societal character, and his analyses of narcissism and/or group narcissism in the various religions. In addition, his psychological definition of religion brings a helpful new perspective on a phenomenon which is, as is well-known, difficult to define.

In contrast to what many critics have asserted, Fromm never abandoned his religio-critical positions – as he himself made clear in his early paper *The Dogma of Christ* (1930a). In 1963 he wrote in the preface to the first American edition of this essay:

While I have not changed my views (...), today I would also emphasize the view (which I held then, as now) that the history of religion reflects the history of man’s spiritual evolution (Fromm 1963a, p. viii).



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Rather than being a defender of religion (a misunderstanding which is found repeatedly), Fromm's intention is to pass it on to others (like Ernst Bloch). He crosses out not a single jot or tittle of the criticism of religion voiced by Freud, Feuerbach or Marx – quite the contrary: he invariably agrees with it. But – in contrast to Freud – he regards religions as ambivalent phenomena in which constructive ideas are to be found, whereas Freud, as a person stamped by the rationalistic vision of knowledge of the second half of the nineteenth century, in Fromm's view had perceived only that which Fromm himself called “authoritarian religion”.

Fromm was a post-metaphysical thinker. He systematically interpreted all ontological statements of all the mystics, theologians, founders of religions and philosophers in terms of the inner psyche. However, Fromm opposed only such projections which from his point of view had the potential to do damage. In Fromm's view, humanistic projections, which take into account the respectively possible status of knowledge, are realistic in orientation and therefore reasonable. According to Fromm humanist projections can help humans grow, and to be freer and happier. He studied the history of religions to find where authoritarian and where humanistic tendencies were to be found. In addition, he was a proponent of the feminist perspective inasmuch as he distinguished matriarchal and patriarchal religions long before the development of feminist theology or philosophy.

Astonishingly, there is not a single chair of religious psychology in Germany even today, and the psychology of religion remains a wallflower – even in my own discipline of religious studies. The dominance of the historical-philological disciplines plays just as much a role in this as the factual a-religiosity of the occupants of many chairs and their anxiety in the face of such topic areas. For this reason, I find it very good that it is possible here at the IPU to study psychoanalysis as a cultural science and that the psychology of religion plays a role in the process.

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## Fact and Fiction about Erich Fromm's Life and Work

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