

# Erich Fromm's Revolutionary Hope

**Prophetic Messianism as a Critical  
Theory of the Future**

Joan Braune



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## **Erich Fromm's Revolutionary Hope**

IMAGINATION AND PRAXIS: CRITICALITY AND CREATIVITY IN EDUCATION AND  
EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

VOLUME 4

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SCOPE

Current educational reform rhetoric around the globe repeatedly invokes the language of 21st century learning and innovative thinking while contrarily re-enforcing, through government policy, high stakes testing and international competition, standardization of education that is exceedingly reminiscent of 19th century Taylorism and scientific management. Yet, as the steam engines of educational “progress” continue down an increasingly narrow, linear, and unified track, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the students in our classrooms are inheriting real world problems of economic instability, ecological damage, social inequality, and human suffering. If young people are to address these social problems, they will need to activate complex, interconnected, empathetic and multiple ways of thinking about the ways in which peoples of the world are interconnected as a global community in the living ecosystem of the world. Seeing the world as simultaneously local, global, political, economic, ecological, cultural and interconnected is far removed from the Enlightenment’s objectivist and mechanistic legacy that presently saturates the status quo of contemporary schooling. If we are to derail this positivist educational train and teach our students to see and be in the world differently, the educational community needs a serious dose of imagination. The goal of this book series is to assist students, practitioners, leaders, and researchers in looking beyond what they take for granted, questioning the normal, and amplifying our multiplicities of knowing, seeing, being and feeling to, ultimately, envision and create possibilities for positive social and educational change. The books featured in this series will explore ways of seeing, knowing, being, and learning that are frequently excluded in this global climate of standardized practices in the field of education. In particular, they will illuminate the ways in which imagination permeates every aspect of life and helps develop personal and political awareness. Featured works will be written in forms that range from academic to artistic, including original research in traditional scholarly format that addresses unconventional topics (e.g., play, gaming, ecopedagogy, aesthetics), as well as works that approach traditional and unconventional topics in unconventional formats (e.g., graphic novels, fiction, narrative forms, and multi-genre texts). Inspired by the work of Maxine Greene, this series will showcase works that “break through the limits of the conventional” and provoke readers to continue arousing themselves and their students to “begin again” (Greene, *Releasing the Imagination*, 1995, p. 109).

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*Prophetic Messianism as a Critical Theory of the Future*

**Joan Braune**

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SENSE PUBLISHERS  
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With love and solidarity,  
To my parents, Nick and Linda Braune,  
And to my grandmother Yvonne Braune.



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## FOREWORD

We are pleased to present this book on the work of Erich Fromm by Joan Braune during these crucial and dark times of perpetual war, economic uncertainty and the relentless drumbeats toward standardization in education. Joan's outstanding scholarship came to our attention when we were researching the intersections between the lives of Erich Fromm and Paulo Freire. We were thrilled to discover that these two men spent time together, but more than that held similar views on the role we play in creating hope as active, dynamic, and forward-looking. For Fromm, hope that is not acted upon is not hope at all. And for Freire, hope is so essential to what it means to be human that he describes it as an "ontological need". Both Fromm and Freire saw hope as active and productive, and a necessary driving force for social change. Dr. Braune's innovative reading and elaboration of Fromm's "prophetic messianism" fits precisely into this critical view of radical hope that refuses to accept the present order while actively imagining and engaging in transformative praxis in present local and global contexts. We present this book as a beacon of active and persistent hope in the midst of prevailing and often hopeless conditions in education. It is our hope that in the spirit of Fromm and Freire, this book will both inform and inspire teachers, students and cultural workers everywhere to imagine and transform schools, neighborhoods, cities and countries into dynamic places of sustainable life, radical love and the undiminished light of humanity at its best.

—*Tricia Kress and Robert Lake*



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I would also like to thank Robert Lake, co-editor of this series with Tricia Kress, both of whom have done much fine work in bringing Critical Theory into wider circles of education, including among emancipatory educators. I am publishing through this series at Bob's invitation, and I am eager to do so, not least because I think the material is timely for the left today, as well as for Critical Theory and critical pedagogy. I am very pleased that this book will form part of the series on "Imagination and Praxis: Creativity and Criticality in Educational Research."

My parents, Nick Braune and Linda Braune, were immensely helpful. I am incredibly fortunate that my parents were very interested in my research and had many ideas to offer and discuss. My father in particular was a dialogue partner, and we have presented on Fromm together at a range of conferences. Both my parents offered more proofreading help than anyone ought to ever do for free. I am immensely grateful.

My grandmother Yvonne Braune, besides knowing a slew of labor history and being in other ways equally awesome, deserves tremendous thanks for her financial assistance in helping me through both undergraduate and graduate education.

Rainer Funk, the director of the Erich Fromm archive in Tübingen, Germany and director of the International Erich Fromm Society helped to answer some questions, including sharing with me some of Fromm's correspondence via e-mail, and it has been an honor to participate in two of the European conferences he helped to organize on Fromm's work. I am also grateful to the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University, where I was able to study the original correspondence between Thomas Merton and Erich Fromm. (I also viewed documents by Fromm at the New York Public Library and University of Kentucky Special Collections Library.)

I would also like to thank Beth Rosdatter, John Connell, Tiffany Rogers, Kimberly Goard, and Craig Slaven for their proofreading assistance or related feedback at different stages of the writing process. I would also like to acknowledge the encouragement of strong networks of graduate student friends, including a writers group and an online goal-setting group.

It is a pleasure to thank all those who helped me bring this work to fruition, not all of whom can be listed here. Naturally, all weaknesses of the book are my responsibility and not that of anyone mentioned here.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

\* \* \*

This is a book about a radical tradition, and my life is partly the product of radical traditions, although anyone who chooses to be part of such traditions is part of them. When my mother's grandmother Ida Solowey fled czarist Russia for New York City, after having gotten into some trouble over illegally redistributing grain to peasants, I imagine she expected the revolution would come soon. When my paternal grandfather Paul Braune left behind a Catholic seminary when the reality of the Great Depression shattered his political complacency, and when he later went to work as a lawyer for draft dodgers and Black Panthers, there must have been times when he also expected the revolution to come soon. So too, probably, did my parents in the 1960s. I, too, want to choose for the revolution, and I too expect the revolution soon. When I look back and realize how many before us felt the same way, I see it not as evidence that we will fail but as a promise to live in and if necessary (though I want to win), to pass on. Thank you, to all who have gone before in the struggle.

## INTRODUCTION

Messianism is a central, recurring theme in the work of Erich Fromm (1900–1980).<sup>1</sup> As an idea, a theme that captured the spirit of the times, and a movement taking a variety of political, religious, and cultural forms, messianism was in the air throughout Fromm’s youth, while he was deciding his position on the debates raging amongst left-wing Jewish intellectuals. He returned to the messianism question in the 1950s, grappling with it continually from the time of his 1955 book *The Sane Society* to his late, posthumously published manuscript, “Marx and Meister Eckhart on Having and Being,” on which he was working in the 1970s (OBH 113).

As Michael Löwy, Eduardo Mendieta, Rudolf Siebert, and others have pointed out, Fromm’s thought, like that of many other Frankfurt School thinkers, was partly motivated by a partially secularized messianism, a theoretical adaptation of the traditional Jewish hope and enthusiasm for the coming of the messianic age (Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia* 151-8; Mendieta 142-3; Siebert *passim*). While the concept of messianism was initially developed by Jewish theologians, not by political theorists, it has proven to be a useful tool for understanding revolutionary change, and strains of its influence can be found throughout the work of the Frankfurt School, from Walter Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History” to T. W. Adorno’s *Minima Moralia* (Adorno 247).

Fromm distinguishes between two types of messianism, “prophetic” messianism (which he defends) and “catastrophic or apocalyptic” messianism (which he critiques). Prophetic messianism works for and hopes for a future “messianic age” or utopia, which will be characterized by justice, fulfillment, peace, harmony, and redemption, and it believes that this future will be brought about by human effort in history. Prophetic messianism is characterized by a “horizontal longing”; it looks ahead to the future with hope (YSB 133). It sees the future fulfillment of its hopes not as a dramatic “rupture” with history but as a result of human action in history.

Despite its bold vision of a coming time of justice and peace, prophetic messianism is not a version of historical determinism (YSB 88, 154-5). Although prophetic messianism involves a “certainty based on inner experience” (a certainty grounded in hope, not in empirical proof), this certainty is “paradoxical” and does not see the future fulfillment of its hopes as inevitable (156-7). Rather, messianism is a version of what Fromm calls “alternativism.” According to Fromm, the Hebrew prophets presented people with “alternatives” to choose between and explained the likely consequences that would follow from each choice. Rosa Luxemburg, a modern-day “prophet” of socialism, presented a similar alternative when she spoke of the need for humanity to choose either “socialism or barbarism,” a decision that Fromm saw as no less crucial for his time (133). The prophet never forces the people to choose one alternative over another—the people are free to choose—but the prophet communicates to the people that each choice will carry certain

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inevitable consequences, not only for society as a whole but for the individuals who compose it.

Catastrophic (or apocalyptic) messianism, the type of messianism that Fromm criticizes and rejects, holds that radical change can occur only through a catastrophe that creates a dramatic break from all preceding history. According to a prominent version of this type of messianism, in a time of catastrophe—in fact, at the moment of humanity’s greatest corruption and failure—some kind of external force will rescue humanity and inaugurate a utopian-like future. This salvation could come in any of several forms: a political leader, a pre-determined law of history according to which crises must produce their own resolutions, a self-declared party vanguard, a deity, a small excluded minority, or an intellectual or artistic elite. Whichever form it takes, this saving force is perceived as entering society from the outside. In contrast to the horizontal longing of prophetic messianism, catastrophic messianism is characterized by a “vertical longing,” a longing for forces or authorities to descend from outside the usual pattern of human affairs, as a *force majeure*, to redeem a fallen and helpless humanity (YSB 133).

According to catastrophic messianism, the vertical intervention into history by the messianic event creates a dramatic “rupture,” severing the messianic future from all preceding history. Scholar of Jewish mysticism Gershom Scholem was one of the leading exponents of catastrophic messianism, and the concept of rupture is central to his understanding of messianism (OBH 142). Scholem posits a “lack of transition between history and redemption” (The Messianic Idea 10). In an oft-quoted passage, he explains,

Redemption is not a product of immanent development such as we find it in modern Western interpretations of messianism since the Enlightenment where, secularized as the belief in progress, messianism still displayed unbroken and immense vigor. *It is rather transcendence breaking in on history, an intrusion in which history itself perishes, transformed in its ruin because it is struck by a beam of light shining into it from an outside source.* (10, Scholem’s italics)

The image of the coming of the messianic age as a bolt of lightning from above differs profoundly from Fromm’s prophetic messianism, which conceives the messianic age as a product of ongoing human action in (horizontal) history.

According to Fromm, catastrophic messianism has dangerous psychological and social consequences. Although catastrophic messianism may appear hopeful in its expectation of dramatic change, it is actually based upon a form of despair that gives the false appearance of hope (ROH 8). At its most benign, it is characterized by an illusory hope that manifests itself as passive, inactive waiting, sometimes combined with busy consumption of consumer goods and mass entertainment, as the depressed and socially isolated individual fills up her time while expecting to be rescued by some authority figure (ROH 6-12). At its most malignant, the illusory hope of catastrophic messianism generates attempts to “force the Messiah,” such

as violently instigating catastrophes in order to force revolutionary change to occur without first gaining the committed involvement of the masses.

Fromm's distinction between prophetic messianism and catastrophic messianism is also a distinction between two historical trajectories. According to Fromm, prophetic messianism originated with the Hebrew prophets, as he explains at length in his "radical interpretation of the Old Testament," *You Shall Be as Gods* (1966). After its origin among the prophets, the prophetic-messianic idea continued to play a pivotal role in a range of history-shaping movements—in certain radical forces and elements in early Christianity (Adoptionism, Montanism) and the Middle Ages (Meister Eckhart, Joachim of Fiore, and others); in Renaissance humanism; in the proto-Enlightenment pantheism of Spinoza; in the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, in the German philosophies of Lessing, Fichte, Hegel, and Goethe; in the utopian socialism of Saint-Simon; in the Young Hegelian radicalism of Moses Hess, Heinrich Heine, and Karl Marx<sup>2</sup> and in the philosophies of early socialist and anarchist thinkers after Marx, including Rosa Luxemburg and Gustav Landauer (MCM 54; OBH 144-5; SS 236). In interpreting socialism as the contemporary heir of the prophetic messianic tradition, Fromm knew that he was aligning himself with a particular camp of thinkers, offering allegiance to the messianism of Hermann Cohen, Ernst Bloch, and others, while differentiating himself from others, including Gershom Scholem, Walter Benjamin, and Herbert Marcuse (TB 126).

Fromm's claim that Marx's thought and that of certain figures in the socialist movement were influenced by prophetic messianism is controversial, and the claim has faced critiques both from the left and the right. The claim that Marxism was "messianic" raises warning flags for some Marxists, especially those who classify religion as mere ideology and are thus wary of language tainted by fraternization with theology. Fromm's interpretation of the Enlightenment as messianic is sometimes met with a similar alarm. Consequently, some might prefer to replace the term messianism with some less "loaded" term, like utopianism or political hope. However, it will become apparent as the book proceeds that the concept of "messianism" cannot be abandoned and that its meaning is rooted in twentieth century historical developments.

Fromm believed that prophetic messianism was under threat in his times, endangered by a catastrophic messianism that had dealt it near-fatal blows in the twentieth century through the capitulation of the Second International to nationalism before the First World War, the degeneration of the Soviet experiment into bureaucratic "state capitalism," the rise of fascism, the collapse of the Zionist movement into militarized nationalism, the destructive psychological forces unleashed by the nuclear arms race, and the despair of the waning 1960s protest movement (SS 239; MMP *passim*). What Fromm calls catastrophic messianism was prevalent in 1920s Germany and influenced the emerging Frankfurt School, at a time when, according to Fromm, humanity had yet to recover from the outbreak of catastrophic messianism that emerged with the First World War.

Prior to World War I, Jewish thinkers in the Enlightenment tradition, such as Hermann Cohen and Leo Baeck, had theorized Judaism in Kantian terms as the



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“religion of reason.” At the time when Cohen was developing this philosophy, the prophetic messianic spirit still held considerable sway over socialist and anarchist movements. Cosmopolitan, humanist, socialist, and calmly rational, Cohen’s messianism influenced a generation of German-Jewish intellectuals. But the rational, universalist messianism of the likes of Cohen and Leo Baeck stands in sharp contrast to the later, cataclysmic, semi-Romantic messianism of some German-Jewish intellectuals of the 1920s. Cohen thus came to represent a mainstay of Enlightenment optimism and Kantian rationalism that the young radicals of the 1920s repudiated as outmoded.

Before joining the Institute for Social Research, Fromm participated in the *Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus* in Frankfurt. The *Lehrhaus* was a hub of leftwing Jewish intellectual life in 1920s Germany; its many famous participants included Martin Buber, Gershom Scholem, Franz Rosenzweig, Leo Löwenthal, Ernst Simon, Leo Baeck, and Abraham Heschel. During this time, Fromm was influenced by Hermann Cohen’s work—he later called Cohen “the last great Jewish philosopher” and praised him for grasping the connection between “messianism and socialism” (OBH 143). Yet Buber, Rosenzweig, and many others in the *Lehrhaus* circle who were initially drawn to Cohen’s ideas eventually broke away from Cohen’s thought (Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia* 59). A new messianism—romantic, nihilistic, anarchic, and catastrophic—envisioned a messianic future that would arrive not as a product of human progress or planning but suddenly, in a time of disorder and despair, through a dramatic “rupture” with all prior history. Fromm stands, sometimes isolated, as a prominent Marxist theorist who continued to defend the pre-war universalistic messianism well into the 1960s and who saw it as true to Marx’s vision. His commitment to this ideal set him apart from many of his contemporaries, including his colleagues in the Frankfurt School.

### THE FUTURE AS A CONTEMPORARY PROBLEM

Today the questions raised by Fromm’s messianism are more relevant and vital than ever. The twentieth century was plagued by the problem of the future, and the current century appears likely to remain troubled by the same problem. Nearly all ways of thinking about the future are enmeshed in dangers, which become ever more evident in light of the tragedies of the twentieth century. On the one hand, determinism with regard to the end of history can foster quietism, whether of a blindly optimistic or cynically pessimistic sort. If the determinist acts at all, she is likely to act with destructive nihilism, viewing her action as essentially meaningless. On the other hand, despite the dangers of determinism, political hope might seem to lack all foundation or justification without the certainty that historical determinism provides, and hope for a better future seems to be a necessary component of any effort to improve society. Nearly all the empirical evidence appears to suggest that humanity is faced with an uncertain future, and if things end at all, they will likely end badly, so what could possibly—one might rhetorically ask—provide a basis for hope, save a blind, deterministic faith? Yet Fromm provides us with a real alternative.

Humanity is wrestling with the future, seeking an understanding of the future that grounds political hope without encouraging quietism or nihilism. According to Anson Rabinbach, the apocalyptic/catastrophic messianism that predominated in post-World War I Germany was characterized by an “ethical ambivalence” arising from the conflicting views between the “idea of liberation” and the “absolute superfluity of any action” (*Shadow of Catastrophe* 33-4). Within this tradition, Rabinbach claims, “passivity and amoral violence are often coupled” (34). But there is a way out of this ambivalence, without abandoning messianism; the way forward lies in the “paradoxical” prophetic messianism Fromm describes, as I will argue. Fromm’s prophetic messianism provides a basis for political hope while eschewing determinism; it couples a certainty rooted in faith with the fundamental uncertainty of empirical reality.

Compounding the difficulty of dodging the Scylla and Charybdis of quietism and nihilism is the near-pathological fear of messianic hope instilled by the events of the past century. To some, the failure of the Soviet experiment was proof positive that messianism or utopianism could end only in totalitarian violence and oppression. Allegedly a product of Marxist hope for a new messianic time before which all preceding events would be mere “pre-history,” the Soviet Union turned out to be a disastrous failure in the struggle for universal human emancipation. Although I argue that rejecting messianism wholesale is not the best response to the failure of the Soviet experiment, that failure undeniably demonstrated the danger of trying to force the messianic age onto the uninvolved, unsupportive masses (under Stalin), as well as the danger of claiming that the messianic age has arrived (“real, existing communism”) when it clearly has not.

Compared only with the atrocities of Stalin’s regime, quietist withdrawal looks appealing. Yet quietism also holds its horrors. Whether one attempts to avoid political decisions or not, one still makes them, wittingly or unwittingly, and at some moments in history inaction resolves itself into acquiescence to injustice, silence into complicity. Of course, this criticism is often offered against Germans under the Nazi regime, but such tragic quietism occurs more frequently than one would like to admit. As bureaucratic forms of organization and technological means of destruction reached new heights, the twentieth century more than any other era demonstrated the catastrophic consequences of blind obedience, one of the manifestations of quietism.

Into the fraught twentieth century—born, in fact, in 1900—Erich Fromm emerged as a defender of Enlightenment-style messianic hope, which was anything but a popular political position throughout most of his long career as a philosopher and public intellectual. Although the brief utopian moment of the 1960s was partly an exception, even in that milieu Fromm was a dissenter from some major currents of the left, as we will see. Between acquiescence and the attempt to forcibly incarnate a utopia without the action of the masses, Fromm sought an alternative, a way to maintain humanity’s long-time hope for an end to the horrors of history, while avoiding the horrors of a desperate, merely destructive nihilism. His solution was to defend hope and a way of conceiving the future that he believed society had lost around the time of World War I.

## THE REDISCOVERY OF ERICH FROMM AND MESSIANISM

Messianism remains an important, contested theme in Critical Theory and in Marxism. After remaining buried for much of the twentieth century, from the 1930s to the 1990s, discussions of messianism were brought to the fore again in the 1990s by Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, which revisited Marxist messianism in the wake of the fall of the Soviet Union, and by Jürgen Habermas's increasing interest in religion, as he grappled with the Frankfurt School's current of messianism and attempted to find his place in the Frankfurt School in relation to it.<sup>3</sup> Since then, messianism has practically spawned a cottage industry, from the historical exegeses of Pierre Bouretz's *Witnesses for the Future: Philosophy and Messianism* (2010) and Benjamin Lazier's *God Interrupted: Heresy and the European Imagination Between the World Wars* (2008), to the recent or contemporary philosophies of Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler, Giorgio Agamben, Cornel West, Julia Kristeva, and Slavoj Žižek, all of whom, whether or not they employ the term, respond to the theme.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps more than any other member of the Frankfurt School (with the possible exception of Walter Benjamin), Erich Fromm engaged directly and publicly with the question of messianism throughout his career.<sup>5</sup> In fact, as I will demonstrate, his approach differs greatly from the prevailing version of messianism discussed by historians and Critical Theorists today. Despite his engagement with messianism and the uniqueness of his approach, research on Fromm's messianism is still minimal,<sup>6</sup> a lack that this book seeks to remedy.

Until fairly recently, Fromm was largely missing or downplayed in accounts of the history of the Frankfurt School. For example, as outlined in the following chapter, one of the canonical books on the history of the Frankfurt School, Martin Jay's *The Dialectical Imagination*, dismisses Fromm too quickly for being excessively "optimistic," while Rolf Wiggershaus's important *Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories, and Political Significance*, is laced with inaccuracies and *ad hominem*s about Fromm, as is David Held's *Introduction to Critical Theory*. But the recent rebirth of interest in Walter Benjamin and Herbert Marcuse, both of whom have tended to be marginalized in the history of the Frankfurt School, bodes well for Fromm scholarship, and a rediscovery of Fromm himself is occurring as well. While the reputations of Max Horkheimer, T. W. Adorno, and, lately, Benjamin and Marcuse have tended to overshadow Fromm's contribution to Critical Theory—Fromm has even been called a "forgotten intellectual"—Fromm is now making a comeback (McLaughlin, "Forgotten Intellectual").

Recently, Fromm's work has been highlighted by Lawrence Wilde, who defends Fromm's interpretation of Marxism as a humanist, normative, and deeply Aristotelian philosophical system,<sup>7</sup> and by Kevin Anderson, who edited a book on Fromm's critical criminology and has written some important papers on Fromm. Stephen Eric Bronner's chapter on Fromm in *Of Critical Theory and Its Theorists* (1994) was an early indication that Fromm's reputation was being revived, and Michael Löwy has recently drawn attention to Fromm as well.<sup>8</sup> Although it erroneously presents Fromm

as positivist, Thomas Wheatland's book *The Frankfurt School in Exile* (2009) is one of a number of texts offering a necessary corrective to the official histories of Fromm's contribution to the Frankfurt School, demonstrating the extent of Fromm's involvement in shaping the Institute's early research program. An anthology of essays on Fromm's thought has recently been published through the same series as this book and is entitled *Reclaiming the Sane Society: Essays in Erich Fromm's Thought* (ed., Seyed Javad Miri, Robert Lake, Tricia M. Kress, Sense Publishers, 2014). Rainer Funk, who worked with Fromm while he was alive and serves as the executor of Fromm's literary estate, is also an important figure in Fromm studies and has written numerous books on Fromm. He has compiled useful anthologies of Fromm's writings, in addition to operating a useful website on Fromm. A number of other authors have recently explored the uses of Fromm's thought in relation to a range of fields of study.<sup>9</sup> Responding to the renewed attention on Fromm, publishers have produced new editions of some of Fromm's important works, for example with Continuum Press contributing the long-out-of-print masterpiece *Beyond the Chains of Illusion: My Encounter with Marx and Freud* and Harper printing a new (abridged) edition of *On Disobedience*. Several of Fromm's books have also been republished as Routledge Classics. Two new volumes of previously unpublished works by Fromm were also released in 2010 (*Beyond Freud: From Individual to Social Psychoanalysis* and *The Pathology of Normalcy*).

Due to the rediscovery of Fromm's role in Critical Theory and the rediscovery of the influence of messianism on the Frankfurt School and Marxism, an exploration of Fromm's messianism is important and timely. The neglect of Fromm's brand of messianism has been nothing short of devastating for studies of the cultural climate of German Jewish intellectual circles at the opening of the twentieth century and for understanding some of the crucial events that have unfolded since that time. Practically all the scholarship on messianism and its political implications over the past two decades recognizes only the apocalyptic/catastrophic variant. This even goes for the otherwise excellent scholarship of Michael Löwy, Anson Rabinbach, Richard Wolin, Nitzan Lebovic, and Eduardo Mendieta.<sup>10</sup> There are many reasons why this restriction in definition of messianism has occurred, and some of the reasons will become evident in subsequent chapters. The influence of Gershom Scholem's studies of messianism definitely played a role, but more importantly, a widespread rise in pessimism contributed to the shift.

This book is a contribution both to the ongoing rediscovery of Fromm—I demonstrate that Fromm was and remains important to Critical Theory—as well as to the debate on messianism, by showing that Fromm's messianism presents a novel and defensible approach to the messianism question. Further, I demonstrate the necessity of bringing Fromm back into the conversation, to avoid losing the messianic tradition for which he so compellingly argues. More generally, this text is a contribution to the history of philosophy and to the philosophy of history, and especially to the question of the “end of history” that has so troubled contemporary political philosophy, particularly in relation to Marxism.

\* \* \*

In the following pages, I outline Fromm's development of a messianic theory of history and the future that speaks to the concerns of his time. Once the historical framework of the first two chapters has been established, a thorough examination of Fromm's concepts of hope and messianism becomes possible. Part I (Chapters 1 and 2) is heavily historical in focus, while Part II (Chapters 3 and 4) switches gears and is more interpretive.

The opening two chapters tell the story of a forgotten idea, the motivating force of a forgotten generation of revolutionaries and avant-garde intellectuals. It was at least partly Fromm's fidelity to this forgotten idea that caused him to be largely written out of the official histories of the many movements in which he had played a central role, in Critical Theory, psychoanalysis, and Marxism. In Chapter 1, I respond to this rewriting of history by returning to the beginning of Fromm's life and re-evaluating his contribution to the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research. I begin by addressing the ways in which Fromm has been mischaracterized by some canonical accounts of the history of the Frankfurt School, including David Held's *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas* (1980), Rolf Wiggershaus's *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories, and Political Significance* (1986), and Martin Jay's *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923–1950* (1973). I then address some themes of Fromm's life and work prior to his membership in the Institute, in large part to demonstrate how much of his work with the Institute came out of his prior ideas, work, and experiences and that the profound insights he brought to the early Institute were his own, not products of other members. The chapter then traces Fromm's work while a formal member of the Institute and evaluates some possible reasons for his eventual departure. A final interlude forms a bridge from his work as a member of the Institute to his later work, through a brief overview of his contribution in two areas: psychoanalysis and the left.

Understanding Fromm's messianism also requires engaging the philosophical, historical, and political contexts in which it emerged theoretically and practically as a possible solution to urgent questions of the time. Therefore, in Chapter 2, I explore the meaning of messianism for several thinkers who influenced Fromm, both predecessors and contemporaries, and situate Fromm's messianism within the context of the lively debates and dialogues about revolution, utopia, esoteric knowledge, national identity, and other topics in which he was engaged, and in response to which his theory of messianism took shape. Using the themes of Gnosticism, *Lebensphilosophie*, and the rejection of the masses-as-reason entailed in the cultural evolution from *Geist* to *Seele*, I explore the evolution of messianism in early-twentieth-century Germany. Beginning with anarchist revolutionary Gustav Landauer and neo-Kantian philosopher Hermann Cohen, the chapter then addresses three philosophers of the *Lehrhaus*—Martin Buber, Gershom Scholem, and Franz Rosenzweig—and two young thinkers in Heidelberg before a parting of ways, Ernst

Bloch and Georg Lukács. Finally, the chapter touches upon the peculiar affinities of the Stefan George circle to Critical Theory.

In Part II of the book, I turn towards a theoretical and interpretive approach to Fromm. Fromm's account of messianic hope and his philosophical defense of it are explored in light of both historically situated and perennial concerns. Chapter 3 focuses upon hope, examining Fromm's negative and positive definitions of it, his philosophical defense of hope, and the phenomenological experience of hope. The three negative definitions of hope are explained at length: (1) hope is not mere desiring or wishing, (2) hope is not passive or inactive "waiting," and (3) hope does not attempt to "force the Messiah." Although he holds that less can be said positively and propositionally about hope, Fromm connects hope with "life" and "growth" and provisionally defines it as an "awareness of [the] pregnancy" of the present. Fromm argues for an ethical obligation to anticipate the future with hope, including an obligation to seek out signs of potential in the present, as opposed to finding only evidence suggesting that humanity is doomed. Responding to the obligation to hope reveals the crucial choice of alternatives with which humanity is faced, and without hope (a hope that is far from politically neutral), the alternative remains hidden. The idea of what one might call an epistemologically privileged subject is also found in Lukács's assertion of the privileged standpoint of the class-conscious proletariat, and specifically on the topic of hope, in Catholic existentialist philosopher Gabriel Marcel's essay in *Homo Viator*. I draw upon Marcel in order to uncover something that Fromm appears to be trying to say but does not articulate as fully or as clearly as does Marcel's account.

Chapter 4 focuses at length upon Fromm's messianism and argues that Fromm's messianism is indeed (despite some evidence that could be interpreted to the contrary) faithful to the pre-war messianic model of Hermann Cohen, not the later, more apocalyptic or catastrophic model. Arguing against Eduardo Mendieta's and Rainer Funk's interpretations of Fromm's messianism, which reflect a widespread mis-categorization of Fromm's messianism, I suggest that a lack of understanding of Fromm's uniqueness in relation to the rest of the Frankfurt School has caused him to be incorrectly categorized with the apocalyptic/catastrophic camp of messianism. In the process, Fromm's sort of messianism has been nearly forgotten, or is often discounted as not truly messianic.

Most of Chapter 4 is structured around a response to a summation offered by Eduardo Mendieta of the collective messianic outlook of the Frankfurt School, a list that Mendieta draws and builds upon from the criteria outlined by Anson Rabinbach's book *In the Shadow of Catastrophe: German Intellectuals between Apocalypse and Enlightenment*. I break down these criteria into a list of five themes: (1) Rupture, (2) Historical Golden Age and Anamnesis, (3) the Enlightenment, (4) Progress and Catastrophe, and (5) Utopia and Imagining/Conceiving the Future. I demonstrate that on each of these five themes, Fromm's messianism differs significantly from the account offered by Mendieta/Rabinbach. This exploration is followed by a daring reply to Rainer Funk's account of Fromm's messianism, wherein I argue that Funk incorrectly portrays Fromm's messianism as a kind of esoteric "Gnosticism."



## INTRODUCTION

A concluding, experimental epilogue comments upon the continuing relevance of Fromm's messianism for contemporary society. In politics and popular culture, the search for a Messiah figure or magic helper, rather than actively constructing a better society, is perhaps the norm in mainstream American society. However, the protest of public employees in Wisconsin and the subsequent Occupy Wall Street movement, sparked in part by the Arab Spring, have begun to renew the prophetic messianic ideal, among a wide array of intersecting liberation struggles, including current struggles for a living wage and against mass incarceration. The resurgence of class as an organizing principle and the reemergence of populist activism in the Occupy movement are still transforming the American political landscape, despite the formidable challenges that lay ahead.

Without the prophetic messianic hope articulated and defended by Fromm, it becomes impossible to bridge the divide between the real and the ideal. This book is not only about the recovery of a lost past—it is about the construction of a different future. In Critical Theory and in theory broadly, loss of prophetic messianic hope has caused the abandonment of utopian projects and has severed the ties of theory and practice. If Critical Theorists want to make theory radical again, a firm philosophical basis for hope in the political future needs to be established, and much can be learned from the strange history of its previous rise and fall.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Most of the books Fromm published during his life directly addressed the theme of messianism, as did a range of his articles and posthumously published manuscripts. The books that directly discuss messianism include: *The Sane Society* (1955), *Let Man Prevail: A Socialist Manifesto and Program* (1960), *Marx's Concept of Man* (1961), *May Man Prevail? An Inquiry into the Facts and Fictions of Foreign Policy* (1961), *Beyond the Chains of Illusion: My Encounter with Marx and Freud* (1962), *You Shall Be as Gods: A Radical Interpretation of the Old Testament* (1966), *The Revolution of Hope* (1968), *To Have or To Be?* (1976) and his unfinished, posthumously published manuscript "Marx and Meister Eckhart on Having and Being" (in *On Being Human*).
- <sup>2</sup> The clearest summation of Fromm's position on Marx can be found in the introductory chapter to his *Marx's Concept of Man*:

I shall try to demonstrate that...[Marx's] theory does not assume that the main motive of man is one of material gain; that, furthermore, the very aim of Marx is to liberate man from the pressure of economic needs, so that he can be fully human; that Marx is primarily concerned with the emancipation of man as an individual, the overcoming of alienation, the restoration of his capacity to relate himself fully to man and to nature; that Marx's philosophy constitutes a spiritual existentialism in secular language and because of this spiritual quality is opposed to the materialistic practice and thinly disguised materialistic philosophy of our age. Marx's aim, socialism, based on this theory of man, is essentially prophetic Messianism in the language of the nineteenth century. (MCM 3)

- <sup>3</sup> E.g., cf. Jürgen Habermas, *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, Religion, and Modernity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2002).
- <sup>4</sup> Jacques Derrida, of course, employs the term "messianism" and revitalizes it; the key text is *Specters of Marx*. On Judith Butler, see her essay "Prophetic Religion and the Future of Capitalist Civilization" in *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, ed. Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan Vanantwerpen

(Columbia, 2011). For Agamben on messianism, see *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (Stanford University Press, 2005). Cornel West is noteworthy in this regard for his defense of hope and the prophetic, although he is not heavily engaged in postmodern debates about “messianism.” For Kristeva, cf. *Strangers to Ourselves* (Columbia University Press, 1994). Žižek’s frequent talk of the “Holy Spirit” as a loving community or “emancipatory collective” bears ties, historically and theoretically, to messianism. For texts that can be read as a Žižekian account of messianism, see *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* (Verso, 2009), especially the concluding chapter, and *In Defense of Lost Causes* (AK Press, 2011), as well as *God in Pain: Inversions of Apocalypse* (Seven Stories Press, 2012).

- <sup>5</sup> Although Walter Benjamin was never a formal member of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, he is generally classed among the members of the broader category of “Frankfurt School” thinkers.
- <sup>6</sup> For example, Svante Lundgren’s *The Fight Against Idols: Erich Fromm on Religion, Judaism and the Bible* offers a helpful overview of Fromm’s thought on various religious matters, and the question of messianism is treated, although Lundgren seems to miss its significance for his thought and the important historical context surrounding the issue. Rudolf Siebert’s *The Critical Theory of Religion* grasps the importance of messianism for Fromm’s thought, but Siebert does not seem to differentiate Fromm’s messianism much from that of other members of the Frankfurt School, while I argue that Fromm’s messianism is of a very different sort and somewhat a critique of the messianism of the rest of the Frankfurt School.
- <sup>7</sup> Cf. Lawrence Wilde, *Erich Fromm and the Quest for Solidarity* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), and Lawrence Wilde, “Against Idolatry: The Humanistic Ethics of Erich Fromm” in *Marxism’s Ethical Thinkers*, Ed. Lawrence Wilde (Houndmills, U.K.: Palgrave, 2001).
- <sup>8</sup> *Redemption and Utopia: Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe: A Study in Elective Affinity*. Trans. Hope Heaney. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1992); “Anticapitalist Readings of Weber’s Protestant Ethic: Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, Georg Lukacs, Erich Fromm” *Logos Journal* (<http://logosjournal.com/2010/lowy/>).
- <sup>9</sup> Several examples of note:
- Education: Rafael Pangilinan, Robert Lake
  - Ethics: In addition to Lawrence Wilde, there is Francisco Illescas, *Reflexiones Éticas a partir de Erich Fromm: Una propuesta para el humanismo del siglo XXI*.
  - Sociology: Neil McLaughlin, Anderson and Quinney
  - Psychology: *Towards Psychologies of Liberation* by Mary Watkins and Helene Shulman.
  - Jewish Studies: *Material Culture and Jewish Thought in America* by Ken Koltun-Fromm (Indiana University Press, 2010)
  - Jewish theology: Rabbi David Hartman
  - Sociology of Religion: Seyed Javad Miri, in Iran (“Rereading Fromm’s Conditions of the Human Situation” Volume 11. December 2010; *Transcendent Philosophy: An International Journal for Comparative Philosophy and Mysticism*; “Religion and Social Theory in the Frommesque Discourse” *Islamic Perspective*. No. 4. 2010).
- <sup>10</sup> Michael Löwy is one of the best contemporary scholars of this cultural milieu and of the theme of messianism, but he defines the prophetic tradition out of messianism from the start, and he writes that Scholem is “universally recognized as the greatest authority in this area [Jewish messianism and political implications]” (“Jewish Messianism” 106). Although Wolin, Rabinbach, and Lebovic offer a compelling critique of apocalyptic messianism and a defense of the Enlightenment as a radical project, they tend to use the term “messianism” to refer only to its apocalyptic variant. For Rabinbach, for example, see Rabinbach’s four criteria of messianism in Chapter 4 below. For Wolin, cf. the chapter on messianism in *Labyrinths: Explorations in the Critical History of Ideas*, which proved exceedingly useful for this book but is problematic in certain respects, perhaps largely due to its reliance on Gershom Scholem’s account of messianism. Wolin has been wary of messianism, treating it partly as a nostalgic, restorative enterprise and seeing it as reliant on an undialectical intervention of transcendence into history, an account of messianism that Fromm rejects, as we shall see (Wolin, *Labyrinths* 49–50).





**PART I**

**EARLY FROMM AND WEIMAR GERMANY**



## ERICH FROMM'S LEGACY AND CONTRIBUTION TO THE EARLY FRANKFURT SCHOOL

Understanding Erich Fromm's messianism requires a preliminary exploration of his early life and work, since his contributions have been widely misrepresented, and since he was not an isolated scholar but an activist and a public intellectual. It is also necessary to respond to some widespread myths about Fromm's role in the Frankfurt School<sup>1</sup> in order to show that Fromm was a central figure in the Frankfurt School and a radical, serious, and original thinker. This examination of Fromm's early work will establish some of the themes that reappear throughout his later work, addressed in following chapters. Finally, this chapter concludes with an overview of Fromm's later life with regard to two themes: psychoanalysis and the left.

Fromm played a seminal role in Critical Theory, but until recently his dramatic impact has been downplayed in the canonical accounts of the history of Critical Theory, often because his ideas were too radical or unorthodox. Although Fromm was central to the Frankfurt School's early work, until the 1990s he was virtually written out of the history of Critical Theory. When he is discussed in the canonical accounts, he is often dismissed as a peripheral figure, and his work is often shunned as overly "optimistic" ("Pollyannaish"), unserious, not radical, or mere popularizing. And although his work was catalytic for many on the activist left, he has often been presented by histories of the sixties as a feel-good pop psychologist, a kind of Oprah-for-the-left (or a Norman Vincent Peale, to use his contemporary Herbert Marcuse's example) (*Eros and Civilization* 262). For a time Fromm became what Neil McLaughlin termed a "forgotten intellectual" (McLaughlin, "Forgotten Intellectual"). I will not dwell at length upon the reasons for Fromm's loss of popularity in these spheres, though I will posit some possible explanations; for a more detailed account, I would refer the reader to McLaughlin's article, "How to Become a Forgotten Intellectual: Intellectual Movements and the Rise and Fall of Erich Fromm" in *Sociological Forum* (1998). In this chapter, I explore Fromm's early life and work, up to his break with the Frankfurt School in 1939, which was shortly before his first major publication in English, his best-selling book *Escape from Freedom* (1941). The relevance of Fromm's early work to his later ideas will become clearer in later chapters. Fortunately, since Fromm's ideas remain as timely as ever, he is now beginning to make a comeback. This chapter is a contribution to the ongoing rediscovery of Fromm's early work.

After exploring some common myths about Erich Fromm's role in the Frankfurt Institute, I examine his work prior to joining the Institute. This will set the stage for Fromm's later work on messianism, explored at length in later chapters, and

will establish that he brought his own, original ideas with him to the Institute. Following an overview of Fromm's pre-Institute work, I offer an exploration of Fromm's work during the approximately ten years of his membership in the Institute. Fromm contributed significantly to the development of the Institute's early research program. Far from being a mere product of the Institute, Fromm was one of its leading architects.

### 1.1 THE AIRBRUSHING OF FROMM FROM THE HISTORY OF THE INSTITUTE

Although Fromm was one of the earliest members of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research—he became a formal, tenured member in 1930, before both Herbert Marcuse (in 1933) and T. W. Adorno (in 1938)—and although he played a central role in the Institute's early years, Fromm was virtually written out of the history of the Frankfurt School until recently. His legacy in Critical Theory has fallen victim to an “origin myth”—as McLaughlin puts it, drawing upon the sociology of knowledge—that accords him a marginal role (McLaughlin, “Origin Myths”). Over the past two decades a renaissance has occurred with regard to Fromm's work and the history of Fromm's role in Critical Theory through the work of Stephen Eric Bronner, Lawrence Wilde, Kevin Anderson, Michael Löwy, Neil McLaughlin, and Thomas Wheatland, among others. The old origin myth of the Frankfurt School, however, continues to exert its influence over some current scholarship, and this myth fundamentally mislocates Fromm's contribution. It ignores that Fromm was an early member of the Frankfurt School's core circle and that his theoretical and empirical work were central to the Institute's program. The myth also downplays or fails to properly credit Fromm's tremendously important synthesis of the psychoanalytic and Marxist methods and his related development of the theory of the authoritarian personality, which formed the basis for much of the Institute's later work.

Fromm's marginalization was not the result of mere scholarly error, nor the consequence of some historically contingent series of events that rendered his ideas less serviceable or less noticeable. On the contrary, Fromm's role as a persistent gadfly in every institution and tradition to which he belonged did not ingratiate him to Critical Theorists, some Marxists, or orthodox psychoanalysts, and his marginalization from canonical historical accounts of these fields was often intentional and systematic. After the 1960s protest movement faded, Fromm was also unintentionally sidelined because his messianic hope was out of sync with the prevailing, pessimistic *Zeitgeist*, as we will see in later chapters. His refusal to confine his work to a single academic discipline or to obediently toe the line of any “school” of thought also had much to do with his marginalization during the 1970s and 80s.

In many works surveying the history or main ideas of the Institute, Fromm is barely mentioned. For example, Trent Schroyer's *The Critique of Domination: The Origins and Development of Critical Theory* (1973) and Zoltán Tar's *The Frankfurt School: The Critical Theories of Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno* (1985) say almost nothing about Fromm (McLaughlin, “Origin Myths” 113n7). Schroyer's

book only mentions Fromm once in passing (Schroyer 203). To be fair, the book is not so much a history of the Frankfurt School as an exploration of certain themes, with a heavy focus on Marx and Habermas, but its lack of engagement with Fromm is symptomatic of the problems of the genre. Tar's book, meanwhile, is closer to an historical account of the Frankfurt School, yet it equates the early Frankfurt School with Horkheimer, ignoring the contributions of Fromm and others to the early Frankfurt School. The title of the book alone perpetuates the myth that the Frankfurt School was essentially a product of Max Horkheimer and T. W. Adorno.<sup>2</sup> And the most important recent book on Horkheimer, John Abromeit's 2011 *Max Horkheimer and the Foundations of the Frankfurt School*, while it gives Fromm more attention than some of the older texts, still treats Fromm's role in the early study of the German working class as confined mainly to gathering empirical data and supplying psychoanalytic categories, with Horkheimer as the theoretical mastermind (Abromeit 219).

Nor does Fromm fare better in bland and supposedly unbiased reference works. Despite the rediscovery of Fromm, even some recent reference works still play into the origin myth. For example, the German Library (Continuum) volume on the Frankfurt School includes selections from Horkheimer, Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, and Leo Löwenthal, but nothing from Fromm. Likewise, *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory* (2004) does not contain an essay devoted to Fromm, and Fromm is mentioned only twice in the volume. He is mentioned only once and quite briefly in the essay on the "marriage of Marxism and psychoanalysis"—the very project for which Fromm was hired by the Institute!—and he is mentioned once more in Raymond Guess's contribution, which classifies Fromm with Franz Neumann and Walter Benjamin as having had a "perhaps more distanced and idiosyncratic relation to the central group" of the Institute (Whitebook 75; Guess 105). That Fromm's role in the Institute was anything but "distanced" or peripheral will become clear shortly.

When Fromm is not summarily dismissed, he is often gravely misrepresented. Three of the earliest, most important works on the history of the Institute for Social Research gravely misconstrue Fromm's contribution: David Held's *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas* (1980), Rolf Wiggershaus's *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories, and Political Significance* (1986), and Martin Jay's *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923–1950* (1973). In this section, I examine the weaknesses of Held's, Wiggershaus's, and Jay's accounts of Fromm as presented in these three books. I am not concerned here with the merit of any of these books as a whole—each constitutes an important contribution to the study of the Frankfurt School—but only with their role in establishing the "origin myth" about Fromm's role in the Institute.

First, David Held's *Introduction to Critical Theory* offers a small number of scattered comments on Fromm, in the course of which Held distances Fromm from the early Institute. Held treats Fromm as a merely marginal member and sometimes not even as

a member at all. In fact, Held incorrectly claims that Fromm did not become a formal member until after the Institute's exile to the United States, though in fact Fromm had become a member three years earlier and had helped facilitate the group's transition to the United States (Held 111). Held even contrasts Fromm with "the Institute" and "the Institute's members," while referring to times when Fromm was still a formal member of the Institute (119). He also misconstrues the reasons for Fromm's later removal from the Institute, writing that Fromm "left the Institute...in order to spend more time on clinical work and to develop a psychology that was more explicitly sociological and less Freudian," while in fact Horkheimer decided to cut Fromm's salary, and Fromm believed that he was being fired for being too Marxist and demanded a hefty severance package—more about that shortly (111). Held's tone towards Fromm is dogmatic and "priestly" in the bureaucratic, gate-keeping sense.<sup>3</sup> To socialists, the claim that Fromm left the Institute because he wanted to develop some other theoretical approach may sound alarmingly reminiscent of the typical excuses of some socialist party that has just kicked out a perceived troublemaker: "We didn't purge him; he abandoned our line, so in effect he'd already split from the Party anyway."

When it does not airbrush Fromm from the history of the Institute as completely as Held's book does, the origin myth often makes Fromm perform a magical vanishing act after leaving the Institute. On the rare occasions when it must be mentioned, Fromm's post-Institute work is dismissed in the literature as unserious, not radical, or excessively optimistic. A typical example of the first two of these charges against Fromm's later work can be found in Wiggershaus's book, while the last charge ("optimism") is made in Jay's book.

Compared to David Held, Wiggershaus has a fairly significant amount to say about Fromm. However, Wiggershaus presents Fromm as an unserious, flaky thinker who abandoned radicalism. According to Wiggershaus, Fromm's early thought was mired in insoluble contradictions that eventually led him to irrational escapism. Since Wiggershaus does not want to make the Frankfurt School itself look flaky, he seeks to demonstrate that Fromm abandoned some early, more sensible standpoint after leaving the Institute. Thus, following a relatively useful summary of Fromm's contribution to the early Frankfurt School, he sums up by exposing a dubious contradiction in Fromm's early thought, followed by an odd dismissal of Fromm's later work:

First, it was shown [by Fromm] that the tight functioning of society would not permit any radical change in the conditions of life; then it was said that only a radical change in the conditions of life would be able to change the behaviour of the masses. But even this sort of change in the conditions of life would only lead to the creation of the new ideological superstructure which the "economic and social base would require." With views such as these, it was only a matter of time before someone like Fromm, who was convinced that fulfillment in life was possible for everyone, turned resolutely towards a messianic humanism which offered an ever-present escape from the endless chain of being and consciousness. (Wiggershaus 60)

Wiggershaus's perceived contradiction in Fromm's thought builds upon a reductionist reading of three texts: Fromm's empirical study of the German working class, his lengthy essay on early Christianity ("The Dogma of Christ"), and his article "Politics and Psychoanalysis" (58-9). The apparent contradiction concerns the classic, often oversimplified Marxist distinction between base and superstructure. Wiggershaus erroneously interprets "The Dogma of Christ" and the study of the German working class as saying that the ideological superstructure completely controls the economic base, to the point of freezing it in stasis. In "The Dogma of Christ," Fromm argued that the power of the Roman Empire was reinforced by a conservative theological turn in early Christianity away from radical eschatological expectation and towards a passive acceptance of earthly misfortunes. Fromm's study on the German working class, which Wiggershaus also references, had revealed that the German working class had too great an attraction to authoritarianism to be prepared to launch a truly emancipatory revolution or to effectively resist the rise of fascism. Wiggershaus concludes that both studies meant that the superstructural authoritarian beliefs of the masses *entirely control* the economic base, preventing changes to the economic system.

Wiggershaus then interprets Fromm's essay on "Politics and Psychoanalysis" to be saying the opposite, i.e., *that the economic base mechanically generates the ideological superstructure*, a view that Fromm also rejected. In fact, the "Politics and Psychoanalysis" essay was an argument against the idea that psychoanalysis could substitute for political struggle, "curing" society purely through simply making people aware of their irrational motivations. Although the essay does assert that ideologies *depend* in some way upon economic conditions, nowhere does it assert that economic conditions are the *sole* cause of ideologies or that their process of causation is unidirectional (PP 216). Finally, Wiggershaus compares his interpretations of "Politics and Psychoanalysis," "The Dogma of Christ," and the study of the German working class and concludes that the pieces amount to a "contradictory" way of saying that society cannot possibly change: the base completely controls the superstructure, and the superstructure completely controls the base. Apparently Fromm was unwilling to accept this depressing conclusion, Wiggershaus suggests, so Fromm flew off into an irrational flight of fancy. The paradigmatic example of such escapism for Wiggershaus is Fromm's messianism, which I argue is anything but irrational escapism.

Wiggershaus misrepresents Fromm's approach to the base/superstructure problem, and he vastly underestimates how dialectical a thinker Fromm was. Fromm always rejected such narrow reductionism, and his work grew even less reductionist over time, to the point that he influenced the left on this question—no one did more to circulate the views of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* than Fromm, presenting a Marx who was clearly not a mechanical materialist. Contra Wiggershaus, Fromm's later work was based upon a model that recognized an interplay between economic and other social structures, with neither mechanically producing the other. Fromm's early work on the "character structure" and his later development in the early 1960s of the idea of "social character" explicitly provided



an interactive intermediary between base and superstructure allowing for reciprocal influence and transformation. Nor was Fromm a pessimist (a “gloomy” thinker, in Wiggershaus’s terms); Fromm never held that “society would not permit any radical change” (Wiggershaus 55, 60).

Along with disparaging Fromm’s work as self-contradictory and flaky, Wiggershaus’s book provides a prime example of another common charge logged against Fromm: the charge that Fromm was not radical. Wiggershaus sets out to argue both that Fromm abandoned the radicalism of his early work after being fired from the Institute, and that Fromm’s later alleged conservatism was already nascent while he was a member of the Institute. Wiggershaus offers three specious arguments that Fromm abandoned radicalism:

1. The first argument is little more than a flawed exercise in guilt-by-association. Wiggershaus writes, “[Fromm] seemed to be closer to circles of psychoanalysts and sociologists that would have nothing to do with an antagonistic social theory than he was to the Horkheimer circle” (Wiggershaus 271). Wiggershaus conveniently ignores that all of the members of Horkheimer’s circle in New York had friends and intellectual collaborators who were dubiously radical. In fact, some in the Institute were a great deal closer to the “New York intellectuals,” such as Dwight MacDonald and Sidney Hook, who later became leaders in the U.S.’s cultural Cold War, though in fairness the Horkheimer circle could not have been expected to guess their later affiliations (cf. Saunders, Wheatland). Wiggershaus’s claim is made even more unconvincing by his failure to mention any of these non-antagonistic thinkers by name. Fromm himself claimed that he was removed from the Institute because he was too far to the left, and his friend Robert Lynd was outraged by his firing and condemned Horkheimer’s circle with the charge that it had fired Fromm for being too Marxist (Wheatland 85).
2. Wiggershaus buttresses his claim of Fromm’s lack of radicalism by repeating the popular claims that Fromm was “traditional” and “idealist,” a very common—and equivocal—critique of Fromm (Wiggershaus 270). Although there are possible interpretations under which the claim is true, the intended interpretation is quite different from these. For example, it is certainly true that Fromm employed ideas from a variety of Western and Eastern philosophical and religious “traditions,” and it is certainly true that Fromm was an “idealist” in the informal sense of the term, i.e., a person strongly committed to ideals, who believes that those ideals can transform society. Perhaps one could make an argument that he was a philosophical idealist in the tradition of Fichte or Hegel, but Fromm never worked out a metaphysics or a thorough-going phenomenology. While I am not convinced that Fromm should be (or would want to be) classified as an idealist in the Fichtean or Hegelian senses, many have argued that Marxism has close affinities to German idealism that have been too often ignored. (Marxism may be Hegel *turned right-side up*, but it is also *Hegel* turned right-side up.)

No matter how much truth there may be in the claims that Fromm is “traditional” or “idealist” when these claims are properly qualified, the lack of adequate explanation typically accompanying these claims encourages a different reading. The implied meaning is that Fromm was *not revolutionary* (i.e., that he favored “tradition” over transformation), and that Fromm was “idealist” *as opposed to materialist*, and ergo, according to the prevailing wisdom, *not Marxist*. I argue elsewhere in this book that Fromm was a revolutionary (not a reformist) and was certainly Marxist—in fact, Fromm’s exile from the Institute probably had more to do with him being *too* Marxist and with his desire to be involved in left-wing activism.

3. Finally, Wiggershaus bases his claim of Fromm’s conservatism on the premise that Fromm believed that the solution to contemporary problems was found in the “individual” and “spontaneity” (Wiggershaus 270). Here Wiggershaus appears to take the line of Adorno, who, in a letter to Horkheimer, opined that Fromm was not a Marxist but either a social democrat or an anarchist, and that Fromm ought to “read Lenin”—more on that letter shortly (McLaughlin, “Origin Myths” 118). Although there are anarchist influences on Fromm—his *The Sane Society* engages with several anarchist thinkers, and the thought of anarchist revolutionary Gustav Landauer was an enduring influence on Fromm—it is also the case that others in the Frankfurt School were similarly influenced by anarchism and some more so than Fromm. Fromm’s philosophy may be called “communitarian socialism,” or to use his more common term, socialist humanism (SS 283). His anarchist affinities are definitely not of Max Stirner’s individualistic type, critiqued by Marx and Engels in *The Germany Ideology*. Furthermore, Fromm’s interpretation of Marx, especially by the 1960s after Fromm had studied Marx’s early writings, held that Marx placed great value on the individual, and Fromm’s enduring appreciation for Marxist revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg could explain his openness to the idea of spontaneous revolt (the “mass strike”), a concept Luxemburg also believed was rooted in Marx. Fromm’s concern with the individual and with spontaneity was chiefly a Marxist critique of Stalinism, not a call for anarchism.

If Wiggershaus’s book provides an archetypal example of the common charges that Fromm was not a serious thinker and that he abandoned his early radicalism, it is to Martin Jay that one can turn for a look at the common claim that Fromm was excessively optimistic. Martin Jay’s *The Dialectical Imagination*, the last of the three early canonical books on the history of the Frankfurt School to be examined here, provides a useful and detailed summary of Fromm’s early work. Although it focuses upon Fromm’s theory and does not discuss his directorship of empirical studies very much,<sup>4</sup> Jay’s account of Fromm’s early theoretical work is relatively unproblematic. It is when describing Fromm’s post-Institute work that Jay’s narrative becomes ambiguous and weak.

Jay prefers Herbert Marcuse’s theories to Fromm’s on the topic of psychoanalysis, and he also views Marcuse as the most Marxist member of the Frankfurt School. Jay occasionally allows this position to distort his scholarly objectivity: for example,

he claims that “only Marcuse attempted to articulate a positive anthropology at any time in his career,” which is clearly false, as Jay should know, since he himself discusses Fromm’s main book on human nature, *Man for Himself* (56).

Echoing a charge by Marcuse against Fromm, Jay’s main complaint about Fromm’s post-Institute work is that it is too “optimistic.” He ties this complaint to the common claims (seen above in Wiggershaus) that Fromm was unserious and not radical, although unlike Wiggershaus, he only makes these claims with regard to Fromm’s work *after* parting with the Institute (*Dialectical Imagination* 98ff). Obliquely noting that Fromm later incorporated ethics into his account of Marxism and drew from Eastern thought, especially Zen, Jay insinuates that Fromm’s post-Institute work was not serious and not legitimately Marxist (100). But “to be fair to Fromm” (as though any ethical approach to Marxism or engagement with Zen Buddhism is *de facto* suspect!), Jay continues, Fromm’s optimism was “not an absolute transformation of his [early] position” (100). He then cites a letter from Fromm to Jay, in which Fromm refers Jay to his response to the charge of excessive optimism in *The Art of Loving* (about which response more will be said in Chapters 3 and 4). It is disappointing that Jay simply quotes Fromm’s letter as opposed to quoting *The Art of Loving*, which responds articulately to the concern about Fromm’s “optimism.” Jay then concludes, without explaining why a greater degree of optimism is undesirable but implying it:

It is difficult, however, to read [Fromm’s] later works without coming to the conclusion that in comparison with Horkheimer and other members of the Institut’s inner circle, who were abandoning their tentative hopes of the twenties and thirties, Fromm was defending a more optimistic position. (100)

Jay’s tone clearly implies that this “optimism” is a strike against Fromm, but he stops there and does not proceed to discuss Fromm’s argument for hope.

In addition to his rejection of Fromm’s “optimism” as either conservative or eccentric, Jay rejects Fromm’s psychoanalysis as insufficiently Freudian. But Jay never seems to question the Institute’s line, beginning in the 1940s, that orthodox Freudianism is naturally allied to political radicalism. Unlike Neil McLaughlin, for example, who interprets the Horkheimer circle’s apologetics for orthodox Freudianism through the lens of the sociology of knowledge, Jay has no detectable suspicion towards the Horkheimer circle’s sudden zeal for orthodox Freudianism. Never does he ask what *extra-theoretical* motives a group of leftist Jewish exiles in McCarthy-era America (certainly potential targets for reactionary, xenophobic, or anti-Semitic aggression) might have had for wanting to align themselves with Freudian orthodoxy against “revisionist” Freudianism. By that time, Freudian psychoanalysis was established in the U.S. and had lost its fringe, avant-garde appeal; it was safe. It was the “humanistic” camp of psychoanalysis (Fromm, Karen Horney, Harry Stack Sullivan, et. al.) who were the non-conformists on the scene. The Institute’s defense of Freudian orthodoxy really came to the fore around 1946, when Horkheimer and Adorno began to publicly condemn Fromm’s “revisionism.”

As McLaughlin points out, to those who were accustomed to hearing the word in a different context, this sounded like a charge that Fromm was a “Marxist revisionist” (Bernsteinian reformist/social democrat as opposed to revolutionary Marxist) and thus insufficiently radical. Jay cites a personal interview with Fromm in which Fromm supposedly commented that Horkheimer had discovered a “more revolutionary Freud”—a quote that Jay almost certainly took out of context, since it is entirely inconsistent with the rest of Fromm’s oeuvre (*Dialectical Imagination* 101). Fromm always sought the revolutionary implications of Freud’s work, but he also excoriated Freud for his authoritarianism, nationalism, and sexism, reiterating throughout his work that Freud was limited by his bourgeois, Victorian context. From Fromm’s standpoint, the revolutionary implications of Freud’s thought could be found only through the method that Marcuse, Horkheimer, and Adorno rejected as an unjustified “revisionism.”

Held’s, Jay’s, and Wiggershaus’s dismissals of Fromm helped to cement until recently the common charges that Fromm was a marginal member of the Institute, that he was excessively optimistic and conservative, and that he was a flaky, unserious thinker. In concluding this overview of the “origin myth” concerning Fromm’s role, it is worth noting that often what is most problematic about the canonical interpretations of Fromm’s role in Critical Theory is not the interpretations themselves but the blithely presumptive way in which they are asserted. These writers and many other writers on Critical Theory seem to feel no need to justify the assumptions that “optimism” is undesirable, that drawing upon classic concepts of philosophical or religious traditions constitutes *de facto* conservatism, that orthodox Freudianism is more radical than “revisionist” Freudianism, and so forth. Fromm’s marginalization has been so total that, until recently, scholars of the Frankfurt School typically have felt obliged to justify neither their rejection of his later work nor their casual swipes at his early work. The story told about the Frankfurt School by Horkheimer, Adorno, to some extent Marcuse, and sometimes Habermas has been taken at face value for decades. What has resulted is a peculiarly ideological, gate-keeping defense of the Frankfurt School “line” that has, until the mid- to late 1990s, remained uncontested.

## 1.2 THE LEHRHAUS TO THE THERAPEUTICUM

In order to understand Fromm’s contribution to the Frankfurt School, it is necessary to examine the work that Fromm did before he joined the Institute. In particular, we need to understand that Fromm brought his socialist radicalism with him to the Institute and that his interest in Marx and Freud preceded his involvement in the Institute. Later chapters will revisit the background information provided here, in order to clarify the uniqueness of Fromm’s adherence to certain ideas in the midst of a strange, apocalyptic moment in history and culture.

A psychoanalyst and a Marxist sociologist, Fromm was hired by the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research for his work on the development of a social psychology,

one of the earliest goals of the Institute. (He was the Institute's only trained psychoanalyst.) Under Max Horkheimer's directorship, the early Frankfurt School was committed to studying the totality of society through interdisciplinary methods and drawing connections between theory and practice, while steering clear of orthodox Marxist reductionism. Fromm's social psychology, melding the insights of Freud and Marx, sought to avoid reducing social phenomena to purely libidinal or economic causes, instead offering multi-layered explanations, as we shall see. His early work on Freud and Marx led him to novel explanations of the role of family, political power, religion, and other social structures in shaping the psychological character of individuals and the pervasive psychological character orientations within societies. Before joining the Institute, however, Fromm's thought was shaped by his early experiences in left-wing Jewish intellectual circles in Germany, by his doctoral studies in Sociology in Heidelberg under Alfred Weber, and by his study and practice of psychoanalysis.

Fromm had more exposure to Jewish religious observance in his upbringing than others of his generation of the Frankfurt School.<sup>5</sup> His father was descended from a long line of Talmudic scholars and was embarrassed to be a businessman; he had probably hoped that Erich would become a rabbi. Fromm later wrote that he felt himself to have grown up in the feudal world, not the modern world, and that in his childhood he looked upon business careers as shameful (Funk, *Life and Ideas* 6, 8). In the late 1910s and early 1920s, he split his time between university study in Heidelberg, where he completed a doctorate in Sociology, and social life in Frankfurt, where he studied Judaism under prominent rabbis and Talmudic scholars and was active in left-wing Jewish intellectual circles.

In Heidelberg, Fromm completed a dissertation in Sociology under Alfred Weber, Max Weber's brother, who authored an important history of philosophy with a strong emphasis on Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel, and became famous for pioneering studies in economic geography.<sup>6</sup> "I had only one non-Jewish teacher whom I really admired and who deeply influenced me," Fromm later wrote, "and that was Alfred Weber, the brother of Max, also a sociologist, but in contrast to Max, a humanist, not a nationalist and a man of outstanding courage and integrity" (AS 251). Fromm also took courses from Heinrich Rickert (who also had a profound influence upon Walter Benjamin) and Karl Jaspers (Jay, *Dialectical Imagination* 202; Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia* 152). His 1922 dissertation was entitled *Jewish Law: A Contribution to the Study of Diaspora Judaism* and explored the way that the Jewish law was interpreted by the Karaite, Hasidic, and Reform Jewish communities (Lundgren 86). Like many young left-wing German Jews of the time, Fromm rebelled against the status quo by becoming interested in Hasidism. Martin Buber had embraced Hasidism for his project of utopian "renewal," and it seemed to Fromm's generation like a plausible alternative to the staid, bourgeois Orthodoxy of their parents' generation. Fromm's dissertation also employed Hermann Cohen's thought and Max Weber's work on the Protestant ethic to discuss how the Jewish perspective

on labor differed from the perspective of the Puritans (Lundgren 101, 83). The distinction between meaningful and alienating dimensions of labor is an ongoing theme throughout all periods of Fromm's work.

Meanwhile, in Frankfurt, Fromm was active in the loosely socialist Jewish youth movement, the *Blau-Weiss*. A Jewish alternative to the German youth movement (which was unfriendly to Jewish membership), the *Blau-Weiss* took hikes in the countryside and sang songs about their unique Jewish identity. Fromm was still a member of the *Blau-Weiss* for a couple of years after 1922, when the organization formally declared its commitment to Zionism and began urging its members to emigrate to the newly forming kibbutzim in Palestine. But under the influence of Hermann Cohen, who was one of the leading Jewish opponents of Zionism, and the influence of Fromm's mentor and Talmud teacher, the socialist Russian exile Salman Rabinkow, Fromm soon came to see Zionism as just another of the pernicious nationalisms to which he was opposed (Funk, *Life and Ideas* 40).

Like Cohen, about whom more will be said in Chapter 2, Salman Rabinkow was an interesting figure with a circle of close students. Fromm met with Rabinkow nearly daily for five years, studying philosophy and sociology in addition to the Talmud and discussing Fromm's thesis work (AS 251). Rabinkow was remembered by his students as a humanistic and gentle person, an opponent of religious fanaticism. He differed from similar teachers in Frankfurt in that he employed the less formalistic "Lithuanian" method of Talmudic study, which "stressed psychological depth, deeper comprehension of the spirit of Jewish law, and the organization of unified points of view" (Schacter 98). Studying from morning to night with great enthusiasm, Rabinkow refused to confine himself to a particular academic discipline, refused to take payment from his students, and never sought a professorial or rabbinical position. His many students, from Ernst Simon to Nahum Goldmann, later spoke of him with tremendous admiration (Schacter).

Along with studying under Rabinkow and coming into contact with Cohen, Fromm was also part of a circle around the Rabbi Nehemiah Nobel, a highly respected Conservative<sup>7</sup> rabbi who was rooted firmly in the progressive tradition of the Jewish Enlightenment (the Haskalah). Nobel took an interest in Fromm's studies, and the two used to take long walks together, including on the Sabbath when it was forbidden, a precursor to Fromm's eventual break from Orthodoxy (Funk, *Life and Ideas* 39; Löwenthal 19). The circle around Nobel was radical, heavily influenced by both socialism and Jewish mysticism (Löwenthal 19). In circles such as these in early 1900s Germany, becoming aware of one's Jewish identity was a process that was often intimately tied to revolutionary politics.

In 1920, Fromm helped to found the *Freies Jüdisches Lehrhaus* (Free Jewish Study-House) out of the circle around Nobel. The *Lehrhaus* became a hotbed of left-wing German-Jewish intellectual life.<sup>8</sup> It would be difficult to over-estimate the environment of electric intellectual excitement that surrounded the *Lehrhaus*, whose many famous participants included Martin Buber, Gershom Scholem, Franz Rosenzweig, Leo Löwenthal, Ernst Simon, Leo Baeck, and Abraham Heschel. It is



safe to say that already, approximately seven years before joining the Institute for Social Research, Fromm was developing some of his own ideas about the type of messianism that he wished to promote; messianism was a topic of heated debate at the *Lehrhaus*. Fromm taught a course on the Book of Exodus there, while Gershom Scholem (the nemesis of Fromm's messianism) taught a course on the Book of Daniel. Fromm later used Exodus as a paradigm of the struggle for liberation, and he rejected "apocalyptic" versions of messianism presented in texts like Daniel (Funk, *Life and Ideas* 42; YSB 90-116; ROH 18).

In 1924, Fromm became interested in psychoanalysis and was trained and psychoanalyzed by Frieda Reichmann, whom he married in 1926. He had first met her in the early 1920s at the expensive sanitarium near Dresden where she was serving wealthy clients while seeking donations from them to treat—or rather, to build a sort of commune out of—the members of the *Blau-Weiss*, including Fromm (Hornstein 29, 53).<sup>9</sup> She was a mother figure for these Jewish youth, bringing them food and allowing them to hang around and socialize in her living quarters during the daytime while she was treating wealthy clients (53-4). Rejecting assimilation, she supported the burgeoning Zionist youth movement as a rediscovery of a separate Jewish identity (63). "For close to four years," Reichmann's biographer writes, "this sanitarium within a sanitarium functioned as a model community...Patients helped each other in whatever ways they could: one would give Hebrew lessons, and another would mend his socks in return" (54). Reichmann moved to Heidelberg in 1924 to set up her own sanitarium, the "Therapeuticum," with plainly religious and utopian motivations. The principle was that "ritual practices didn't have to be compulsions performed in a rote way out of fear of punishment by God; they could be the basis for deep spirituality" (64). As Reichmann later explained,

We thought we would first analyze the people, and second, make them aware of their tradition and live in this tradition, not because the Lord has said so, but because that meant becoming aware of our past in big style. Then we would do something not only for the individuals but also for the Jewish people. (Silver 20)

The point of communes like the Therapeuticum was a rediscovery of Judaism as a unique identity that stood outside the mainstream of German society. Although the anti-assimilationist Jewish youth did not always define their commitment in such terms, according to Leo Löwenthal this revolt against assimilation was often motivated by opposition to capitalism more than by a defense of an ethnic or religious identity (Löwenthal 19).

Founded together with Fromm, Reichmann's "Therapeuticum" was so heavily influenced by Jewish thought and spirituality that it became known as practicing a "Torah-peutic" method, serving kosher meals and celebrating Jewish holidays (Kellner "Erich Fromm, Judaism" 3, Löwenthal 26). The clientele were primarily Jewish intellectuals, including Leo Löwenthal, Ernst Simon, and Rabinkow (Funk, *Life and Ideas* 61). It was seen as radical and cutting edge; psychoanalysis was

not yet popular and was still viewed with suspicion. Löwenthal later credited the Therapeuticum with influencing the Frankfurt School project of melding psychoanalysis and Marxism (Löwenthal 26). By that time, it should be noted, Fromm was becoming increasingly politically radicalized, probably largely through his experiences at the *Lehrhaus* and through the influence of Rabinkow. Gershom Scholem described Fromm in 1926 as an “enthusiastic Trotskyite” who “now pitied me for my petit-bourgeois parochialism” (by which “parochialism” he probably meant Zionism) (*From Berlin* 156).<sup>10</sup>

Reichmann, approximately ten years Fromm's senior, employed a therapeutic method based upon the Jewish idea of *tikkun* (redemption, making-whole) and the Hasidic messianic proverb that “to redeem one person is to redeem the world.” There were no neutral actions: every moment and every encounter with another person was an opportunity to release the divine “sparks” hidden within creation (Hornstein 28, 42). (The belief in these hidden sparks was a product of the Lurianic Kabbalah, which influenced Hasidism as well as some interesting revolutionary moments in Jewish history.)

At the time that Reichmann met Fromm, both were still steadfastly Orthodox in accord with their upbringing; Reichmann had kept kosher through medical school and had refused to work on the Sabbath throughout her time as a doctor treating brain-injured soldiers during the war (Hornstein 53). Under the influence of psychoanalytic ideas, however, Fromm and Reichmann drifted away from their earlier religious assumptions. Fromm's decisive break with Orthodox Judaism came in 1928. For Fromm, the stage had already been set for his break from Orthodoxy by the contacts he had made through the *Lehrhaus*, and his walks with Rabbi Nobel on the Sabbath, which broke the rules of the Sabbath observance, would have already raised the question in Fromm's mind.

Reichmann's biographer Gail Hornstein states that Fromm's and Reichmann's 1927 articles psychoanalyzing the Sabbath ritual and kosher laws, published in Freud's journal *Imago*, already marked their initial, public break from Orthodoxy. Reichmann later said of the publications, “That's how we announced we were through [with Orthodoxy], in big style, like two real Jewish intellectuals!” (Hornstein 66). A more complete break followed in 1928, when they went to a park during Passover (feast of unleavened bread) and ceremoniously and silently shared a loaf of leavened bread (66). Perhaps with a tinge of sadness, Reichmann later joked that they were afraid at the time about the folk belief that Jews who abandoned Orthodoxy were cursed to die childless; neither of them believed in the curse, of course, but neither Reichmann nor Fromm ever did have children (Silver 22).

Reichmann later became renowned as an extraordinarily gifted and humane psychoanalyst, famous for refusing to give up hope on even the most challenging cases. Fromm and Reichmann separated in 1930, after which Fromm had romantic relationships with Karen Horney (from around 1933 to 1943) and with African American dance artist and anthropologist Katherine Dunham in the early 1940s, before marrying Henny Gurland in 1944, and Annis Freeman in 1953 after Gurland's



death (Hornstein 68). (Regrettably little research has been done upon the relationship with Dunham, whose pioneering work on Caribbean dance and connection to the négritude movement merit study in their own right. Lawrence Friedman's new biography of Fromm is one of the first works on Fromm to discuss Dunham in the context of U.S. culture; Rainer Funk's "illustrated biography" of Fromm mentions the relationship but does not mention that Dunham was African American. Dunham speaks highly of Fromm as a humanist in her 1969 memoir of her time in Haiti, *Island Possessed*.)

With Fromm's help after their separation, Reichmann obtained a position at an important mental hospital in the U.S., which she directed for many years. In a feat that Freud had considered impossible, she famously used psychoanalysis to cure a patient of schizophrenia, as memorialized in the famous book and film *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*. Fromm and Reichmann kept in touch a bit over the years after their separation and were amiable in their later years (Silver 21).

Despite some weaknesses, Fromm's 1927 article on the Sabbath was significant for his later work; it was Fromm's first formal attempt to apply psychoanalytic theory to a concrete sociological phenomenon. The article was a bit reductionist, concluding that the Sabbath was a ritual of repentance for the Oedipal desire for the mother and the killing of the father (Funk, *Life and Ideas* 61).<sup>11</sup> It was Fromm's first published text dealing with messianism, though it lacked the complexity of his later work on the theme. Nature and the earth, symbolically associated with the mother ("Mother Earth"), were not to be violated upon the Sabbath; the Sabbath sought to restore the harmony and oneness experienced in the womb, symbolized in Jewish thought by Paradise (Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia* 152). According to Michael Löwy, the article demonstrated a brief brush by Fromm with "restorative" messianism (153). Fromm's mature writings interpreted Jewish messianism not as a restoration of a prelapsarian golden age but rather as a dialectical synthesis of history and pre-history.

Fromm's dissertation on the Jewish law and his article on the Sabbath both examine the nature of labor and point towards radical transformation of working conditions. Both express hope for a messianic future free of misery and toil (Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia* 153). In the Sabbath article, Fromm speaks of a total absence of work in the messianic age, harking back to Marx's and other early socialists' calls for an "abolition [*Aufhebung*] of labor" (Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia* 153; Zilbersheid).<sup>12</sup> Fromm's dissertation speaks similarly, though not of an abolition of labor but of the transformation of labor into something pleasurable. He rejected the asceticism of the Protestant work ethic and urged a return to the Jewish view of work as something good though not an end in itself (Lundgren 83).

In concluding this overview of Fromm's life and work prior to joining the Institute, it seems that there is abundant evidence that Fromm *brought* his socialist radicalism with him to the Frankfurt School and that Fromm's radicalism was not due chiefly to his involvement in the Institute. Through his dissertation on the Jewish law and his article on the Sabbath, Fromm was exploring the nature of labor and envisioning a

messianic future in which labor would be liberated and leisure would be increased. The general milieu of young enthusiastic Jewish socialists in which Fromm found himself before joining the Institute, along with the influence of Rabinkow, Hermann Cohen, and Rabbi Nobel, would have encouraged him to interpret his religious background in a radical, socialist light, as would the radical excitement of the rising psychoanalytic movement and the experience of Reichmann's commune-like "sanitarium within a sanitarium" near Dresden and the Heidelberg Therapeuticum. Scholem's claim that Fromm was a Trotskyist in 1926, while spoken with derision, provides further evidence that Fromm was drawn to Marxism. In the following section, we will explore how Fromm came into contact with the Institute for Social Research, the work he did while allied with it, and the reasons for his parting from the Institute approximately ten years later.

### 1.3 FROMM AND THE INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH

Now that Fromm's pre-Institute work has been examined, the reader has a sense of the ideas and experiences that Fromm brought with him to the Institute. Fromm's collaboration with the Institute for Social Research began in 1928 or 1929 when Fromm began working with Max Horkheimer, before Horkheimer took over as director (Abromeit 194). Fromm's friend Leo Löwenthal, whom Fromm had once introduced to the *Lehrhaus* circle, returned the favor by introducing Fromm to Horkheimer (Funk, *Life and Ideas* 72). In 1930, shortly after Horkheimer took over from Friedrich Pollock as director of the Institute, Horkheimer hired Fromm as a tenured member to head the Institute's social psychology division (Bronner 79). This was before Marcuse and Adorno joined the Institute. At this time, Fromm was a core member of the Institute, though Horkheimer later downplayed his centrality to the Institute's history (Funk, *Courage* 296-7).

Despite the Institute's heritage of a "dictatorship of the director" (as earlier director Carl Grünberg had approvingly quipped), one must not overstate the extent to which Horkheimer set the agenda for the early Institute. It is true that Horkheimer saw the need for bringing psychoanalysis into conversation with Marxism, and his interest in psychoanalysis had been stimulated by Löwenthal's stories about being psychoanalyzed at Fromm and Reichmann's Therapeuticum (Jay, *Dialectical Imagination* 87). As was popular among intellectuals of the time, Horkheimer had also undergone psychoanalysis himself (under Karl Landauer, who was also one of Fromm's analysts) (Abromeit 188; Roazen, "Exclusion" 3). However, the mere fact that Fromm was already in touch with Horkheimer in 1928 or 1929, before Horkheimer became director of the Institute, casts some doubt on the standard narrative. According to that narrative, Horkheimer's famous opening lecture as director of the Institute was a solitarily-conceived blueprint for the Institute's future work, and Fromm's effort to synthesize Freud and Marx conveniently *just happened to be* what the early Institute was seeking. But it is more likely that Horkheimer stated this commitment in his opening lecture because he was fully aware that Fromm was

already engaged in this project, and because he intended to hire Fromm. The same goes for Horkheimer's articulation in the speech of plans for an upcoming empirical study of the German working class, which Fromm later led.

In his opening lecture, Horkheimer also expressed his commitment to an interdisciplinary research program that would seek to understand the social totality. In the tradition of Karl Korsch and Georg Lukács, both of whom had challenged Marxist orthodoxy in favor of a Hegelian emphasis on historical totality, Horkheimer sought to foster a radical, loosely Marxist social theory that drew upon Hegel and steered clear of economic reductionism and positivism. He also was wary of philosophical "systems" from the outset. He hoped to link theory with practice, exploring concrete examples of socio-historical phenomena while avoiding scientism and positivism (Jay, *Dialectical Imagination* 41).

By drawing upon Freud, Fromm would forge a path for Critical Theory *avant la lettre* that avoided narrow reductionism and explored multiple social phenomena, such as the family, religion, and law. Much of his work shortly before joining the Frankfurt School and while a member of the Frankfurt School in the 1930s was devoted to creating a theoretical synthesis of Freud and Marx and exploring its applications to concrete institutions and practices, such as the legal system, early Christianity, and the politics of the German working class. Fromm was intimately involved in the Frankfurt School's early project of doing theory in a way that spoke to contemporary problems and that discovered the intersections of the socio-economic totality within the lives of individuals.

Fromm's early work, however, may already have been in tension with some of Horkheimer's aims. Fromm's humanism, manifesting itself by the 1940s in the assertion that, despite other sources contributing to the development of individual character, there is nevertheless a certain unchanging human essence which would reach its fulfillment in the future, would have been anathema to Horkheimer's hesitancy about the idea of an enduring human nature, his rejection of the idea of a "meaning" of history, and his affinities with Schopenhauer's pessimism (Abromeit 148-9; Jay, *Dialectical Imagination* 55-6). Fromm's early work may have avoided a possible confrontation on this issue; Fromm's most overt arguments for humanism and messianism come later, beginning in the 1950s. He would later title his political program "socialist humanism," and nearly all of Fromm's work after leaving the Frankfurt School addressed questions of an enduring human nature and its future fulfillment. Another, related factor at work in Horkheimer's evolution from excitedly hiring Fromm to nervously distancing himself from him may have been Horkheimer's evolution of ideas with regard to the Enlightenment; as Abromeit's biography suggests, the early Horkheimer seems to have been a defender of the Enlightenment ideal of reason against proto-fascist and *lebensphilosophische* ideologies (Abromeit 171). This defense of the Enlightenment would have meshed well with Fromm's own concerns until Horkheimer's disappointment stemming from the Moscow Trials and the conformist character of U.S. culture led Horkheimer to a greater degree of hesitancy with regard to the Enlightenment promise of freedom

through reason, education, and democratic equality. We will return to the events surrounding Fromm's break from the Institute later in this chapter.

In what follows I offer a chronological overview of Fromm's writings and their significance, from the time when Fromm first came into contact with the Institute in 1929 to the time of his parting with the Institute in 1939. This is necessary in order to show that Fromm's early writings made a significant contribution to the Frankfurt School and to present some of the ideas that Fromm would later develop in greater detail, which will be explored further in later chapters. Later in this book it will become evident that Fromm's post-Institute work emerged logically out of his earlier work and is usually in harmony with it, seriously engaging many of the same themes, contra the common charge that Fromm's post-Institute work flew off on an irrational and flaky tangent.

We can begin by exploring Fromm's early article "Psychoanalysis and Sociology." The article was written at the end of 1928 and published in 1929 in a psychoanalytic journal, before Horkheimer became director of the Institute in 1930 (Funk, "Major Points" 2). In that article Fromm laid out the basis of his synthesis of Freud and Marx, explaining psychoanalysis's need for sociology and vice versa. It pointed to Freud's recently published *Future of an Illusion* as an indication that Freud recognized the need for exploring the historical genesis of the psyche ("Psychoanalysis and Sociology" 2). Kevin Anderson suggests that the essay might better have been titled, "Psychoanalysis and Marxism" and that Fromm's commitment to a "revolutionary Marxist" position is already evident in it (Anderson [2000] 92). Marxism is the only sociological theory addressed in the article, and Fromm calls Marx "the greatest sociologist of all" (92). Fromm's essay concludes with a quote from *The German Ideology* that expresses an idea of Marx's that Fromm would frequently reference in his later work on messianism: "History does nothing, it possesses no immense wealth, it fights no battles. It is instead the human being, the real living person, who does everything, who owns everything, and who fights all battles" (92; "Psychoanalysis and Sociology" 3). As Anderson rightly notes, Marxist themes recur throughout Fromm's work, including his early essays, which frequently offer a radical critique of the reformism of Social Democrats Kautsky and Bernstein (95).

In 1930-1, Fromm published three studies on criminology in psychoanalytic journals and a lengthy class analysis and psychoanalysis of early Christianity, "The Dogma of Christ." Despite the surface appearance of a large divergence between the two topics, the criminology essays and the essay on early Christianity address relatively the same issue: the way in which authority is maintained through becoming internalized in the psyche of the individuals subject to it, who sado-masochistically seek punishment for their repressed desire to rebel.

The three essays on criminology explored the social function of punishment in maintaining the authority of the state. Fromm reflects that the threat of punishment does not deter crime, since most crimes either have economic causes or result from unconscious motives, not rational premeditation ("State as Educator" 124). Although punishment rarely deters crime, the purpose of punishment does not seem to be mere

retribution either—the modern criminal justice system considers itself therapeutic or educational, not merely punitive, Fromm points out (124). Instead of being a means of deterrence or retribution, Fromm suggests—long before Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* investigated this phenomenon—that punishment is employed by the state in order that the populace will psychologically internalize the state’s authority. Once this internalization occurs, the masses’ desire to revolt is turned inward masochistically towards self-punishment. By wielding the power to punish, the state becomes a father-figure (125-6). The criminal can derive satisfaction through submitting to the father-figure’s punishment; some people will even commit crimes with an unconscious wish to be punished (“State as Educator” 126; “Psychology of the Criminal” 146). The rest of the populace, the non-criminals, find in punishment an outlet for their aggressive impulses, finding sadistic satisfaction in learning of the punishment of others (“State as Educator” 126). War, Fromm notes, also serves as an outlet for the sadism of the masses (126). The state’s power of force is thus “Janus-faced,” with one face turned towards the criminal or the enemy, the other towards the obedient masses (“Psychology of the Criminal” 147).

Fromm’s other important work of 1931, “The Dogma of Christ,” was framed as an application of the synthesis of Freudian and Marxian theory to an analysis of early Christianity. In fact, the book-length essay operates on a variety of levels, and in it Fromm’s Marxist radicalism and his originality are again evident. According to Fromm, early Christianity was a movement of the impoverished masses, and early Christian communities were communistic in organization. The message of early Christianity was messianic and revolutionary; it was not a “social-reform program” (reformism) but rather “the blessed promise of a not-distant future in which the poor would be rich, the hungry would be satisfied, and the oppressed would gain authority” (DC 77). The early Christians fully expected this messianic future to come soon, within history and in their lifetimes, not in an other-worldly afterlife (93).

In contrast with the view of the Church later that Jesus was divine and *became human*—the Homoousian doctrine—Fromm contends that the early Christians were Adoptionists, believing that Jesus began as an ordinary human being and *became divine*. Adoptionism inspired a radical belief that all human beings had the potential to become gods, and this belief was linked to a spirit of revolt against authorities, both God the “Father” and earthly rulers. A major shift in the doctrine occurred as the Roman Empire became Christianized and the ruling classes converted, Fromm contends. “*The decisive element was the change from the idea of man becoming God to that of God becoming man*” (90, Fromm’s italics). The emphasis shifted from immanent, historical empowerment of the masses and feverish messianic expectation, to the acceptance of fate and of the unchanging providence of a transcendent deity. After that shift, revolution no longer seemed like a possibility, so the only solution was to submit to the authority of the father-figure and to love him (DC 91). The masses were still enraged about the injustices they were suffering, but their rage was turned inward against the self. Through accepting earthly misfortunes as just punishments, the Christian masses now hoped only for bliss in the afterlife

and turned to the Church and to the cult around Mary as images of the forgiveness and love that could be obtained through obedience and passive acceptance of authority (93-5).

"The Dogma of Christ" was hailed by a review in the Institute's *Zeitschrift* as (Michael Löwy's paraphrase) "the first concrete example of a synthesis between Freud and Marx"—no small achievement (Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia* 155). "The Dogma of Christ" was also a political statement: as Michael Löwy points out, Fromm intended his analysis of early Christianity as a criticism of the Soviet Union (155). The decline of the early Christian communes with their revolutionary enthusiasm and the rise of a hierarchical Church structure, obediently submissive to the Roman ruling class, was an allegory for the collapse of the early, enthusiastic workers' councils (soviets) and the submission of the Russian working class to the Stalinist state after the death of Lenin (155).<sup>13</sup>

Importantly, the essay also contained a political critique of "Gnosticism." Fromm was writing at a time when a sizeable subculture, including some proto-fascists as well as some sincere leftists, were claiming to be returning to the worldview of ancient "Gnosticism," especially its despairing belief in the world's fallenness and its vision of goodness and the messianic future as wholly other. Fromm described the ancient Gnostics as "the well-to-do Hellenistic middle class...[who] wanted to accomplish too quickly and too suddenly what [they] wished...before the consciousness of the masses could accept it" (DC 75). They were—one might paraphrase—the ancient world's Romantic nihilists. In "The Dogma of Christ," Fromm stressed that there *was* an alternative to the failed options of compliant obedience (Stalinism), "revisionism" (Bernstein and Kautsky's reformism), and Gnosticism (romantic or reactionary yearning for destruction or return to the past) (75). In early Christianity, Montanism emerged as an alternative to these failed options. The Montanist movement was a revolt "against the conforming tendencies of Christianity" and "sought to restore the early Christian enthusiasm" (75). It is not clear where Fromm located the contemporary equivalent of the ancient Montanist rebirth of messianic enthusiasm, such as whether he would have equated it with Trotskyism or some other emerging movement, or whether he would have described it as something that he wished for and did not yet see happening. Wherever Fromm may have seen hope for change in his context, however, his essay was plainly radical and was plainly critical of Stalinism, reformism, and nihilist "Gnosticism." One may justifiably assume that it was more than Fromm's Jewish background that caused the Nazis later to add the "The Dogma of Christ" to their list of prohibited reading materials (Roazen, "Exclusion" 2).

Some would argue that "The Dogma of Christ" presents an inaccurate account of the history of Christianity, but the point is somewhat irrelevant to the aims of Fromm's essay. "The Dogma of Christ" was not primarily about Christianity. In addition to critiquing the situation of the left of the time, the essay addressed the same important question that Fromm's work on criminology had addressed: the way in which external political authority becomes internalized in the psyche of



individuals, with politically conservative consequences: either compliant submission or destructive nihilism. This concern has far-reaching political implications, beyond specific questions about early Christian history. It may indicate something at the core of the Nazis' rise to power and may even provide a useful critique of political events today.<sup>14</sup> At any rate, "The Dogma of Christ" may be read as Fromm's first major work on messianism. Like his later work on messianism, the essay presented messianic hope as an alternative to conformism and nihilism.

By comparison with "The Dogma of Christ," Fromm's next two major publications may have been a bit reductionist and less dialectical, but they are both rather famous, and they demonstrate the strengths and weakness of Fromm's brief period of relatively orthodox Freudianism. These two 1932 essays for the Institute's *Zeitschrift*, "Psychoanalytic Characterology and Its Relevance for Social Psychology" and "The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology" continued Fromm's project of melding Marx and Freud, exploring applications of various psychoanalytic categories. The first article, focusing on object relations, concluded with an account of the bourgeois character structure as anal-erotic (CP 137-8). The continuation of anal impulses associated with toilet-training into adult life becomes sublimated into tendencies to "orderliness, punctuality, cleanliness, and stinginess" and an obsession with "duty" (142-3). This stage of development is also characterized by "pride" and a feeling of being utterly unique and special in comparison to everything and everyone else (143). People who are fixated at this stage "are inclined to regard everything in life as property and to protect everything that is 'private' from outside invasions. This attitude does not apply to money and possessions only; it also applies to human beings, feelings, memories, and experiences" (144). In this article, one can already see Fromm's later thesis in *The Sane Society* that it is possible for an entire society to be psychologically ill without knowing it—that is, neurosis is not necessarily limited to a minority of deviant individuals who stand out as abnormal. Particular socio-economic structures may foster the development of particular neuroses.

The second 1932 article, "The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology" (hereafter, "Method and Function"), is Fromm's best-known early work, in part because it is one of the few works by Fromm that Marcuse praises in *Eros and Civilization*, though I will not address Marcuse's interpretation of the article here (*Eros and Civilization* 241-2). The article is noteworthy since it offers one of Fromm's first critiques of Freudian orthodoxy, though the article is still very close to the orthodox Freudian "line." In the essay, Fromm explores the family as a mediating link between the individual psyche and social and economic structures (*Eros and Civilization* 241; CP 117). The example of the family demonstrates for Fromm that psychoanalysis and Marxism need one another and must meet through an analytic social psychology that "*seeks to understand the instinctual apparatus of a group, its libidinous and largely unconscious behavior, in terms of its socio-economic structure*" (CP 116, italics Fromm's). The socio-economic structure delimits the ways in which the sexual instincts can be expressed or sublimated. Although Freud did not abstract the individual from social relationships, he mistakenly absolutized

his contemporary bourgeois society, underestimating the degree to which social relationships are shaped by differing socio-economic conditions (115, 117). In a spunky challenge to one of Freud's most prized theories, Fromm also suggests that the Oedipus complex is not universal but is only a feature of patriarchal societies, not matriarchal ones (119).

"Method and Function" had a certain political subtext. It was a response to Wilhelm Reich's 1929 manifesto, "Dialectical Materialism and Psychoanalysis" (Erös 1). Reich's pamphlet had been an attempt to convince Stalinists of the merits of psychoanalysis. In order to give the method of historical materialism a wide berth and prevent psychoanalysis from colliding too much with it, Reich had limited the function of psychoanalysis to a merely *negative* critique of society, such as exploring the "irrational motives which have led a certain type of leader to join the socialist or national-socialist movement" or "[tracing] the effect of social ideologies on the psychological development of the individual" (1). Fromm responded to Reich in "Method and Function" by arguing that psychoanalysis also made a *positive* contribution to Marxism and that psychoanalysis could have *any* object, "only and wholly insofar as psychic factors play a role in the phenomenon" (Erös 1, CP 114). Psychoanalysis's usefulness to Marxism was not limited to uncovering neuroses in individuals or doing ideology critique. Fromm's ongoing commitment to coupling a negative critique of society with a positive account of the goals for which it could strive can already be seen here.

Despite its renown and despite its significance as a response to Wilhelm Reich, "Method and Function" is not Fromm at his most nuanced. This early attempted synthesis of Freud and Marx was less reductionist than either orthodox Freudianism or orthodox Marxism, but one could argue that here, as in his other early works on this topic, Fromm is somewhat reductionist in his emphasis upon a materialist explanation of human phenomena as outgrowths of biological drives and the economic base (CP 129). The article opens with the assertion, "Psychoanalysis is a materialistic psychology, which should be classed among the natural sciences" (110). As noted previously, Fromm later developed a more nuanced account of the interaction between base and superstructure in Marxist thought than that demonstrated in this article. He also later placed less emphasis upon the libido than he did in "Method and Function," accepted something more like the "social drive" he rejects in this early essay, and shifted from his early presentation of psychoanalysis as a "natural science" to classifying it as a "human science" (CP 110, PR 6).

Fromm's work on J. J. Bachofen (1815-1887) marked a further development by Fromm away from the limitations of Freudian orthodoxy, having already challenged Freud's ahistorical approach to psychoanalysis and his theory of the Oedipus complex. In 1933-4, Fromm published two pieces on Bachofen's theory of matriarchy in the Institute's *Zeitschrift*. Writing on Bachofen had only recently become acceptable, and any serious consideration of him, only shortly before this time, would have jeopardized one's academic credibility, partly because Bachofen had influenced both Engels and Nietzsche, neither of whom were accepted subject matter in academia



(Noll 164). In the ideological battleground of the 1920s, however, Bachofen had made a comeback. Among proto-fascists, his work was taken as a mythical, Teutonic alternative to Freud's more rationalistic approach to psychoanalysis. Fromm warned of this right-wing enthusiasm surrounding Bachofen, and he also pointed out that Bachofen's work had been used by Engels and other radicals, not just the right-wing, and thus might be salvageable.

Fromm responded to and defended the radical interpretation of Bachofen, arguing that the differing political interpretations were made possible by the contradictions in Bachofen himself, an aristocrat discontented with capitalism and fascinated by the past, though not a Romantic (CP 92). Fromm writes of Bachofen:

There is obviously a sharp contradiction between the Bachofen who admires gynecratic democracy and the aristocratic Bachofen of Basel who opposed the political emancipation of women...It is a contradiction that crops up on several different planes. On the philosophical plane, it is the believing Protestant and Idealist over against the Romantic and the dialectic philosopher over against the naturalistic metaphysician. On the social and political plane, it is the anti-Democrat over against the admirer of a Communist-democratic social structure. On the moral plane, it is the proponent of Protestant bourgeois morality over against the advocate of a society where sexual freedom reigned instead of monogamous marriage. (93)

These contradictions in Bachofen made possible the varying interpretations of his work, but it is Marxism, according to Fromm, that can best account for the dialectical contradictions in Bachofen's work. Though it is not a return to the past, Marxism is the heir of the pre-historic matriarchal system, of its values of equality and fraternity (108-9).

The Bachofen articles represented a further development of the dialectical approach of Fromm's "Dogma of Christ" and demonstrated greater nuance than Fromm's "Method and Function." In the more substantive of the two Bachofen articles, one can see Fromm's emerging commitment to a highly *future-oriented messianism*, away from any "restorationist" desires for a mere return to Paradise. The proto-fascists Ludwig Klages, Alfred Bäumler, and Alfred Schuler praised Bachofen's theory because they "looked back to the past as a lost paradise," while the radicals (Marx, Engels, Bebel, and others) praised Bachofen's theory from an opposite standpoint, since they "looked forward hopefully to the future" (CP 85). Everyone at that time would have known that Klages and Bäumler had turned to Bachofen in search of a psychology that would provide an alternative to Freudian psychoanalysis and in search of a *lebensphilosophische* alternative to Neo-Kantianism, which was now perceived as stale and bourgeois (Lebovic, "Beauty and Terror" 2, 10). (For further discussion of Klages and *Lebensphilosophie* in relation to the Frankfurt School, see Section 2.4 in Chapter 2.) Unlike his proto-fascist contemporaries Klages and Bäumler, Fromm was not abandoning Freud's rationalism in favor of Bachofen's irrationalism. Rather, he was drawing upon Bachofen in an attempt to transcend

the limitations of both Freud and Bachofen through a dialectical synthesis of the pre-historic “matriarchy” envisioned by Bachofen with the modern, Enlightenment insights of psychoanalysis.

In the same essay on political responses to Bachofen, one can see Fromm's emerging psychoanalytic critique of Nazism, which he would revisit and rework throughout his career, even exploring the question at great length in his very late work *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973). In the early essay, Fromm analyzed the desire among the masses for regression to a state of helpless infancy and dependence upon an all-giving, all-nurturing mother. This mother figure was to be honored symbolically through passive submissiveness towards nature (manifested by belief in history as “fated” or cyclic), a strong preference for those to whom one is related by blood, a predilection to honoring the dead through rigid repetition of rituals, and an attachment to land and soil, symbolically associated with motherhood and feminine fertility. The conservatives looked to Bachofen's theory of matriarchy for these traits, which were already being exalted by the Nazi Party. Although the fascist movement oppressed women, Fromm points out that the reactionaries' sympathies for Bachofen did not conflict with their opposition to women's liberation. Rather, the reactionaries liked Bachofen's theory of matriarchy because they liked the idea that there were natural, essential differences between the sexes (which, while not Bachofen's main point, was a point on which Bachofen agreed), and because they were attracted to the submissive acceptance of fate that had supposedly characterized the matriarchal world (CP 90).

In 1933, the Institute collided with Nazi power and sought refuge in Geneva, and in 1934 it moved to New York. Although the Nazis had closed the Institute, it may have been possible to remain a while longer. But considering Fromm's psychoanalysis of Nazism, the members of the early Institute were not surprised by the Nazis' rise to power, and they knew that they needed to escape Germany quickly (Löwenthal 27). The pathologies of Nazism and the trend towards compliant obedience among the German working class were ever on Fromm's mind. Furthermore, Fromm's theory and personal experiences had given him cause to fear nationalism. Nationalism had long been a major intellectual concern for Fromm. One of the formative experiences of his adolescence was his startled discovery of the irrationality of the patriotic fervor in support of World War I (BC 7). Moreover, his early participation in and rejection of the Zionist movement added to his concerns about nationalism.

In addition to his worries about nationalism, Fromm's research project on the German working class convinced him that the danger of Nazism was far greater than most of his contemporaries yet realized. His study of the German working class was based upon the premise that, although most German workers were ideologically opposed to Nazism, this was not sufficient indication that they would resist the Nazis (DC 151).<sup>15</sup> It was unclear whether the German working class' opposition to Nazism was merely superficial or “rooted in [their] character structure” (151). The study concluded that the majority of the German citizens would be neither enthusiastic Nazis nor dissidents but would quietly acquiesce to the rise of National

Socialism, since their professed support for freedom was only superficial. Even more worryingly, the study found that some workers affiliated with the left would be drawn into the Nazi movement by their love of authoritarianism. For example, asked to list their heroes, some left-wing participants responded with a list like, “Marx, Lenin, Nero, and Alexander the Great,” while others responded to the effect of, “Marx, Lenin, Socrates, and Pasteur” (OD 35). While both respondents professed support for socialism, for the former respondent socialism was a mere “ideology” or “rationalization” covering over a love of power, while the latter respondent truly admired “benefactors of mankind” (35). While the latter respondent would likely support the resistance, the former might support the Nazis. Not surprisingly, considering the results of this study, the Institute moved almost as far away from Germany as geographically possible, leaving Europe entirely, long before many others fled.

By 1935, as the Institute settled into its new home in New York, the seeds of Fromm’s expulsion from the Institute had been planted. Fromm was popular in the U.S. and probably felt at home more quickly than others in the Institute, since he already had many contacts in the U.S. through psychoanalytic circles. (However, Wiggershaus’s claim that Fromm’s popularity implied that Fromm had friends who were less radical and that this caused his break from the Frankfurt School is dubious.) Frequently traveling, Fromm was not in New York as steadily as the other members of the early Institute were. In addition to his ability to settle comfortably into the U.S. more rapidly, perhaps his work on Bachofen had created some tension between him and others in the Frankfurt School. Some in the Institute’s broad social circles may have disagreed with Fromm’s attack on Ludwig Klages in that work, and Fromm’s critique would not have gone unnoticed by Adorno or by Adorno’s friend Walter Benjamin, both of whom had crossed paths with Stefan George’s and Ludwig Klages’s Cosmic Circle and had formed their own opinions on the Bachofen debate—I will return to this briefly in Chapter 2.

Despite these factors that may have brought into question Fromm’s role in the Institute, it was the response to Fromm’s 1935 essay for the *Zeitschrift*, “The Social Determinants of Psychoanalytic Theory” that most explicitly demonstrated the rift that was growing between Horkheimer’s close circle of followers and Fromm.<sup>16</sup> Adorno at this time was trying to get closer to Horkheimer but was still an outsider and knew little about the Institute’s earlier work. He responded to Fromm’s article with a polemical rant in a letter to Horkheimer, accusing Fromm of being a reformist who needed to read more Lenin:

[Fromm’s article] is sentimental and wrong to begin with, being a mixture of social democracy and anarchism, and above all shows a severe lack of the concept of dialectics. He takes the easy way out with the concept of authority, without which, after all, neither Lenin’s avant-garde nor dictatorship can be conceived of. I would strongly advise him to read Lenin. And what do the anti-popes opposed to Freud say? No, precisely when Freud is criticized from the

left, as he is by us, things like the silly argument about a “lack of kindness” cannot be permitted. This is exactly the trick used by bourgeois individualists against Marx. I must tell you that I see a real threat in this article to the line which the journal takes... (McLaughlin, “Origin Myths” 118-9)

It is a perplexing rant indeed, especially the admonition to “read Lenin.” If Adorno were genuinely concerned that Fromm’s approach were reformist or anarchist, then he might have turned to Marx for a critique, not Lenin. Perhaps Adorno believed that Horkheimer was an orthodox Marxist and would be concerned about deviation from orthodox Marxism, but Adorno seems to miss the fact that that debate would have been about *Stalin*, not Lenin. Nor does Adorno seem to realize that one of the Institute’s main theoretical projects to that point had been a study of authority commissioned by Horkheimer. There is a certain absurdity in Adorno’s claim that Fromm’s study “took the easy way out with the concept of authority.”

Although Adorno ends up looking confused, the letter is significant because it suggests the flawed equation that would later be used in an attempt to marginalize Fromm from the left: Freudian “revisionism” = Marxist revisionism = reformism. It should be pointed out that although critical of *Freud*, Fromm’s article was not at all critical of Marx or of revolutionary sentiments; the article’s Freudian revisionism was in no way connected to Marxist revisionism. In fact, the article condemned the weaknesses in Freud’s theory and Freud’s personal character as essentially the results of a *bourgeois, class bias* on the part of Freud, and the article harshly criticized the merely reformist, liberal attitude of mainstream psychoanalysis, which was condescending and authoritarian despite its appearance of objectivity and “tolerance.” According to Fromm, the orthodox Freudian psychoanalyst subtly sends the following message to the patient:

“Here you come, patient, with all your sins. You have been bad, and that is why you suffer. But one can excuse you. The most important reasons for your misdeeds lie in the events of your childhood for which you cannot be made responsible. Furthermore, you want to reform, and you show this in coming to analysis and in giving yourself up to my directions. If, however, you do not comply...then you cannot be helped.” (Social Determinants 158-9)

In contrast to this patriarchal and authoritarian attitude towards the patient, Fromm urged an attitude of unconditional (matriarchal) love for the patient. But far from suggesting that such love was absent in Marx or Marxism, Fromm presented his article as a critique of bourgeois attitudes and also rejected any Romantic or unscientific return to feudal values (for which he critiqued Groddeck) (159). The article plainly suggests that psychoanalysis must struggle to transcend both feudalism and capitalism, though the article is focused primarily on a critique of Freudian psychoanalysis and does not proceed to discuss socialism directly.

By 1935 Fromm had already challenged Freudian orthodoxy on a variety of points, but his critique had not previously been so vehement. Almost from the very

beginning of his work on psychoanalysis, Fromm had questioned the ahistorical character of psychoanalytic categories as posited by Freud. He had argued that character and neuroses are shaped differently in different socio-economic contexts. He had even argued quite early on that the Oedipus complex, one of Freud's most prized theories, was not an enduring feature of human experience but a result of patriarchal social arrangements. His writings on Bachofen, a thinker whom many considered an alternative to Freud, would also have raised eyebrows among Freud's most loyal disciples. However, the 1935 article marked Fromm's public, dramatic break from orthodox Freudianism, perhaps analogous to his earlier published break from Orthodox Judaism, the 1927 Sabbath article. Flouting psychoanalysis's father-figure, the 1935 article was a joyful act of iconoclasm, condemning Freud repeatedly as bourgeois, conservative, patriarchal, repressed, and incapable of love.

Considering the radical tone and content of Fromm's article, it is indeed puzzling that Adorno condemned it as reformist. If the article could reasonably be expected to trigger an offended outburst in defense of orthodox Marxism, it was not due to any opposition to Marx in the article but only due to the article's rejection of biological reductionism. (As Fromm later pointed out, however, the article was attacking Freud's materialism, which was quite different from Marx's materialism [McLaughlin, "Origin Myths" 119n21].) The article marked the most decisive rejection of biological reductionism to be found in Fromm's work up to that point. It is more likely, however, that Adorno had more pragmatic reasons for his response. Fromm was a more established member of Horkheimer's circle at this time and was popular and well-known in various circles in the U.S. Adorno was not yet even a formal member of the Institute—he was not hired by the Institute until 1938—but he was already angling for a position in it. He may have judged it beneficial for his career to present himself to Horkheimer as a defender of Marxist orthodoxy against Fromm, although one may dispute how orthodox a Marxist Horkheimer would actually have been in 1935.

Fromm remained a central member of the Institute for several more years despite the controversy over the 1935 article. He engaged in a number of empirical studies on U.S. workers and students in the late thirties, while reviewing the findings of the study of the German working class and preparing the manuscript of *Escape from Freedom*. The *Studies on Authority and the Family*, on which Fromm and Horkheimer had collaborated, was published in 1936 in Paris, and Fromm was listed as one of the authors, along with Horkheimer and Löwenthal. It was clear to those in the know that Fromm had contributed a substantial portion of this important work. Richard Wolin writes that, "In retrospect it is quite clear that it was the concept of 'analytical social psychology' advanced by Fromm that served as the inspiration and model for the project as a whole," through Fromm's emphasis upon the family as a mediating link between the individual and socio-economic structures (*Terms of Cultural Criticism* 53). The *Studies*, as well as some essays of Horkheimer's from the late 1930s, explored themes upon which Fromm had been at work since the late

1920s: the role of the state in socialization as it took over a role once consigned to the family (the rise of “the state as educator,” as Fromm had put it), increased sadomasochism among the masses, and a “loneliness that craved authority” (Bronner 82). Horkheimer’s earlier work had focused more upon philosophical questions concerning social totality, ontology, the relation between theory and practice, and the Institute’s research program in relation to various other philosophical and theoretical approaches in vogue at the time (positivism, orthodox Marxism, phenomenology, Neo-Kantianism). The *Studies*’ development of the theory of the authoritarian personality and its relation to the family was almost entirely a product of Fromm’s theoretical work.

It was not until 1939 that Fromm formally broke from the Institute. It should be clear by now that the break was not due to a lack of substantive contributions on his part. In fact, it was quite the opposite. It is difficult to determine, however, whether Fromm’s break from the Institute was mainly caused by Horkheimer, Adorno, or both equally. In *The Frankfurt School in Exile* (2009), Thomas Wheatland lays the blame squarely on Horkheimer. By contrast, Neil McLaughlin stresses Adorno’s role in Fromm’s break from the Institute; some evidence for this view is already suggested by Adorno’s angry response to Fromm’s 1935 article.

According to Wheatland’s interpretation, as the Institute adjusted to exile in New York in the late 1930s, Horkheimer was solidifying his relationship with new allies—Adorno, Otto Kirchheimer, Franz Neumann, and Walter Benjamin—and distancing himself from some old ones, especially Fromm (Wheatland 61). Fromm’s centrality to the Institute and his public persona were making Horkheimer nervous. Wheatland writes,

Of all the Horkheimer Circle’s members, Fromm became the most visible and popular at Columbia during his first years in the United States. He was less guarded than his colleagues, and he was in a position, as the group’s functional director of social research projects, to develop strong contacts with U.S. social scientists. (76)

Horkheimer was frequently concerned about maintaining the loyalty of members of the Institute, and his often authoritarian grip made the Institute resemble the authoritarian family structures it was researching (80). This view of Horkheimer’s authoritarian grip upon the Institute corresponds to Jürgen Habermas’ later assessment of Horkheimer’s character in the 1950s. According to Habermas, “Horkheimer was an ‘authoritarian’ and ‘bullied’ all the young assistants” (Specter 32). In a 1934 letter to Pollock, Horkheimer wrote,

[Fromm] does not particularly appeal to me. He has productive ideas, but he wants to be on good terms with too many people at once, and doesn’t want to miss anything. It is quite pleasant to talk to him, but my impression is that it is quite pleasant for very many people. (83)



According to Wheatland, Horkheimer wanted to find a small group of loyal supporters, perhaps Adorno and Marcuse, and even break with them from the Institute if necessary, in order to focus on research for a book (what eventually became *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*) (81). Meanwhile, Horkheimer was worried that the Institute would be targeted by the rising Red Scare, and he strictly forbade members of the Institute from any political involvement (72). Though Horkheimer's fears about the Red Scare were not unfounded—the Institute's office had been visited by detectives and was frequently under FBI surveillance—this prohibition may have seemed stifling to Fromm, who became politically active soon after leaving the Institute (73). Fromm later complained that the results of his study on the German working class remained unpublished because Horkheimer was worried the study would be too Marxist for the U.S. political climate (McLaughlin, "Origin Myths" 116).

Faced by a financial crisis in the Institute, Horkheimer decided to cut Fromm's salary first (Wheatland 83). In 1939, Horkheimer and Friedrich Pollock informed Fromm that they would stop his pay after October, asking him to agree "based on his ability to survive solely on his psychoanalytic practice" (83). Fromm objected and demanded a twenty thousand dollar severance package, to which Horkheimer conceded (83-4).

Stephen Eric Bronner provides further evidence for the case that Horkheimer was largely to blame for Fromm's firing. It was also in 1939, according to Bronner, that Horkheimer began a conservative turn (Bronner 83). Although Horkheimer was fairly supportive of the Communist Party throughout the 1930s, the Hitler-Stalin Pact may have been the breaking point, and after that time his focus turned away from practice-oriented theory towards a focus on the individual (80). There were earlier indications, however, that Horkheimer was shifting from his earlier theoretical commitments to praxis and totality, towards a new emphasis upon the individual; his 1936 essay defending pleasure and egoism, which prefigured some of his later work in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, was one signal of the shift (Jay, *Dialectical Imagination* 58). Further, Horkheimer had stated as early as 1930 that Marxism was not to be identified with "the grasping of a 'totality' or of a total and absolute truth," perhaps implying a criticism of Lukács's method (Tar 23). It is possible that Horkheimer was never fully at home with Fromm's holist, roughly Lukácsian synthesis of the individual and the social.

While Wheatland stresses Horkheimer's role in Fromm's firing, Neil McLaughlin stresses Adorno's role. Enmity between Fromm and Adorno was fairly evident. According to Wiggershaus, Adorno tended to refer derisively to Fromm as a "professional Jew" (McLaughlin, "Origin Myths" 117). And as noted above, Adorno responded to Fromm's 1935 article with the peculiar polemic in which he accused Fromm of being a reformist or an anarchist. In a letter to Martin Jay explaining the causes of his firing, Fromm himself seemed to lay the blame more upon Adorno. Since this is one of the few places where Fromm speculated openly upon the causes for his break from the Institute, it is worth quoting at length:

In the first years of the Institute, while it was in Frankfurt and Geneva, Horkheimer has [sic] no objection to my critique of Freud, which began very slowly before I left the Institute. It was only in the years after the Institute had been for some time in New York, and maybe since I began to write *Escape from Freedom*, that Horkheimer changed his opinion, became a defender of orthodox Freudianism, and considered Freud's attitude as a true revolutionary because of his materialistic attitude towards sex. A strange thing for Horkheimer to do incidentally, because it is pretty obvious that Freud's attitude toward sex corresponded to the bourgeois materialism of the 19th century which was so sharply criticized by Marx. I remember that Horkheimer was also on very friendly terms with [Karen] Horney in the first years of [Horkheimer's] stay in New York, and did not then defend orthodox Freudianism. It was only later that he made this change and it is too personal a problem to speculate why he did so. *I assume partly this had to do with the influence of Adorno, whom from the very beginning of his appearance in New York I criticized very sharply.* Considering the whole situation of the Institute it is not surprising that when Horkheimer made this change, Lowenthal and Pollack [sic] did the same. *Adorno was in this respect probably not influenced by Horkheimer, but rather the other way around.* (McLaughlin, "Origin Myths" 119n21, italics mine)

This passage strongly suggests that Adorno's mid-1930s letter to Horkheimer, with its polemical admonition that Fromm should "read Lenin" (as though Fromm hadn't read Lenin!) was indeed an indication that Adorno was seeking to push Fromm out of the Institute in order to work more closely with Horkheimer. However, in spite of this conclusion, one must also bear in mind Horkheimer's powerful position in the Institute and Fromm's remark elsewhere that "the unwillingness of Horkheimer to publish [the study on the German working class] was one of the many conflicts which led to [Fromm's] departure" (116).

Whatever the causes, Fromm's firing resulted in a major set-back for the Institute both financially and for its public image. Not only did the Institute have to pay Fromm a sizeable severance package—\$20,000 was no paltry sum in the Great Depression—but Fromm's firing resulted in the Institute losing funding from Columbia University. Fromm had played a crucial leadership role in the studies of the German working class and on authority and the family, and in the late 1930s he had directed empirical research studies of unemployed men in Newark and female students at Sarah Lawrence College (Wheatland 66, 70). Prominent Columbia sociologist Robert Lynd, a friend of Fromm's, was angered by the Institute's treatment of Fromm and denounced the Institute with the claim that Fromm had been fired for being too Marxist, an assessment with which Fromm himself concurred (85). And since Fromm had been considered the leader of the Institute's empirical research, and since Columbia's Sociology department emphasized empirical research, which was the trend in academic sociology in the U.S. in 1939, it appeared to Columbia that the Institute no longer had much to contribute. At Lynd's recommendation,



another research group (Paul Lazarsfeld's) replaced the Institute's former position at Columbia (86). The Institute then turned to research on anti-Semitism, partly in a desperate search for grant funding (88).

We are not concerned here with the Institute's further work after the break with Fromm, so we leave off this historical account at the point of Fromm's break from the Institute. In Chapter 2, some Frankfurt School figures appear again in relation to the messianic milieu of fin de siècle Germany and the apocalyptic *Zeitgeist* of the 1920s. We also return in Chapters 3 and 4 to the work of some members of the Frankfurt School, especially Herbert Marcuse, along with some examination of Walter Benjamin and others, in relation to Fromm's work on messianic hope.

As has been demonstrated, although he has long been marginalized by canonical historical accounts of the Institute for Social Research, Fromm's contributions to Critical Theory were vast. Before joining the Institute, he had already explored the theme of alienated labor through his dissertation under Alfred Weber and had begun a theoretical synthesis of psychoanalysis and Marxism, applying psychoanalysis to societal questions in his article on the Sabbath. After being invited into the Institute by Horkheimer, Fromm's explorations of the possibility of a theoretical synthesis of Marx and Freud helped to shape the Institute's inter-disciplinary research program. Fromm applied his synthesis of Marx and Freud to studies on criminology, early Christianity, the Russian revolution (the underlying theme of "The Dogma of Christ"), Bachofen's theory of matriarchy, the family, and the authoritarian personality, all while working with the Institute. As we have seen, Fromm's thought evolved over the course of his membership in the Institute, as he rejected biological and economic reductionism, explored Bachofen while criticizing his reactionary acolytes, and finally concluded that orthodox Freudianism (though not psychoanalysis itself) had to be rejected. Fromm's daring critique of Freud, his popularity, and perhaps his desire to become involved in radical political activism may all have played a role in his eventual exclusion from the Institute. Personal conflicts among members of the Institute and the emerging intellectual partnership between Horkheimer and Adorno probably contributed as well.

Whatever the reasons for Fromm's break with the Institute, it should now be evident that Fromm's work during his approximately ten years of involvement with the Institute was substantial and central to the Institute's program. Further, it should be evident that Fromm was not merely a peripheral member of the Institute, was not conservative or a liberal reformist, and was not an unserious or merely derivative thinker. Instead, he was central and radical, forging a bold theoretical synthesis between psychoanalysis and Marxism, applying this method to concrete problems, and developing important critiques of the psychoanalytic establishment, orthodox Marxism, and fascism. Although one must reject the claim of some that all the essential ideas of Fromm's later thought are contained in his 1930s writings—in particular, his later writings were transformed by his encounter with the writings of the early Marx—the explorations of human nature, history, and political power in these early works were central to Fromm's later work (Knapp 23). More

importantly, he had launched the first major attempt to combine psychoanalysis and Marxism, and to apply this theory to society through concepts like that of the authoritarian personality; this was a profound contribution to the Frankfurt School's early research program and, more broadly, to sociology and social psychology. His later work on messianism, prefigured in his early work, will be the focus of later chapters. There we will see that his critique of Freud, his dialectical account of Bachofen and of early Christianity, and his early attempts to meld the Marxist and psychoanalytic methods laid the basis for a radical philosophy of history and of Marxist messianic hope.

#### INTERLUDE: FROMM FROM MEXICO TO SWITZERLAND

Almost immediately after his exodus from the Frankfurt School, Fromm became publicly engaged in left-wing activism. He also continued to challenge Freudian orthodoxy, and he did so publicly and for a wider audience, including through a controversial book-length case study of the master himself, *Sigmund Freud's Mission*. I have examined Fromm's early life, demolishing some common misconceptions about Fromm's place in Critical Theory. The later events in Fromm's life do not need to be covered at equal length here, but I will elucidate Fromm's later life and work briefly with respect to two themes: psychoanalysis and the left.

##### *Erich Fromm and the High Priests of Psychoanalysis*

To explore Fromm's later life and work with regard to psychoanalysis, I begin by tracing Fromm's professional migration from Freud's psychoanalytic organization, the International Psychoanalytic Association, to his role in founding a new international psychoanalytic movement, the International Federation of Psychoanalytic Societies, which is still large and active today. Finally, I address Fromm's psychoanalytic legacy and his critique of orthodox Freudianism.

##### *Fromm and Professional Psychoanalytic Organizations*

Due in large part to his public rejection of orthodox Freudianism and his scathing critique of Freud and his circle, Fromm had rocky interactions with the International Psychoanalytic Association (IPA).<sup>17</sup> The IPA was the professional psychoanalytic organization founded by Freud and representing Freudian orthodoxy. Although some facts regarding the history of Fromm's interaction with the IPA are unclear—in part because his last wife destroyed large amounts of Fromm's correspondence after his death—the following facts are known. In 1935, Fromm was contacted by Carl Müller-Braunschweig, then head of the Berlin branch of the IPA, known as the DGP, which was still operating in Berlin under Nazi rule. Müller-Braunschweig rather pointedly demanded that Fromm pay the dues he owed to the DGP. Fromm offered to pay by installments, but in the spring of 1936, he withheld his last payment,

writing a sharp letter to Müller-Braunschweig, asking whether it was true that the DGP had “excluded its Jewish members” and objecting that he had not even been informed of this (Roazen, “Exclusion” 10). Müller-Braunschweig and Ernest Jones (more on Jones momentarily) wrote back assuring Fromm that the Jewish members of the DGP had resigned voluntarily (in late 1935) and apologizing for not having informed him earlier (10, 12). Following this response, Fromm submitted the remainder of his dues (12-3). (In that same year, the reader may recall, Fromm wrote his feisty article attacking orthodox Freudianism, “The Social Determinants of Psychoanalytic Theory,” which was scorned by Adorno and later praised by Marcuse in *Eros and Civilization*.)

Fromm could not have known the full extent of the concessions that the DGP was making in order to stay in operation under the Nazi regime. The situation gradually worsened until November 1938, when the Nazis at last moved to close down the DGP (Roazen, “Exclusion” 13). By that time, the DGP was a subsection of the “Göring Institute,” directed by “enthusiastic Nazi” M.H. Göring, a distant cousin of Hermann Göring (Goggin and Goggin 24). A photograph of Freud had been replaced by one of Hitler, and all members were required to read *Mein Kampf* and were forbidden to treat Jews, homosexuals, and soldiers suffering “battle fatigue” (what we now term PTSD) (“Exclusion” 12-3). The DGP had held a celebration of Freud’s eightieth birthday two years before, but Jews were not welcome. Müller-Braunschweig was heavily involved in the transition of the DGP into a branch of the Göring Institute. He also turned over the names of Jewish psychoanalysts in Italy to the Nazis, and the other major leader of the DGP, Karl Boehm, publicly endorsed the genocide of homosexuals and turned over for execution the soldiers determined to be “malingerers” (14, Goggin and Goggin 203).

Fromm also probably did not know that the removal of Jewish members of the psychoanalytic institute had been dubiously “voluntary,” considering that they had been presented with the catch-22 of resigning or closing the entire German branch of the IPA. Since it was not until almost three years later that the Nazis forbade Jews from practicing medicine or law, it may have been possible to keep the Center running with its Jewish members for a while longer, but the Jewish psychoanalysts in Berlin were not given the opportunity to evaluate this possibility by the IPA (13). Later, in *Sigmund Freud’s Mission*, Fromm subtly references Freud’s non-confrontational stance towards the Nazis, pointing to Freud’s fear of anti-Semitism and his early wish that Jung would be the “Aryan” successor and that psychoanalysis would expand beyond Jewish circles in Vienna in order to survive (SFM 48-9).

In questioning the IPA’s policies, Fromm was jeopardizing his one source of professional accreditation as a psychoanalyst. In the United States, psychoanalysis was the province of physicians, so as a non-physician Fromm was at a significant disadvantage and was not eligible to join the New York branch of the IPA. In the late 1930s or early 1940s, Fromm discovered Harry Stack Sullivan’s Zodiac Club in New York, a center for psychoanalytic and related intellectual discussion where he was welcome. The Zodiac Club was an informal circle including such

prominent humanistic psychoanalysts as Karen Horney (with whom Fromm was romantically involved) and Clara Thompson, along with noteworthy anthropologists Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead. In 1950, Fromm moved to Mexico, partly for the health of his new wife Henny Gurland. He continued to travel back and forth from the United States and Europe, generally remaining in Mexico for five month intervals at a time (Funk, *Life and Ideas* 127; Millán 208).

Fromm did not interact with the IPA again until 1953, when he noticed that he was no longer listed as a member and contacted the organization to find out why (Roazen, "Exclusion" 16). This time, he was coldly and bureaucratically dismissed. The claim was that Fromm had been dropped from the membership rolls because the IPA had decided to get rid of the special "direct" memberships that had existed during World War II and to require instead that everyone belong to a specific branch of the IPA. In fact, only one exception seems to have been made; a direct membership had been granted to Werner Kemper, who had been involved in genocide in Nazi Germany and had fled to Brazil with the help of Ernest Jones (16). (Kemper was later accused of involvement in torture in Brazil (16).) As a non-physician, Fromm did not qualify for admission into the New York branch of the IPA (13). It was conceded that Fromm could re-apply for acceptance if he wished to be a direct member of the IPA again, but in his view this requirement was spurious, since he had never left the organization, and at any rate, the letter from an IPA representative subtly implied that if he did apply again, he would not be accepted (17-8). In the early 1960s, after his exclusion from the IPA, Fromm helped to found the International Federation of Psychoanalytic Societies (IFPS), an alternative to the IPA. The IFPS still exists today and is active; the important William Alanson White Institute in New York is one of its member organizations, and the IFPS also has branches in Finland, Italy, Brazil, Chile, Switzerland, Mexico, Austria, Lithuania, Norway, Greece, Canada, and Spain, according to the IFPS website.

Fromm always insisted that he was loyal to the core insights of psychoanalysis, especially the importance of the unconscious. "I never gave up psychoanalysis," Fromm wrote in a letter to Martin Jay, sounding irked at the suggestion:<sup>18</sup>

I have never wanted to form a school of my own. I was removed by the International Psychoanalytic Association... , and I am still [1971] a member of the Washington Psychoanalytic Association, which is Freudian. I have always criticized the Freudian orthodoxy and the bureaucratic methods of the Freudian international organization, but my whole theoretical outlook is based on what I consider Freud's most important findings... (Jay, *Dialectical Imagination* 89-90)

It was the dispute over what those "most important findings" were that undergirded Fromm's exclusion from the IPA. He had been told that he could apply for re-admittance and that it was unlikely that anyone who agreed with the basic tenets of psychoanalysis would be excluded, but Fromm realized that what was at stake was exactly the identity of those basic tenets.

*Fromm's Psychoanalytic Legacy*

As Neil McLaughlin explains, the basic theses of the “humanistic psychoanalysis” in which Fromm was engaged (although he resisted being classed strictly as a member of the humanistic school) are now more widely accepted than the views of Fromm’s orthodox opponents:

Today one can find few serious defenders of the death instinct, the primal horde or orthodox libido theory. Most of the interesting work in psychoanalysis rejects instinct theory and deals with, as Fromm suggested it must, relatedness and identity. Fromm’s neo-Freudian former collaborator Karen Horney is now being rediscovered as an early proponent of feminist object relations. Sullivan’s work has given rise to the emergence of interpersonal psychoanalysis, an important school of thought within contemporary Freudian theory. In addition, Fromm’s position on Freudian theory has gained new influence in recent years. (McLaughlin, “Origin Myths” 8)

Few of Fromm’s ideas have been credited to him in the canon of psychoanalytic theory today. These ideas are generally viewed in disjunction from Fromm’s contribution to Critical Theory. It is telling, for example, that an Oxford *Dictionary of Psychology* lists Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse under its definition of “Frankfurt School” and does not mention Fromm, although it does have a separate entry on “Fromm’s [character] typology” (Colman 287, 290).

Although Fromm is still too often overlooked, the ideas he and others advanced are now more widely accepted, which has paved the way for an ongoing revival of Fromm’s contributions to psychoanalysis. In Europe, his insights are enriching certain psychoanalytic circles, such as the circle around the recently deceased Italian psychoanalyst Romano Biancoli. In Mexico, the International Federation of Psychoanalytic Societies (IFPS) holds conferences that seek to draw from Fromm’s psychoanalytic insights. The editorial of a 2000 issue of the journal of the IFPS was headlined, “Erich Fromm: A Rediscovered Legacy.” In 2009 a new introductory book to Fromm’s psychological thought was published, Annette Thomson’s *Erich Fromm: Explorer of the Human Condition*. While encumbered by a sometimes overly simplistic style of argumentation,<sup>19</sup> the book discusses ways in which Fromm’s insights underlie developments in psychology that are now widely accepted. Fromm’s work is also currently contributing to the development of “psychologies of liberation” (cf. Shulman and Watkins, Bruce Levine).

Much remains to be done towards recuperating Fromm’s psychoanalytic legacy. As Paul Roazen writes, “A central silence in the official story of the history and development of psychoanalytic thought has to do with Erich Fromm’s contributions” (Roazen, “Escape” 239). The time is ripe for a revival of interest in Fromm’s humanistic psychoanalysis. The reputation of psychoanalysis itself has suffered since the 1950s and 60s, especially as the Reagan-era drug war and neoliberal laudations for individual responsibility found the behaviorism of B. F. Skinner more useful for

its ideological aims. Although Skinner rejected the use of punishment (“aversives”) as a means of behavior modification, others were less humane. That was a time in which James Dobson of Focus on the Family, with his manuals on corporal punishment of children, was at an all-time height of popularity, as the progressive, humanistic approach to childrearing of Benjamin Spock (who worked with Fromm on peace activism through anti-nuclear weapons organization SANE) was losing popularity. In that era, behaviorism supplanted psychoanalysis. Although the tide of professional opinion has turned against the more aggressive versions of behaviorism of the past (electric skin shock and other “aversive” therapies, for example), it remains the case that behaviorist and pharmaceutical methods are privileged over talk therapy.<sup>20</sup>

### *Fromm's Critique of Freud and His Circle*

Fromm's critiques of orthodox psychoanalysis include critiques of Freud himself as well as of Freud's disciples. Three of Fromm's major criticisms of orthodox psychoanalysis are based upon his assessment of Freud's personality and its influence on the movement: (1) Freud was overly pessimistic, (2) Freud's thinking was limited by his Victorian context, and (3) Freud had an authoritarian personality, reflected in his manner of leading the IPA.

According to Fromm, while Marx's vision was imbued with messianic hope for the future, Freud's view was “tragic” (BC 39). Freud's pessimism was increased by the bloodbath of the First World War, which Freud enthusiastically endorsed at the outset. (“All my libido is given to Austro-Hungary” (SFM 101).) According to Fromm, Freud's theory of the death drive, developed in the wake of the war, was the chief indication of Freud's increased pessimism. In addition to Freud's pessimism, a keynote of Fromm's critique was that Freud was limited by his Victorian context, in that he had a patriarchal worldview and was obsessed with sex. The charge of Freud's patriarchy was not unique to Fromm but was advanced by Karen Horney among others, and other humanistic psychoanalysts challenged what they considered Freud's over-emphasis upon sexual desire in the development of the psyche.

Finally, Fromm charged that Freud had an “authoritarian personality” and was unable to love. Fromm continued to maintain this charge after he advanced it in his controversial 1935 article, to which Adorno responded with such hostility, and in which Fromm portrayed Freud as a tyrannical leader who sought to crush all dissent within the early psychoanalytic organization. Fromm's *Sigmund Freud's Mission* (1959), in another act of unabashed and celebratory iconoclasm, turns Freud's psychoanalytic method upon Freud himself, casting him as unloving and repressed, “a typical Puritan” who “had little love for people in general, when no erotic component was involved,” and claiming that Freud “made love an object of science, but in his life it remained dry and sterile” (SFM 33, 28, 31). More to the point, the book turns on a lengthy analysis of Freud's dependence upon authority figures and his tremendous need for followers to serve as objects of his authoritarian impulses.



Fromm's critique of Freud's loyal followers builds upon the critique of Freud's authoritarian personality. From Freud's own *modus operandi* arose an organization that nearly killed the radical, non-conformist, revolutionary faith of early psychoanalysis, replacing it with a conservative bureaucracy and staid ideology. (There are parallels here, of course, to the Soviet Union. As with Fromm's critique of early Christianity in the "The Dogma of Christ," Fromm's critique of orthodox psychoanalysis serves also as an implicit critique of orthodox Marxism.)

Aside from his critiques of Freud's personality, Fromm's remaining critiques of orthodox psychoanalysis may be summarized in two points: (1) orthodox psychoanalysis was "fanatical," and (2) orthodox psychoanalysis as a professional discipline was bureaucratic, dehumanizing, and gate-keeping.

Firstly, Fromm asks of psychoanalysis as he asked also of the Frankfurt School and Marxism: "*How could psychoanalysis...be transformed into this kind of fanatical movement?*" (DC 143; italics Fromm's). He traces the problem to Freud himself, whose youthful desire to participate in political struggle was channeled into the formation of an apolitical psychoanalytic "International." According to Fromm, the "fanatic" is a narcissist who deals with her removal from the world and withdrawal into herself by means of a "cause" that becomes her source of strength and connection (156). Fromm characterizes the fanatic as "burning ice," motivated by "cold passion" (156). When it was not fanatical, psychoanalysis was conformist, Fromm asserted—not only internally, but in its relationship to society, orthodox psychoanalysis was a bulwark of the status quo.

Secondly, Fromm issues a prophetic call for psychoanalysis to abandon its "sterile bureaucracy" and recommit itself to the quest for truth (DC 148). According to Fromm's theory of religion, all human societies are religious in some way, but the religion they actually believe and practice is not necessarily the one they profess to follow. When a religion deteriorates from a living system into a dead ideology, bureaucracies arise. These bureaucracies are then administered by priests—not prophets—who keep tradition alive through rituals, after the beliefs that animated the religion have become stagnant (have become "idols") (MPP 124). Fromm states that members of each psychoanalytic "school" had to be "properly 'ordained,'" implying that their members were priests, not prophets (AB 65).

Fromm was unique in unabashedly criticizing Ernest Jones's three-volume, hagiographic "court biography" of Freud. He responded to Jones repeatedly, including in *Sigmund Freud's Mission*, in his essay "Psychoanalysis—Science or Party Line?," and in *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis* (SFM *passim*; DC 135-138; CP 9-12). For example, he objected to Jones's branding of Sándor Ferenczi and Otto Rank as mentally unstable at the time of their break from orthodox Freudianism (CP 19; DC 136). Fromm probably knew that Jones's book also involved a degree of cover-up of the situation of psychoanalysis in Nazi Germany. Jones claimed in the biography, "This year [1934] saw the flight of the remaining analysts from Germany and the 'liquidation' of psychoanalysis in Germany," a claim that Jones probably knew was false or at least grossly oversimplified, since Jones had written

to Ana Freud in 1933, approving of Karl Boehm's efforts to "save" psychoanalysis in Germany by continuing to keep the IPA running in Berlin with the agreed resignation of the Jewish members (Roazen, "Exclusion" 6, 10).

By the 1950s, in *The Sane Society* (1955), Fromm had worked out most of his criticisms. In the foreword to that work, Fromm noted some shifts in his thought with regard to Freud since Fromm's earlier books *Escape from Freedom* (1941) and *Man for Himself* (1947). According to Fromm, the "basic thesis" of the "humanistic psychoanalysis"<sup>21</sup> to which he now subscribed was "that the basic passions of man are not rooted in his instinctive needs, but in the specific conditions of human existence, in the need to find a new relatedness to man and nature after having lost the primary relatedness of the pre-human stage" (SS viii). Here it is clear that Fromm's humanistic psychoanalysis had the same aim as his messianism: to grapple with the loss of the primeval paradise and to seek a better future without resorting to psychological regression. Despite his disagreements with Freud and orthodox psychoanalysis, Fromm notes in *The Sane Society* that there are aspects of Freud's theory that he still found valuable and was retaining, including "[Freud's] scientific method, his evolutionary concept, [and] his concept of the unconscious as a truly irrational force" (SS viii). Yet Fromm concluded his observations about psychoanalysis in *The Sane Society* with the warning that "there is a danger that psychoanalysis loses another fundamental trait of Freudian thinking, the courage to defy common sense and public opinion" (SS viii).

### *Erich Fromm as Left-wing Activist*

Fromm was an activist. As we have seen, Fromm was certainly an organizer even before arriving at the Institute for Social Research (and his radicalization long preceded his contact with the Institute). We turn now to Fromm's activism after his exodus from the Institute, at which point, freed from Horkheimer's restrictions on political involvement, Fromm was more able to engage in activism and soon joined the Socialist Party of America (SP-SDF). Among Fromm's first major political endeavors in the United States was his involvement in the founding of the leading anti-nuclear weapons organization in the U.S., "SANE" (named after his book *The Sane Society*), for which he went on an important national speaking tour. Later he assisted with anti-war protest candidate Eugene McCarthy's Presidential bid (even writing suggested speeches for McCarthy), continued his extensive activist speaking tour, collaborated with Trappist monk and peace advocate Thomas Merton in the attempt to coordinate an international conference on peace to be sponsored by the pope (which never came to fruition but had many endorsers), fought to get his leftist cousin Heinz Brandt freed from political imprisonment in East Germany, and—probably his crowning organizing achievement—organized and published an international "symposium" of "socialist humanists" seeking a socialist alternative to capitalism and Soviet Communism (*Socialist Humanism: An International Symposium*). He corresponded and collaborated with a range of leading activists



and public intellectuals, including Raya Dunayevskaya (who also carried on a correspondence with Marcuse) (Anderson and Rockwell *passim*). Dunayevskaya was the founder of a “Marxist Humanist” tendency on the U.S. left and the only prominent Marxist organizer in the U.S. who took the influence of Hegel upon Marx very seriously. In addition to his many books, articles, and speeches, Fromm wrote at least three important radical pamphlets that were widely circulated, two for the Socialist Party of America (SP-SDF) (*Let Man Prevail* and *We Have a Vision*) and one for the American Friends Service Committee (*War Within Man*). Fromm’s influence on the U.S. left became widespread in the 1950s, with his bestsellers *The Sane Society* (1955) and *The Art of Loving* (1956) challenging the sterility of 1950s life. Martin Luther King later cited *The Art of Loving* as one of the philosophical influences in his development of a “love ethic” (hooks [2010] 1).

Given this background, it should be no surprise that the FBI had a file on Fromm over 600 pages long (Funk, *Life and Ideas* 145). Nor should it be surprising how vocal were his conservative opponents, nor that a polemical advocate of laissez-faire capitalism like Ayn Rand would include a polemic by Nathaniel Branden against Fromm’s concept of alienation in her *Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal* and would later say that Fromm’s ideas about love were reflected in her villain character James Taggart in *Atlas Shrugged* (Rand 259-285; Binswanger 3). Nor should it startle the reader to learn that Isaiah Berlin attacked Fromm’s idea of “positive freedom” in his *Four Essays on Liberty*, nor that even in the late 1980s, Fromm was still a favorite whipping boy for conservative critics like Allan Bloom, in his *Closing of the American Mind* (Berlin xlii; McLaughlin, “Critical Theory” 6).

It is more interesting, perhaps, that Fromm was driven from the circles around the New York Intellectuals—he was cut off from Irving Howe, for example, who resented *The Art of Loving* and the manifesto that Fromm wrote for the Socialist Party of America (SP-SDF) (McLaughlin, “Forgotten Intellectual” 226). Howe’s rejection was especially damaging to Fromm since Howe was editor of *Dissent* magazine, “the natural home for [Fromm’s] moderate democratic socialist politics” (according to Neil McLaughlin) (226). Fromm’s work was famously harshly criticized by Sidney Hook as well, and Fromm faced similarly intense public criticism from Daniel Bell in the 1970s (by which time Bell was a Cultural Cold Warrior), against whom Fromm had contended that there was deep continuity between the early and late Marx (225-6, cf. Frances Stonor Saunders on Bell in *The Cultural Cold War*).

Despite Fromm’s long life of activism, not only has the history of his contributions to Critical Theory and psychoanalysis been revised in a way that downplays and misrepresents his role, but so has the history of Fromm’s contribution to the left. Due to the lack of scholarship on Fromm and due to various “origin myths” of the Frankfurt School and the left, it often appears as though Fromm did not contribute much to the left. Fromm is often simply omitted in discussions of the movements in which he played an important role. Some confusion stems from the myth that the Frankfurt Institute or “Critical Theory” was the architect of the New Left or one of its chief theoretical influences. The related myth that Herbert Marcuse was “the

guru of the New Left” obscures Fromm’s contribution and misconstrues Marcuse’s. (Consider as an example of this obscuring of Fromm’s contribution to the left, the recent book *Scriptures for a Generation: What We Were Reading in the ‘60s*; the book contains approximately fifty entries on authors who influenced the 1960s, and there is no entry on Fromm, though there is one on Marcuse [Beidler 140, 179].)

To turn to the problem of the myth of Marcuse as “guru of the new left,” one must consider the way in which Marcuse’s role has tended to displace Fromm’s in histories of the New Left. For example, Jamison and Eyerman’s *Seeds of the Sixties* explores Fromm along with Marcuse, C. Wright Mills, Hannah Arendt, and a few others. Although Jamison and Eyerman consider Fromm’s contribution, they malign Fromm peculiarly (though characteristically, for the genre), while presenting Marcuse as a radical upstart:

When his old [i.e., former] colleague Erich Fromm grew too successful in his popular psychoanalysis and turned radicalism largely into a personal quest for mental health, Marcuse took him on and questioned whether Marxism was really a humanism at all, as Fromm claimed. Unlike Fromm, Marcuse never ceased being—or at least trying to be—a revolutionary. Marcuse sought to keep the radicalism of Marx from being watered down, from being transformed into a toothless liberalism; but he also resisted the attempts to freeze Marxism in its own past, to reify the writings of Marx as dogmatic truths that were in no need of amendment. (Jamison and Eyerman 120)

Jamison and Eyerman never present an argument for what they take to be obvious truths: Fromm’s alleged conformism, “liberalism,” dogmatism, and lack of radicalism. These criticisms echo the typical presentation of Fromm according to the “origin myth” of the Frankfurt School addressed earlier.

It is an oft-repeated adage, first proclaimed by *Time* magazine and later reinforced by Douglas Kellner, that Herbert Marcuse was “the guru of the New Left,” a claim that seems to displace Fromm’s contribution and a claim that Marcuse himself desperately tried to put to rest (cf., for example, video footage of Marcuse contesting this claim in *Herbert’s Hippopotamus*, and Wheatland 269) (Kellner, Introduction xi, xxxvi; N. Braune 5). Although the New Left had no single “guru,” Fromm was significantly more influential on the New Left in its early stages. The myth that Marcuse was the guru of the New Left is only now being debunked (cf., Bronner 2002, Wheatland 2009). Although Marcuse’s writings show that he was attentive to changes on the New Left, it seems that, as Wheatland puts it, “the New Left meant more to him than he meant to the New Left” (Wheatland 334). Marcuse was more of a student of the New Left than its mentor (334).

[Marcuse] neither set the waves of student protest in motion nor shaped U.S. student opinion on a large scale once the New Left was on the rise. Instead, he recognized the significance of the Movement and the events that he was witnessing, and he sought to counsel the New Left as it grew and tried to articulate a new agenda for the late 1960s. (334)

It was only in the late 1960s that Marcuse began to gain the attention of parts of the left in Europe and in the U.S., especially the Weather Underground (N. Braune 5). There were some left activists in the U.S. who were seriously influenced by Marcuse—Angela Davis, Ron Aronson, Mike Davis, Stanley Aronowitz—but Marcuse was almost never discussed in the leading publications of the New Left: *New Left Notes*, *Studies on the Left*, and *Ramparts* (317).

It has been suggested that Marcuse did not initially catch on with the New Left because they found his writing inaccessible, presupposing philosophical knowledge and drawing upon such thinkers as Plato, Rousseau, Schiller, Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Freud (Wheatland 298). Anti-intellectualism on the left and Marcuse's opposition to this anti-intellectualism further increased the distance between Marcuse and the New Left (298). There is a great deal of truth in both these claims. The sheer difficulty of reading Marcuse, enhanced by his struggles with writing in English, and the anti-intellectual mood of the left would not have worked to his advantage. Although Fromm also drew heavily upon the history of philosophy, his style of writing was more publicly readable.

However, perhaps another reason that Marcuse was inaccessible was that he was not trying to be accessible. Fromm had consciously decided to write for a wide audience and had written books for the general public since 1941. Marcuse, on the other hand, may have believed it impossible to reach the masses with his message in the 1960s (as is suggested by the pessimism of *One-Dimensional Man*) and consequently did not attempt it. One can observe a significant change in Marcuse's style in the late 1960s.<sup>22</sup> Along with others in the Frankfurt School of the 1950s, it is possible that Marcuse had accepted the *Flaschenpost* method, sending out "messages in a bottle" for a future time at which the culture of the masses would be capable of seeing their value (Wheatland 88, 203, 267-8).

David Wellman, though not a key player on the left at the time, is worth quoting at length, since his comments typify the opinion of the 1960s left towards Marcuse:

I'm not surprised that you haven't found much mention of Marcuse in the archival materials on the American New Left. I don't remember him being an important figure to us during the Radical Education Project. Our idea of education during that period didn't pertain to theoretical, philosophical issues but much more basic understandings of American society and how to change it. That said, I remember people reading *One-Dimensional Man* later on...I can't estimate how many other people were reading it. I guess there was some interest since I recall discussing it with people in informal settings. I personally was turned-off by the book. It struck me as incredibly pessimistic and unhelpful to people trying to make change. I read him to be saying that change was impossible given the one-dimensionality of modern society and since that was what I was trying to do, the book was less than useful to me. It was an argument for why my activism was doomed to failure. I did, however,

find his notion of repressive tolerance incredibly important. It gave voice to my experience in the student and civil rights movement. It gave a name to the way we were treated by people in power. (Wheatland 317)

Wellman's remarks appear prototypical in their skepticism concerning *One-Dimensional Man*, considering its message of pessimism and a totally administered society, along with their gratitude for Marcuse's "Repressive Tolerance," which was more widely read by the New Left than *Eros and Civilization* or *One-Dimensional Man*.

As for the other members of the Frankfurt School, their influence on the New Left was negligible.<sup>23</sup> Nor were Fromm and Marcuse viewed by the public as members of the "Frankfurt School" or of "Critical Theory." Stephen Eric Bronner writes, offering some chronological perspective on the titles generally identified with the tradition of "Critical Theory" and their availability to the U.S. public in English translation:

*History and Class Consciousness* by Georg Lukács appeared only in 1971, Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy* was first published in 1970, and a severely edited version of Benjamin's *Illuminations* only in 1969. Horkheimer's collection titled *Critical Theory* and his and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* were published in 1972, and Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* in 1973, while Ernst Bloch's *Principle of Hope* appeared in 1986. None of these works were known when the movement was on the rise, or even when the future of Martin Luther King's Poor People's Movement was on the agenda, but rather only when the original flame had begun to flicker (Bronner 166).

By contrast, as Bronner points out, Fromm's *Escape from Freedom* (1941), *The Sane Society* (1955), and *The Art of Loving* (1956) had all been bestsellers in the U.S., before Fromm's *The Revolution of Hope* was published in 1968. Fromm's *Marx's Concept of Man*, published in 1961, "introduced the young Marx to America and provided the dominant interpretation of this thinker" (Bronner 166).

Fromm significantly influenced the development of the New Left. For example, in addition to Fromm's influence on Martin Luther King's love ethic, it was sometimes claimed that Fromm's *Sane Society* was one of four or five books that influenced Tom Hayden's Port Huron Statement (Bronner 165). Annette Thomson writes of Fromm's fame on the left:

At the height of Erich Fromm's popularity in the United States and Mexico in the 1960s, he received around 30 invitations per month to give lectures and talks. These events attracted huge audiences—for example 2000 students at Chicago University and over 3000 in Mexico City. Some of Fromm's books became international bestsellers and were translated into most major languages. (Thomson 1)

By the 1970s, after his campaign for Eugene McCarthy, Fromm's influence upon the New Left in the United States began to fade. Fromm moved back to Europe in

the early 1970s, where he remained a prominent public figure to his death, and his influence in Europe grew as it waned in the U.S.

Fromm's impact over the course of his career was global. Paulo Freire, the founder of contemporary critical pedagogy, was considerably influenced by Fromm (Freire 11). (Fromm also points to the importance of Freire's work [ROH 116].) Freire and Fromm met at Fromm's home in Cuernavaca, Mexico, through the introduction of Ivan Illich, who was a friend of Fromm in Mexico (Freire 44, 90). (Fromm also wrote a nice introduction for Illich's book *Celebration of Awareness*.) Fromm also influenced socialist humanists in Eastern Europe (especially the Yugoslav Praxis Group), with the help of his important book/organizing project, *Socialist Humanism: An International Symposium*.

Various reasons have been offered for Fromm's decline in popularity in the New Left towards the end of the 1960s. I hold that Fromm seemed too hopeful or optimistic in the climate of growing despair, as some on the left began to feel helpless, in the wake of Cointelpro and protracted struggle, and as some turned to drugs, violence, and spiritual escapism. As will become apparent in Chapter 3, such escapist responses were the very kinds of things Fromm was warning against and to which he was presenting messianic hope as an alternative. Stephen Eric Bronner explains Fromm's fall from popularity thus: "With the fragmentation of the New Left and the rise of postmodernism, [Fromm's] work appears almost quaint. The old concern with inner development and the emancipatory content of new social relations is no longer what it once was" (Bronner 171). Fromm was unlikely to be the hero of desperate or retreating activists, which was the majority by that point. I argue in the Epilogue that current political developments make Fromm more relevant today than ever, in a present resurgence of resistance.

As has been shown, Fromm had considerable influence upon the early development of the New Left. His radical critique of society, combined with his popularity, won him both enemies and friends. Now that we have surveyed Fromm's work up through the end of his life with regard to his early theoretical synthesis of Marx and Freud, his break from the Frankfurt School, and his interactions with and critiques of psychoanalysis and the left, it is necessary to discuss the context of the debates concerning messianism in which Fromm was engaged, the tumultuous situation of German intellectual life from shortly before the First World War to the late 1920s.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Although I sometimes follow the convention of using the terms "Frankfurt School" and "Institute" interchangeably—Fromm was certainly a member of both—it should be remembered that the Frankfurt School is sometimes interpreted as a broader category that can include scholars like Karl Korsch and Ernst Bloch, who were not members of the Institute for Social Research.
- <sup>2</sup> Fromm's absence in the book is particularly unfortunate considering that Tar's thesis—i.e., the Institute became pessimistic (partly through the influence of Schopenhauer on Horkheimer) and abandoned Marxism—jibes with Fromm's own concerns about the Institute.

- <sup>3</sup> Fromm distinguishes between the bureaucratic “priest” and the revolutionary “prophet.” I return to these concepts later in this chapter.
- <sup>4</sup> Jay is a bit vague about who should be given the most credit for the study of the German working class, noting that the study was mentioned in Horkheimer’s inaugural lecture as director of the Institute but, unlike some other scholars’ accounts, Jay’s does not give Horkheimer all of the credit for the idea or the research (*Dialectical Imagination* 93).
- <sup>5</sup> Although Leo Löwenthal is known to have engaged seriously with Jewish thought, his parents were not religious. He accompanied Fromm at the *Lehrhaus* and at Fromm and Reichmann’s experimental religious commune/psychoanalytic treatment center, the *Therapeuticum*, but like most members of those circles, he was rebelling against his parents’ secularism and rediscovering Judaism for himself. Max Horkheimer was raised in a Conservative Jewish family but had less exposure to Jewish tradition and broke from the practice of Judaism more quickly than did Fromm.
- <sup>6</sup> Fromm cites Alfred Weber in *The Sane Society*, where he mentions his “scheme of historical development which has some similarities to the one in my [Fromm’s] text. He assumes a ‘chthonic period’ from 4000 to 1200 B.C. which was characterized by the fixation to earth in agricultural peoples” (SS 51). Alfred Weber seems to have been an influence on Fromm’s concern about reactionary attachments to land and soil.
- <sup>7</sup> Of course, I am referring here to Conservative Judaism (as opposed to the Orthodox, Reform, or other branches) and not to Nobel’s politics, which were left.
- <sup>8</sup> Although Franz Rosenzweig is often credited as founder, Fromm’s involvement in the *Lehrhaus* predates Rosenzweig’s, who later became the director (cf., Funk, “Jewish Roots” 2).
- <sup>9</sup> Fromm and Reichmann are also said to have met through Frieda’s “childhood friend” Golde Ginsburg, whom Fromm was dating and who later married Fromm’s friend Leo Löwenthal (Hornstein, Funk).
- <sup>10</sup> Scholem’s book is peppered with similarly biting remarks about others in these circles who rejected Scholem’s interpretation of Judaism and messianism, so one need not assume that Fromm’s demeanor towards Scholem was offensive or condescending.
- <sup>11</sup> Fromm’s later work on the Sabbath also highlighted the radical implications as a foretaste of the messianic time, in which labor would be ended, harmony restored, time and death conquered, and enjoyment instituted (FL 247–9; TB 42).
- <sup>12</sup> Zilbersheid’s article “The Idea of Abolition of Labor in Socialist Utopian Thought” and his book *Jenseits der Arbeit. Der vergessene sozialistische Traum von Marx, Fromm und Marcuse* suggested that Fromm and Marcuse both followed upon Marx’s conception of an *Aufhebung* of labor, with Fromm interpreting this *Aufhebung* with an emphasis upon the *transformation* of labor (into a free, creative process) and Marcuse stressing the aspect of an *Aufhebung* as *abolition* of labor (freedom from the misery of toil).
- <sup>13</sup> This use of allegory is not especially surprising. Fromm often employs historical narratives (such as that of Robespierre or of seventeenth century false messiah Sabbatai Zevi) and myths (Antigone, Adam and Eve, etc.) to present subtle critiques of contemporary problems. Even when he is explicitly critiquing a contemporary social movement (for example, psychoanalysis), it often seems that his criticism is directed elsewhere (for example, towards the current direction of the socialist movement). For example, Fromm’s book *Sigmund Freud’s Mission*, which mocks Freud’s attempt to form a psychoanalytic “International,” should probably be read as a not-too-subtle critique of orthodox Marxism, not just orthodox Freudianism. Fromm’s use of historical narratives and myths is in some sense of a typical Freudian trope; psychoanalysis frequently draws from mythology, literature, and history to discuss basic human neuroses. However, Fromm’s application of this method to a critique of contemporary social problems is unique.
- <sup>14</sup> For an example of an interesting contemporary application of Fromm’s theories of the authoritarian personality and “escapes from freedom,” see Max Blumenthal’s use of Fromm for building a compelling critique of the U.S. religious right in *Republican Gomorrah: Inside the Movement that Shattered the Party* (New York: Nation Books, 2009).
- <sup>15</sup> Incidentally, Rolf Wiggershaus also misunderstands the premise for the study of the German working class. He condemns it as pessimistic about revolution, and he objects that one cannot determine whether an individual will support a socialist revolution through exploring their authoritarian



sentiments (for example, as manifested in their attitude towards the role of women in society, or their support for or opposition to corporal punishment of children). What Wiggershaus misses is that the study never was trying to determine whether the workers in Germany professed support for a socialist revolution—in fact, the study was begun with the knowledge that many of the German workers were self-professed socialists. Rather, Fromm’s study was evaluating the contradictions in the thinking of the German workers and examining what results could be expected from political engagement on the part of the workers. Even if an upheaval of some sort could be expected, the question was not whether it would choose to label itself a “socialist revolution” but whether its consequences would be more like Stalinism or more like the society envisioned by Marx in which human freedom would be its own end. Wiggershaus asks rhetorically whether most workers in Russia before the revolution, if surveyed, would have supported equality for women and humane treatment of children; the answer of course is “no,” but that is not the point; authoritarian attitudes are relevant to the long-term success of a revolution, and Fromm did not view the Soviet Union as fully socialist. Wiggershaus conveniently ignores that the so-called “gloomy,” “pessimistic” study was proven correct in its prediction that the German working class was not ready to lead a socialist revolution or an effective anti-fascist resistance.

- <sup>16</sup> Marcuse, interestingly, loved this essay by Fromm, lauding it later in *Eros and Civilization* even in the midst of pillorying much of Fromm’s other work (*Eros and Civilization* 243). Although it is ironic that Marcuse praises the most manifestly anti-Freudian of Fromm’s early essays—Marcuse at the time was condemning Fromm’s Freudian “revisionism”—it is not surprising that Marcuse would like the essay. The essay challenged the Freudian illusion of the analyst’s political and philosophical “neutrality” and rejected the bourgeois value of “tolerance” (the subject of a later, important essay by Marcuse), and it condemned contemporary society as overly sexually repressive.
- <sup>17</sup> In this section on Fromm’s interaction with the IPA, I am chiefly indebted to Paul Roazen’s essay, “The Exclusion of Erich Fromm from the IPA.”
- <sup>18</sup> Incidentally, Fromm sounds irked in every quotation from correspondence with Martin Jay that is quoted in Jay’s *Dialectical Imagination*. This is probably because, judging from the criticisms that Fromm is quoted responding to, Jay’s letters to Fromm accused him of being an optimistic Pollyanna and of abandoning psychoanalysis.
- <sup>19</sup> For example, Thomson suggests that Fromm’s discussion of the similarities between world religions is encumbered by his failure to discuss the B’hai Faith—a point which she does not explain further. More problematic is her odd dismissal of Fromm’s socialist humanism on the grounds that “his suggestions gnaw away at the very essence of our Western and arguably global system of capitalism” (as though Fromm did not know this!) (Thomson 139).
- <sup>20</sup> “Aversive therapy” is not wholly a thing of the past. Some more aggressive programs of behavioral reward and punishment still exist, including (as this goes to press), the controversial Judge Rotenberg Educational Center in Canton, Massachusetts, which employs painful electric skin shocks to patients as an “aversive.” The Center’s practice has been condemned by the United Nations as torture.
- <sup>21</sup> In *The Sane Society*, Fromm still labels himself as a member of humanistic psychoanalysis, though he becomes hesitant about this label later and does not want to be classified as a member of the humanistic “school.”
- <sup>22</sup> For example, consider the difference in tone between *Eros and Civilization* (1955) and *Essay on Liberation* (1969). Here is *Eros and Civilization*: “The Orphic and the Narcissistic Eros engulfs the reality in libidinal relations which transform the individual and his environment; but this transformation is the isolated deed of individuals, and, as such, it generates death” (209). And here is *Essay on Liberation*: “The majority of the black population does not occupy a decisive position in the process of production, and the white organizations of labor have not exactly gone out of their way to change this situation” (*Essay on Liberation* 58).
- <sup>23</sup> This claim applies only to Horkheimer’s generation; in the next major generation of Critical Theory, the young Jürgen Habermas did have some influence on the New Left in Germany.