

Escape, Fromm, Freedom: The Refutability of Historical Interpretations in the Popperian Perspective

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RÉSUMÉ : Je me penche sur un aspect de la philosophie sociale de Popper, à savoir les principes d'évaluation des interprétations historiques. Ma thèse globale est que suivant la perspective poppérienne, notre choix parmi des interprétations historiques doit user d'au moins deux des critères qu'applique Popper au choix parmi diverses théories scientifiques : une interprétation devrait logiquement se prêter à une réfutation et elle devrait être consistante. Afin de montrer la pertinence et la fécondité de cette approche, je me concentre sur l'interprétation historique des causes de la montée du nazisme que propose Erich Fromm, en particulier dans *Escape from Freedom*. Je montrerai que l'application de notions psychanalytiques dans le cadre de son interprétation historique a une valeur explicative faible, voire nulle. Son échec à expliquer certaines questions sociales tient à plusieurs raisons. Premièrement, l'auteur ne fournit pas, quoi qu'il en dise, d'explication causale convaincante. Ensuite, les concepts et les multiples hypothèses ad hoc auxquels il a recours tendent à rendre son interprétation irréfutable. Enfin, Fromm s'appuie sur des assumptions théoriques contradictoires. Mon analyse est basée sur la notion fondamentale de Popper voulant que la connaissance scientifique empirique exige au strict minimum une ouverture des interprétations historiques à la critique intersubjective. C'est cette exigence qui permet de les critiquer — c'est-à-dire les accepter, les réfuter et les corriger — sur une base rationnelle.

In the present work I shall discuss one aspect of Popper's philosophy of history, namely, his views on the principles of assessment of historical interpretations and choosing among them. The problem is both theoretic-

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cal and practical. First, there exist multiple interpretations which often give conflicting accounts of the same historical phenomena, historical periods, or history in general. Second, Popper, along with some other philosophers, shows that certain approaches to history, which he calls "historicism,"¹ have sometimes direct and detrimental consequences on history itself; or, to put it simply, certain historical views may be dangerous. The problem of appraisal of historical interpretations may thus be said to have philosophical, methodological, scientific, and social significance. The aim of this article is not merely to highlight the criteria of choosing among historical interpretations in Popper's philosophy, but also to try to show how—if at all—they can work. The overall thesis is this: within the Popperian perspective, we can, and should, criticize historical interpretations using some of the criteria which Popper applies also to deciding among scientific theories. In particular, this is the possibility to (non-experimentally) refute given historical interpretations, though, unlike in the natural sciences which are usually liable to direct empirical tests, the minimal demands for an historical interpretation are: (1) its providing at least a logical possibility for refutation, and (2) its consistency. I shall give, first, a brief background of the problem of historical interpretations in Popper's thought, in particular his treatment of the criteria mentioned, and, second, attempt to illustrate how the criteria work.

1. The Refutability of Historical Interpretations

Popper accepts the division of sciences into *theoretical* (or generalizing) and *historical*. Theoretical sciences "are mainly interested in finding and testing universal laws" (Popper 1997, p. 143) and are united by common methods which "always consist in offering deductive causal explanations, and testing them" (*ibid.*, p. 131). Since another aspect of this form of explanation is prediction, we can use it for testing theories (laws, hypotheses). Historical sciences, on the other hand, usually take universal laws for granted, and are interested in singular statements, in particular, in the "causal explanation of singular events" (*ibid.*, p. 144). In other words, the dividing line among the sciences is drawn along the axis "events—laws," not "the natural—the social." As in a physical causal explanation, every explanation within the historical sciences employs a description of initial conditions of the event, i.e., its short "history." These descriptions, along with trivial universal laws, provide the needed explanation (to be discussed in section 3). The laws are as a rule so trivial that they are taken for granted, and need no special consideration.²

Theoretical history comparable to theoretical physics is impossible. First, Popper contends, because we cannot predict the growth of human knowledge (in particular, of science which affects our lives significantly), we cannot predict the course of human history.³ Second, there are no historical laws like the law of humanity's evolution claim to have discovered which was the core historicist doctrine; evolution on the Earth, including

historical evolution, is a unique event. Certainly, we use in historical research some kinds of scientific hypotheses (points of view) which direct our interest. The same facts and historical evidence may, however, equally well “verify” different hypotheses and points of view which highlight these facts. Popper repeats persistently throughout his works that verificationism is not what makes scientific knowledge scientific; rather this method “immunizes” a theory from testing. Instead, we have to look for counter-examples and the possibility of falsifying the theory. Many times Popper recalls that his methodological demand for falsificationism began from his dissatisfaction with Marxist and Freudian theories, which were “verified” and “confirmed” by virtually any past and contemporary evidence.⁴ Another aspect of falsificationism is that it “prohibits” at least some class of statements, while verificationism rather “invites” numberless confirming instances.⁵

Popper follows Max Weber and many historians holding that any historical research begins from one’s selective point of view, not with a mere collecting of “pure” facts. This point of view, which Popper compares to a searchlight, directs our research and highlights (i.e., selects) certain facts:

Such selective approaches fulfil functions in the study of history which are in some ways analogous to those of theories in science. It is therefore understandable that they have often been taken for theories. And indeed, those rare ideas inherent in these approaches which can be formulated in the form of *testable hypotheses*, whether singular or universal, may well be treated as scientific hypotheses. But as a rule, these historical “approaches” or “points of view” *cannot be tested*. They cannot be refuted, and apparent confirmations are therefore of no value, even if they are as numerous as the stars in the sky. (1997, p. 151)

As will be seen from further discussion, the phrase “they cannot be refuted” is limited to logically consistent or irrefutable “general interpretations.” Historicism “mistakes these interpretations for theories” and fails to see a plurality of interpretations which are “fundamentally on the same level of both suggestiveness and arbitrariness (even though some of them may be distinguished by their *fertility*—a point of some importance)” (ibid). Therefore, we can speak only about contesting, or sometimes complementary, general historical interpretations,⁶ which usually cannot be tested; they may be more or less plausible, more or less interesting and fertile. Some historians share this view.⁷ Thus, there are many histories possible, not one single and true history of humanity.⁸

Popper emphasizes that testable hypotheses can rarely be obtained in history and, as was said earlier, they are equally suggestive and arbitrary (this applies to *general* interpretations discussed further), but “this does not mean, of course, that all interpretations are of equal merit” (1996, p. 266). This untestability does not lead to the relativist attitude which

welcomes any historical interpretations equally. Popper offers at least three criteria for their comparison (and selection):

First, there are always interpretations which are not really in keeping with accepted records; secondly, there are some which need a number of more or less plausible auxiliary hypotheses if they are to escape falsification by the records; next, there are some that are unable to connect a number of facts which another interpretation can connect, and in so far “explain.” There may accordingly be a considerable amount of progress even within the field of historical interpretation. (ibid.)

This progress is attainable by way of new historical evidence, and by introduction of specific or singular historical hypotheses, which play the role of hypothetical initial conditions (ibid.). It is noteworthy that this critical treatment of historical interpretations derives from his methodology of testing theories and goes back to his *Logic of Scientific Discovery*, where Popper writes,

We may if we like distinguish four different lines along which the testing of a theory could be carried out. First, there is the logical comparison of the conclusions among themselves, by which the internal consistency of the system is tested. Secondly, there is the investigation of the logical form of the theory, with the object of determining whether it has the character of an empirical or scientific theory, or whether it is, for example, tautological. Thirdly, there is the comparison with other theories, chiefly with the aim of determining whether the theory would constitute a scientific advance should it survive our various tests. And finally, there is the testing of the theory by way of empirical applications of the conclusions which can be derived from it. (1992, pp. 32-33)

“Empirical applications of the conclusions which can be derived from it [the theory]” is the element missing in Popper’s view of historical interpretations, but which is present in the testing of theories. That is, historical interpretations cannot as a rule be deductively tested. Their refutations, if possible, should be obtained some other ways. So, the approximation of an historical interpretation to a scientific theory may be said to be a matter of degree. Ian Jarvie, in his reply to John Passmore’s account of Popper, points out the following distinction:

[General] *historical interpretations*—points of view—are non-testable (they are not *ad hoc* because they do not try to explain anything). Of course [specific or particular] *historical hypotheses* are testable both against the known facts and against the new facts yet to be turned up by research. . . . Scientific hypothesis have a higher degree of inter-subjective testability because they clash (potentially) with a vastly greater range of experience (such as future events) than do historical hypotheses; they are far more open to refutations. (Jarvie 1960, pp. 355-56)

To the extent the interpretation bears some resemblance to scientific theory (e.g., includes a hypothesis), where it allows (in rare cases) for empirical tests, or shows the possibility (in principle) for falsification, one can apply the central demand which Popper applies towards scientific theory, i.e., refutability: "For only if we can look out for counter examples can we test a theory" (1996, p. 267). Insofar as an historical interpretation allows for refutation, it may be said to be "scientific" (we may decide to call it otherwise "refutable" or "arguable" depending on our convention).

Historical interpretations are always initiated by our interest in history in general and our present practical problems, both of which form our historical points of view. Perhaps this is what Popper means by the word "fertility" of the interpretation: a greater approximation of the interpretation to a scientific theory (in the sense of its refutability), and its ability to better explain the past and present.

The main thing is to be conscious of one's point of view, and critical, that is to say, to avoid, as far as this is possible, unconscious and therefore uncritical bias in the presentation of the facts. In every other respect, the interpretation must speak for itself; and its merits will be its fertility, its ability to elucidate the facts of history, as well as its topical interest, its ability to elucidate the problem of the day. (ibid., p. 268)⁹

Further, *general interpretations*, on the one hand, "are in their character vastly different from scientific theories" (ibid., p. 265); they are not empirically testable. Specific or *singular historical hypotheses*, on the other hand, supplement general interpretations: "Often enough, these can be tested fairly well and are therefore comparable to scientific theories" (ibid., p. 266). To be sure, specific interpretations (singular historical hypotheses) may be circular in that we have only evidence which fits in with this interpretation. "If, however, we can give to such material an interpretation which radically deviates from that adopted by our authority . . . then the character of our interpretation may perhaps take on some semblance to that of a scientific hypothesis" (ibid., p. 267). Popper writes repeatedly that the criterion of the scientific character of a theory or hypothesis consists in its empirical testability, or at least in finding the conditions of its refutability.¹⁰ One of the aspects of the theory's refutability is that we adopt it rationally and critically, even though always tentatively.

Unless the above account misrepresents Popper's thoughts in regard to scientific method and history, it can be summed up as follows: We can, and should, assess singular historical hypothesis (and to a certain extent general interpretations) using the following criteria: (1) the interpretation's refutability in principle (its openness to criticism);¹¹ (2) its greater correspondence to historical records; (3) the lesser number of auxiliary hypotheses; (4) and its explanatory power.¹² Finally, those singular historical

hypotheses which defy refutation or are internally inconsistent should be temporarily abandoned ("eliminated"). It does not matter whether they are called "metaphysical," "non-scientific," "non-falsifiable," or "futile."

I do not think it possible to eliminate *all* "metaphysical elements" from science: they are too closely interwoven with the rest. Nevertheless, I believe that whenever it is possible to find a metaphysical element in science which *can* be eliminated, the elimination will be all to the good. For the elimination of a non-testable element from science removes a means of avoiding refutations. (Popper 1982, pp. 179-80)¹³

The relevance of these ideas can be illustrated endlessly. "History means interpretation" has become a worn-out axiom. From this some tend to mistakenly conclude that we are not able to compare different interpretations whose number is allegedly infinite.¹⁴ It was said, however, that we are able to criticize and compare interpretations—but only those which are amenable to the intersubjective criticism approach. The fact that only refutable historical interpretations can be compared is the point which many overlook to this day. For instance, the "theory" claiming that history is a succession of clashes of civilizations is irrefutable because any historical happening can be interpreted in this light. Or else the "rival" interpretation which insists that the world history has been driven by the capital accumulation of the hegemonic states and their exploitation of the rest is equally irrefutable. As vulnerable to criticism is the account rendering "the family and the household as a terrain in which men act as a class. But male domination is not only about the appropriation of a woman's labor power, it is also about the appropriation of her sexuality, her body" (Brittan 1997, p. 119). These and many other historical interpretations are used as set-piece descriptive tools of certain *aspects* of historical change, but the way they are formulated and the mode of their explanations do not provide us with the possibility to make meaningful objections. Some claim their ability to predict epoch-making events like the collapse of the Soviet Union on the basis of the rather hermeneutic "geopolitical theoretical principles."¹⁵ Or else that "there might be objective social laws, in particular laws of social change" (Bunge 1999, p. 111). Psychoanalysis retains its stable niche in contemporary social/sociological theory, and we are told today that sociology and psychoanalysis are "necessary partners."¹⁶ All this is usually said in full confidence that this kind of knowledge is empirical and scientific.

2. Two Interpretations of the Rise of Nazism

This conflict has grown out of a struggle of ideas.

von Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom*

There are hundreds of Hitlers among us who would come forth if their historical hour arrived.

Fromm, "Malignant Aggression"

In an attempt to illustrate the view that one can compare historical interpretations and select among them those which better fit the criteria just discussed, I will examine two historical interpretations of the same phenomena: the causes leading to Nazism (the problem being not merely theoretical). First, I shall give a short exposition of their different assumptions. Second, I shall give their analysis from the Popperian perspective considered above and try show how the criteria work, if they work at all. One preliminary remark is necessary. The two historical interpretations chosen for the comparison are those of Friedrich Hayek and Erich Fromm. Hayek shared with Popper some fundamental ideas, while Fromm upheld ideas based on Freudian and Marxian teachings, the teachings with which Popper rather fundamentally disagreed. This choice is made deliberately in order to show more explicitly how the criteria may possibly be applied. Popper had undertaken a detailed criticism of psychoanalysis, showing why he considered it a non- or pre-scientific doctrine.¹⁷ From the following, it will be seen that the application of psychoanalytical notions in *historical* interpretations have a weak explanatory power as well—precisely because they do not provide cogent causal explanations and the possibility for refutation.

In his *The Road to Serfdom*, Hayek undertook, besides other tasks, a study of the "evolution of ideas" (Hayek, 1965, p. 1) which contributed to the origin of fascism in prewar Germany. It was implicitly based on a law-like generalization (which Popper would call a "trivial law") that our beliefs and ideas determine (cause) our actions and ultimately shape the whole course of our lives. Hence, the role of ideas—in particular, of philosophical ideas, ideologies, education, etc.—are relevant to the state of affairs we experience. To be sure, Hayek does not consider the mere content of the ideas leading (along with other factors) to fascism, but rather their practical effects; this helped him, during wartime, "to understand the forces which have created National Socialism" (*ibid.*, p. 5).

The problem is not why the Germans as such are vicious . . . but to determine the circumstances which during the last seventy years have made possible the progressive growth and the ultimate victory of a particular set of ideas, and why in the end this victory has brought the most vicious elements among them to the top." (*ibid.*, p. 7)

Hayek studied the development of these ideas within complex interrelations with other social institutions. The role of the ideas, however, may not

be underestimated, for "we must not forget that this conflict has grown out of a struggle of ideas within what, not so long ago, was a common European civilization" (*ibid.*, p. 11).

For the sake of space I will not follow Hayek's analysis further, but only point out that methodologically he attempts to single out the essential causes of the growth of fascism. The relevance of these causes (in particular, of ideas) may, of course, be disputed or corroborated further on the basis of new historical evidence. Besides, we keep in mind that Hayek's interpretation is only one of numerous possible interpretations of this period and of a given set of events. Nevertheless, what is characteristic for Hayek's analysis is that the logical form of his explanation allows us to see causal connection (see next section): it conforms with Popper's minimal requirement for an empirical theory for it is refutable in principle, refutable at least logically. Since the interpretation in question is arguable, i.e., it is tentatively accepted on rational grounds, it allows therefore for a consequent critical discussion and further specifications.

Another historical interpretation is one of Fromm's psychoanalytic portraits which he applied, albeit sketchily, to the causes of German fascism. In the beginning of Hitler's case, Fromm tells us,

An analytic psychobiographical study aims at answering two questions: (1) What are the driving forces that motivates a person, the passions that impel or incline him to behave as he does? (2) What are the conditions—internal and external—responsible for the development of these specific passions (character traits)? (1973, p. 369)

At the end of his inquiry—i.e., a psychoanalytical biography of an individual—Fromm arrives at "another aim: that of pointing to the main fallacy which prevents people from recognizing potential Hitlers before they have shown their true faces" (*ibid.*, p. 432).¹⁸ This turn is surprising, because what is missing in Fromm's research is the analysis of the "sociopolitical situation," which he eventually notes in passing at the end of his essay, whereas the whole story consists of Hitler's biographical details written from the psychoanalytical perspective.¹⁹ Fromm does not discuss here what is usually considered the relevant (and arguable) causes of that particular situation—such as, for instance, the influence of propaganda, philosophical ideas, economic conditions, traditional local mentalities, and, after all, the whole "sociopolitical situation"—on the fascist sentiments. Nor does he discuss the fact that Nazi ideology was a set of well-articulated, if maniacal, ideas which led them to their crimes. His key assumption is the psychological traits of "potential Hitlers." Thus, Fromm's historical account of Nazism seems quite cryptic, for the connection between Hitler's alleged necrophilia (or sado-masochism, or anal character) and the rise of Nazism is vague.²⁰

Recall that this analysis should also be called nevertheless a “historical interpretation.” Can we now prefer one interpretation to another, or at least compare them? As has been said, the criteria are an interpretation’s being refutable (the main and minimal criterion), its correspondence to historical records, the lesser number of auxiliary hypotheses, and its explanatory power. However, so far we have seen only that, unlike Fromm’s analysis, Hayek’s contains criticizable references to causes. Therefore, one has to show that (1) the causal connection is demonstrable in one interpretation and not in the other, and that (2) a causal explanation is somehow relevant to the criteria and, hence, to the assessment of the two.

3. The Relevance of Causal Analysis

In respect to two of the four above criteria—agreement with historical records and number of auxiliary hypotheses—one can say that both interpretations are on a par with each other. Both find an infinite number of “confirmations” in historical evidence available. Both may be supplemented with a different number of auxiliary hypotheses (although Fromm’s analysis also requires Freudian tenets). In other words, both interpretations may be called complementary, not contradictory, in this regard. The present concern is, consequently, to show that the two other criteria—refutability and explanatory power—are connected with the causal explanation, which is present in one interpretation and absent in the other.

To be sure, it is not Popper’s whim but rather a traditional demand for a scientific account to seek causes and give answers to “why” questions.²¹ Using Abraham Kaplan’s differentiation between a *semantic* and a *scientific* explanation one might say that causal explanations clarify things, unlike “semantic explanations,”²² which merely clarify meanings of words.

The deductive-nomological model of scientific explanation has been known by a few names: Popper-Hempel, Hempel, Hempel-Oppenheim, and covering-law model.²³ The version of Carl Hempel is the best known. Within just two decades, many referred to his “The Function of General Laws in History” (1942) and especially to his and Oppenheim’s “Studies in the Logic of Explanation” (1948) as “classical,” to the extent that, e.g., the long-overdue post-Soviet philosophical demand produced in 1998–2000 no fewer than three independent Russian translations of Hempel’s 1942 work.²⁴ The impact of these articles has been so persistent that, up to now, it seems to eclipse Hempel’s later revisions (or concessions) which made it more plausible and workable in historical analysis. Thomas Haskell, for one, recognizes that the narrativist and linguistic counter-attack on the model “smacks of overreaction,” but still sees the limitations in it, perhaps because he leaves unnoticed the further inductive-statistical development of the model (Haskell 1998, pp. 12–20). Those who, quite rightly, questioned the applicability of the deductive version of the model in history will, nevertheless, admit that any causal explanation has to

resort to some regularity, i.e., any causal explanation *is* nomological.²⁵ The (general) nomological model shows that a causal explanation does explain only if it subsumes a particular event under a regularity, i.e., under a statement expressing either statistical or universal law. To establish whether the causal connection has been shown is to ascertain whether the logical structure of the explanation or prediction supports the conclusion—this is the import of the nomological theory. It is this feature, on which Popper insists as well, that allows for both ascertaining the validity of causal inference and for the potential refutations of the premises and conclusion.²⁶

Let us return to the two historical hypotheses at issue. Hayek’s analysis is based on the premise (a lawlike generalization) that our beliefs and ideas determine our actions and, ultimately, the whole way of our lives. However well- or ill-supported these causes may be, we can at the very least logically represent the causal connection between the premises and conclusion.²⁷ With obvious simplifications and omissions, it goes like this:

X-kind of beliefs tend to shape accordingly X-kind of actions.
Nazi ideology prevails in a particular period in Germany.

We can expect (with a high probability) the development of Nazism in Germany.

Apart from the possibility of logical assessment of the argument, all the elements of the argument are open in principle to empirical testing.²⁸ On the other hand, it seems impossible to represent the elements of Fromm’s analysis in a form of causal argument. There are two main, but isolated, ingredients: (1) there exists (in a certain period) a complex social phenomenon Nazism, and (2) there (always) exist some individuals with “intensely destructive character.” One can suppose or make up any connections between the two.

4. Fromm and the Social Sciences

The psychiatrist can “prove anything” when he deals with groups rather than individuals, because his generalizations are not checked by negative cases.

Bendix, “Compliant Behavior and Individual Personality”

In a century which has seen the rise of totalitarianism, Hiroshima, Auschwitz, and the possibility of a “nuclear winter,” social theory has demanded a language which is able to grapple with modernity’s unleashing of its unprecedented powers of destruction. Psychoanalysis has provided that conceptual vocabulary.

Elliott, “Psychoanalysis and Social Theory”

To solve Fromm’s riddle and to understand his mode of reasoning²⁹ in “Malignant Aggression,” one has to look at other works in which he

undertakes a similar sophisticated and detailed explanation of the causes conducive to the rise of Nazism. A close study of Fromm's *Escape from Freedom* will probably explain the role of the sado-masochistic character type, which is the key theoretical notion in that book, in the development of Nazism and help to prevent such misfortunes in the future.

Before embarking on the discussion of *Escape*, a few historical remarks are in order: The book's very title purports to say something fundamental about the lives of potential readers, their thinking, conditions, and hopes. The belief is justified, for Fromm does have this goal. Already by 1964 the volume had enjoyed twenty-four English editions and had been dubbed by many as a "classic."³⁰ One of the factors of its success may be similar to that attributed by Popper to the appeal of Marx's teaching, namely, its strong humanistic intentions. Fromm's research endeavour too begins with his manifest humanism: "If we want to fight Fascism we must understand it" (1964, p. 5).³¹ The issue is that too many educated readers have been taking these intentions, however sincere, at their face (and scientific) value, often without asking themselves whether Fromm had ever succeeded in understanding Fascism. Undergraduates and social theorists alike often tend to accept uncritically his analysis of the causes of totalitarianism, to take his humanist intentions for outstanding theoretical scholarship. James Coleman, for one, writes, "The wide popularity of works [including *Escape*] by social scientists and others that explicitly open the question of human freedom . . . indicates the importance of these [methodological] questions to persons in society" (1990, p. 5). That Coleman mistakenly makes Fromm a methodological individualist in this context is not the whole trouble; what is more worrisome is that he makes him a "social scientist" merely on the basis of Fromm's intentions. Don Martindale, in his brief exposition of *Escape*, follows Fromm saying that "Authoritarianism and sado-masochism were powerful in lower-middle-class German society, and supplied the motivational core of the Nazi movement. These same forces are also present in the democratic societies" (1981, p. 526). Like Coleman, he makes no critical word on the controversial claims.

Fromm was not a pioneer in the adoption of psychoanalysis in social explanations. The tradition of the incorporation of different versions of Freudianism in the social sciences has quite a long history, and it is noteworthy to trace this reception in leading sociological journals. The integration of Freud in American sociology begins around 1920, and already in 1939 Ernest Burgess wrote, "in the last twenty years the influence of psychoanalysis upon sociologists has been steadily increasing," and Fromm figures among "younger sociologists" employing psychoanalytic concepts "in a systematic way" (pp. 364-65). Burgess singles out three kinds of influence of psychoanalysis on sociologists. Some of them reject psychoanalysis but "are indirectly influenced" by and employ analytic terms:

There are those who uncritically accept the theories and formulations of psychoanalysis and either substitute them for sociological theories and concepts or make use of both with little or no attempt to reconcile them. . . . Those more critical attempted to put psychoanalytic theories and explanations to some sort of natural science test. . . . In the majority of such instances the findings have been negative or have shown only a slight degree of correlation with the expectation according to the Freudian theory. (Burgess 1939, pp. 365-66)³²

After obtaining psychoanalytic training, Fromm joined the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research in 1932. (This was the year of the introduction of psychoanalysis in the Institute, whose initial name was supposed to be "The Institute for Marxism," where Marxism was to be studied "as a scientific discipline" [Jay 1996, pp. 8, 28]). As Jay says, "the unnatural marriage of Freud and Marx" in the Frankfurt school was a bold step:

Conservatives and radicals alike agreed that Freud's basic pessimism about the possibilities for social change were incompatible with the revolutionary hopes of a true Marxist. . . . It was thus primarily through Fromm's work that the Institut first attempted to reconcile Freud and Marx. (ibid., pp. 86-88)³³

With impending Nazism, Fromm, along with most of the Frankfurters, had to go abroad and found himself in the United States. At this time some local sociologists become familiar with his work. Harold Lasswell, an enthusiast of Freudian sociology, cheered Fromm's psychoanalytic treatment of bourgeois society, observing that "more and more psychoanalysts are discovering culture":

Skill in prolonged free fantasy, which is skill in self-analysis, becomes one of the indispensable tools of whatever social scientist is concerned with the fundamental problems of personality and culture. . . . It is safe to say that more care is now being given by social scientists to the recording of dreams, slips of the tongue, random movements, and possible somatic conversions than ever before. (1939, p. 386)

Escape from Freedom was published in 1941, and the mixed reception in North American sociology was immediate.³⁴ Henry Ozanne proposed to standardize the concept of "social character" in social science, and found much to inspire him in *Escape*: "the fruitfulness of the concept of social character will lie in its predictive possibilities" (1943, p. 524). Arnold Green gives a more stringent analysis of Karen Horney's and Fromm's use of psychoanalytic concepts, especially neurosis, pointing in particular to certain chaotic, contradictory, and even absurd messages in *Escape* (1946, esp. pp. 537-40). Talcott Parsons and Bernard Barber, on the other hand, summarized in 1948 the impact of psychoanalysis on sociology in ambig-

nous fashion: "However inadequate the theoretical level they [Horney and Fromm] have attained . . . their work is a major contribution toward the synthesis which must develop if sociology is to come to full maturity" (1948, p. 253).³⁵ Eventually, Parsons would find an appropriate place in his somewhat eclectic sociological synthesis for a revised model of Freud's theory of personality (Parsons 1964). Alfred Lindesmith and Anselm Strauss studied in 1950 the already-well-established genre of culture-and-personality writings, most of whose authors (including Fromm) used "a sprinkling of psychoanalytical terminology" (p. 587). They observed in the works of diverse authors, from anthropologists to sociologists, a few common flaws: reliance on certain versions of psychoanalysis and disregard of research of psychologists, clinicians, and psychiatrists; the "immunity to negative evidence" and the use of the "technique of calling on unconscious ideas when the evidence fails"; confusion of facts and interpretations; and neglect of criticism. Reinhardt Bendix's penetrating analysis shows not only the empirical, but also theoretical, weakness of Fromm's and like authors' works: Fromm's concept of "social character" (which, incidentally, Fromm regarded as his main contribution to social theory) is a useless "scientific fiction"; its use tends to "attribute to psychological dispositions what is in fact the result of economic pressure, political power, or historical tradition" (Bendix 1952, pp. 296-300).³⁶

Psycho-socioanalysis makes deep inroads in history as well. In his review of psychohistorical works, Isaac Kramnick finds much insight in them, in particular within the increasingly flourishing genre of theories of revolutions. He underlines, nevertheless, that

A problem with psychological explanation of revolutionary activity is its self-contained, self-confirming quality. Allowing no questions, it can explain everything. One takes the basic hypothesis and whatever the facts be they can be twisted to validate the hypothesis; in short, it is impossible to lose. . . . This is a closed universe of psychoanalytic argument into which it is impossible to enter with disconfirming evidence. (1972, pp. 61-62)

Gerald Izenberg begins his retrospection of psychohistory—in particular the applications of psychoanalysis to intellectual history—with the admission that, often having scarce evidence, this method tends to become circular: "hypotheses about early developments are speculatively deduced from adult events and then used to explain those events" (1975, p. 139).³⁷ Yet, Izenberg contends that psychoanalytic interpretations "can be useful, and will sometimes be necessary, in explaining the direction that someone's research took" (ibid., p. 148). Biographical records of frictions between scholars and their parents help to illuminate, for example, not only Durkheim's interest in studying suicide, Weber's in religion, and James's in philosophy, but also to a great extent the developments and

contents of their works. Psychohistorians (Fromm included) suggest that "a person's intellectual project at its most basic level may also be rooted in his profoundest individual emotional needs and conflicts" (ibid., pp. 148-51). By the 1960s, psychohistory had become an institutionalized academic discipline, as had psychoanalytic sociology.³⁸

Further, Howard Kaye observed that in the 1950s-1960s "Freudian theory was deemed to be a vital part of the sociological tradition"; but by the early 1990s, Freud's "peculiar mixture of a nineteenth-century mechanistic psychobiology . . . and a romanticism of unconscious wishes and fantasies [seemed] to be both scientifically discredited and sociologically irrelevant" (1991, p. 87). Not entirely; 1996 saw a passionate case for *Escape* appear in the same periodical: Neil McLaughlin, witnessing the new rise of nationalism, intolerance, and authoritarianism in the world, found that the book "has never been more relevant" (1996, p. 241). (He is surely not alone in stressing the curative role of psychoanalysis in dealing with current theoretical as well as political and military problems.)³⁹

Erich Fromm's work provides a useful theoretical microfoundation for contemporary work on nationalism, the politics of identity, and the roots of war and violence. Fromm's analysis of Nazism in *Escape from Freedom* . . . outlines a compelling theory of irrationality . . . its analysis of Nazism, and Fromm's larger theoretical perspective are worth reconsidering. (1996, p. 241)

I readily follow the advice to reconsider *Escape*, and shall do so as cautiously as possible, lest to bring on McLaughlin's warning that the "common view of Fromm as a naïve rationalist and simplistic popularizer is a socially constructed myth" (ibid., p. 242).⁴⁰ The present concern shall be neither the sociological reasons for the impact of the book nor its political commitments or social context; I shall focus on its contents, the way he arrives at his understanding of Fascism—the understanding which aims to give us theoretical, scientific, and liberating hope. This is all the more important given that the social theorists Craig Calhoun and Joseph Karaganis tell us today that Fromm's and the Frankfurt schoolmen's "disjunctive contribution" was their

effort to work out a unified explanation of modern capitalism that grasped the similarities between Soviet and Nazi totalitarianism. This was important not only for historical analyses of the mid twentieth century . . . but also for understanding the importance of the state to modern capitalism generally. (2001, p. 186)

For the sake of brevity, I will conclude the story of *Escape*'s reception, criticism, and admiration with a note,⁴¹ and proceed to the concise exposition and methodological analysis of Fromm's explanation of Nazism.

5. *Escape from Freedom as Escape from Freedom*

If we want to fight Fascism we must understand it.

Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*

Fromm is something of a juggler. His system contains a large number of contradictory principles and concepts. . . . Any reader can find just about what he looks for in Fromm. But this same pervasive ambivalence of the work is also one of its most exciting features, for it stimulates the reader to try to reconcile the opposites.

Schaar, *Escape from Authority*

Unlike Schaar's, my present task is not to reconcile the opposites in Fromm, but rather to highlight his main errors and to show that he does not succeed in understanding Nazism.

To begin, Fromm contends, "the theory of society with which psychoanalysis seems to have both the greatest affinity and also the greatest differences is historical materialism" (1994, p. 9).⁴² The greatest affinity consists in "their appraisal of consciousness, which is seen by both as less the driving force behind human behavior than the reflection of other hidden forces" (ibid.). The unbelief of humans' autonomy is extrapolated from individual to the social psychoanalysis: "It is one of the essential accomplishments of psychoanalysis that it has done away with the false distinction between social psychology and individual psychology" (ibid., p. 3).⁴³ The further clarifications of the false distinction, however, obscure the matter: "The difference between individual and social psychology is revealed to be a quantitative and not a qualitative one" (ibid., p. 4). Yet, we learn, two pages later, that "whereas psychoanalytic research is concerned primarily with neurotic individuals, social-psychological research is concerned with groups of normal individuals" (ibid., p. 6). The distinction between neurotic and normal individuals must be qualitative and it is not clear then how the difference between individual and social psychology is to be merely quantitative.

The theoretical and methodological core of *Escape* consists of a few components. There is the postulate of the "hidden forces," in particular, economic and psychological hidden forces, and Fromm is perfectly explicit about this hybrid of Freud and Marx. There is also his belief that the empirical validity of psychoanalysis is due to its laborious observations,⁴⁴ but, contrary to Freud, the book's analysis is based on "the assumption that the key problem of psychology is that of a specific kind of relatedness of the individual towards the world" (1964, p. 12).⁴⁵ Another assumption is the already-mentioned expansion of individual psychology onto collective behaviour. (These three components are utterly disputable, but I will assume them to pursue Fromm's arguments and conclusions.) There is also the rather cogent generalization, expressed in a somewhat poetic manner,

that freedom can become "a burden, too heavy for a man to bear, something he tries to escape from" (Fromm 1964, p. 6). The purpose of the book was "to analyze those dynamic factors in the character structure of modern man, which made him want to give up freedom in Fascist countries and which so widely prevail in millions of our own people" (ibid.).

The actions of the hidden forces in Fromm's analysis (i.e., his historical hypothesis of the causes of Nazism) work through the economic and social conditions, as well as through the psychological conditions. He formulates his concern in addition as

a general problem, namely, that of the role which psychological factors play as active forces in the social process; and this eventually leads to the problem of the interaction of psychological, economic, and ideological factors in the social process. Any attempt to understand the attraction which Fascism exercises upon great nations compels us to recognize the role of psychological factors. (ibid., p. 7)

Fromm recognizes that the psychological factors are additional to "the economic and social conditions which have given rise to Fascism" (ibid., p. 6). Moreover, he claims that these social conditions govern the psychological conditions of the escape from freedom.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the task of social psychology turns out to be not only to show human passions "as a result of the social process," but to show also "how man's energies thus shaped into specific forms in their turn become productive forces, molding the social process" (ibid., p. 14). Fromm stipulates that his view is different from both psychological and sociological approaches.⁴⁷ Studying the effect of capitalism on modern people, he defines his task even further:

[We] are focused only on one aspect of this general problem: the dialectic character of the process of growing freedom. Our aim will be to show that the structure of modern society affects man in two ways simultaneously: he becomes more independent, self-reliant, and critical, and he becomes more isolated, alone, and afraid. (ibid., p. 104)

Under capitalism, people become hostages of material and economic factors which are ends in themselves: "man became a cog in the vast economic machine" (ibid., p. 110). This state was not novel to twentieth-century people, for the fathers of the Reformation "psychologically prepared" them for their subordination. "Once man was ready to become nothing but the means for the glory of a God who represented neither justice nor love, he was sufficiently prepared to accept the role of a servant to the economic machine—and eventually a 'Führer'" (ibid., p. 111).⁴⁸

Eventually, the economic factors, through, and along with, psychological factors, created the conditions favourable for an escape from freedom.⁴⁹ Yet, daily routine and amusement masked the real (i.e., unrealized,

hidden) human conditions: the feeling of individual isolation, powerlessness, aloneness, fear, and bewilderment. Fromm's contemporaries, he infers from this, have only two options because they

cannot go on bearing the burden of "freedom from"; they must try to escape from freedom altogether unless they can progress from negative to positive freedom. The principal social avenues of escape in our time are the submission to a leader, as has happened in Fascist countries, and the compulsive conforming to as prevalent in our own democracy (ibid., p. 134)

To reveal the mechanisms of escape from freedom, Fromm iterates the main premises of the analysis. The pressure of the unconscious forces and its effects can be properly studied only if we accept a strange blend of metaphysical individualism and methodological holism:

Any group consists of individuals and nothing but individuals, and psychological mechanisms which we find operating in a group can therefore [sic] only be mechanisms that operate in individuals . . . we do something which might be compared with the studying of an object under the microscope. (ibid., p. 137)⁵⁰

Furthermore, the study of neurotic personalities is indispensable for social psychology, since the "phenomena which we observe in the neurotic person are in principle not different from those we find in the normal" (ibid., pp. 137-38).⁵¹ Having methodologically mixed individuals with groups, and neurotic with normal, the conclusions that a given society is "sane" or "insane" must be equally impeccable (and, for Fromm, empirical)—just as is any other diagnosis based on the application of an individual character type to social wholes (see, e.g., his 1965, which was a continuation of *Escape*).

According to Fromm, there are three significant types of mechanisms of escape from freedom based, respectively, on three psychological types: "authoritarianism," "destructiveness," and "automaton conformity." The first scenario, authoritarianism, presupposes that one is tending "to give up the independence of one's own individual self and to fuse one's self with somebody or something outside of oneself in order to acquire the strength which the individual self is lacking" (1964, p. 141). Fromm finds the most distinct forms of the mechanism in the striving for submission and domination or, interchangeably, in masochistic and sadistic strivings.⁵² What is peculiar about "sadistic tendencies" and "masochistic trends" is that, although being opposing ideas, they are regularly located "in the same kind of characters" (ibid.); in addition, their traits in different degrees "are probably to be found in everybody" (ibid., p. 162); and, of course, they have different forms, types, and sophisticated interrelations reflected in "dynamic concepts."⁵³

We can also find at this stage of Fromm's observations quite a plausible sketch of an explanation of the rise of Nazism: "As a matter of fact, for great parts of the lower middle class in Germany and other European countries, the sadomasochistic character is typical, and . . . it is this kind of character structure to which Nazi ideology had its strongest appeal" (ibid., pp. 163-64). The explanation then may take on the following form:

Whenever a great portion of society and/or one of its powerful groups is appealed to by a certain ideology, there is a high likelihood that this ideology will rule. A great part of the lower middle class in Germany had *sadomasochistic character structure* and found Nazi ideology appealing.

Nazism rose in Germany.

Although the conclusion seems plausible, there are three main objections. First, introducing ideology, Fromm deviates from the fundamental principle of the hidden forces; ideology is all too manifest a force to be called "hidden." (This is based on another assumption that our beliefs, about which we are conscious, determine our actions—a premise Fromm would never accept.) Second, since the italicized clause ("*sadomasochistic character structure*") is to be translated as "the striving for submission and domination," one doubts its significance. The 1920-1930s did not comprise a unique period in this respect, even in German history (otherwise Nazi-like regimes would attend probably all our pasts), and the relevance of the character type is not clear.⁵⁴ Finally, we do not know why this type should support Nazism and not communism or Buddhism. The reason why the ideology was appealing to the lower middle class could well be different and the explanation via this character type superfluous. This is probably what Fromm himself (subconsciously) realizes and why he does not dwell on this implicit explanation. His concern now is to recognize the "authoritarian groups,"⁵⁵ explain why they became powerful, and establish the connection between this character type and the rise of Nazism. Fromm differentiates between authoritarianism (sado-masochistic strivings) and the second scenario of escape, *destructiveness*—notwithstanding that "they are mostly blended with each other" (1964, p. 179). Destructiveness aims at elimination of its object and "is rooted in the unbearableness of individual powerlessness and isolation" (ibid.). The way to escape one's powerlessness in the world is to destroy it—evidence for which destruction abounds far and near:

Any observer of personal relations in our social scene cannot fail to be impressed with the amount of destructiveness to be found everywhere. For the most part it is not conscious as such but is rationalized in various ways. As a matter of fact, there is virtually nothing that is not used as a rationalization for destructiveness (ibid., pp. 179-80)⁵⁶

The third scenario of escape, *automation conformity*, is “of the greatest social significance” since it is “the solution that the majority of normal individuals find in modern society” (*ibid.*, p. 185). It consists in the individual’s ceasing to be oneself: “he adopts entirely the kind of personality offered to him by cultural patterns; and therefore becomes exactly as all others are and as they expect him to be” (*ibid.*, pp. 185-86). This is a lax generalization.⁵⁷ To defend it, Fromm takes pains to show that his fellows (who are “normal individuals”) have, as a matter of fact, “pseudo-thinking,” “pseudo-feelings,” “pseudo-willing” (*ibid.*, pp. 185-206).⁵⁸ As a result, “this substitution of pseudo acts for original acts of thinking, feeling, and willing, leads eventually to the replacement of the original self by a pseudo-self” (*ibid.*, p. 205).

Only a handful of intellectuals, or those few who indeed can think,⁵⁹ are able to discern the real thoughts, feeling, and wills of their zombie-like fellow beings. Fromm’s distrust of their self-awareness is limitless:

The driving forces are not necessarily conscious as such to a person whose character is dominated by them. A person can be entirely dominated by his sadistic strivings and consciously believe that he is motivated only by his sense of duty. He may not even commit any overt sadistic acts but suppress his sadistic drives sufficiently to make him appear on the surface as a person who is not sadistic. Nevertheless, any close analysis of his behaviour, his phantasies, dreams, and gestures, would show the sadistic impulses operating in deeper layers of his personality. (*ibid.*, p. 163)⁶⁰

Even more interesting then is another of his remarks: “The feature common to all authoritarian thinking is the conviction that life is determined by forces outside of man’s own self [sic], his interest, his wishes. . . . The powerlessness of man is the leitmotif of masochistic philosophy” (*ibid.*, p. 171). Now, let us ask ourselves, who can best epitomize all authoritarian thinking and masochistic philosophy? And is the word “sadistic” not more appropriate for the latter?⁶¹

In the chapter “Psychology of Nazism,” Fromm completes his explanation of the causes of Nazism. To assess the relevance of psychological factors, he considers two popular strategies. Disregarding psychology, the first strategy

looks upon Nazism either as the outcome of an exclusively economic dynamism—of the expansive tendencies of German imperialism, or as an essentially political phenomenon—the conquest of the state by one political party backed by industrialists and Junkers; in short, the victory of Nazism is looked upon as the result of a minority’s trickery and coercion of the majority of the population. (*ibid.*, p. 207)

The second in its turn reduces the issue to psychology; this view “maintains that Nazism can be explained only in terms of psychology; or rather in those of psychopathology” (*ibid.*, pp. 207-208). Fromm believes that neither of the two views is correct.⁶² Nevertheless, as we will see, his explanation is eventually reduced to the first version of “exclusively economic dynamism” and the main constituent of his psychological explanation turns out to be the “minority’s trickery.”

Fromm deals now with “the psychological aspect of Nazism, its human basis” (*ibid.*, p. 208). The basis comprised two major groups. The first consisted mainly of “working class and the liberal and Catholic bourgeoisie” and bowed to the Nazi without strong enthusiasm and resistance because of “inner tiredness and resignation” (*ibid.*, p. 209). The second group, which fanatically supported the Nazi ideology, embraced “the lower strata of the middle class, composed of small shopkeepers, artisans, and white-collar workers” (*ibid.*, p. 211). The economic prerequisites for these groups’ attitudes were the considerable decline of the German economy and inflation; the political factors were the replacement of monarchy with the parliamentary system and the humiliating Treaty of Versailles. The psychological consequences of this social situation were frustration and the weakening of the authority of parents.⁶³ It is notable that the preconditions of “the increasing social frustration” (*ibid.*, p. 216), “the feeling of individual insignificance and powerlessness” (*ibid.*, p. 217), and even of the sado-masochistic strivings are economic and political. Fromm seems to suggest the following causal sequence: economic interests—anxiety—hatred—panic—sado-masochism.⁶⁴ (Marx often wins out over Freud in Fromm.) We are at the crucial point of Fromm’s story.

Those psychological conditions were not the “cause” of Nazism. They constituted its human basis without which it could not have developed, but any analysis of the whole phenomenon of the rise and victory of Nazism must deal with the strictly economic and political, as well as with the psychological, conditions. . . . There is no need to enter into a discussion of these economic and political questions. The reader may be reminded, however, of the role which the representatives of big industries and the half-bankrupt Junkers played in the establishment of Nazism. Without their support Hitler could never have won, and their support was rooted in their understanding of their economic interests much more than in psychological factors. (*ibid.*, p. 218)

Despite Fromm’s ostensible reluctance to discuss “these economic and political questions,” the author goes on and the explanation looms. These big property owners did not have sufficient representation in a parliament in which Socialists and Communists had 40 percent. At the same time, the weight of the Nazis in the parliament was growing; they represented the class “that was in bitter opposition to the most powerful representatives of

German capitalism” (ibid.). Therefore, the capitalists “expected that Nazism would shift the emotional resentment . . . into other channels and at the same time harness the nation into the service of their own economic interests. On the whole they were not disappointed” (ibid., pp. 218-19).

Putting aside correspondence to historical records, Fromm’s account is plausible. An influential and rich group of society was interested in this ideology: the ideology rules. When Fromm does without psychoanalysis, he is most clear; the explanation is so plain that it needs no reference to any specific psychological notions. (Strictly speaking, money-grubbing of the big industries is also a psychological factor, and it is not clear what prevents Fromm from also capitalizing on this line of explanation.) The interests of big capital secured the political success of the Nazi: “What mattered was that hundreds of thousands of petty bourgeois, who in the normal course of development had little chance to gain money or power, as members of the Nazi bureaucracy now got a large slice of the wealth and prestige they forced the upper classes to share with them” (ibid.).

The real “hidden force” and the trigger appears to be the economic and political “trickery” of the minority. Moreover, the Nazi party turns out to be the unscrupulous minority’s partner. The big capital employs Hitler as an “efficient tool” to use the angry middle class in its interests,⁶⁵ for he

combined the characteristics of a resentful, hating, petty bourgeois, with whom the lower middle class could identify themselves emotionally and socially, with those of an opportunist who was ready to serve the interests of the German industrialists and Junkers. Originally he posed as Messiah of the old middle class, promised the destruction of department stores, the breaking of the domination of banking capital, and so on. The record is clear enough. These promises were never fulfilled. However, that did not matter. Nazism never had any genuine political or economic principles. It is essential to understand that the very principle of Nazism is its radical opportunism. (ibid., p. 220)

Fromm has shown a pretty credible picture of the psychology of Nazism, and Nazis as nothing but a gang of political wheeler-dealers.

What Fromm then attempts to demonstrate is the relevance of all the previous psychoanalytical study, in particular how the Nazis brainwashed masses and why the “human basis” accepted their ideology. He shows “that Hitler’s personality, his teachings, and the Nazi system express an extreme form of the character structure which we have called ‘authoritarian’ and by this very fact he made a powerful appeal to those parts of the population which were—more or less—of the same character structure” (ibid., p. 221). A close inspection of *Mein Kampf* leaves no doubt that Hitler was a person of extremely sado-masochistic character (ibid., pp. 221-36).⁶⁶ Moreover, Fromm shows unambiguously the source of Hitler’s ideas and ideology:

This ideology results from his personality which, with its inferiority feeling, hatred against life, asceticism, and envy of those who enjoy life, is the soil of sado-masochistic strivings; it was addressed to people who, on account of their similar character structure, felt attracted and excited by these teachings and became ardent followers of the man who expressed what they felt. (ibid., p. 236)

Simply, sado-masochistic personality produces sado-masochistic ideology which attracts sado-masochists; hence, given that a significant portion of the population is sado-masochistic, we have good reasons to expect the coming of the corresponding ideology. However illuminating it may sound, we know at least the origin of one’s ideas: it is one’s own personality or “type.”

The conclusion of Fromm’s account of Nazism is especially instructive both in terms of the relation between the hidden forces and the author’s consistency. Assuming a didactic tone, he writes: “Unless the whole industrial system, the whole mode of production, should be destroyed and changed to the preindustrial level, man will remain an individual who has completely emerged from the world surrounding him” (ibid., p. 237). One might have begun dismantling the vicious system right away, but—on the next page—Fromm promptly alerts:

The modern industrial system has virtually a capacity to produce not only the means for an economically secure life for everybody but also to create the material basis for the full expression of man’s intellectual, sensuous, and emotional potentialities, while at the same time reducing the hours of work. (ibid., p. 238)

The remainder of *Escape from Freedom* consists of the analysis of freedom, democracy (as, of course, a form of escape from freedom⁶⁷), and theoretical conclusions. We read in the conclusion: “Only in a planned economy in which the whole nation has rationally mastered the economic and social forces can the individual share responsibility and use creative intelligence in his work” (ibid., p. 273).

We can now fully grasp Fromm’s explanatory picture. Following is a summary of Fromm’s account of Nazism in *Escape*. Its key elements can be divided into two groups: Fromm’s theory of Nazism and his explanation of the political rise of Nazism.

Theory

Let us first outline the theoretical tenets, the socio-psychological laws (law-like statements, hypotheses) clearly articulated in *Escape*.

- Consciousness is the reflection of economic and psychological hidden forces.

- The psychological mechanisms operating in a group are the mechanisms operating in individuals.
- The character structure of the modern person is such that he or she wants to give up freedom.
- The modern person becomes increasingly isolated, alone, and afraid.
- The need for conformity makes individuals want to give up personal freedom and submit to a leader.
- There are the three significant types of mechanisms of escape from freedom based, respectively, on three psychological types: authoritarianism, destructiveness, and automaton conformity.
- Individuals cease to be themselves; they have pseudo-thoughts, pseudo-emotions, pseudo-will.
- One's ideology ultimately results from one's personality or character type.

Explanation

The second group comprises *Escape's* description of the political situation from which Nazism arose. Relevant laws from the preceding group are implied in the explanation (see Popper 1992 [esp. §12] and Hempel 1942). Fromm's explanation of the rise of Nazism is displayed here in the form of an argument whose premises describe the initial conditions, i.e., the causes, of the Nazis' political success.

- (a) Germany experienced a considerable economic decline aggravated by inflation and political upheavals; the psychological consequences were strong frustrations and feelings of insecurity, especially among the lower middle class.
- (b) Frustrations led to sado-masochistic tendencies.
- (c) Hitler was a sado-masochistic character and, since one's ideology results from one's character type, his ideology was sado-masochistic.
- (d) Since the lower strata of the middle class consisted mainly of people with sado-masochistic character, they were attracted to Hitler's sado-masochistic personality and ideology.

- (e) The Nazis, while an influential political force, had no genuine political or economic principles outside of their radical opportunism.
- (f) Pursuing their own interests, powerful German capitalists helped to advance Hitler and his party still further.
- (g) The Nazis promised to gear their policy toward the interests of the most powerful capitalists as well as those of the lower middle class, thus securing the support of both groups.

(h) The Nazis came to power.

A brief analysis of this argument: The premises—even though some of them are non-empirical statements—seem to support the conclusion. We can replace the “sado-masochistic” in the explanation—namely, in premises (b), (c), and (d)—with any other type of character, and the conclusion will still follow. Put simply, this explanation will read: the sufficient cause of the Nazis' political success in that historical situation was the support of big capital for the Nazis due to the latter's political opportunism. (These causes are decisive in the analysis: e.g., in the same situation, the capitalists—in pursuit of their interests—would support communists if the communists' principle were one of “radical opportunism.”) Fromm himself made quite explicit the responsibility of the capitalists and the Nazis' opportunism in their political success. The causal role of sado-masochism remains rather optional, and its only function in the whole play is to give redundant labels to the characters.

Now, the above discussion has been a sort of game of give-away because Fromm's argument has been represented as more consistent than it is, whereas criticism has been retained mainly in notes. The following are objections to theoretical and empirical statements prominent in Fromm's account of Nazism.

Fromm is persuaded that his method, due to its Freudian and Marxist sources, is scientific. Yet, his central tenets and findings are overtly non-empirical (speculative, arbitrary, whimsical, etc.); Fromm's socio-diagnostics is based on rather hermeneutic application of manifold “dynamic” definitions, metaphors, and classifications.

He abuses and, depending on his particular task, disregards the distinction between “normal” and “neurotic” people. Another unwarranted move is the application of individual psychoanalysis to social psychology. These two blends give way to virtually any diagnoses of the society, but no means to check and compare them empirically.

By introducing an ambivalent term “sado-masochism” and similar concepts, he is able to prove any claim. The notion of “sado-masochistic character” (or “the strivings for submission and domination”) has to undermine any further serious discussion. Otherwise, the description of human actions in ambivalent terms can lead—as it does in *Escape*—to contradictory statements and hence makes one’s position immune from any objection. (Popper reminds us that by using contradictions in our arguments we can logically prove anything [1992, p. 91].)

The three character types and respective scenarios of the alleged escape from freedom are questionable through and through. First, we may at will invent any number of scenarios and then “observe and confirm” them in reality; there are no good reasons to consider as “significant” only those three coined by Fromm. Second, even the way Fromm himself interprets their contents, these three overlap considerably: the same action may be understood as we please, and there is no means of its unambiguous reading. Third, even if Fromm had made clear-cut distinctions among them, he without scruple merges them statistically.

As was discussed, the theses of “automatization” of personality and of pseudo-thinking is done at will, for everyone may claim with equally ungrounded reasons one’s own accurate reading of others’ minds. Moreover, the consequences of the thesis of automatization—and of the hidden forces in general—has to eliminate any responsibility from the Nazis or big capital. All of Fromm’s moral rhetoric and concern is therefore futile gab: there is nobody to blame, only forces.⁶⁸

There is no contradiction in the “sado-masochistic strivings” and the acceptance of, say, liberal ideology; the latter too provides perfect opportunities for the individual to dominate and submit in any imaginable sense (in terms of economic success and prestige, of the bureaucratic or working hierarchies, of political and social activity, of personal psychological and physical confidence, and in symbolic terms—in any sphere).⁶⁹ Briefly, the connection between one’s “character type” and the character of ideology (broadly, one’s worldview) is not established, if it exists at all.

Finally, Fromm holds as a matter of fact, or rather as an economic-psychological law, that economic disasters lead to certain forms of “escape from freedom.” Even accepting all his other assumptions, we find lots of counterexamples. Similar economic, political, and psychological circumstances produced completely different developments in Europe and elsewhere.⁷⁰ (Fromm, perhaps, anticipated such objections, and prudently also dubbed democracy as a form of “escape.”) Once more, if no

objection is possible, there is no possibility either to argue, or to arguably accept this claim.) In other words, there is no well-established regularity between a certain social situation and the type of resulting ideology.

To sum up, Fromm provides neither social nor psychological foundations for the development of specific types of ideologies and regimes. Judging on the basis of his writings, he does not allow even a relatively independent role to thinking: human rationality, and “the capacity for critical thinking,” for the liberation of which Fromm purportedly fights, is impossible in the face of the yoke of self-willed hidden forces. For these reasons, the ominous prophecy “there are hundreds of Hitlers among us who would come forth if their historical hour arrived” (1973, p. 433) arouses not fear, but rather curiosity: What is this statement all about? Having armed ourselves with psychoanalytical machinery, we will easily detect the same “character types” among the staunchest libertarians and neo-Nazis, communists and conservatives. Fromm’s psychoanalytical diagnosis of the causes of fascism still may be replaced without harm by its famous counterpart: There are hundreds of bicycle riders among us who would come forth if their historical hour arrived.⁷¹ Of course, we may pay a tribute to Fromm for his scientific and sheer humanistic intentions, but still have to admit that their upshot is only counterproductive: he believes that the real causes of Nazism were irrational forces, and puts forward as much irrational explanation and panacea. Escape from freedom, rather, is that faith in irrational hidden forces, for freedom (humanism, scientific thinking, and many other subjects of Fromm’s concern) can only be sacrificed—not gained—if one day we revert to this faith again. All this might sound like a platitude if there were not a widespread confusion today about what rationality and science are, and the tendency to abuse these concepts in support of the most humane and freedom-loving projects, thus impairing the projects themselves.⁷²

5. Conclusion

I shall conclude this discussion with what began it, namely, the Popperian perspective. For Popper, the most obvious objection is that Fromm’s approach is all-explaining—the feature which had been the main “irritant” in both Freudianism and Marxism. One can see on almost every page in Fromm that his artistry of psychoanalytic interpretation—to “devise types,” to use “dynamic concepts,” etc.—facilitates any so-called explanation. Since the protagonists of history, the forces, are hidden, we are free to interpret them, using Fromm’s technique, as we please, not only in the way he does. The influences of hidden forces as a political postulate may be convenient: as a hypothesis it is not arguable.

Furthermore, were it the case that human beings are truly driven by cunning hidden forces, then we would never learn about an impending

escape from freedom, or how to escape this escape from freedom or from any other hidden disaster. (Fromm's revelations themselves may well be the product of the insidious hidden forces which we would never outplay; hence, there is no escape as such.) His empirical claims are mainly questionable: it is not a matter of fact that Fromm's contemporaries were more frightened, neurotic, isolated, etc., than their predecessors; and, since the distinction between neurotic and normal people is diluted, we cannot even measure these subtle disparities. Besides, the amount of ambiguities and contradictions in Fromm has to ward us off from taking him literally. To resolve contradictions, he resorts constantly to auxiliary "hypotheses" in the form of mere classifications and renaming familiar phenomena. This verbiage only makes his account still more immune to any refutations, not more refutable.⁷³

The length of an article does not allow me to discuss Popper's requirements for a social explanation such as anti-psychologism, methodological individualism, and situational analysis. What has been more important for this discussion are the minimal requirements for accepting an interpretation on rational, arguable grounds to be considered for further and stricter assessments. The question "Does science require that we seek only certain kinds of stories?"⁷⁴ could perhaps be answered as follows: in the Popperian perspective, science does not have this requirement. What it does require at a minimum is an historical interpretation's openness to intersubjective criticism which is only attainable if the interpretation provides the possibility for its acceptance or refutation on rational grounds, i.e., if it can be checked by logic and evidence (more technically, if it has a non-empty "class of its potential falsifiers" and is non-contradictory). This requirement applies in the first place to singular historical hypotheses, and also to general historical interpretations to the degree they are open to the discussed criteria. The main problem with Fromm's interpretation, within the Popperian vision of the scientific method discussed here, is that it is neither refutable nor consistent. It interprets everything easily, but prohibits nothing. These kinds of interpretation of history deserve and necessitate, due to their popularity, critical examination—in particular because this popularity is completely out of proportion to their potential to produce that critical and rational understanding which can only preserve freedom.⁷⁵

Notes

1 The "Fundamental thesis" of *The Poverty of Historicism* is "that the belief in historical destiny is sheer superstition, and . . . there can be no prediction of the course of human history" (Popper 1997, p. v); and, "I mean by 'historicism' an approach to the social sciences which assumes that *historical prediction* is their principal aim, and which assumes that this aim is attainable by discovering the 'rhythms' or the 'patterns', the 'laws' or the 'trends' that underlie the evolution of history" (ibid., p. 3).

2 The role of these trivial laws is unproblematic for Popper (e.g., 1996, pp. 262-65), and this view of his provokes misinterpretations. Thus, when he gives his famous example of employing trivial universal laws with the first division of Poland, von Wright comments: "But would anyone dream of 'explaining' the division of Poland in the tacit terms of such a 'law of sociology'?" It is remarkable how well defenders of the covering law theory of historical explanation succeed in evading relevant examples" (von Wright 1971, p. 179). It seems that von Wright misses here Popper's point: indeed, nobody as a rule resorts to such laws. Otherwise, mentioning them in any case would be, to put it mildly, pedantry.

3 Popper shows the impossibility by "strictly logical reasons" (1997, p. vi); it follows from our ignorance of the future growth of our knowledge that "we must reject the possibility of a theoretical history . . . a historical social science that would correspond to theoretical physics" (ibid., p. vii).

4 Cf. "The method of looking for verifications seemed to me unsound . . . to be the typical method of pseudo-science. I realized the need for distinguishing this method as clearly as possible from that other method—the method of testing a theory as severely as we can—that is, the method of criticism, the method of looking for falsifying instances" (Popper 1982, pp. 162-63).

5 "A theory is to be called 'empirical' or 'falsifiable' if it divides the class of all possible basic statements unambiguously into the following two non-empty subclasses. First, the class of all those basic statements with which it is inconsistent (or which it rules out, or prohibits); we call this the class of the *potential falsifiers* of the theory; and secondly, the class of those basic statements which it does not contradict (or which it 'permits'). We can put this more briefly by saying: a theory is falsifiable if the class of its potential falsifiers is not empty" (Popper 1992, p. 86).

6 Or, as Popper calls them in *The Open Society*, "general interpretations" and "quasi-theories" of history: "[I]t is important to see that many 'historical theories' (they might perhaps be better described as 'quasi-theories') are in their character vastly different from scientific theories" (1996, pp. 265-66).

7 For example, Carlo Ginzburg writes that his historical study of the sixteenth-century individual "ended by developing into a general hypothesis on the popular culture" (1992, p. xii). His hypothesis, and that of Mikhail Bakhtin before him, about the circular or reciprocal character of culture in pre-industrial European societies is opposed to another hypothesis that claims the existence of a gap between the cultures of subordinate and ruling classes. Nevertheless, Ginzburg contends that "these are hypotheses to a certain extent, and not all of them equally well documented" (ibid., p. xvii).

8 "[S]ince all history depends upon our interest, there can be only histories, and never a 'history,' a story of the development of mankind 'as it happened'" (Popper 1996, p. 364).

9 "Fertility" or "fruitfulness" in scientific knowledge becomes somewhat clearer also from his other writings. In his autobiography, discussing language and

philosophy, Popper writes: "Fertility is the result not of exactness [of words] but of seeing new problems where none have been seen before, and of finding new ways of solving them" (1993, p. 25). Or see, e.g., in his *Logic*: "My only reason for proposing my criterion of demarcation is that it is fruitful: that a great many points can be clarified and explained with its help" (1992, p. 55). After all, the fertility (or fruitfulness) of a theory consists, for Popper, in its contribution to the main questions of knowledge: What can we know? How certain is our knowledge?

10 "If somebody proposed a scientific theory he should answer, as Einstein did, the question: 'Under what conditions would I admit that my theory is untenable?' In other words, what conceivable facts would I accept as refutations, or falsifications, of my theory?" (Popper 1993, p. 41).

11 That is the refutability at the initial logical level, not by means of empirical tests rarely obtainable in history; it is the refutability in principle, which allows for testing the interpretation's logical consistency. The interpretation, which defies meaningful objections already at this stage, may well be abandoned.

12 "We may speak of 'better' and of 'worse' theories in an objective sense even before our theories are put to the test: the better theories are those with the greater content and the greater explanatory power (both relative to the problems we are trying to solve)" (Popper 1993, p. 86).

13 Cf. "[From the point of scientific method] we can never rationally establish the truth of scientific laws; all we can do is to test them severely, and to eliminate the false ones (this is perhaps the crux of my *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*)" (Popper 1996, p. 363).

14 See Peter Gay's account of how a greater number of evidence reduces the number of possible interpretations (2000, pp. 36-39): "Paradoxically, in short, facts cut down the number of sensible interpretations" (*ibid.*, p. 39).

15 See Collins 1978, 1986, and 1995. For criticism of Collins's "prediction," see Coleman 1995, Hechter 1995, and especially Portes 1995.

16 John O'Neill urges sociologists to turn to psychoanalysis (2001, p. 112), as if they ever lacked interest in it: "No theory is adequate that ignores the complexity of the relations between reason and the passions. . . . Thus sociology and psychoanalysis remain uneasy yet necessary partners" (*ibid.*, p. 122).

17 See, e.g., in Popper 1982, pp. 163-74. Adolf Grünbaum (1984, 1993) attacked Popper's criticism, claiming that psychoanalysis *is* empirically testable, hence scientific, but merely false. But see Gellner (1993, especially pp. 185-92) where he in turn challenges Grünbaum's claims: "An examination of the very part of Freudianism, which Grünbaum selects as paradigmatically testable, illustrates and supports exactly the opposite conclusion: that the system is so constructed as to evade falsification." See also Burgess (1939, pp. 365-66) on early attempts of American sociologists at empirical refutations of some of Freud's claims where they did allow for refutations.

18 It is not that this speciously humanistic aim emerges as a by-product of the psychoanalytical scrutiny. If we only try to appreciate the practical signifi-

cance of this panacea, "recognizing potential Hitlers," we will inevitably have to resort to the means of the real Hitler in order to protect ourselves from potential ones. Fromm leaves us hope: "I believe that the majority of people do not have the intensely destructive character of Hitler," even though he warns: "But even if one would estimate that such persons formed 10 percent of our population, there are enough of them to be very dangerous if they attain influence and power" (*ibid.*, p. 432). One can only imagine the scale of the purge were such psychoanalytics employed to rid society of this potentially dangerous class of people.

19 Fromm depicts at great length young Adolph's narcissism and attachment to mother, dreams and gestures, Oedipal rivalry and sado-masochistic tendencies, "malignant incestuousness," and, to be sure, necrophilia (1973, pp. 375-433).

20 Also vague is its witch-hunt solution of identifying potential Nazis. Probably, Hayek could make the following objection to this account of Fromm's: "those who think that it is not the system which we need fear, but the danger that it might be run by bad men, might even be tempted to forestall this danger by seeing that it is established in time by good men" (Hayek 1965, p. 135).

21 "How?" and teleological "What for?" scientific explanations are—or should be—translatable into "Why?" answers.

22 Kaplan differentiates between a *semantic* explanation, which "makes clear a meaning," and a *scientific* explanation (Kaplan 1964, pp. 327-32). Semantic explanation "is a translation or paraphrase, a set of words having a meaning equivalent or similar to those being explained, but more easily or better understood" (*ibid.*, p. 327); it always serves for someone in particular, depending on his/her cognitive background. "The difference between a semantic and a scientific explanation is . . . like the difference between a statement's being clear and its being true" (*ibid.*, p. 328); the truth of propositions does not depend on the personal characteristics.

23 Popper's first exposition of the deductive-nomological (D-N) model of explanation appears in his *Logic* in 1934 (see his 1992, pp. 59-60). He for some time insisted on his priority (1996, p. 364), to which Hempel admitted indirectly later on (see Hempel 1965, pp. 251 and 337, where, among other predecessors, he especially praises Popper). On this, however, von Wright remarks that "the 'Popper-Hempel' theory of explanation had been something of a philosophic commonplace ever since the days of Mill and Jevons" (1971, p. 175). Popper himself later confirmed this in part in his autobiography (1993, p. 117). Some suggest that the model is just a derivative of Aristotelian theory of explanation. A comprehensive account of the model is found in Wesley Salmon; unfortunately, he only mentions Popper's *Logic* among the works promulgating the D-N account (Salmon 1989, p. 4), and, he thinks, it is "The 1948 Hempel-Oppenheim article [that] marks the division between the prehistory and the history of modern discussions of scientific explanation" (*ibid.*, p. 10). On the differences between Popper's and Hempel's versions of the theory of scientific explanation, see Donagan 1964. Jack Pitt (1959) prefers, as many do,

- the name "Popper-Hempel model" and contends that the attacks on its applicability to history are ill-grounded.
- 24 See Hempel 1998a, translated by S. Vvedenskiy: 1998b, translated by O. Nazarova; and 2000, translated by Nikolai Rozov (who kindly informed me by e-mail that his translation was also made in 1998). This incipient demand for the analytical tradition, however, followed another period. It was the decade of attempts at reinterpreting Marx and pre-Soviet Russian philosophy, blended with a lively interest in and reception of continental and postmodern philosophies.
- 25 One may appeal to Hempel's inductive-statistical amendments to the deductive model, or to Max Weber's, or even to Aristotle's notion of scientific explanation, or, equally, to a common-sensical query: how else can one impute causality without appealing to regularities? This does not hold solely for scientific explanations; in everyday life too, our customary explanations have explanatory force only due to the connection—usually tacit, but purported—between an event and some general rule or regularity; the laws are, as a rule, so trivial that they are taken for granted and need no special consideration. Patrick Gardiner puts it in a nutshell: "The force of the word 'because' derives from the fact that a particular case has been seen to satisfy the requirements of a causal law, and it is to this causal law that we must appeal if our explanation is questioned" (Gardiner 1952, p. 2).
- 26 Popper applied this requirement to a scientific theory as early as *Logic of Scientific Discovery*: "I shall require that its [scientific system's] logical form shall be such that it can be singled out, by means of empirical tests, in a negative sense: it must be possible for an empirical scientific system to be refuted by experience" (1992, p. 41).
- 27 The causal connection is all too trivial to dwell on: Hayek illustrates it, e.g., as follows: "this conflict has grown out of a struggle of ideas" (1965, p. 11).
- 28 As Hempel wrote: "A proposed explanation is scientifically acceptable only if its *explanans* is capable of empirical test, i.e., roughly speaking, if it is possible to infer from it certain statements whose truth can be checked by means of suitable observational or experimental procedures" (1965, p. 303).
- 29 I call it Fromm's "mode of reasoning" because, as I think will be clear from the following discussion, it is problematic to find in his explanations logic or consistency in the strict sense; rather, these explications are based on logical twists, stretches, and diverse classifications being ever-adjusted to the main precepts (let alone ideological commitments which are not discussed here). Hence, the only thinkable way to give a fair representation of, or to present in the best light, Fromm's writings is to reproduce them as a whole with his own comments. For the sake of brevity, I shall single out what I find most characteristic and relevant in his pieces regarding the causes of Nazism in a form as coherent as possible.
- 30 Martin Jay writes: "As an explanation of the authoritarianism America was about to fight in the war, it [Escape] received considerable attention and in time
- 270 *Dialogue*
- became a classic in the field" (1996, p. 98). Isaac Kraminick refers to *Escape* as "*locus classicus*" (1972, p. 54), as does Neil McLaughlin (1996, p. 259).
- 31 Moreover, sometimes he sounds like a critical rationalist: "[The] methods of dulling the capacity for critical thinking are more dangerous to our democracy than many of the open attacks against it" (Fromm 1964, p. 128). Elsewhere, he even puts forward the psychoanalytic version of the thesis of the fallibilism of science: "The history of science is a history of erroneous statements. Yet these erroneous statements which mark the progress of thought have a particular quality: they are productive . . . in the continuous effort of mankind to arrive at objectively valid knowledge" (1944, p. 380). Here ends any similarity between Popper and Fromm. Instead of error elimination, Fromm insists on a "continuous *reinterpretation* of older statements" (*ibid.*, p. 380; Fromm's emphasis).
- 32 Burgess gives references to four such empirical tests disconfirming some of the Freudian statements (1939, p. 366).
- 33 Also see Jay 1996, pp. 86-88.
- 34 See also Robert Jones (1974) on the impact of Freudianism in American sociology, and Neil McLaughlin (1996) on the reception of *Escape*.
- 35 Parsons and Barber go on to say that Fromm's *Escape* figures as a notable attempt to "deal with the national social system as a whole" (1948, p. 255).
- 36 "When we analyze the 'social character' of a society, we are in fact characterizing the emotional problems with which the people are typically faced and which arise out of the institutions and historical traditions of that society" (Bendix 1952, p. 303).
- 37 The circularity of such interpretations is noted also by Lindsmith and Strauss (1950) and by Bendix (1952).
- 38 See, however, Peter Burke who writes, "what Americans call 'psychohistory' goes back considerably further than 1950s and Erik Erikson's famous study of *Young Man Luther*" (1990, p. 11). The scope and creative plenty of psychoanalytic sociology can be seen in Weinstein and Platt's *Psychoanalytic Sociology* (1973), a two-volume collection with a similar title edited by Prager and Rustin (1993), Endleman's *Psyche and Society: Explorations in Psychoanalytic Sociology* (1981), and *Advances in Psychoanalytic Sociology* edited by Rabow et al. (1987).
- 39 See, e.g., Elliot: "The works of social theorists as diverse as Fromm, Marcuse, Althusser, Habermas, Kristeva, Irigaray, Castoriadis, and Lyotard all share a Freudian debt. Yet there can be little doubt that the motivating reason for this turn to Freud among social theorists is as much political as intellectual" (1996, p. 171).
- 40 One may well wonder whether social constructionism pertains solely to criticism of Fromm, or whether McLaughlin's praise of *Escape* as a "social science classic" (1996, p. 259) is also no more than a socially constructed myth.
- 41 Fromm has enjoyed a warm reception far beyond Anglo-American academia. Freud and prominent Freudians—in particular Fromm—have been, for

instance, the most published authors in the post-Soviet countries during the 1990s. Fromm's theoretical impact (or, at the very least, his jargon) is apparent today even in popular press. One can read in authoritative editions that the "wise psychoanalyst Fromm has explained contemporary forced (!) slavery as 'escape from freedom'" (Bal'buov 2003). Another expert assures us of the predictability of the actions of Saddam Hussein because his "is an authoritarian personality of sado-masochistic type" (Stepanov 2003). (Cf. other analysis' claims that, e.g., Saddam Hussein created a system in his country based on his childhood relations with his cruel stepfather [Miller 2004], or that Vladimir Putin's childhood anal fixations inform his current policies [Vaganov 2003].)

Here are probably the most popular sources, in addition to those mentioned before, on Fromm's social scholarship: John Schara (he is quite aware of Fromm's ambiguities and "pervasive ambivalences" [1961, p. 7], though his own account may perhaps also be described so [see the epigraph to §5]); Martin Brinbach (1961) on psychoanalytic applications in social theory; Guyton Hammond (1965), Stanley Glen (1965), and Svante Lundgren (1998) deal with Fromm's account of religions. A collection celebrating Fromm in Landis and Tauber contains Isaac Asimov's acceptance of Fromm's thesis of automatization (1971, p. 263), and the editors' praise of Fromm's precision (*ibid.*, p. 1). Also see Rainer Funk (1982) and his illustrated biography of Fromm (2000); Marcus and Tar (1984); Knapp (1989); Burston (1991); and, finally, Bernstein's comprehensive six-volume examination of the Frankfurt school (1994; Vols. 4 and 5 pertain especially to Fromm).

- 42 This is from *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis* (cited from "Social Psychology as a Combination of Psychoanalysis and Historical Materialism" in Fromm 1994). This antinomy of affinity and difference should be called "dialectical." Fromm extensively resorts to the "dialectical method" when he suspects the reader is misunderstanding, e.g., the difficulty in realization of the two sides of freedom exists "because we think in non-dialectical terms and are prone to doubt whether two contradictory trends can result simultaneously from one cause" (1964, p. 104).
- 43 See *The Dogma of Christ and Other Essays on Religion, Psychology, and Culture* (cited from "The Approach to a Psychoanalytic Social Psychology" in Fromm 1994).

44 "[I]t is . . . a thoroughly empirical method, based on painstaking observation of an individual's uncensored thoughts, dreams, and phantasies" (Fromm 1964, p. 136).

45 Apart from our universal biological needs, "those drives which make for the *differences* in men's character, like love and hatred, the lust for power and the yearning for submission, the enjoyment of sensuous pleasure and the fear of it, are all products of the social process" (Fromm 1964, p. 12).

46 "What are the social conditions upon which such psychological conditions are based?" (*ibid.*, p. 7).

47 For this purpose, supplementary notions are employed: dynamic psychology, two types of adaptation, one's character malleability, etc.

48 Fromm seems not to question the long-term intercultural connection and the analogy between transcendental non-anthropomorphic Protestant God and the Nazi Führer.

49 "The mode of capitalistic production made man an instrument for supra-personal economic purposes, and increased the spirit of asceticism and individual insignificance for which Protestantism had been the psychological preparation" (Fromm 1964, p. 113). (It may also be worth mentioning that fascism emerged as a regime initially in Catholic Italy.) Fromm realizes at this point that "this thesis, however, conflicts with the fact that modern man seems to be motivated not by an attitude of sacrifice and asceticism, but, on the contrary, by an extreme degree of egotism and by the pursuit of self-interest" (*ibid.*). This empirical in-character conflict is being "resolved" by another complex typology of "love," "self-love," "object," "hatred," "selfishness," etc., interpreted in psychoanalytic machinery and diverse philosophical views (*ibid.*, pp. 113-16).

50 This syllogism is similar to that given by Plato, when he established the three-part structure of the best state on the basis of the three-part structure of the human soul.

51 Then the question arises, is there any use for the neurotic-normal distinction? Fromm again catalogues: a person may be called "normal" if (1) he or she "is able to fulfill the social role he is to take in that given society"; (2) "we look upon health or normalcy as the optimum of growth and happiness of the individual" (*ibid.*, p. 138). From this we may well conclude that people normal in both senses actively participated in the authoritarian regimes too; e.g., as extremely "functional" Gestapo interrogators and happy family persons. Simply speaking, the connection between one's neurotic character and totalitarian inclinations is not apparent.

52 "This terminology is justifiable because the sado-masochistic person is always characterized by his attitude toward authority" (*ibid.*, p. 164).

53 Here Fromm shows one of the main features of his method which is performed by "dynamic concepts." "The term [sado-masochistic] is used here in the dynamic sense. . . . Since Freud assumed that the basic motivating forces are sexual ones, he arrived at concepts like 'oral,' 'anal,' or 'genital' characters. If one does not share this assumption, one is forced to devise [etc.] different character types. But the dynamic concept remains the same" (1964, p. 163). Fromm seems to be preoccupied with a false dilemma here; the fragment is notable also because a psychoanalytic, too, is subject to the influence of forces.

54 We can easily interpret in terms of sado-masochistic (striving for domination-submission) characters social and psychological relationships, for example, in medieval Europe, especially where what is called "feudal society" was the predominant form. These interrelations and interactions within the layered social hierarchy were not merely economic and legal; they were impossible without the reinforcement by the strong psychological sanctions for personal loyalty

and governance (e.g., the responsibilities of feudal lords and the moral code of chivalry). If we decide to call this psychological feudal framework sado-masochistic, then it is no less sado-masochistic than that of 1930s Germany. The point is that even when feudal societies experienced periods of economic, political, and psychological crises, they did not end up in totalitarian regimes—the invention of the twentieth century.

55 “[We] can consider only certain individuals and social groups as typically sado-masochistic” (Fromm 1964, pp. 173-74).

56 That is, depending on our whim, anything can be interpreted as destructiveness; the ways of hidden forces are inscrutable. E.g., “If for any reason other persons cannot become the object of an individual’s destructiveness, his own self easily becomes the object. When this happens in a marked degree, physical illness is often the result and even suicide may be attempted” (ibid., p. 180). For that reason, one may claim that Fromm’s “destructiveness” and “authoritarianism” blend completely in this respect. For instance, if you want to become a Nazi party member (out of your sado-masochistic strivings, i.e., your wish to submit and dominate), you, at the same time, want to destroy some people, classes, system, at a pinch yourself in the struggle for the idea. As one can see, it is all about our interpretative inclination. After all, is Fromm’s own striving—“we want to fight Fascism”—a sober and independent position, or is it his destructiveness? Is his book a result of the actual wish to dominate (say, intellectually)? Or is it a striving to submit to a hidden force? I do not see how, or why, Fromm should be freed from his own interpretative practice.

57 The view, held by the Frankfurt schoolmen or, e.g., by the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset, that people at the turn of the twentieth century became “automatons,” or “mass-people,” etc., is not accurate, but rather politically laden (the theorists’ remedies are usually elitist and/or Marxist in character). The large-scale introduction of electronic mass-media in the 1920s-1930s intensified cultural exchange, which, however, did not lead automatically and exclusively to a greater unification of people. Another side of this phenomenon was, e.g., a wider scope of cultural diversification and dynamism (something, by the way, that cultural anti-globalists tend to neglect). It is strange how such a dialectician as Fromm misses other aspects of the issue.

58 Say, “a general assumption that most men marry voluntarily” is just wrong, for they merely think that they want to get married, whereas “actually” it is a trap resulting from “a sequence of events”, for they do not know their real “psychological motivations” which would be open only to a trained analyst. As well as it is a “great illusion” to think that if one is not forced to do something, she or he does it by one’s own decision (Fromm 1964, pp. 195-201).

59 “The thought that is the result of active thinking is always new and original in the sense that the person who thinks has used thinking as a tool to discover something new in the world, outside or inside himself” (ibid., p. 195). This rare and modest thinker, one has to assume, makes his discoveries exclusively inside others.

60 Fromm is perfectly right about the affinity between his versions of Freudism and Marxism. Marxists too believed that the true self-consciousness has to be given to the working class from the outside, given or prescribed by those who could see it for the class members.

61 Elsewhere, Fromm, trying to monopolize his interpretation of Freud, expresses a deep concern about “great dangers in the development of certain trends in psychoanalysis which . . . relinquish with the errors also the most valuable parts of Freud’s teaching: his scientific method, his evolutionary concept, his concept of the unconscious as a truly irrational force” (1965, p. viii); “a truly irrational force” is perhaps a compliment. What is more, “there is a danger that psychoanalysis loses another fundamental trait of Freudian thinking, the courage to defy common sense and public opinion” (ibid., p. viii). The danger was overestimated.

62 “Nazism is a psychological problem, but the psychological factors themselves have to be understood as being molded by socio-economic factors; Nazism is an economic and political problem, but the hold it has over a whole people has to be understood on psychological grounds” (ibid., p. 208).

63 “The decline of the old social symbols of authority like monarchy and state affected the role of the individual authorities, the parents. [This connection is not explained in the text.] . . . [T]he younger generation felt superior to their elders and could not take them, and their teachings, quite seriously any more. . . . The economic decline of the middle class deprived the parents of their economic role as backers of the economic future of their children” (ibid., p. 215).

64 E.g.: “In the postwar period it was the middle class . . . that was threatened by monopolistic capitalism. Its anxiety and thereby its hatred were aroused; it moved into a state of panic and was filled with a craving for submission to as well as domination over those who were powerless” (ibid., p. 219).

65 Nazism in general is a tool “in the struggle for the economic and political aims of German imperialism” (ibid., p. 221).

66 Fromm also regarded Hitler as a gifted spontaneous analyst: “Hitler himself is very much aware of the conditions which make for the longing for submission” (ibid., p. 223). While Hitler’s craving for domination is more notable, his striving for submission is found mainly in the wish “to obey Nature’s power,” whatever this might mean.

67 The idea that democracy is another form of escape is developed later on in Fromm’s *The Sane Society*: “I try to show that life in twentieth-century Democracy constitutes in many ways another escape from freedom” (1965, p. x).

68 This is another source of the current psychological appeal of *Escape*. Accentuation of idiosyncrasy, and the shift from actions and responsibility to psychological peculiarity, have tacit apologetic implications: any action can easily turn out to be a mere “disease.” The didactic convenience of this approach is obvious: since I am something—a “character type”—my actions will at the very least have prominent historical prototypes (even if I am nothing).

- 69 I have, perhaps, entered into hermeneutic games; I am afraid they are almost inevitable if we are to discuss Fromm seriously.
- 70 E.g., the economic crisis of 1929 did not produce similar mass ideologies and regimes either in the U.S. or in most European countries. Numerous historical examples exist of similar crisis conditions resulting in liberal and other non-fascist scenarios. Developments upon the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw bloc have shown completely different scenarios; we have no grounds to assume that the number of "sado-masochists" in the post-Soviet countries varies as radically as the directions of these countries.
- 71 The allusion being to Erich M. Remarque's novel *Three Comrades*.
- 72 As Alan Sokal famously wrote, "I'm a leftist (and feminist) because of evidence and logic, not in spite of it" (Sokal 1996, p. 64). He writes elsewhere: "I'm an unabashed Old Leftist who never quite understood how deconstruction was supposed to help the working class" (Sokal and Bricmont 1998, p. 269).
- 73 Cf. Popper: "As regards *auxiliary hypotheses* we propose to lay down the rule that only those are acceptable whose introduction does not diminish the degree of falsifiability or testability of the system in question, but, on the contrary, increases it" (1992, p. 83).
- 74 The question was suggested by Prof. Hattiangadi.
- 75 I am indebted to Professors Jagdish Hattiangadi and Ian C. Jarvie at York University and to the anonymous referees for this journal for reading earlier drafts of this article and for their criticisms. My thanks also go to David McKim (Centre for Academic Writing, York University) and to Roberta Gerwing (*Dialogue*) who improved the English and made the text more readable.

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