

ERICH FROMM SOCIETY OF NORTH AMERICA
Second Biennial Conference 2026

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Arranged panel by panel

8 – 10 October 2026
Teachers College, Columbia University · New York

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Day 1 — Thursday, 8 October 2026

PARALLEL SESSION 1 · TRACK A · 12:45 - 2:45 PM · HORACE MANN 138

The Authoritarian Character Revisited

Robert M. Cutler · Naomi Janowitz · KC Boismier, Tony Puddephatt

Robert M. Cutler

Waterloo Institute for Complexity and Innovation, University of Waterloo

Disindividuation and the Authoritarian Character: Fromm, Klein, and Simondon

Erich Fromm's earlier concept of the authoritarian character clarifies the present crisis of democracy when read through Gilbert Simondon's theory of individuation and Melanie Klein's account of formative relational life. The later literature on "authoritarian personality" and trait measurement is not at issue here. The concern is with a socially produced orientation toward certainty, conformity, and control that culminates in a preference for externally stabilized order, including in democratic conditions that can themselves generate a wish for relief through submission. Under contemporary technical mediation, alienation is best understood as disindividuation: blockage in the co-formation of judgment, relation, and agency. Fromm's critique of alienation remains powerful, but it leaves technics under-theorized, often treating technology as context or instrument rather than as a constitutive condition of subject-formation. Klein sharpens the psychic side of the problem by clarifying how dependence, anxiety, and defensive organization emerge within formative relational matrices. Simondon extends the analysis by treating technics as a milieu of individuation rather than as external context or mere instrument. Alienation then appears not as estrangement from an original essence but as interruption in the processes through which psychic, social, and technical domains co-individuate. This reframing shifts alienation from loss of authenticity to failure of transduction across the milieus that sustain becoming. In this reframing, platformed and protocol-governed forms of mediation organize interaction through conditions that subjects do not co-shape. The result is practical passivity under the appearance of activity and participation. At the cognitive level, instrumental reason reinforces this closure by coordinating conduct within prefabricated logics rather than opening judgment. Democratic erosion appears not only as institutional breakdown and ideological polarization, but also as damage to the processes through which subjects form political judgment, sustain shared reality, and tolerate uncertainty. Under such conditions, externally stabilized certainty can be experienced as relief. Fromm's authoritarian character regains explanatory force at that point. A non-authoritarian democratic response depends not on stripping away mediation but on reorganizing it.

Naomi Janowitz

University of California-Davis

Is the Revolutionary Character a Match for the Authoritarian Personality?

Given the crisis unfolding in the United States, much attention has been given to the Authoritarian Personality. First outlined by Fromm and the Frankfurt School, it is used to

express the popularity of Trump among American citizens. Only psychology can explain the willingness of the Authoritarian's followers to patronize a domination-seeking person in exchange for participating in his power. Less well-known is Fromm's concept of a Revolutionary Character even though it offers insight into opposition to authoritarianism (1955). On this topic, perhaps the most important facing the United States today, Fromm begins with the seemingly self-contradictory idea that a Revolutionary Character does not lead a revolution. Revolutionaries are too likely simply to replace one form of rigid authority with another. Instead, Revolutionary Characters are independent and free, especially from political authorities (1955, 154). The path towards freedom outlined by Freud with the resolution of the Oedipus complex is expanded into a final overcoming of the residual Father figure. Disobedience to this Father is the core action as Fromm returns to the Garden of Eden and Eve's disobedience in choosing to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. From that point an individual says No to an authority based on saying Yes to some other set of values that motivate her. Fromm's psychological model helps explain what is unfolding in the streets of America. In Minneapolis, individuals are not leading any familiar form of Revolution. Instead, they are saying No to authoritarianism and Yes to helping their neighbors in small actions which, due to the nature of an authoritarian system, put their lives at risk. Political scientists predict the percentage of the population needed to fell an authoritarian government, but it is Fromm's model that gives insight into oppositional individuals. On an optimistic note, Fromm called upon psychologists, stating that "they must themselves be revolutionary characters" (1955, 166) in the belief that these individuals can indeed outlast and outwit authoritarians.

Fromm, Erich. 1955. *The Dogma of Christ and Other Essays on Religion, Psychology and Culture*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

KC Boismier and Tony Puddephatt

University of Manitoba

Symbolic Interaction in Authoritarian Times: A Frommadian Synthesis

The symbolic interactionist (SI) tradition has been criticized for having an overly optimistic view of human development within democratic society. As we see an increasing trend toward authoritarian and fascist movements globally, it becomes especially important to foster a more critical theoretical framework for SI. Introducing Erich Fromm to SI allows for the exploration of new research questions that dig deeper into structural conditions and how they interact with unconscious emotional drives. We compare the social psychology of Fromm to the intellectual precursor of Symbolic Interactionism, G.H. Mead, and consider how to creatively combine their approaches. This "Frommadian" synthesis is not without challenges, so we consider this combination in a way that is logically consistent while still being true to the source material. We present this integrated model with the hope that it might inspire new research questions as we strive to understand the processes of ideological recruitment across social contexts.

PARALLEL SESSION 1 · TRACK B · 12:45 - 2:45 PM · HORACE MANN 144

Authoritarianism in Practice: Comparative Case Studies

Amihan April C. Mella-Alcazar · Matheus Romanetto · Daniel F. Davis

Amihan April C. Mella-Alcazar

Urdaneta City University

Duterte's "War on Drugs" in the Philippines as an Expression of Nazism from the Frommian Perspective

March 3, 2025 came as a surprise to many Filipinos, when former Philippine President Rodrigo Roa Duterte returned from Hongkong and was arrested. The arrest was implemented by the Philippine National Police based on a red notice from the INTERPOL, upon the request of the International Criminal Court. He was immediately whisked to The Hague, where he has been in detention henceforth. The reversal of fortune for the former head of state was a denouement nobody could have anticipated. He was the patriarch of a political dynasty. Duterte was the seven-time former mayor of Davao City, the Philippines' third largest metropolis. He was Philippine President from 2016 to 2022. His reputation as a former prosecutor preceded him as a formidable character. As Davao City Mayor, the city had a reputation of being the "safest city" in the Philippines. It was also during those years that the rumor about the formation of a so-called "Davao Death Squad" (DDS) came into the public consciousness. The DDS liquidated drug users and pushers, and political opponents of the Dutertes. During the campaign period, he vowed to eradicate the drug menace in six months' time. What occurred was a "war on drugs" that lasted his whole term of office. The estimated number of victims who died during his six-year term was around 30,000, although official police reports indicate 6,000. The "extra-judicial killings" justification was that the victims were killed out of self-defense by law enforcement agents. Currently, Mr. Duterte is facing at the ICC "three (3) counts of murders and attempted murders, although the actual scale of victimization during the charged period was significantly greater, as reflected in the widespread nature of the attack". The acts are characterized as "crimes against humanity". But in truth, the seeds of "Nazism" were already present in the Philippines, when Mr. Duterte saw the opportunity to bring it forth to fruition. The paper traces the progression of "Nazism" and its manifestations in the Philippines, as expounded by Erich Fromm in *Escape from Freedom*.

Matheus Romanetto

University of Kansas

One of a kind: familial character and political conflict in Brazil

Erich Fromm pioneered the study of relations between social character and political orientation, as part of the team which wrote "The working class in Weimar Germany". One of the study's central findings was that a majority of the working-class population didn't display clear-cut authoritarian or democratic character orientations, but rather fell in-between. Aspects of the same conclusion reappear in Fromm and Maccoby's "Social character in a Mexican village", as well as other Frankfurt school analyses of politics and personality, such as Pollock et al.'s "Gruppenexperiment", and Adorno et al.'s "The authoritarian personality". The abundance of mixed character formations in empirical data – not only at the individual level, but also at the social and statistical one – poses important theoretical and methodological problems for the study of political dynamics.

This presentation explores the importance of mixed character formations with reference to a particular type of structure: contradictions between individual and social character, and their implications for political conflict, as they are observed in familial conflicts over

politics in Brazil. Drawing from 100 hours of depth interviews and ethnographic observations in São Paulo and Brasília, it argues that individual variations over a shared nucleus of character traits are one of the vehicles for political estrangement in the family. Conflicts between kin explode not only where one finds deep differences in character orientation – but also, and especially, where individual character implies different relations to, and defenses against, a common unconscious orientation. The argument is illustrated with reference to three cases: (i) a middle-class family with progressive members, in which one of the sons turns to Neonazism; (ii) a working-class family in which a far-left daughter eventually persuades her sister to abandon conservative religion; (iii) a fisherman's family in which each of three brothers ends up in a distinct position of the political spectrum: far-left, center, and far-right.

Daniel F. Davis

Oxford Brookes University

Social Character, the Crises of Democracy, and the Rise of Right-Wing Populism

Erich Fromm's death in 1980 aligned with the beginning of great political changes across the globe. In the USA and the UK the so called 'neoclassical/neoliberal counter revolution' had begun its first phase with its ruthless war against workers' unions. It then continued with an agenda to privatise public services, deregulate the financial sector, globalise production, and withdraw the welfare-state. These changes altered many individuals' relationships to society, and their interpersonal relations to others and to themselves. They also, I claim, led to an alteration in social character. Although the psychological basic-striving of the marketing social character, to 'sell-oneself' continued to exist, the need to adopt a more alienated, narcissistic, and marketized 'sense-of-self', extended beyond the social requirements of the era of social democracy. The dynamic adaption to, what I call, a new hyper-marketing orientation, was not just set by direct political agenda. It was also facilitated and packaged in the 'feel-good', loner-against-the world films of the 1980s/90s, and, what Owen Jones describes as the 'self-worth'/you're worth it' propaganda of mass advertising. The necessity of 'individual-responsibility' soon transformed into normalised narcissism. With the consensual validation of the hyper-marketing social character, neoliberalism could be reproduced and was cemented in political consensus. This was further legitimised in the mainstream when Francis Fukuyama infamously expressed, we had entered the 'end of history'. Drawing on the works of Neil Postman, politics became vacuous, and was reduced to a marketized spectacle of entertainment. In the 21st century, confused, alienated, and narcissistic individuals began to seek answers to why, particularly after the 2008 financial crisis, their lives had become insecure, unequal and lacked meaning. Long held impotency, and fear, turned to compensatory aggression and a striving for authoritarian 'escape-mechanisms'. In the USA, Donald Trump embodied a group-level appeal of narcissism that had become normalised over many decades of neoliberalism. He also offered a simple means to offload blame and anger onto minority groups. My paper details how the neoliberal consensus, and the inherent narcissism of the hyper-marketing social character has causal links to the rise of right-wing populism, and the crises of democracy today.

PARALLEL SESSION 1 · TRACK C · 12:45 - 2:45 PM · HORACE MANN 150**Frommian Approaches to Clinical Practice Today***Sean G. Meggeson · Jeffrey Sacks · Plamen Minchev***Sean G. Meggeson***Independent Scholar***Contemporary Psychoanalysis as an Escape from Freedom: Empathy, Risk, and Social Conformity in Clinical Practice**

This paper revisits Erich Fromm's critique of psychoanalysis in *The Crisis of Psychoanalysis*, focusing on his claim in Chapter One that the analytic encounter often devolves into a tacit collusion between analyst and patient, whereby both parties avoid psychic risk. Fromm argues that, rather than fostering transformation, this dynamic stabilizes existing defenses: the patient remains protected from unsettling insights, while the analyst preserves professional comfort and authority. This paper extends Fromm's critique into the contemporary psychoanalytic landscape, suggesting that current emphases on performative empathy and affective attunement risk reproducing this same collusive structure under a more humanistic guise. In prioritizing the patient's sense of safety above all, the analyst may inadvertently foreclose the dialectical tension—between safety and risk, interpretation and conflict—necessary for genuine psychic change. This paper further contends that this “analytic cowardice” has broader social implications. Drawing on Fromm's concept of “escape from freedom,” it argues that psychoanalysis can function as a site where individuals seek refuge from the burdens of autonomy and responsibility. Within this framework, the analytic relationship becomes a mutually reinforcing arrangement in which the patient avoids confronting freedom, and the analyst, incentivized both economically and institutionally, accommodates this avoidance. Psychoanalysis thus risks becoming not a means toward liberation, but a form of “therapy from freedom.” Democracy has not and does not stand to benefit from this avoidant stance. Methodologically, this paper employs selective and anonymized clinical vignettes from the author's practice to illustrate forms of analytic engagement that resist this drift toward “escape from freedom,” foregrounding moments in which risk, conflict, and interpretation are sustained rather than prematurely resolved. In response, the paper proposes a reorientation of psychoanalytic practice, calling for a decentering of empathy as a primary clinical virtue, advocating instead for a model grounded in what Fromm and others have called “analytic love”—a form of engaged, risk-bearing commitment to the patient's growth. Such an approach would privilege interpretations that extend beyond inward hermeneutics toward socially situated meanings, fostering not only individual insight but also a renewed capacity for agency, responsibility, and hope.

Jeffrey Sacks*William Alanson White Institute***Ricoeur and Fromm: A hopeful platform for repair of the traumatized global social imaginary**

Ricoeur, a major thinker of the twentieth century, suggests the synthesis between paradoxes or contradiction like logic and the imagination captures a multilevel organizing principle of the interpersonal experience. The interpersonal “miracle of an exchange of roles, between beings that cannot be substituted for each other” offers a field of synthesis of elements of the

public and the private as well as the concordant and discordant. This interdisciplinary “miracle” of exchange of roles, interact, conflict and blend within the private contemporary analytic arena as well as the public global social imaginary. Fromm also offers a hopeful model for mans productive interpretation of the global social imaginary through mutual recognition towards liberation of the self. This conversation or exchange of roles embedded in the longing for belonging and mutual recognition serves as clinical models for potential healing synthesis. The multiplicity of exchange of roles operates simultaneously amongst the self, another and the mythic universal global social imaginary. This mysterious complex milieu offers both enabling as well as disabling transformative discourse between the private or poetic and the public or the rational. ideology and utopia. The privileged clinical interdisciplinary space of healing mutual recognition and wounding misrecognition between alien others creates a working platform of conflict, transformation and change. The altered or enhanced self offers a new voice in the constantly listening or evolving global social imaginary. But this healing “miracle of role reversal”, paradoxically encounters both healing and wounding dimensions or roles of man, within the global social imaginary. Within the enabling and disabling matrix the voices in this conversation geminate between the self, the other and the global social imaginary. Currently a regressive mythopoeic conversation from an all- knowing heroic-trickster and one- person hermeneutics of suspicion dominate the porous field of the global social imaginary. This regressive repudiation of complexity and the alien other represents a treacherous promise of simplicity. This paper offers a clinical case study of role reversal between villain/victim within the private/public spanning three generations as seen through the lenses of both Paul Ricoeur and Erich Fromm. When the private analytic process clarifies a narrative of dystopic-blended roles, then the miracle of transformative mutual recognition offers new voices of several generations, as healers within the family and the public global social Imaginary. These new voices offer hope and possibility and challenge the static regressive trickster hero. Clinically we are facilitating healing alternatives in the ongoing conversation between our patients and their conversation with the challenging global social imaginary.

Plamen Minchev

Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Bulgaria

Am I normal, or how society shapes our understanding of normalcy

The question of who is normal or who is not is so crucial that it has been asked for many centuries. Every human being asks themselves: is what I feel normal, is what I think normal? In ‘The Sane Society’ Erich Fromm (Fromm 1955a) tries to define what a sane society would look like. This is undoubtedly a huge and a very difficult task which he undertakes. Rainer Funk also tries to define how we understand what is sane and what is not (Funk 2006c). More importantly, the concept of social character can give us a good idea how different societies understand sanity. In this respect we will find that the notion of sanity is not entirely the same in every society and at the same time there are many common characteristics. The psychologists must have in mind what the social character of the society or the different groups in it is in order to work properly with their clients. Their task is to create a situation that is not the same as the everyday life in the society, a situation that promotes sanity, that promotes that all feelings can be expressed, that nothing human is alien to me or to you. In order to do this, they must be aware of what is allowed and what is not allowed (i.e. repressed) by the society in terms of feelings, thoughts, etc. To achieve this

task they must have a view about human nature. A view that does not put limits on the human being, that takes into account the specific expressions of being human at a given historical moment and at the same time allows for the expression of something universally human that does not need to correspond to specific social requirements that lead to the repression of all that is not in line with these requirements. Erich Fromm's theory about human nature can help us understand and practically achieve this task.

PARALLEL SESSION 2 · TRACK A · 3:00 - 5:00 PM · HORACE MANN 138

Narcissism, Othering, and the Social Unconscious

Sandra Buechler · Michael Korson, LMFT, CGP · Or Netanel

Sandra Buechler

William Alanson White Institute

Fromm's Views on Group and Individual Narcissism

Narcissism is a potential source of conflict in individual treatment, since therapy inherently values all insight, but narcissism opposes shame inducing insights while accepting gratifying insights. For the narcissist the goal is to feel good about themselves now. Since narcissists feel defined by how they are treated by others, the therapist's behavior, like everyone else's, is taken as a measure of the patient's worth. But treatment has the potential to become an experience in which the truth is valued more than looking good. On a group level, narcissism can have grave consequences. Fromm (1947, p.82) described the problems it poses: "The essence of this over-estimation of one's own position and the hate for all who differ from it is narcissism. 'We' are good; 'they' are evil. 'We' are admirable; they' are despicable. Any criticism of one's own doctrine is a vicious and unbearable attack; criticism of others' position is a well-meant attempt to help them return to the truth." Fromm spelled this out further: "When a man says, 'My country is the most wonderful country, we are better than anyone else' then you can say he is patriotic, loyal, a good citizen, and nobody says he's crazy because it is shared by everybody else. Everybody likes to feel that too, and people of another country like to feel that about their country. When the two get together there is tremendous hate, because each has to preserve the collective narcissism in which he shares with others in the wonderful feeling of his greatness" (Fromm, 1994, p.184). Fromm saw this as at the bottom of most wars. This "othering" of those who don't belong to one's "own" country or group precludes a truly humanistic perspective. Group narcissism narrows our focus. We forfeit the feeling of human solidarity to gain a false sense of superiority. The consequences of narcissism, in individual and group interactions, will be explored using Fromm's insights.

Michael Korson, LMFT, CGP

Psychoanalytic Institute of Northern California

The Other Kind of Othering: A Response to Living with War

While keeping in mind those struggling to survive in war zones today, I contend that all humans are living with war -- a culture extending across borders and shores, reinforcing division, eroding trust, uprooting people from their homes, and sowing fear and devastation. Tracing psychoanalytic thinking about the causes of war, I begin with the Freud-Einstein

correspondence and then consider Fromm's shift from biological drives to social dimensions. Contemporary thinking about the social unconscious brings the internal and external together: groups reside inside the individual as much as individuals make up groups. Rozmarin focuses on belonging, the identities groups provide and the demands (sometimes of violence) they make. I consider Sen's analysis of how singular identity categories foment sectarian violence. At the core of violence and war is the dehumanization of the other. Through projection of unwanted aspects of the self (or of groups), we create the denigrated other to hate or kill. I suggest another kind of othering, generative othering, which recognizes our need for the Other. My concept borrows from Fromm's view that love is not a spontaneous emotion but an active attitude, a practice, that requires discipline, concentration, and patience -- "an orientation of character which determines the relatedness of a person to the world as a whole..." Generative othering is the expression of that attitude. Following Levinas, consideration of the Other forms our basic humanness. I propose a consciousness -- the borderless subject -- that sees the self in multiple identities and belonging to multiple groups. I argue that our shared humanity (which Fromm believed in) is found through our differences, not despite them. Psychoanalysis not only helps develop this perspective, but offers what is needed to interrupt, not merely interpret, dehumanization and foster love. I present two vignettes from an international psychoanalytic conference to illustrate living with war and generative othering.

Or Netanely

Independent Scholar

Social Psychosis: When the Sane Go Mad

This paper revisits Erich Fromm's *The Sane Society* by asking not simply whether Western society is chronically insane, but how overwhelming social ruptures may attack the capacity to be human. We propose social psychosis as a clinical heuristic for moments when the social field becomes disorganizing: shared reality weakens, moral categories destabilize, and thought is flooded by panic, splitting, projection, or deadness. Therapists and patients are immersed in the same shaken field. At times, the therapeutic container inverts—shifting from holding inner chaos to shielding patients from a destabilized outside. We illustrate this through brief clinical situations: During COVID-19, Dina attended sessions from her car, her only private space. The therapist, anxious for his own safety, relied on the screen without fully thinking its impact. The screen became a partition that diluted trust and co-presence. Returning to the office, she was starved for human contact and carried an injury of abandonment. Adam, an activist-therapist, is made to feel crazy for advocating for the planet amid social denial. In his practice, he meets patients outdoors, allowing nature to participate in treatment. Becoming human proceeds through contact with stones, soil, and weather. Ron, a gamer, fell in love through an online game; his virtual wedding felt more real than his in-person relationship, and he left his wife for a partner he had never met. Shared fantasy fostered hyper-attachment while bypassing limits, weakening symbolic depth and mutual recognition. Michael had been ready to end therapy when war broke out. He returned overwhelmed by hateful identifications, moral confusion, and terror. Treatment worked to metabolize these identifications and restore distinctions necessary for mourning and responsibility. We conclude by outlining clinical responses that help restore human capacities within these same situations: working through projective identification and the social unconscious; re-establishing embodied co-presence as a basis for relatedness;

protecting the slow tempo of self discovery; and resisting ideological flattening while recovering moral agency.

We will examine the radically human role of therapy in these circumstances.

PARALLEL SESSION 2 · TRACK B · 3:00 - 5:00 PM · HORACE MANN 144

Political Economy: Liberalism, Socialism, and Their Discontents

Michael J. Thompson · Axel Fair-Schulz · Sally Ly

Michael J. Thompson

William Paterson University

Erich Fromm and the Crisis of Liberalism

Today we are witnessing a crisis of liberal society. The demise of democratic institutions, rising neo-fascism, oligarchic control of wealth and society, as well as a withdrawal from core values of the Enlightenment such as equality, solidarity, and progress all point to an acute change in modern society. In this paper, I will argue that rich Fromm's ideas can help us diagnose this crisis by showing how liberalism ignored during the 20th century the care of the self and its development. Fromm's ideas about psychological individuation, the nature of human relations, and the psychological capacities needed for real democracy point us away from liberalism as a theory of society and politics and toward a democratic socialist paradigm that has yet to be realized.

Axel Fair-Schulz

State University of New York at Potsdam

Erich Fromm and the Lost World of "Real-Existing Socialism": Lessons for Democratic Socialism Today

Erich Fromm criticized both Western capitalist democracies as well as Soviet-style "real existing socialism" as inadequate forms of social, political, and economic organization for humanity. Both systems were, in his mind, unable to overcome the alienation of humans from nature, their own labor, and themselves. My paper focuses on Fromm's critique of Soviet-style state socialism, both as a theory and as political practice. To Fromm, the main purpose of socialism was not only to overcome the unfair distribution of resources and power in society and provide for the material and cultural needs of each individual but to also create the conditions for the formation of "fully developed human beings," as he put it in his book: *The Sane Society*.

As the myriad pathologies and shortcomings of real-existing capitalism are painfully obvious to more and more people, it becomes increasingly important to not only have clarity about what we need to overcome (in capitalism) but what we need to replace capitalism with -- a truly democratic, emancipatory, sustainable, and liberated society. Reexamining Fromm's critique of Soviet-style socialism can help us sharpen our understanding of what the contours of a democratic socialist society could look like.

Sally Ly*York University***Love as Labor: Fromm, Social Reproduction, and the Limits of Love under Capitalism**

This paper reconsiders Erich Fromm's idea of love through Social Reproduction Theory (SRT) to question love - can love exist outside capitalism? Fromm sees love as something we practice, and something that can help people become free. In contrast, Marxist-feminists argue that care, emotions, and intimate relationships are forms of labor that help keep capitalism running. From this perspective, love has already been shaped by the economy from the start. This creates a tension. If love is part of the work that reproduces labor power, then the line between "real" love and exploited labor becomes unclear. This paper argues that we cannot simply assume love is pure or outside capitalism. Instead, we need to ask how it is shaped by everyday life in families, care work, and relationships. By reading Fromm together with Social Reproduction Theory, the paper explores whether love can ever be free from systems of exchange, obligation, and value. It suggests that love is both shaped by capitalism and still holds the possibility for resistance. In the context of the current crisis of democracy, the question of whether love can exist outside capitalist relations becomes a question about the possibility of non-dominating social life.

PARALLEL SESSION 2 · TRACK C · 3:00 - 5:00 PM · HORACE MANN 150**Biophilia, Ecology, and Resistance***Luca Mandara · Nils Bischof · Jeffrey Nall-Bradford***Luca Mandara***Visiting Lecturer at the University of Basilicata***For a critical eco-psychology. Revisiting the Fromm-Marcuse debate**

My aim is to revisit the debate between Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse on the "internal" nature of humans under the light of the recent debate on the "external" non-human nature between two Eco-Marxists: Jason W. Moore and John B. Foster. According to his "relational ontology", Moore states that nature is not an autonomous and external substance, limiting the human action from the "outside"; there is no natural "thing" "before" society and no society "after" nature, but immediately their historical and relational ecology. According to Foster, Moore's view reduces nature to a cultural product, making senseless concepts like "violence on", "destruction of", "liberation of" nature – since there is no nature "before" human action – and celebrating the capacities of capitalism to create always new ecologies from its own crisis, missing the determination of the current crisis which may well be last. In opposition, Foster's dualistic and dialectical approach recognizes both a relative "thingness" to nature and its relative dependence on social action. Likewise, in his review on Freud, Fromm negated the libidinal substantiality of the Ego, to relate its developments to social history. Marcuse, instead, defended the irreducible difference of the Freudian pleasure-oriented and embodied psyche, seeing in it the ground of every present and future "Great Refusal". In the following, I will point just at the methodological premises of both positions. My hypothesis is that Fromm's interpersonal psychology is based on a monistic view which underestimates the relative independence of the action of "nature". On the contrary, Marcuse, who developed dialectically the Freudian dualism, recognized a relative autonomy to nature, irreducible to human will. This is the

theoretical premise of his dialogue with the environmental criticism toward the Promethean productivism of capitalism.

Nils Bischof

Executive Board of the International Erich Fromm Society

Resisting War: Biophilia from the Perspectives of Erich Fromm and Bertrand Russell

In times in which the oldest modern democracy turns towards authoritarianism and war, we must reconsider humanist views on past wars and their impact on social character orientations. This brings us back to a comparison between Erich Fromm's ideals for the conduct of life – especially the love of life – and intellectual thoughts during the first world war. The British founding father of analytic philosophy, Bertrand Russell (1872–1970), famously resisted any military service, went into jail for anti-war statements, and advocated a truly democratic world parliament. Surprisingly, he explicitly calls for a love of life, a biophilic attitude, just like Fromm does. This contribution to the conference examines the beliefs of Russell and Fromm in a synopsis. It illuminates to which degree Erich Fromm was influenced by Russell's writings, and in which points their concepts overlap. From our contemporary standpoint, we thereby find new answers to the question: How should citizens and politicians act to foster democracy and peace?

Jeffrey Nall-Bradford

University of Central Florida

Biophilous Martyrdom: Erich Fromm, Aaron Bushnell, and the Sanity of Radical Protest

In *The Sane Society* (1955), Erich Fromm warned, “The danger of the past was that men became slaves. The danger of the future is that men may become robots.” For all of the sophistication of our machines, one thing they have never done is self-immolate. Since 2023, three people in the United States have self-immolated in protest of what leading human rights groups have determined is a genocide in Gaza. Judged by conventional psychological and political perspective, such persons are “sick,” at best, and their actions misguided. A distinctly Frommian humanistic vision of mental wellness and human excellence challenges such conclusions and holds open the possibility that such people exemplify an underlying excellence similar to that of Socrates, Jesus, and Rabbi Akiba.

Drawing on Fromm's concepts of revolutionary character, biophilia, and biophilous martyrdom, this paper shows the logical inconsistency of honoring prophetic change agents of the past while deeming “ill” those following in their self-sacrificial footsteps. Though many believe that self-immolation is suicide by another name, Fromm's 1967 paper, “Martyrs and Heroes,” in dialogue with a 1966 statement issued by Martin Luther King, Jr. and Thich Nhat Hanh—helps us grasp the difference between those who die because they no longer wish to live and those who sacrifice their own life in the hopes of furthering life. Using the case of U.S. Airman Aaron Bushnell, who self-immolated in February 2024 to protest his government's support for Israel's Gaza campaign, I show that Fromm's framework enables us to differentiate between “loving” life and “clinging” to life. Such an assessment provokes consideration of the possibility that some of those common sense deems most mentally unwell actually exemplify human excellence. Though being sane in a sick society does not require acts of self-sacrifice, neither does it preclude them. A Frommian framework insists that what and how we honor our love of life, truth, reason, and

integrity must be self-determined. At a minimum, Fromm calls into question contemporary “counter-radicalization” frameworks that would have the non-menacing examples of Socrates, early Christian martyrs, Rabbi Akiba, and the Vietnamese Buddhist monks “de-radicalized” rather than honored.

Day 2 — Friday, 9 October 2026

PARALLEL SESSION 3 · TRACK A · 11:15 AM - 1:15 PM · HORACE MANN 138

Organizations, Leadership, and Collective Dynamics

ERICH FROMM STUDY CENTER @ IPU BERLIN

Katrin Voigt · Severin Hornung · Thomas Höge · Christine Unterrainer · Thomas Kühn

Katrin Voigt

International Psychoanalytic University Berlin

Collective Narcissism as a Social Megatrend and Its Implications for a Critical Organizational Psychology

This paper mobilizes Erich Fromm’s concept of collective narcissism as a social-psychological lens for interpreting contemporary crisis dynamics and their implications for organizational cultures and democratic orientations. For Fromm, collective narcissism denotes a compensatory form of identification in which individuals stabilize fragile self-esteem by attaching themselves to an idealized collective that is experienced as superior and worthy of admiration (Fromm 1964). Crucially, this mechanism is not confined to pathological extremes but is embedded in the “normal” functioning of modern societies, particularly under conditions of insecurity, alienation, and perceived loss of control. Building on this premise, the paper argues that contemporary crises—such as economic volatility, ecological threats, socio-political fragmentation, and a climate of uncertainty in the sphere of work due to the ongoing technological transformation—intensify experiences of vulnerability that render collective narcissistic attachments more salient. Organizations, in turn, emerge as key sites in which such dynamics are reproduced and normalized, especially against the backdrop of the high value assigned to work within late modern industrial societies (Fromm, 1941, 1962). Organizational cultures increasingly provide symbolic resources for self-enhancement through narratives of excellence, purpose, and moral superiority. These narratives function as affective stabilizers, compensating for uncertainty while simultaneously masking structural contradictions and inequalities. The paper further examines the implications of these dynamics for democratic orientations within organizations. Collective narcissism tends to privilege homogeneity, affirmation, and loyalty over plurality, critique, and reflexivity. As a result, dissent may be delegitimized as disloyalty, and decision-making processes may shift from deliberative engagement toward moralized or affect-driven forms of alignment. This undermines core democratic principles such as accountability, inclusivity, and the constructive handling of conflict. At the same time, collective narcissism is understood as functionally ambivalent: while it stabilizes subjectivity under crisis conditions, it also constrains the development of more reflexive and democratic organizational forms. The paper concludes by outlining a critical-humanistic perspective that emphasizes the need to render narcissistic dynamics visible and

contestable, thereby fostering organizational cultures that enable critique, tolerate ambivalence, and support non-idealized forms of belonging.

Severin Hornung · Thomas Höge · Christine Unterrainer

International Psychoanalytic University Berlin (IPU Berlin)

The Anatomy of Neoliberal Destructiveness: Anti-Humanist Political-Economic Ideology and Socio-Ecological Polycrisis

Theoretical background and exemplary results on the psycho-political significance of neoliberal ideology in the socio-ecological polycrisis are presented. From the perspective of radical humanism, neoliberalism proliferates socially corrosive political-economic practices of market expansion, deregulation, entrepreneurial freedoms, prioritization of capital interests, and dismantling of welfare states. Simultaneously, it pervades psychological processes, belief systems, and identities, shaping the collective social character. After reviewing foundations of system-justification, political-economic ideologies, and social character theory, exemplary results are reported, pertaining to the ecological climate crisis, the social crisis of eroding civil solidarity, and the political crisis of liberal democracies. Three surveys studies used the neoliberal ideological beliefs questionnaire with sub-dimensions of individualism, competition, and instrumentality. One study examined relationships with system justification, environmental consciousness, climate-protective behavior, and carbon footprint, confirming a detrimental role of neoliberal ideological beliefs. A second study established connections between neoliberal ideological beliefs, moral disengagement, and lacking civic engagement for people seeking refuge. A third explored correlational patterns in neoliberal beliefs, political attitudes, and party preferences, confirming tendencies towards right-wing populism and social dominance orientation. Additionally, interviews among socio-economically disadvantaged groups were conducted for qualitative triangulation. Contradicting their social interests, participants reproduced neoliberal individualism, competition, and instrumentality through meritocratic explanations for poverty, rejection of wealth redistribution, and scapegoating of immigrants. Underlying psychological processes included reduction of cognitive dissonance and appeasement of epistemic and existential motives. Psychodynamics of neoliberal ideology in the polycrisis are highlighted, including self-reinforcing spirals, corrosion of transformative capacities, and a xenophobic authoritarian turn. Implications for societal, organizational, and individual transformation are discussed, contrasting destructive and productive forms of social relatedness underlying anti-humanist neoliberal ideology and corresponding humanist ideals.

Thomas Kühn

International Psychoanalytic University Berlin (IPU Berlin)

Any Revolution of Hope? Transformative Leadership as Normative Identity Work in Democratic Crisis

Contemporary debates on the crisis of democracy often focus on institutional change or polarization. From a political-psychological perspective, however, the problem can be reformulated as a question of how individuals and groups orient themselves toward freedom, authority, and responsibility, and how these orientations are formed, stabilized, or unsettled under conditions of insecurity and social contradiction. Revisiting Erich Fromm's

Escape from Freedom and his concept of social character, this paper examines how such tensions are processed in everyday practices of relating to others and to oneself. To analyze these processes, the paper introduces normative identity work as a central conceptual lens. Normative identity work refers to the ongoing negotiation of how to act and make sense of oneself under contested or shifting conditions. Democratic orientations, from this perspective, are not given but continuously produced, stabilized, or unsettled in situated processes in which individuals and collectives work on their positioning. Within this framework, transformative leadership is conceptualized as a particular form of normative identity work. Leadership is thus not approached as an individual attribute but as a social practice that shapes how tensions between autonomy and dependence are taken up in concrete contexts. In this sense, leadership becomes analytically relevant where it structures how orientations toward authority are enacted and how responsibility is assumed or displaced. Conceptually, the paper links this perspective to Fromm's notion of social character by specifying how historically shaped patterns of orientation are enacted and potentially reworked in processes of identity work. The heuristic of agency, belonging, and coherence serves to analyze how these processes unfold across different contexts. Revisiting Fromm's idea of a "Revolution of Hope," hope is understood as a capacity to sustain engagement with tension rather than foreclose it. In this sense, the paper contributes to the conference theme by specifying the crisis of democracy as a problem of psychosocial mediation across levels of social reality. Rather than locating the crisis primarily in institutional breakdown or ideological division, it becomes visible in the ways in which orientations toward freedom and authority are formed, stabilized, or unsettled in ongoing processes of identity work. This perspective clarifies how democratic life depends on practices that keep tensions workable, and how leadership contexts become sites in which such practices are shaped, negotiated, and often held in tension.

PARALLEL SESSION 3 · TRACK B · 11:15 AM - 1:15 PM · HORACE MANN 144

Social Character, Socialization, and Political-Emotional Mobilization

ERICH FROMM STUDY CENTER @ IPU BERLIN

Niclas O'Donnoké · Michael Kubsda · Gavin Sullivan

Niclas O'Donnoké

Erich Fromm Study Center, IPU Berlin

The Agency of Society: Familial Negotiations and Relational Forms as Sites of Psychic Socialization in Crisis-Stricken Democracies

This contribution argues that Erich Fromm's concept of the family as the psychological agency of society offers a precise framework for understanding how crises of democracy are mediated in everyday life. Its central thesis is that democratic crisis cannot be understood adequately at the level of institutions, ideology, or political discourse alone, because it is also negotiated in the intimate relations through which subjects are formed. From this perspective, the family becomes a privileged social field in which social demands, conflicts, and contradictions are translated into durable orientations of feeling, perception, and action. The argument begins with Fromm's theory of social character formation. It takes seriously his claim that education is not merely the transmission of

explicit norms, but a process through which socially required orientations become anchored in the personality. On this basis, the contribution shows that familial relations are crucial not simply because parents communicate values, but because children are bound to them through attachment, imitation, and the desire for recognition. Social expectations are therefore not encountered as abstract rules. They are experienced in concrete, embodied relationships, in recurring affective situations, and in the atmosphere of everyday life. Against a purely functionalist reading the contribution insists that this process is marked by tension and contradiction. Family life is shaped by competing demands, temporal dislocations, intergenerational conflict, and ambivalent attachments. It is therefore not only a medium of social reproduction but also a site in which wider social and psychological antagonisms are negotiated in lived form. This perspective makes contemporary democratic crisis more graspable at the level of everyday life. It allows us to ask how authoritarian desire, declining trust in democratic participation, pressures of ecological and economic adaptation, and new forms of political polarization are registered within familial relations and negotiated between generations.

Michael Kubsda

Alice Salomon Vocational College; University Duisburg-Essen

The emotional world of modern humans and the propaganda strategies of authoritarian agitators

In every country of the modern world, anti-democratic and authoritarian parties and political movements are attracting more and more people. It is striking that anti-democratic agitators do not convince their followers through reasoning, as they lack substantively meaningful concepts. Instead, they appeal to people's emotions and passions and thereby winning them over. Their speeches target people's emotions and longings. In doing so, they target two very different groups of emotions: on the one hand, negative feelings such as fear, anger, rage, powerlessness, shame, hatred, and envy. On the other hand, positive feelings of longing for security, safety, pride, significance, and identity. Fromm's interdisciplinary theory can explain the highly contradictory feelings of modern humans: Negative feelings such as fear, anger, hatred, powerlessness, and envy arise from character orientations prevalent in a globalized and digitized industrial society: the exploitative character orientation, the marketing character orientation, and the ego-oriented character. The longing for positive feelings, such as identity, community, security, and a sense of belonging, arises from unmet basic human needs. Anti-democratic agitators target these conflicting human emotions with their rhetoric and achieve four things: First, these strong emotions create a close emotional bond between people and the

agitator. He gives people the feeling that he is very close to them and truly understands them. Second, these strong emotions prevent people from reflecting on the real causes of the problems, and they forget to address and demand their own interests. Third, the real causes of the problems are not discussed; instead, certain groups are blamed and made into scapegoats. Fourth, by addressing people as a group, the agitator manages to create a form of group narcissism that gives the individual the feeling of being in the right. Democratically minded people must not leave the realm of emotions, passions, and desires to the anti democrats and their manipulations, but must actively make feelings, desires, and passions the subject of objective discussions and democratic politics.

Gavin Sullivan*International Psychoanalytic University Berlin***Grievances, Resentment and Ressentiment in Fromm's 1929 to 1933 Weimar Germany 'Workers and employees on the eve of the Third Reich' study**

Background. The questionnaire study of workers and employees led by Erich Fromm and conducted by Hilda Weiss was one of the first examples of a questionnaire-based social research in the early twentieth century. A further innovation was to use ideas from Marxism and psychoanalysis to inform the design of the questionnaire and the analysis of the responses (Brunner, 1994). Despite loss of approximately half of the original 1100 handwritten questionnaire responses when Fromm, Weiss and colleagues in Frankfurt emigrated due to the Nazi threat, the study was published by Bonns (1980, 1984) as a predominantly quantitative analysis. Contemporary research on the appeal of authoritarian actors and groups has focused on right-wing authoritarianism (), collective shame (Scheff, 2018), types of resentment (e.g., Groll/Grudge; Neckel, 2023), ressentiment (ter Braak, 1937/2018), the the potentially important roles of repression and social sharing (Salmela & Capelos, 2021; Capelos, Salmela, & Krisciunaite, 2022), and related issues of collective identity (e.g., collective narcissism, group pride, reactionism; Capelos et al., 2024; populism; Obradović et al., 2020; empowerment; Drury et al. 2020.).

Purpose and Method. In this paper, I draw upon developments in qualitative research to outline current work to undertake a reflexive thematic and affective practices re-analysis of condensed and longer responses to open questions (e.g., How can future wars be avoided?).

Results. Building on the published analysis (Bonss, 1980, 1984) of political orientations in which it was concluded that most workers in the Weimar republic were ambivalent or authoritarian specifically in relation to the rise of Hitler and the NSDAP, this reexamination shows the impact of combined grievances about war reparations, capitalism, income inequality, and "stolen enjoyment". The interpretation of these early findings is clarified via connections with the existing literature and contrasting with the "ego-weakness" features (McAfee, 2024) of the "anti-social triad of grievance politics" model (Capelos et al., 2024).

Conclusions. Implications for contemporary research on disaffection with politics and right and left-wing forms of populism are outlined including the enduring value of a Frommian social-relational psycho-analytical approach for contemporary theories and studies of grievance and ressentiment.

PARALLEL SESSION 3 · TRACK C · 11:15 AM - 1:15 PM · HORACE MANN 150**Fromm in Dialogue: Intellectual Histories***Nick Braune · Eric Oberle · Sam Boyles***Nick Braune***Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, South Texas College***Why was Philosopher Ruth Nanda Anshen so Attracted to Fromm's Humanism and Hope?**

Ruth Nanda Anshen knew Erich Fromm's work, having written an insightful five-page book review of *Man for Himself* for *The Philosophical Review* in 1948, and having included two Fromm essays in her late-40s book on the family. Later, Anshen published Fromm's *Art of Loving* in her *World Perspectives* series. Although philosophy was narrow

in the 1950s, she was ready for the topic. Interestingly, she also would bring into her series another book on “the philosophy of love” – by Martin D’Arcy, S.J.: *The Meeting of Love and Knowledge*. Her series published “only those spiritual and intellectual leaders” who find a “common humanity more fundamental than any unity of dogma.” With a doctorate in philosophy, Anshen, who studied under and collaborated with Alfred North Whitehead, worked with a project to unite the “sciences” (a wide use of the term), a project connected to Columbia University. She planned and edited the *World Perspectives* books. In 1977 when Fromm’s *To Have or to Be* came out, readers saw Anshen’s eleven-page introduction about the *World Perspectives* series. The series began with French “personalist” Catholic philosopher, Jacques Maritain, followed by many prominent writers: Moses Hadas, Paul Tillich, Georg Lukacs, Mircea Eliade, Raymond Aron, etc. It is interesting that of the 55 books in Anshen’s series, there were 49 different writers; but four books by Fromm! *Art of Loving*, *Sigmund Freud’s Mission*, *Revolution of Hope* and *To Have or To Be*. This paper will show how Ruth Nanda Anshen saw in Fromm’s writing a common pursuit. Fromm, in a criticism of Positivism says: “Something was missing in the celebration of the ‘new science’ [coming out of the Enlightenment, I presume] and there appeared the danger that the values which in Europe were anchored in the theistic frame of reference would be lost.” Religion was about the only system which incorporated trans-survival needs, needs expressed in art like painting, sculpture, music, dance, and mythology...all important for human existence, but beyond just food and shelter-like needs. I will show that philosopher Ruth Nanda Anshen also reflects this view and is looking for people, like Fromm, who can counter Positivism.

Eric Oberle

Arizona State University

The Knowledge-Love Problem and the Idea of Modern Interdisciplinarity in Fromm’s Works

Fromm’s concept of personality—its autotelic capacity, as well as its potential pathologies—is rooted in a modern, interdisciplinary theory of sociology and psychology. Mediating this relation, however, is a meditation on life, structured by the phenomenological notion of *Leben* and the existentialist concept of disclosure or revelation in substantive reason, itself anchored in a mixture of biblical-hermeneutic theories and classical virtue theory. This paper attempts to discern a systematic intent within Fromm’s writings on the question of the social substance of knowledge, in order to see whether it can serve as a model for understanding his relation to key exponents of the Frankfurt School: Adorno, Marcuse, Horkheimer, and Benjamin. Exploring, for example, Fromm’s concept of biophilia in terms of Plato’s concept of *areté*—a word translated variously as virtue, excellence, or “an art of disclosing knowledge hidden in things”—I address how Fromm’s concept of education contains a preference for ontic, ancient, and elemental aspects of a theory of knowledge (e.g., the idea of love of particular things) over modern, Pragmatist models. This, in turn, points toward a critique of certain modern doctrines (e.g., Weber’s and Horkheimer’s emphasis on the distinction between instrumental and value rationality). In this way, the paper seeks to contribute to an understanding of Fromm’s theory of character and selfhood not just as a model for *Bildung* in the educational sense, but as something that stands in tension with *Bildung*’s social-democratic purposiveness.

Sam Boyles*Independent Scholar***The Other Psychoanalysts**

Fromm occupies an interesting place in psychoanalytic history, insofar as he is critical of what he calls “Freud’s authoritarianism” while also pursuing the psychoanalytic project. This distanciation from Freud is not new, and in many ways can be viewed as the basis for conceptual innovations in psychoanalysis, going back to the early days of Stekel, Adler, and Jung, and their removal from the inner circle. My paper proposes a structural reading of this type of positioning in relation to Freud, both in its antagonistic and creative elements. It explores the early forms of othering, as well as what is at stake when this movement is repeated in critique, insofar as it serves a symbolic purpose in relation to the psychoanalytic father.

PARALLEL SESSION 3 · TRACK D · 11:15 AM - 1:15 PM · HORACE MANN 148**Education, Embodiment, and Liberation***Samuel Mendonça · Shapel Monique LaBorde · Uzma Chowdhury***Samuel Mendonça***Pontifical Catholic University of Campinas***Convictions, lies, and the desire for submission: Nietzsche, Fromm, and the crisis of democracy in Brazil**

This paper examines the contemporary crisis of democracy through a theoretical dialogue between Friedrich Nietzsche and Erich Fromm, with particular attention to the Brazilian context. Drawing on Nietzsche’s claim in *Human, All Too Human* that convictions are more dangerous enemies of truth than lies, the paper argues that rigid belief systems, rather than deliberate falsehoods, play a central role in enabling authoritarian and proto-fascist dynamics. Nietzsche’s critique of convictions is interpreted as an early diagnosis of the psychological and epistemic conditions that foster susceptibility to simplification, moral absolutism, and ideological rigidity. This perspective is placed in dialogue with Fromm’s analysis in *Escape from Freedom*, in which the “escape from freedom” describes a tendency toward submission, conformity, and destructiveness in response to uncertainty and social dislocation. Together, these frameworks illuminate how authoritarian dispositions are not only imposed from above but are also subjectively desired and reproduced. The paper situates this discussion within Brazil’s recent democratic crisis, particularly the 2018 presidential election. Drawing on a reflective text written in that context, it analyzes public discourses marked by the normalization of violence, including explicit defenses of torture, alongside counter-movements such as #EleNão and #TorturaNão. These are interpreted as expressions of a broader tension between rigid convictions and critical rationality in democratic life. By integrating Nietzsche’s critique of truth with Fromm’s social psychology, the paper argues that the erosion of democracy must be understood not only as an institutional failure but also as a crisis of subjectivity. In this sense, education, conceived as ethical and intellectual self-formation, emerges as a crucial site of resistance. Ultimately, a Nietzschean-Frommian framework offers both a diagnosis of the affective and cognitive roots of authoritarianism and a normative horizon for the renewal of democratic culture.

Shapel Monique LaBorde

Teachers College, Columbia University

Biophilia as Black Feminist Pedagogy: Fromm, Ancestral Education, and the Practice of Becoming

In the face of democratic crisis, Erich Fromm's concept of biophilia offers a crucial language for understanding education as more than the transmission of knowledge or preparation for citizenship. For Fromm, biophilia names an orientation toward life, growth, relation, and creative becoming. Its opposite, necrophilia, reveals a desire for domination, control, lifelessness, and destruction. This paper argues that Black feminist pedagogy can be understood as a biophilic practice, an education in aliveness under conditions designed to diminish life. Reading Fromm alongside Black feminist thinkers such as bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Patricia Hill Collins, and Alexis Pauline Gumbs, this paper examines how practices of care, grief, storytelling, beauty, mothering, ancestral memory, and communal accountability function as democratic pedagogies. These practices do not merely help individuals endure oppression; they cultivate capacities for relation, freedom, and becoming. In this sense, Black feminist pedagogy deepens Fromm's account of democratic life by grounding biophilia in embodied histories of survival and collective transformation. I argue that the crisis of democracy is also a crisis of life-orientation: a struggle between social forces that train people toward fear, submission, domination, and "death", and educational practices that teach love, memory, responsibility, and freedom. Black feminist ancestral pedagogy offers a vital response to this crisis by showing that democracy must be learned not only through institutions, but through the everyday practices by which communities choose life again and again.

Uzma Chowdhury

Columbia University

To Have or To Be A Child: Fromm Contra Colonized Childhood

Against the background of the genocide in Palestine, in a war, that among other atrocities, has been called a war on children, the crimes and crisis of the Epstein class, and the ongoing detention of children by Immigration Customs and Enforcement, Fromm's understanding of childhood and powerlessness has become more important than ever. This paper examines the entanglement of state power, property relations, and constructions of the child, arguing that childhood is historically and politically constituted through regimes of proprietary personhood. It traces how colonial property relations positioned children as extensions of familial and imperial ownership, embedding logics of control, dependency, and dispossession into legal and social frameworks. These dynamics persist in contemporary governance, where the state-regulated family operates as a key site for reproducing property-based hierarchies and normative citizenship. Further, this paper examines how even ostensibly emancipatory interventions can reify colonial property relations by framing children primarily as objects of protection, custody, or risk. Such frameworks often reinscribe the authority of the state and family while obscuring the structural conditions that produce vulnerability. Through the lens of Erich Fromm's discussion of property as alienation, and childhood as individuation, this paper argues that taken together, Fromm's ideas put forth a political imperative moving our sociality from "having" children to "being" and being with children, as a central tenet of the pursuit of freedom.

PARALLEL SESSION 4 · TRACK A · 3:00 - 5:00 PM · HORACE MANN 138

Humanistic Foundation and Critical Theory of Democracy

ERICH FROMM STUDY CENTER @ IPU BERLIN

Rainer Funk · Jonathan Keir · Jürgen Hardeck

Rainer Funk*Erich Fromm Institute Tübingen***Fromm's Concept of Social Character and the Question of Normality**

Fromm is a proponent of normative humanism and, at the same time, a critic of what the majority of society all too often perceives as “normal,” revealing it to be pathogenic (a “pathology of normalcy”). People function best as a workforce but suffer from psychologically and socially patterned defects. What is perceived as “normal” is actually pathogenic. It varies from one social character orientation to another. Fromm's critical view of what is considered socially “normal” is relevant to any kind of change and transformation. This will be illustrated using selected social character orientations.

Jonathan Keir*Erich Fromm Studies Centre, Dr. Karl Schlecht Foundation Tübingen***‘Democracy is Dead! Long Live Democracy!’ The Socialist Humanism of Erich Fromm and Oscar Wilde in an AI-Driven Future**

Both Erich Fromm and Oscar Wilde envisaged a human future in which the economy serves human psychological development rather than state power. While Wilde believed that government of the future would exist merely to automate labor so that individuals could pursue art, Fromm and some of his successors, most notably Rainer Funk, worried about the inferiority complexes *vis-à-vis* technology that might gradually paralyse future human spiritual activity. We examine these two poles of socialist humanism and argue that future democratic politics will move between them; the era of democracy as a vehicle for negotiation of narrow economic interests between owners and workers will in any case give way, in the best of possible future worlds, to a broader ‘spiritual democracy’ of open dialogue among human beings liberated from the scarcity constraints of 19th- and 20th-century economic globalization. Future democratic politics, in this utopian future, will resemble an ongoing debate between proponents of Wilde's view of human nature, in which the freedom of the artist from economic and social coercion predominates, and Fromm's more organic conception of the human individual as conditioned, always and everywhere, by society.

Jürgen Hardeck*Independent Scholar***A Renaissance of Humanism Rather Than Vengeance for a Life Unlived Erich Fromm's Alternative Critical Theory**

Can the pervasive group narcissism and rampant destructiveness of the present day still be successfully curbed? Erich Fromm's 20th-century socio-psychological analyses offer

surprisingly relevant insights into the conditions necessary for alternative sources of inspiration.

PARALLEL SESSION 4 · TRACK B · 3:00 - 5:00 PM · HORACE MANN 144

Critical Pedagogy and Democratic Education

Neil McLaughlin and Lisa Taylor · Kenneth Rösen · Bryant William Sculos

Neil McLaughlin and Lisa Taylor

Professor, Sociology, McMaster University, Professor Education, Bishops University

Erich Fromm and Educational Reform: Riesman, Freire, Illich and hooks.

This paper will discuss the influence Fromm had on four of the major critics of modern education in modern North American debates: David Riesman, Paulo Friere, Ivan Illich and bell hooks. We will outline the relationship Fromm had with each thinker, how Fromm influenced them and end with what educational reformers today could learn from looking at these five thinkers together as a package. We will offer insights from Fromm updated, to offer ideas for the contemporary crisis of education today where critical theory and critical pedagogy is being attacked and scapegoated instead of engaged

Kenneth Rösen

Independent Scholar

Manufacturing Consent: Extending the New Sociology of Education with Erich Fromm

If the contemporary crisis of democracy is understood not primarily as a crisis of political institutions but rather as a crisis of democratic practice, it must first—and above all—be conceived as a crisis of the autonomous political subject. This perspective places the educated individual at the centre of debates on democratic decline. Without succumbing to the reductionist assumption that educated subjects are inherently democratic subjects, the relationship between education, society, and democracy becomes a crucial field of inquiry. Following Antonio Gramsci's insight that every relation of hegemony is necessarily also a pedagogical relation, the role of education in the socially orchestrated neutralization of critique, autonomy, and critical thinking comes into view. In their place emerges a conception of the human being encapsulated in terms such as **human resources** and **employability**: a neoliberal anthropology in which the proclaimed freedom of the individual increasingly resembles what Erich Fromm described as a "totalitarian escape from freedom." Fromm's analysis thus retains striking contemporary relevance. Within capitalist societies, critical reflection and critical consciousness are often suppressed at an early stage, since any form of critique carries the potential to question—and thereby destabilize—the system itself. The erosion of critical thought facilitates the transformation of individuals into social automatons who act according to externally prescribed imperatives. Such conditions constitute fertile ground for the formation of authoritarian character structures. Where education and schooling increasingly function as agencies of societal adaptation, this process of social automation intensifies, accompanied by growing experiences of powerlessness and isolation. Against this tendency, a critically oriented, socio-analytical form of education becomes indispensable—one aimed at confronting the

“totalitarian forces” identified by Fromm and counteracting the “spiritual isolation” of modern individuals through a humanistic conception of education and society.

Against this backdrop, the paper proposes to mobilize insights from Fromm’s early work for pedagogical analysis. In particular, his socio-psychological studies on the relationship between subject and society will be integrated into the New Sociology of Education in order to supplement this tradition with a more explicit theory of the individual. The paper argues that neoliberal educational arrangements increasingly operate as factories of consent, while also demonstrating—following Fromm—that education still holds the potential to contribute to the humane reconstitution of society.

Bryant William Sculos

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

Erich Fromm on the Pedagogy of Politics & the Politics of Pedagogy

Some has been written about the relationship between Erich Fromm and Freire’s critical pedagogy (derived from *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*), specifically focusing on Fromm’s theoretical influence. Some has been written on the value of Fromm’s work to understanding emancipatory educational practices (see Pangilinan, 2009). However, little has been written about the place of pedagogy in Fromm’s theory of transition from capitalism to (humanistic) socialism or communitarian socialism. This paper will connect these two extant literatures to a novel articulation of a Frommian theory of transitional or revolutionary pedagogy in order to show how pedagogy is a crucial aspect of a systemic transformation to a nonalienated, radically-democratic form of postcapitalism. The paper will also connect this theorization of Frommian pedagogy of politics back to the political implications and importance of pedagogical choices (and even labor struggles) surrounding the traditional classroom, including the ongoing policing of content in K-16 spaces.

PARALLEL SESSION 4 · TRACK C · 3:00 - 5:00 PM · HORACE MANN 150

Erich Fromm and Marx’s Concept of Man (1962) for Today

Joan Braune · Kieran Durkin · Alexander Rene Marek Stoa · Harrison Fluss (commentator)

Papers by Alexander René Marek Stoa, Joan Braune and Kieran Durkin, with a short commentator response from Harrison Fluss.

Joan Braune

Gonzaga University

“AI is African Intelligence”: Recovering Workers’ Agency Against AI Idolatry

This paper explores developments in artificial intelligence as threats to human agency, through the lens of Erich Fromm’s work on Marx. In Fromm’s 1961 *Marx’s Concept of Man*, Fromm connects Marx’s earlier and later work via Marx’s critique of the alienation of the worker (which transforms the worker into a thing) and the “fetishism” (idolatry) of commodities (which grants power to the product of human labor at the expense of the worker’s own agency). Fromm sees parallels to the concept of idolatry in the Hebrew Scriptures, and the “deadening” impact of idol worship. He contrasts the deadening

capacities of capitalism with a tradition he finds in Spinoza, Hegel, Marx, and Goethe, linking full aliveness (or divinity) to a historical process of becoming. With all the talk today of AI's power to surpass humans—e.g., a controversial advertisement for AI at a Silicon Valley bus stop even snickered, “Humanity had a good run”—it is easy to ignore the ways in which artificial intelligence is nevertheless a product of human labor. Michael Jeffrey Asia, Kenyan tech worker and Secretary General of the Data Labelers Association, recently told 404 Media, “AI can never be AI without humans. It is not artificial intelligence. It's African intelligence...Most of these are dirty jobs and most of these jobs have been done here in Africa.” Fromm and Marx would be quick to point out that AI is, like almost everything, a product and representation of human productive capacities throughout history. However, as Fromm argued in *The Revolution of Hope* and in his other work on the dangers of nuclear weapons, a truly “humanized” approach to technology is not a mere transfer of ownership of technological tools from capitalists to workers, but empowers workers' ethical agency to decide which technological processes and commodities serve human well-being, and which must be limited or curtailed.

Kieran Durkin

The Need-Relation Of Bourgeois Society.

In the Marxist tradition, the concept of human need plays an important but somewhat underappreciated role. In the 1844 Manuscripts, Marx famously spoke of human as creatures rich in needs, while in *Capital* he notes the ways in which capitalism aims at the stimulation of new needs commensurate with the continued valorisation of capital. Erich Fromm's unique account of human needs draws on the early and late Marx, supplementing and extending this discussion with a psychoanalytic and philosophical anthropological rendering of what it means to be a being rich in needs. Through his notion of “existential needs,” Fromm devises an explicitly normative account of human existence that develops upon Marx's critique of what I call the need-relations of bourgeois society. On this understanding, we can see need-relations in Fromm as responding to the main questions that structure human social existence in a manner that follows Marx's methodological principle of the dialectical mediation of general and determinate abstraction. In this way, Fromm is shown to provide us with a way of analysing pathological individual and social developments relative to new passions as refractions of more basic needs and to, thereby, open the possibilities of more fully analysing the connection between desire and need through the various social mediations of bourgeois society.

Alexander Rene Marek Stoan

Global Labour Research Centre, York University

Recovering Factories, Proletarianizing the Neighbourhoods: Restoring Communal Life & Reducing Alienation during Crises

This paper seeks to explore Erich Fromm's conception of humanistic ritual that have the possibility of pushing back against the alienation modernity in conversation with the Cruz de Mayo popular festival in a Caracas barrio that has been controlled by the chavista la Piedrita colectivo for over 20 years. Deploying Erich Fromm's dichotomy between humanistic and authoritarian ritual from his analyses of religion and modernity, I seek to situate this humanistic ritual, being put on by a top-down guerilla vanguardist organization,

in this context of deepening authoritarianism after the death of the messianic figure of Chávez. Rooted in indigenous traditions, Cruz de Mayo is a pan-Hispanic celebration of spring, it remains underexplored in the literature broadly but especially so in Venezuela. Based on participant observations of this festival in 2022, my findings clash with existing research that depicts La Piedrita largely as a violent, politically extreme, pro-chavista militia. By analyzing Cruz de Mayo, this study shows how colectivos, often framed only as militant actors, also deploy ritual practices that promote a shared humanity rooted in a shared sense of being-with the community. Ritual functions as a mechanism of cohesion, harm reduction, and conflict mitigation, complicate binary portrayals of colectivos as violent or cooperative. The article puts Fromm into conversation with contemporary left and socialist politics thus deepening EFSNA's Social Inquiry Committee's endeavors to connect Fromm's humanistic socialism into the present. Further, it resonates with the conference's theme of Crisis of Democracy by demonstrating the connectivity between Fromm analysis for the need for humanistic ritual to overcome alienation and the manifestation of these communitarian ideas by the vanguard, armed left in Latin America.

PARALLEL SESSION 4 · TRACK D · 3:00 - 5:00 PM · HORACE MANN 148

The Way We Dream Today and the Tyranny of Technology

Daniel Burston · Grace Katzmar · Lauren Langman · Tova Benski

Daniel Burston

Professor Emeritus, Psychology, Duquesne University

Irrational Doubt and Conspiracy Theories in Fromm and the Frankfurt School

In 1965, an American historian and Professor at Columbia University named Richard Hofstadter published *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, a study of what Horkheimer and Adorno called “pseudo-conservative” politicians like Senator Joseph McCarthy and Senator Barry Goldwater, who used fear mongering and conspiracy theories as tools of persuasion. The book was influenced by Freud and the Frankfurt School and argued that conspiracy theories are more prevalent on the Right but are present on the Left as well, though largely confined to the fringes on both sides of the political spectrum. However, times have changed, and recent studies suggest that more than half of the American public subscribe to conspiracy theories or what forensic psychiatrist Brian Holoyda calls “delusion-like beliefs” (DLBs) of one sort or another. Though not symptoms of mental disorder according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, these widely held beliefs are not susceptible to refutation on the basis of reason or evidence (i.e. rational doubt). They exude an air of paranoid mistrust, providing those who believe in them with narratives that rationalize their sense of grievance and are saturated with what Erich Fromm called “irrational doubt”. Although he never addressed the topic of conspiracy theories explicitly, this paper looks at one Right one Left-wing conspiracy theory in light of Fromm's notions of rational and irrational doubt, comparing his ideas about these social psychological phenomena with the classical Freudian perspectives and rational and irrational doubt, and discusses possible ways to understand and address them in the public sphere.

Grace Katzmar*Teachers College Alum***Taking the Leap: Transformative Resistance Against Authoritarian Structures**

As authoritarian governments increasingly gain power across the globe, the study of collective and individual mechanisms of control and freedom is urgently needed. This paper explores the three-way parallel between authoritarian structures on the level of the state, within educational institutions, and on an individual level. Erich Fromm's theories of negative/positive freedom, authoritarian control, social character and the social unconscious serve as a lens to contextualize the phenomena that lead individuals and societies to conflate abusive structures with protection. As a counterpoint, Larry Green's concept of Transformational Learning and Paulo Freire's Critical Consciousness provide theoretical frameworks of resistance in service of democratic freedom. My methodology is rooted in autobiographical vignettes which draw parallels between my experiences under the control of an abusive cult structure, with the repression of student activism in higher education and increasing threats to American democracy at the national level. These vignettes address mechanisms of authoritarian control at the personal level, while illuminating the function of those mechanisms within institutions and the state. With democracy under threat, it's vital to understand how societies succumb to the repression of "negative freedom," in order to understand how individuals can act as a catalyst for "positive freedom." This paper posits that structural resistance must take place first in the hearts and minds of individuals; by interrogating the unconscious and drawing the social unconscious into collective awareness, we may discover the possibility of resistance, transformation, and freedom.

Lauren Langman · Tova Benski*Loyola University of Chicago***Toward A Sane Society in the 21st Century**

About 70 ago, Fromm, critical of capitalism and its impact on social character envisioned a sane society. Integrating Freud and Marx, character was motivated to do the work that must be done to secure profits for the elites-but such character was alienated from its essential nature. Basic needs were frustrated. Yet the domination of capital went unquestioned, a "pathology of normality" as people accepted the dominant system albeit at a cost of personal and social suffering. Fromm envisioned a sane society where people could find creative self-fulfillment, love for other and care for others and for Nature biophilia, in a supportive community, meaningful identities, a sense of transcendence, and a framework of devotion and meaning based on the humanistic versions of religion that do not rest upon a punitive supernatural creator-but as people should be as gods. His view of human nature provides optimism. When we look at the contemporary world, neoliberal global capitalism has rendered personal, economic and social life far more problematic than the 1950s. Nevertheless, some of the conditions of today, impacting youth, give us room for hope. With echoes of Hegel and Marx we see history as dialectic moving toward progress, not linear, but cyclic, simply, social change oscillates between progressive and regressive moments, reflecting different social character that while shaped by early socialization, authoritarian vs empathic/democratic, given "dynamic character change," the social context may change values and attitudes. Today, many, especially the young, are facing

precarity, limited job prospects and career mobility. Environmental despoliation has become a major threat, perhaps threatening a second extinction. Moreover, younger generations tend to be more economically and socially liberal. If we consider what Karl Mannheim called the generational mediation of social change via cohort flow, it becomes evident that neoliberalism has fostered resistance as a progressive generation of youth, the Z generation, spearheads a variety of progressive social and political movements. Erich Fromm foretold a post capitalist, sane society in which the predominant social character was productive, biophilic. Current conditions are fostering progressive movements, “great refusals whose post capitalist social characters are likely to usher a sane society.

Day 3 — Saturday, 10 October 2026

PARALLEL SESSION 5 · TRACK A · 9:00 - 11:00 AM · HORACE MANN 138

Democratic Selfhood, Legitimacy, and Leadership

James E. Block · Stephen Onley · Dustin J. Byrd

James E. Block

DePaul University

Fashioning a democratic individual.

Those affirming participatory democratic institutions not the mythic social contract pseudo-democracy of liberalism understand – building on Fromm and Marcuse – that the shaping of individuals for the earlier dispensation seriously impedes social transformation. Have we fully discerned the reshaping of human development required? After decades investigating post-liberal psychological transformation, we confront reorientation: Fromm provides an indispensable new framework for the post-liberal self and society but leaves the psychodevelopmental grounding of the optimal dynamic of social character, interpersonal relations, and facilitative institutional processes. This period of fundamental historical transition as with previous such ages requires reconceptualizing the formation of human selfhood from its earliest life stages. Within the work of psychoanalytic theorist and clinician Heinz Kohut as the founder of Self Psychology the groundwork was formulated in the 1960s and 1970s a new developmental framework. Given his dedicated clinical orientation and his evolving theoretical innovations, Kohut’s work has been influential primarily in therapeutic circles while its transformative psychopolitical and psychocultural implications remain largely unexplored. As a refugee in 1938 from Nazism and increasing critic of American socialization practices, he understood that the patterns of authoritarian and liberal psychological arrest commence early in life, well before subjects recognize their formidable impact. Unaware this early shaping was -- as developed by Hobbes, Locke, and Dewey -- the explicit psychosocial foundation of liberal adaptation and integration, he nevertheless understood -- rejecting (Hobbesian-Lockean) Freud -- that these systemic misshaping internalizing the empire and anti-democratic patterns very early required recasting. Put starkly, promoting ‘democratic’ attitudes, interpersonal connections, and systemic morality without a revised development – despite a commitment to meaningful change – futilely replicate the embedded order. Addressing this challenge, Kohut systematically reframed the authority dynamic of traditional European development and

American socialization to nurture the internal capacities to navigate a post-liberal democratic order. Generating individuals grounded from early childhood in their own aspirations and sense of empowerment evolving new capacities and values, they could collaboratively create a common world of actualized individuals. Kohut's conceptual transvaluation and detailed path to implementation help us surmount the logjam of a declining system and its descent into empire.

Stephen Onley

Teachers College, Columbia University

The Self-Concealing Crisis: Automaton Conformity and Democratic Legitimacy

When legitimate governance breaks down, it tends to show: in the streets, in collapsed institutions, in the open withdrawal of public trust. The present crisis of democracy is showing all of these. Institutions under strain. Public trust eroding. Yet one indicator tells a different story entirely. Recent elections have produced the highest voter turnout in over a century. Citizens are showing up at historically unprecedented rates even as everything else deteriorates. This is the puzzle this paper wants to solve, and precisely the puzzle Erich Fromm's work is equipped to illuminate. Genuine self-governance requires more than participation in procedures. It requires what I call Democratic Competence: the capacity to comprehend, reason about, and evaluate the rules under which one lives. A republic that fails to guarantee that education has undermined the conditions of its own legitimacy. The consent of citizens who cannot evaluate what they consent to is not consent. It is the performance of consent. If citizens are governed without genuine consent, why do participation rates remain at historic highs? Because participation metrics measure whether people show up, not whether showing up constitutes genuine self-governance or its automated performance. More than 70% of Americans fail basic civic literacy assessments on the functions of their own government, yet turnout continues to climb. Fromm provides that account. In *Escape from Freedom*, the individual who escapes through automaton conformity does not experience himself as unfree, but as self-willing; modern man "lives under the illusion that he knows what he wants, while he actually wants what he is supposed to want." The republic funds an adjustment-oriented educational system that installs social character aligned with existing structures, which produces citizens who cannot perceive their own evaluative incapacity, and provides the appearance of democratic consent to the system that never taught them to evaluate it. The failure is structurally self-concealing: the mechanism that produces it is precisely what keeps participation indicators looking healthy. Fromm diagnosed the psychology. This paper draws the political consequence he left on the table: a republic can lose its legitimacy to citizens who do not know they have lost anything.

Dustin J. Byrd

The University of Olivet

Beyond the Chains of Delusion: Erich Fromm and the False Consciousness of the American Precariat

In *Escape from Freedom*, Erich Fromm argued that modern individuals, overwhelmed by freedom and the uncertainty created by an atomized secular society, often flee towards authoritarian ideologies, politics, and leaders, which provide a sense of security against the feeling of existential meaninglessness and social chaos. In this sense, authoritarianism is a

means of escaping social-psychological alienation brought about by the insecure contours of modernity. Even more so today than when Fromm lived, economic precarity, cultural polarization, and information overload intensifies these anxieties about modern life, as social media and other digital ecosystems create self-reinforcing realities where misinformation and affect-driven narratives dominate. In response to this enveloping reality, protective false consciousnesses emerge. Exclusionary identities congeal otherwise isolated individuals into “herds” and provide them with superficial meaning, binary identities, and a false sense of stability. In other words, as the lifeworld is increasingly colonized by the political-economic demands of capitalism and the “captured” state that enforces it, individuals retreat into a self-perpetuating false consciousnesses, a delusional somnambulant state that delivers the precariat to the authoritarianism of what Fromm called, the “magic helper.” In American politics today, the “magic helper” can be seen most clearly in the figure of Donald Trump, whose form of “marketing politics,” following his own marketing character, operates on a branding model wherein he himself is less of a traditional politician and more of a symbolic product. Erich Fromm’s enduring contribution to psychoanalytical political theory has concretely shown that authoritarianism is not merely a political deviation from democracy, but rather a psychosocial phenomenon. When applied to today’s American political landscape, Fromm’s psychosocial analyses suggest that confronting Trump and Trumpism requires an engagement beyond electoral opposition; it demands addressing the foundational emotional, economic, and cultural conditions that produce the precariat’s need for the kind of delusions that only false consciousness tied to marketing politics can produce.

PARALLEL SESSION 5 · TRACK B · 9:00 - 11:00 AM · HORACE MANN 144

Alienation, Suffering, and the Search for a Sane Society

Lynn S. Chancer · Andrew J. Shapiro · Brooke A. Finley

Lynn S. Chancer

Hunter College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York

Psychosocial Criminology and Erich Fromm: Drawing on Fromm to Illuminate the Study of Crime and Violence

This paper explores whether the ideas of Erich Fromm should be better known in the field of criminology, and among critical criminologists generally than at present -- especially but not only when it comes to trying to understand a variety of crimes that may or may not be violent. Indeed, many theories of criminological motivation look to psychological explanations for crime as well as to social causes based on discriminations of class, race and less often gender. But important texts like Gadd and Jefferson’s **Psychosocial Criminology** or Jefferson and Hollway’s **Doing Qualitative Research Differently** barely mention Fromm though they clearly draw on Freud’s notion of the unconscious and on the operations of unconscious Freudian dynamics. Simultaneously, within both criminology and sociology (and even though books like the above introduced psychosocial perspectives to these disciplines) , it can easily be argued that Freudian theories remain mostly marginalized in criminological and critical criminological studies; they are more likely to be cited occasionally than popularly and regularly . All this being said, though, would greater incorporation and awareness of specifically Frommian ideas make a difference to

how criminological theory conceptualizes motivations of crimes that are more and less violent? It is a question that may have interesting and even far-reaching implications insofar as dominant explanations of crime often make their way into media and popular culture representations that can eventually influence political, social, and even policy-related understandings as well. The first part of the paper will review what Fromm had to say about the study of crime and violence focusing particularly but not only on his writings in **The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness**. Second, I look to criminological literature and where Fromm would fit into usual explorations of criminological understandings if his theorizations were included and recognized. Third and finally, the paper examines how greater use of Frommian ideas in criminology and the study of violence might bring important humanistic perspectives into meaningful visibility (including media visibility) overall.

Andrew J. Shapiro

The Graduate Center of the City University of New York

Complicity of the Oppressed: A Socially Patterned Defect that Reproduces Inequality

The workers of the world have not united. In anti-oppression movements globally, infighting and backstabbing are ubiquitous. Why is it so hard to come together in solidarity and sustain movements for change? What role do oppressed groups play in oppressing others, and what role can we all play in bringing forth emancipatory political alternatives? Questions like these have been raised by social psychologists and Marxist organizers, black feminists and social movement theorists. Answers, however, too often fail to make connections across academic literatures and levels of analysis. Some blame capitalist ideology, while others blame material conditions, and still others point to psychological predispositions. Erich Fromm, I argue, offers a way out of the impasse. More than most, Fromm explored why and how people act contrary to rational self-interest. Why did the German masses choose Nazism over Marxian class solidarity? Why did the US populace allow itself to be taken in by mediocre consumerism? To answer both questions, Fromm suggests that our fundamental human need for relatedness leads us to seek social acceptance by conforming to the dominant character of our society. Individual personalities are brought into alignment with the wider character structure by way of social filters that inculcate some traits and suppress others. Unhealthy societies tend to produce similarly unhealthy relational patterns, which Fromm terms socially-patterned defects, while repressing more productive orientations. Putting Fromm—and those he influenced, like Paulo Freire and bell hooks—into conversation with Marx, Foucault, Collins, and others, I develop a model of “complicity of the oppressed” wherein marginalized people seek to elevate themselves by cooperating in the oppression of others. Insofar as capitalism fosters competition and filters out solidaristic tendencies, marginalized people tend to choose narrow self-advancement over broad movements for change. Complicity of the oppressed is thus a socially-patterned defect, a byproduct of intersecting oppressions that turn people against one another. The challenge, then, is to readjust our filters toward love and solidarity.

Brooke A. Finley*Associate Professor of Clinical Nursing at the University of Rochester School of Nursing and Health Sciences***Escape from Caring: Capitalist Degradation of the Nursing Profession and the Struggle for a Sane System of Care**

The liberatory humanism of Erich Fromm directly shaped modern psychiatric nursing through his training and intellectual influence on Hildegard Peplau, widely regarded as the mother of psychiatric nursing. Peplau's theory of interpersonal relations emerged within a Frommian psychoanalytic tradition that emphasized freedom, mutual recognition, and resistance to authoritarian social organization, shaped in part through her study with Fromm as her psychology professor at Bennington College. Drawing on Fromm's critiques of alienation and domination in *Escape from Freedom*, *The Sane Society*, *The Art of Loving*, and *To Have or To Be?*, as well as his essays in *On Disobedience* and his socialist humanist interpretation of Marx in *Marx's Concept of Man*, this paper argues that Peplau's work contains a latent feminist political economy that stands in opposition to the medical monopoly and the parasitic, logics of contemporary capitalist healthcare. Nursing's historical subordination is not accidental, but is structurally produced through gendered fantasies that cast nurses as handmaidens, maternal figures, or endlessly self-sacrificing caregivers. This feminization of care functions as a mechanism of extraction, justifying wage suppression, overwork, and exclusion from institutional power while obscuring the intellectual, relational, and political labor that nursing performs. From a Frommian feminist perspective, such degradation reflects what Fromm describes in *Escape from Freedom* as an "escape" into dependency, conformity, and authoritarian organization, rather than the realization of positive freedom grounded in autonomy, relatedness, and productive activity. Within corporatized healthcare, physicians are increasingly subjected to parallel forms of alienation, revealing convergent constraints on professional autonomy across disciplines under monopoly control. As articulated in *The Sane Society*, a healthy society is one that fosters biophilia, meaningful work, and the capacity to love, rather than organizing itself around commodification, domination, and the "having" mode of existence. Re-examining Peplau through this lens highlights how her emphasis on mutuality, power awareness, and anxiety containment reflects the conditions necessary for what Fromm would consider a "sane" social order. Fromm's call for disobedience underscores that ethical practice requires the capacity to resist dehumanizing systems, while his socialist humanism insists that such conditions are historically produced and therefore transformable. By reclaiming the radical humanism embedded in this lineage, nursing and medicine can resist monopolistic and extractive systems, repositioning healthcare as a democratic, relational, and liberatory social practice capable of addressing the needs of impoverished, rural, and chronically undertreated populations.

PARALLEL SESSION 5 · TRACK C · 9:00 - 11:00 AM · HORACE MANN 150

The Frommian Mind - Book Launch

Rory Varrato · Jeremiah Morelock · Chiara Ginevra Berra

Rory Varrato

William Alanson White Institute

A Multidimensional View of Fromm as Philosopher

In what ways can we view Erich Fromm as a philosopher? To answer this question, I formulate five Frommian questions, each corresponding to one section of our forthcoming edited volume, *The Frommian Mind*. This non-exhaustive list is meant to suggest orienting generalizations, or overarching frameworks, through which Fromm's work can be seen for some of its distinctively philosophical qualities. These questions include: 1) *How can we create concepts through metaphor?* – applied to the section “Fromm's Influences, Interlocutors, and Inheritors;” 2) *How can we change the world through thought?* – applied to the section “Social and Political Philosophy and Practice;” 3) *How can we help others to become themselves?* – applied to the section “Psychoanalytic Philosophy and Technique;” 4) *How can we psychoanalyze arguments?* – applied to the section “Fromm and the Frankfurt School;” and 5) *How can we develop our humanistic potential?* – applied to the section “Frommian Futures.”

Jeremiah Morelock

Boston College

Masculinity Problems and Authoritarian Escape Attempts

Erich Fromm's *Escape from Freedom* can be read through the lens of gender and masculinity. Fromm's central argument is that while the freedoms won by modernity are liberating, they are also experienced as a profound burden in the form of isolation and anxiety, and that flight into sadomasochism is a common response, finding outlet in authoritarian movements. Modern masculine socialization specifically prepares men for that flight. The relational deprivations built into dominant forms of Western masculinity, combined with the anomic dislocation produced when the structures organizing male worth can no longer be sustained, together produce the conditions in which authoritarian movements take hold. Men socialized to organize their worth around achievement and provision, who find themselves destabilized and threatened both economically and culturally, face a crisis of meaning. The so-called “red pill” capitalizes on that vacuum, offering a ready-made identity, a male-positive ideology, and a community organized around a shared account of male grievance. What is touted as masculine authenticity (a reclaiming of birthright against feminist encroachment), is in Fromm's terms a flight from freedom into domination. A path out, I suggest, would include the cultivation of mature relatedness, elevating within visions of “masculinity” forms of life that include care and mutual vulnerability.

Chiara Ginevra Berra*Teachers College, Columbia University & NYPSI***Necrophilous Aesthetics: Erich Fromm and the Ethics of Artistic Production**

Although Erich Fromm repeatedly gestures toward the importance of art, his work lacks a systematic account of aesthetics. This chapter reconstructs a Frommian interpretation of art from scattered remarks across his work, arguing that aesthetics occupies a central place within his ethical and psychoanalytic project. Drawing on Fromm's concepts of biophilia, necrophilia, and the productive orientation of character, I propose that art is best understood not primarily in terms of representation or style, but in terms of the forms of subjectivity it cultivates.

In this framework, art functions as a mode of perceptual and affective transformation: it discloses the underlying dynamics of reality and can orient the subject toward life, growth, and relationality. At the same time, this transformative capacity is not inherently emancipatory. Through an analysis of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and in dialogue with Walter Benjamin, the chapter develops the concept of a necrophilous aesthetics to describe forms of art that mobilize perception and affect toward domination, mechanization, and destruction.

By foregrounding the ethical and psychological stakes of aesthetic experience, this chapter repositions art as a site of subject formation within Fromm's thought. It argues that the decisive question for a Frommian aesthetics is not what art represents, but what it does: whether it cultivates biophilic or necrophilic orientations toward life.

PARALLEL SESSION 6 · TRACK A · 1:00 - 3:00 PM · HORACE MANN 138**Psyche, Culture and Ritual Across Traditions***Ayesha Hussain · Shir Shanun, Psy.D. · Ewelina Topolska*

Ayesha Hussain*Independent Scholar***The political unconscious and psychotherapy: Being a Muslim Psychotherapist in India**

The paper presentation would discuss critical ideas in Erich Fromm's works that can cater to the urgent need of engaging with the sometimes disavowed political unconscious inside the clinic. Amidst a global and local rise of islamophobia, often any remote signs of "Muslimness" run the risk of bating psychic distemper in proponents of majoritarian and totalitarian values. In recent times, India has seen(and unseen) how Hindutva ethnonationalists, rattled by signs of Muslimness, have chosen to resolve their primitive anxieties by launching a systematic erasure of the Indian Muslim – Constitutional (de)formation, dehumanization, morphing of history and iconography, and deadly violence against Muslims through lynchings and riots. Fromm's ideas on psychological unpreparedness for freedom, and on automaton conformity explain the thumping support of the country's otherwise passive section of its citizenry while his theory of racism attempts to explain it as a psychological defense against lack of belonging. As an Indian Muslim female psychotherapist, living and practising through these times, more often than not working with Hindu patients, I find myself conscious of my intriguingly difficult and not so difficult position at the intersection of identity, history and lived social reality. This paper

will be an exploration of the political unconscious as it might sometimes unfold in the clinic and my attempts to navigate the same while examining how the Frommian values can inform and consistently shape the clinic as a space harbouring safety and hope for both the patient and the therapist as both return to it repeatedly.

Shir Shanun, Psy.D.

Frommian Transformation In Ritual

Based on a book chapter written for *The frommian Mind* with Ricardo Robles, LMFT, I will expand on the “crisis of democracy” by advancing the Frommian perspective on acts of love and freedom through the lens of Byung-Chul Han’s understanding of our need for ritual in the information society. This is brought into clinical practice with the use of psychoanalytic field theory, to demonstrate transformations in the micro-level of society’s impingements on freedom. Our thesis puts forward that rituals as immersive narrativizing practices serve as an act of love and may support the emergence of freedom, restoring an embodied and felt sense of human connection. Field techniques serve to differentiate compulsive, sterile rituals from a growth promoting.

Ewelina Topolska

University of Silesia

“I Want My Personal Suffering to Cause Widespread Suffering”: The Inseparability of Psyche and Politics in Angélica Liddell and Erich Fromm

This paper explores the contemporary crisis of democracy through the lens of Erich Fromm’s psychoanalytic and social theory, as reflected in the theatre of Angélica Liddell (Spain). Central to the analysis are Fromm’s concepts of “necrophilic orientation” and “escape from freedom,” which describe the mechanisms whereby individuals whose emotional development did not reach optimal levels for different reasons seek refuge and reassurance in submission, destructiveness, collective narcissism, accumulation of wealth and authoritarian control. The paper argues that Liddell’s dramaturgy provides a powerful aesthetic and affective staging of this dynamic, revealing how democratic erosion is rooted not only in institutional failure, but in deep psychological needs. Focusing on the plays “The Year of Richard” and “Dead Dog at a Dry Cleaners: The Strong”, we are going to explore how Liddell portrays figures of leadership whose individual psychopathologies become politically consequential. In “The Year of Richard”, the central figure embodies an extreme will to power driven by insecurity, narcissism, and emotional fragmentation. This characterization resonates with Fromm’s analysis of authoritarian personalities, whose deep emotional mutilation, fear and solitude fuel a desire to dominate and control, ultimately translating into destructive political action. Similarly, “Dead Dog at a Dry Cleaners: The Strong” presents a world saturated with suffering, rage, and existential despair, where the boundaries between personal trauma and collective violence collapse. The paper contends that Liddell’s theatre exposes the dangerous permeability between private pathology and public power. Leaders’ and voters’ unresolved psychological conflicts are not contained at the individual level but expand into the social and political sphere, producing catastrophic decisions and legitimizing violence. In this sense, the crisis of democracy appears not merely as a structural or ideological problem but as a symptom of a broader failure to sustain emotionally resilient, autonomous individuals.

PARALLEL SESSION 6 · TRACK B · 1:00 - 3:00 PM · HORACE MANN 144

The Erosion and Renewal of Democracy: Global Perspectives

Pablo Javier Varela Fregoso · Jacob Cherry · Víctor Lazcano

Pablo Javier Varela Fregoso

Instituto Mexicano de Psicoanálisis, A. C.

Is it possible to move towards a humanist democracy?

Erich Fromm trained first as a sociologist and later as a psychoanalyst, becoming a member of the Frankfurt School. He expressed interest in understanding and explaining the hidden reasons for fascism in his book **Fear of Freedom**, and later, in his book **Psychoanalysis of Contemporary Society**, he proposed several alternatives, emphasizing love, faith, and hope. For Fromm, democracy should be a system that allows for the full development of the individual, and he distinguished between a formal and an authentic democracy. Fromm believed that to achieve an authentic democracy, independent thought, critical thinking, and social security were essential. Finally, he proposed a humanist and participatory democracy.

Jacob Cherry

Duquesne University

Freedom Without Meaning: Erich Fromm, Youth Alienation, and the Crisis of Democracy.

This paper argues that Erich Fromm offers a powerful framework for understanding the contemporary crisis of democracy by attending to the loss of meaning increasingly experienced by young people. Drawing on Fromm's analysis of freedom, alienation, and escape from freedom, the paper examines how democratic fragility is not only a political problem but also a psychological and existential one. Fromm understood authoritarian movements as responses to anxiety, isolation, and the burden of freedom in societies that fail to provide shared sources of purpose. I suggest that similar dynamics are now visible among younger generations who face precarious economic conditions, fragmented social bonds, and an instrumental view of education and work that erodes a sense of vocation and moral orientation. The paper connects Fromm's critique of consumer capitalism and bureaucratic rationality to contemporary patterns of disengagement, nihilism, and susceptibility to authoritarian or technocratic solutions. In particular, it explores how the absence of meaning fosters both political apathy and the desire for external structures that promise certainty and belonging at the cost of democratic responsibility. By revisiting Fromm's humanistic psychoanalysis and his insistence on productive love, biophilia, and active participation in social life, the paper argues that democratic renewal requires more than institutional reform. It requires cultivating conditions in which young people can experience agency, responsibility, and meaningful connection. Ultimately, the paper defends a Frommian form of hope grounded not in optimism about political trends but in the possibility of reorienting education, social life, and psychological practice toward the development of mature freedom. Such a reorientation, I argue, is essential if democracy is to survive as a lived practice rather than merely a formal system.

Víctor Lazcano*SEMSOAC (Seminario Mexicano de Sociopsicoanálisis, A.C.)***Reclaiming our Freedom: the Potential of Frommian Thought in the Latin American Struggle for a Post-Neoliberal Future.**

The social and environmental deterioration caused by neoliberalism has driven it to the limits of its sustainability, generating a crisis that has fostered the emergence of anti-system movements threatening its ideological and political hegemony through democratic institutions. In response, the neoliberal project attacks democracy and allies itself with the authoritarian far-right within the cultural context of whiteness, offering a sophisticated avoidance mechanism to a desperate population. This mechanism combines authoritarian and conformist elements, through which individuals are convinced to actively submit under the belief that they are fighting for their freedom and personal success, while directing their resentment—born of feelings of loneliness and insignificance—against subaltern groups who resist or rebel against the system. This paper explores how Erich Fromm's ideas help explain the effectiveness of this strategy and could guide (theoretically and ethically) transformative political alternatives toward a post-neoliberal future for Latin America.

PARALLEL SESSION 6 · TRACK C · 1:00 - 3:00 PM · HORACE MANN 150**What Made Us Human? Cooperation, Evolution, and Fromm***Mauricio Cortina, MD · Robert A. Paul · Christian Herreman***Mauricio Cortina, MD***Washington School of Psychiatry***Revising Fromm's Views on Development and Human Nature**

All social sciences have an underline view of human nature, but it is rarely made explicit. An exception is the work of Erich Fromm. His views were first expressed in his 1947 book *Man for Himself* and remained unchanged through the rest of his life. Fromm's basic view was that the enormous expansion of the neocortex together with the loss of our instinctual endowment is what made us human. Based on an up-to-date view of what made us emotionally human I describe three main social instincts that we share with chimpanzees, our closest ape relative that were transformed *not lost*. The three main *social* instincts were our tribal (or group) instincts, attachment instincts, and sexual instincts. The first transformation of our group or tribal instincts is described by the late anthropologist and primatologist Christopher Boehm. He has shown that the few remaining nomadic hunter gatherers studied by anthropologists in the last 100 years have one characteristic in common. They all maintain an egalitarian structure that supports each other and helps them share food and resources. They also strictly suppress any member of the group who would try to dominate the group. The second major instinctual transformation involves an expansion of attachment bonds and is described by anthropologist Sarah H. Hrdy. She describes a form of communal care that emerged during the prehistory of our nomadic hunter-gatherers. In this system the care of infants and young children is shared by other mothers and members of the group and not just by the mothers—as seen in our closest ape relative the chimpanzees. The third important transformation were our sexual, and is

described by Bernard Chapais from the University of Montreal. The transformation took place when our human male ancestors began to develop more stable pair bonds with females. This stability allowed our male ancestors to recognize their prodigy as their own and become less aggressive with other males in the group. A fourth major transformation that made us human was not instinctive in nature but based on dual inheritance model in which genes and cultural knowledge are two interactive forms of inheritance. The cumulative effect of this dual form of inheritance over thousands of generations have made us into a dynamic specie that is always in the making, while maintaining a basic set of universal human needs.

Robert A. Paul

Emory University

Dual Inheritance and Its Implications.

In this paper, I first briefly explain what the theory of dual inheritance is, and how it has become widely accepted as a form of gene-culture co-evolution. I then give a brief introduction to my own version of this theory, which recognizes that conflicts arise between culture and genetics, our two sources of inherited information. This, in turn, poses the question of what enables culture to overcome the tendency to destructive competition that characterizes for example, chimpanzee societies. To answer that question, I begin with Freud's often misunderstood revision of his instinct theory, showing that he based his theory of culture (or "civilization") not on his drive-discharge model, but on emotions of affection and tenderness, embodied in the figure of Eros, the god who connects all things. I then introduce Fromm's idea of biophilia, which I try to show is more in keeping with Freud's late view; and then move on to discuss the work of Alan Fiske, whose theory of mental relational models provides us with further supporting concepts, "communal sharing" and "kama muta". I conclude by alluding to Fromm's theory of the rise of Nazism, showing that the conditions that produced that horror are also present now in our notorious epidemic of loneliness.

Christian Herreman

International Attachment Network

The extended mimetic gesture.

I present an extended version of Merlin Donald's "Mimetic Gesture" as a key step in our uniquely human way of relating. According to Donald, the use of the body as a memory and communicative device allowed Homo Erectus to overcome the prevailing episodic culture. We can see a similar process within certain exchanges between mothers and infants, within psychotherapy and even in everyday interactions. The characteristics of these relational sequences can be said to surpass the individual actors engaged, as they are embodied, co-created and involve accumulated knowledge through the "ratchet effect" that recursively links the actors to the wider group. They are the basis of our unique cooperative capacity, but also of our sense of trust, belonging, security and meaning. This intersubjective matrix can be disrupted or even torn apart through violence and neglect, but also by cultural and economic pressures that underestimate the value of community, muting the very process of "resonance" responsible for our most emphatic and creative functioning and leading to more violent ways of relating. I present two examples of how the re-establishment of this

intersubjective process can be promoted within psychosocial interventions and psychotherapy: one using Video Intervention Therapy within a housing program for at risk mothers and their babies. The use of the video allows not only the promotion of a secure attachment within the dyad, but also a cooperative culture with the team involved in the intervention. The second example shows the co-creation of a personal mythic narrative capable of making sense of a phobic symptom in a psychotherapy process. In both examples the role of the extended mimetic gesture is highlighted. I finish with some simple social practices that I usually discuss with my clients and families that have been quite successful in their capacity to reestablish the missing sense of “we”.