

The Authoritarian Character Revisited: Genesis and Key Concepts

Nathisvaran Govender, Richard Sivil, and Gregory Morgan Swer

Abstract: This paper revisits the conceptual history of the early Frankfurt School's investigations into the authoritarian character, the set of sadomasochistic character traits that dispose an individual or group to seek their own domination. This research project, which produced Fromm's *Studies on Authority and Family* and Horkheimer's *Egoism and Freedom Movements* in 1936 and ended in 1939 with Fromm's expulsion from the Frankfurt School, is generally held to have been a theoretically-unproductive and abortive endeavour. We dispute such a reading by reconstructing the key concepts and methods of this research project, and demonstrating its breadth and coherence. In so doing we illustrate the centrality of Fromm's contribution to the Frankfurt School early work on authority and indicate that the proper point of origin for those seeking to grasp the Frankfurt School's research on the authoritarian character is 1930, the year in which Fromm joined the Frankfurt School.

Keywords: authoritarian character, Frankfurt School, Erich Fromm, sadomasochism, Max Horkheimer.

I. Introduction

This paper explores the history of the early Frankfurt School's investigations into authoritarianism. More specifically, it analyses the conceptual development of the authoritarian character, the set of sadomasochistic character traits that dispose an individual or group to seek their own domination, and the role that Erich Fromm played in the development of this concept and the mode of analysis of which it formed a part. With the rise of authoritarian populist leaders in democratic societies across the globe in recent years, there has been a significant revival of interest in the work of thinkers whose research focused on authoritarianism, fascism, demagoguery, etc. and their causes. Along with the work of thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Giles Deleuze and Wilhelm Reich, the work of the first generation of the Frankfurt School on authoritarianism and Fromm's post-Frankfurt School work on authority have also seen renewed attention.

With regards to Fromm, interest tends to focus on his work, *Escape from Freedom* (1941), in which the urge to authoritarianism is presented as an escape mechanism from the anxiety caused by freedom. And with the Frankfurt School, attention tends to centre on *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) which analysed the authoritarian and totalitarian tendencies resulting from the supposedly liberatory Enlightenment commitment to reason. However, the early work of the first

generation of the Frankfurt School on authoritarianism, produced when Fromm was still a formative influence on the theoretical direction of the School, tends to be overlooked. This neglect may be due to several factors. Firstly, Fromm's expulsion from the Frankfurt School in 1939 places his work prior to that point under something of a cloud. This negative reputation is reinforced by the critical drubbing that Fromm's work was perceived to have received for its 'neo-Freudian revisionism' during the so-called Marcuse-Fromm debate that took place in *Dissent* in 1955-56. Secondly, the Frankfurt School's early work on authoritarianism can appear to have been something of a theoretical dead end. The research project only yielded two significant theoretical texts, Fromm's 1936 *Studies on Authority and the Family: Sociological Dimensions* and Max Horkheimer's 1936 *Egoism and Freedom Movements: On the Anthropology of the Bourgeois Era*.¹ And shortly after their production the theoretical direction of the Frankfurt School, under the influence of Friedrich Pollock and Theodor Adorno, underwent a profound reorientation. As it is this later phase that produced the first generation's best-known work, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and key concepts such as instrumental reason and the culture industry, it is hardly surprising that the attention of scholars has tended to gravitate to the studies of authority produced by the School in this period rather than those of the 1936 period when Fromm and Horkheimer produced their studies of the authoritarian character.

The purpose of this paper is to revisit the early Frankfurt School's research on authority, its key concepts of the authoritarian character and the social psyche, and the singular blend of Freudian psychoanalytic theory and historical materialism that characterised its mode of social analysis. Its aim is to draw attention to the distinctive features of a neglected phase in the conceptual development of Frankfurt School Critical Theory, and to foreground the crucial contribution that Fromm made to this development. Rather than merely being of antiquarian interest, the intention behind this revisitation of the authoritarian character is to present it to the contemporary researcher of authoritarianism as a coherent research programme with conceptual tools of analysis that may be of use to them in their own research. For despite its reputation as an abortive theoretical development, the School's early research into the authoritarian character produced a coherent theoretical framework that still holds considerable analytic potential. And to those who find this theoretical perspective and mode of analysis to be of interest we then indicate the historical development of the project by analysing earlier works that laid its theoretical foundations. This focus on the conceptual prehistory of the authoritarian character concept that appeared in 1936 throws into relief the vital role played by Erich Fromm in formulating the method and theoretical framework that gave rise to the very concept of an authoritarian character. And shows the 1936 works *Studies* and *Egoism* to be the culmination of a body of theoretical research that Fromm began in 1930.

¹ Hereafter referred to as *Studies*, and as *Egoism* respectively.

This paper uses the early Frankfurt School's two major works on authority, Fromm's 1936 *Studies* and Horkheimer's 1936 *Egoism*, to reconstruct the key methods and concepts of the School's research into the authoritarian character. It then argues that, contrary to the secondary commentary, these 1936 works do not represent the beginning and end of the theoretical investigation of the authoritarian character but rather represent the culmination of a programme of social psychological research that Fromm had been carrying out since 1930. The paper then traces the origins of concept of the authoritarian character in Fromm's 1930 *The Dogma of Christ* and 1932 *The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology: Notes on Psychoanalysis and Historical Materialism*.² In effect, we argue that a proper understanding of the scope of authoritarian character's conceptual development necessitates recognition of the centrality of Fromm's theoretical and methodological contributions.

To this end, we first provide a definition of the concept of the authoritarian character and explain the concept's theoretical function in the early research of the Frankfurt School on authoritarian social tendencies. We identify the key concepts and method used in the authoritarian character research programme, namely the authoritarian/sadomasochistic character concept, the concept of a social psyche, and the Freudo-Marxist mode of analysis. Having done so we argue that the concept of the social psyche and the Freudo-Marxist method were both formulated in Fromm's works for the Frankfurt School prior to the 1936-1939 period, and that as a result the starting point for the School's research into authoritarianism should be viewed as 1930 in order to take account of the full extent of Fromm's theoretical input.

II. The Authoritarian Character Project

A Brief Definition of the Authoritarian Character

The purpose of the authoritarian character project was to understand the 'expression of deeply rooted trends' within an individual or society's character that results in the predisposition towards or vulnerability to authoritarian demagogic leaders (Kramer 2011, 18). The project was developed in response to the rise of Nazism in Weimar Germany and totalitarianism in the Soviet Union, and embodied the spirit of inter-disciplinary analysis that Horkheimer set out in his inaugural address (Horkheimer 1993). More specifically, research into the authoritarian character formed part of an attempt by the Frankfurt School to understand the manifestation of authoritarian character traits within individuals. It employed a Freudian interpretation of character (filtered through historical materialism) and was designed to understand authoritarian social structures, and develop a holistic model of authoritarian character.

² Hereafter known as *The Dogma*, and *The Method* respectively.

Freud and Marx were used as micro and macro methods of analysis, respectively. The Freudian micro-analysis explored the formation and exacerbation of authoritarian character traits within the individual psyche whilst the Marxist macro-analysis examined the influence of material factors on the development of these traits. The micro and macro stand in a dialectical relationship to one another and it is their combined operation that creates the right conditions for the expression of authoritarian traits. And in turn, the authoritarian character that develops as a consequence of these influences is subsequently imprinted on the character of those individuals not yet predisposed to these traits.

Fromm's *Studies* was published in 1936 as part of a more extensive study, the first major work undertaken by the School, intended to analyse authoritarian attitudes and the roots of their formation, particularly within the family, using its interdisciplinary approach and featured contributions from key figures of the Frankfurt School's first-generation. The focus on studies on authoritarianism arose primarily from a pressing need to understand the rise of fascism in Germany. Fromm, the Frankfurt School's resident psychoanalyst, was tasked with providing a psychosocial understanding of authoritarianism. It is in *Studies* that we first see the use of authoritarian character concept in the analysis of the authoritarian character, described at this stage as the sadomasochistic character (Gabardi 1987, 169). *Studies* was Fromm's most significant contribution to the conceptual development of the Frankfurt School (Best, et al. 2018, 63). It was followed soon after by Horkheimer's *Egoism*, the second key text of the authoritarian character research project, which drew heavily upon Fromm's analysis of the authoritarian character in *Studies* (Abromeit 2011, 238).

The analysis developed and conclusions reached in *Studies* would define the psychic structure of the authoritarian character. Namely, that socio-economic factors impact the development of character within the family, and that it is in the family that the idea of authority initially develops within the subconscious. Furthermore, under the right socio-economic conditions, sadomasochistic character traits can take root and be expressed. And where sadomasochistic traits are present within an individual's character, and that individual resides within a society that gratifies these aforementioned traits, then such individuals are primed to be enchanted and exploited by authoritarian leaders.

A Brief History of the Authoritarian Character Concept, 1936-1939

The project was "based on a Marxist social and psychoanalytic theory" and "framed psychoanalytically in terms of drive theory" (Kramer 2011, 3, 18). Kramer adds that the authoritarian character was mainly developed within Fromm's *Studies* [1936] (2011, 9). The purpose of *Studies* was to develop an understanding of authority and its impact on the family as the primary source of psychic development. Best, et al concur, describing *Studies* as intended:

The Authoritarian Character Revisited: Genesis and Key Concepts

to develop a social-psychological explanation for the loss of internalized authority or 'conscience' among masses of salaried workers and framed that explanation in terms of what they called the 'crisis in the family', or the child's terribly de-centering experience of an absolute conflict between the law of the father and the law of the state (2018, 899).

Bottomore (2002) uses the term authoritarian character solely to designate the work done in *Studies* (2002, 20). Jay along with other key secondary commentators holds *Studies* to be a key work of the Frankfurt School, calling it "the Institute's First Studies of Authority" (1976, 113). Jay describes the work as the attempt to understand "the family's crucial role in mediating between material substructure and ideological superstructure" (1976, 124).

Abromeit seconds Jay's emphasis on *Studies* but significantly includes Horkheimer's *Egoism* as a part of the authoritarian character project, stating that:

Fromm's essay presented a psychoanalytic analysis of the sadomasochistic character, whose origins and development Horkheimer would subsequently seek to explain historically in his 1936 essay, 'Egoism and Freedom Movements.' At this point, there was still an extensive unity in Horkheimer and Fromm's theoretical interests and approaches (2011, 337).³

Egoism extends Fromm's analysis of the authoritarian character into a historical study of the emergence of populist bourgeois leaders in the early Enlightenment era. Abromeit states that, "Horkheimer drew on all of these methodological insights of Fromm, but he also supplanted them with insights of his own in order to determine the proper place of psychology in a 'dialectical theory of history'" (2011, 253). Horkheimer, in 1936, used the authoritarian character concept in his analysis of the rise of authoritarianism in freedom movements, but was already beginning his conceptual arc away from such overtly psychoanalytic matter. This is evident in his analysis which, while reliant on the authoritarian character concept, inclines towards the type of materialist analysis that would come to characterise the Frankfurt School's work from 1940 onwards. *Egoism* therefore represents the last of the Frankfurt School's studies into the authoritarian character.

There are those who would place the beginning of the School's research on the authoritarian character at an earlier date. There was an empirical study, titled *The Working Class in Weimar Germany*, that Fromm had begun in 1930. The purpose of this study was to understand the failings of the proletariat to engage in revolution, to comprehend why the working class had adopted 'petty bourgeois attitudes' rather than, as theorised by orthodox Marxism, bringing about the overthrow of capitalism. In embarking upon this study, which collected information about the German working class in an effort to explain this revolutionary failure, the Frankfurt School sought to understand "the German

³ Abromeit here indicates that Horkheimer's *Egoism* [1936] was not a conceptual development of Fromm's sadomasochistic character, but rather an interpretation of the sadomasochistic character in historical materialist terms.

working class, its living and working conditions, political orientations and inclinations, and cultural and social attitudes... its potential for resistance as well as seduction" at a purely empirical level only (Feist 1986, 383).

There is some uncertainty within secondary sources regarding the extent to which the study impacted upon research into the authoritarian character. Bottomore (2002) refers to this study as part of the School's research on the authoritarian character. Jay also holds that the "authoritarian character" was a concept that developed out of the Frankfurt School's findings in *The Working Class in Weimar Germany* (1976, 117). The purpose of the study, Jay reports, was to understand "the failure of traditional Marxism to explain the reluctance of the proletariat to fulfil its historical role" (1976, 116).⁴ This Weimar study would not be published until the 1980s but Jay argues that its content was used in *Studies*. Jay states that, "Some of the project's findings were... worked into subsequent studies of authoritarianism... the questionnaire it had developed was incorporated into the next major Institut project, the *Studien über Autorität und Familie*" (1976, 117). McLaughlin likewise holds that the development of the "authoritarian character" begins with the study of *The Working Class of Weimar Germany* (1999, 115). McLaughlin also notes that recognition of Fromm's contribution to the development of authoritarian studies at the Frankfurt School was hindered by the study not being published until the 1980s. McLaughlin, like Jay, links the results of the study of *The Working Class of Weimar Germany* to the analysis of *Studies*.

Whilst we agree with this work's influence on the subsequent theoretical development of the authoritarian character research project (and, as we indicate in Section 4, with placing the start date of this research in 1930) we argue instead that *The Working Class in Weimar Germany* should not be considered part of the Frankfurt School's authoritarian character research project on the grounds that it did not develop any of the concepts central to the Institute's analysis of the authoritarian character. In other words, for those seeking a theory of authoritarianism, there is nothing substantive to be found in this work.

This reading of *The Working Class in Weimar Germany* is seconded by Jay who states that the study was an "empirical study of the mentality of workers in the Weimar Republic" (1976, 116). The study served to establish that the German working class was susceptible to authoritarianism, and thereby to the appeal of the Nazi Party. This signalled the beginning of the School's interest in understanding why society was predisposed towards authoritarianism as opposed to the liberation many Marxist theorists had predicted (Feist 1986, 387).

After the Frankfurt School's move to New York in 1934, its stance on the "basic premises of Critical Theory" altered significantly.

⁴ Whilst we would not dispute Jay's claim, it should be stressed that the purpose of the study was limited to this aspect of proletariat behaviour. In other words, its purpose was not to detail the structure or development of the authoritarian character.

The Authoritarian Character Revisited: Genesis and Key Concepts

Where Critical Theory broke new ground was in its argument that the role of the economy had changed significantly in the twentieth century. In fact, the debate within the Institut over the nature of fascism centered largely on the character of that change (Jay 1976, 152).

This alteration marked the end of the Frankfurt School's analysis of the authoritarian character. As Jay notes, the Frankfurt School did not lose its appetite for understanding Nazism, but rather shifted away from understanding authoritarianism in terms of the authoritarian character (1976, 133). The subsequent studies into authoritarianism abandoned the Freudo-Marxist mode of analysis for an increasingly historical materialist one which no longer focused on understanding the psychodynamics of the authoritarian character but rather in analysing the socio-economic circumstances that gave rise to Nazism As Jay puts it,

the Institut employed two general approaches in its analysis of Nazism. One, associated with Neumann, Gurland, and Kirchheimer, focused on changes in legal, political, and economic institutions... Its basic assumptions were those of a more orthodox Marxism, stressing the centrality of monopoly capitalism, although with considerable refinement. The other major approach, followed by the group around Horkheimer, saw Nazism as the most extreme example of a general trend towards irrational domination in the West... it paid increased attention to technological rationalization as an institutional force and instrumental rationality as a cultural imperative (1976, 166).⁵

The new conceptual direction that the Frankfurt School pursued overlapped with Fromm's expulsion from the Frankfurt School in 1939. Fromm had been instrumental in the conceptual development of the School's research into the authoritarian character through his construction of the Freudo-Marxist method of analysis that the Frankfurt School employed. Following Fromm's departure, the Frankfurt School took a new conceptual direction, beginning with Horkheimer's *The Authoritarian State* [1940] which focused on the critique of technological rationality. As Jay notes, "In '*Authoritarian State*' [Horkheimer] developed a critique of technological rationality... anticipating many of the arguments he was to develop with Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*" (1976, 156).

The last major work in the authoritarian character project was published in 1936. Fromm's expulsion from the Frankfurt School, the adoption of Pollock's state capitalism thesis, and the publication of *The Authoritarian State* in 1940 mark the definite beginning of the post-authoritarian character research phase. The School's post-1939 studies into authority do not employ the Freudo-Marxist analysis that characterised its previous research. Consequently, the term 'authoritarian character' is used almost exclusively by secondary commentators

⁵ This perspective on the direction that the Frankfurt School embarked upon after 1939 is supported by Best, et al (2018, 804).

to describe two works by the Frankfurt School, *Studies* and, to a lesser degree, *Egoism*.

The School's studies on authoritarianism also shifted focus post-1939. Jay notes that, "In the forties the *Studies in Prejudice* picked up where the *Studien über Autorität und Familie* had left off, but now the focus was on American forms of authoritarianism" (1976, 172). And with this redirection towards the analysis of American forms of authoritarianism "came a subtle change in the center of the Institute's work. American mass culture thus became one of the central concerns of the Frankfurt School in the forties." (Jay 1976, 172) Central to this change in direction in the analysis of authoritarianism was the sea change initiated by Horkheimer's "re-philosophizing" of the Frankfurt School's theoretical orientation (Dubiel 1985, 106). This change was best encapsulated by the centrality now given in the School's research to Pollock's state capitalism thesis, which detailed a new type of capitalism with the state controlling the entire economic process. Domination in this context refers to the complete control that the state has over all aspects of life:

If state capitalism is a workable system, superior in terms of productivity to private capitalism under conditions of monopolistic market distribution, what are the political implications? If the state becomes the omnipotent controller of all human activities, the question 'who controls the controller' embraces the problem of whether state capitalism opens a new way to freedom or leads to the complete loss of it as far as the overwhelming majority is concerned (Pollock 1982, 90).

The importance of Pollock's state capitalism thesis to the School's research on authority is evident in Horkheimer's *The Authoritarian State* [1940]. Here Horkheimer analysed the various types of authoritarian state, such as the totalitarian Nazi regime and integral statism of the Soviet Union, and the tools by which authoritarian states exercise domination over their people, with state capitalism presented as the primary tool of state domination. Horkheimer asserted that, "State capitalism is the authoritarian state of the present" (1973, 3). It is in this work that we see concepts being developed that would later be used in the Frankfurt School's best-known work, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002) [1947].

Noerr describes the central message of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as:

The self-destruction of Western reason is seen to be grounded in an historical and fateful dialectic of the domination of external nature, internal nature, and society... Reason appears as inextricably entangled with domination... In the service of an advancing rationalization of instrumental thought modelled on the domination of nature and serving its purposes (2002, 218).

The new direction the Frankfurt School pursued post-1939 is thus markedly different in nature from the School's earlier efforts to understand authoritarianism. The reorientation in focus and theoretical mode of analysis, which began with Horkheimer's *The Authoritarian State*, marked a shift towards understanding authoritarianism by means of a materialist analysis of domination.

This theoretical trajectory eventually culminated in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, where domination was now presented as dialectically inevitable.

The School's theoretical research into the authoritarian character, as we have seen, centred around two texts, *Studies* and *Egoism*, with the former being the key text. *Studies* was a psychoanalytically-based socio-historical study that analysed the impact of the family on the development of character traits and, in particular, the influence of the family as a psychic unit on the development of authoritarian character traits. *Egoism* applied the concept of the authoritarian character to the analysis of various freedom movements throughout history. After Fromm left the Frankfurt School in 1939, the School's studies on authoritarianism developed along a different conceptual path focused more on a dialectical socio-historical framework with psychoanalysis used as a means of interpreting surveys, as opposed to a psychoanalytically-based understanding of authoritarianism enriched by socio-economic analysis.

III. Key Features of the Authoritarian Character Research Project

The following section details three key elements drawn from *Studies* that together constitute the authoritarian character concept and its mode of analysis. Firstly, the Freudo-Marxist method of analysis, which is vital to the conceptual formulation and analysis of the authoritarian character. Secondly, the concept of sadomasochism, which differs considerably to the standard Freudian account. Thirdly, the concept of a shared social psyche, which is key to understanding why certain societies are more susceptible to the production of the authoritarian character than others. These three elements are intertwined in the analysis of the authoritarian character.

The Freudo-Marxist Synthesis

It is the Freudo-Marxist method of analysis that characterises the authoritarian character research project. The project's purpose was to understand the predisposition of individuals and societies to seek their own oppression by pursuing the security of authoritarian leadership and the Freudo-Marxist method of analysis was employed to analyse this predisposition through macro and micro-level dialectical analysis.

It is in *Studies* that we see the first concerted effort by the Frankfurt School to uncover the set of traits that constitute the authoritarian-sadomasochistic character. Fromm begins with the typical family structure. From a young age, Fromm argues, one is exposed to authority relations within the family structure. Within the family structure one begins to relate to authority and, by so doing, to develop an innate desire for the subordinate to become 'like' the authority figure. Fromm here follows Freud in identifying the father as an individual's first exposure to authority. However, Fromm differs from Freud in stating that the authority that the father holds does not rest within his role as father alone. The

father does not model authority but transmits social authority, i.e. authority that exists within society. Fromm states that, "The authority that the father has in the family is not a coincidental one later supplemented by the social authorities, but rather the authority of the father himself is ultimately grounded in the authority structure of society as a whole" (2020, 18)[1936].

It is essential, however, to note that the father is the first relation to authority one has, and the father is closely connected to the formation of the super-ego (Fromm 2020, 16)[1936]. As the authority of a ruling power exists outside of oneself Fromm, like Freud, attributes the formation of an internal understanding of authority to the super-ego (Fromm 2020, 13)[1936]. The child confronts external force in the form of the father and, out of biological dependence, identifies with the father and internalises his commands and prohibitions as features of its super-ego. And thus, in the relationship between father and child, authority is transformed from something external to the child to an internal psychic entity. Individuals then act on those internalised authority structures, obeying them not out of fear but out of psychic necessity as authority relations become part of their pre-conscious and, thus, their psychic makeup.

Again, it is important to note that for Fromm the type of authority that the parent represents and which the child internalises is directly derived from the parent's standing within the socio-economic structure. The child models and internalises authority from the father through its emotional relationship with the father, and primarily through the experiences of fear and love. And this relationship itself, Fromm argues, reflects the wider social structure. A peasant father, for instance, views his children in terms of their utility-potential as a source of labour, whilst a petty bourgeois views his as domestic compensation for his own lack of social status and power. In each case, the child's affective relationship to the father changes accordingly, as does the formation of the child's super-ego. And thus, the formation of the super-ego and the child's primary relationship to authority are not naturally occurring processes but rather are socially conditioned by the father's place within the social hierarchy.

Fromm's account also stresses the dialectical nature of the relationship between external social authority and the super-ego. Having internalised external authority in the form of the super-ego, the individual then projects their super-ego onto the dominant power within society. And with this transfer, the qualities of the super-ego and the individual's irrational emotional responses to it are imbued in the authority figure. The individual's relationship to that figure then takes on the features of their relationship to their super-ego, and the authority figure appears to them as inherently trustworthy and beyond rational critique. This affective relationship to authority enormously increases authority's power, and is in this "transfigured" form that authority is then re-internalised and used to support the individual's super-ego (Fromm 2020, 16)[1936]. And this process of internalisation, projection, and re-internalisation of authority continues for as

long as the external authority is perceived to wield genuine power, and thereby threaten genuine danger to the individual.

On Fromm's account, authoritarian traits are not necessarily harmful or neurotic. For example, in the relationship between a student and their supervisor, though it does have an authoritarian element, there is no inherent neurosis involved. What leads to authoritarian traits becoming neurotic is the gratification of neurotic traits, i.e., sadomasochism and the repression of libidinal drives. Fromm's sadomasochistic traits operate along the same lines as those discussed by Freud in *The Economic Problem of Masochism* particularly with regards to the understanding of moral masochism. Key points of agreement are that with masochism the apparent pursuit of unhappiness for its own sake is unconsciously motivated by guilt and the desire for self-punishment, and that masochism and sadism are coupled in that the presence of masochistic traits necessitates the presence of sadistic traits.

As we have seen, for Fromm the individual's relationship to both authority and their own super-ego is conditioned by the amount of fear experienced. And the amount of fear to which an individual is subject is itself socially determined. In a society with class divisions deriving from the capitalist mode of production, the upper classes will experience the least amount of fear and the greatest sense of agency, and the lower classes the greater amount of fear and least amount of agency. The latter situation can lead to weak ego development in the individual. Lacking the strength to control their drives through the ego, the individual relies upon the super-ego and authority to do so. The expenditure of psychic energy in this process of repression further weakens the ego, and thereby increases reliance on authority to carry out psychic functions. And in an authoritarian society, the lower one is placed in the socio-economic hierarchy, the more fearful and more helpless one becomes, and the more one's existence appears to be incapable of self-direction and utterly subject to the whims of fate. Fromm states that, "The relative opacity of social, and thereby individual, life creates a nearly hopeless dependency to which the individual adapts by developing a sadomasochistic character structure" (2020, 43)[1936]. Such masochistic traits are not naturally occurring but result from socio-economic relations between individuals and the social structures within a society. And ultimately, from the mode of production imprinted upon the social structure. For Fromm as for Marx, no facet of human existence is independent of socio-economic conditions.

Sadomasochism

This section details the psychic structure of the sadomasochistic character as described by Fromm in *Studies*. The sadomasochistic character forms the conceptual core of the authoritarian character research project and represents the defining character trait of the authoritarian character (Fromm 2020, 37)[1936]. Indeed, the two terms can be used interchangeably within the parameters of the project. Fromm observes that where sadomasochistic traits are present within an

individual's character and when that individual resides within a society that gratifies these traits, it will be the case that these individuals are primed to be susceptible to authoritarian leaders within an authoritarian society.

The satisfaction of authority and the dominance of the super-ego are responsible for not only the repression of drives but also the creation of character traits. In the first case, on Fromm's account of masochism, a degree of gratification results when an individual with these masochistic traits submits to authority. This gratification results in an individual taking pleasure in obedience, submission and the surrender of their personality. These are traits of a masochistic character structure. These masochistic traits are developed through psychic processes, just like any other character trait. However, contrary to the conventional thinking of the time which held that drives were responsible for submissive traits, Fromm claimed these traits to be both contingent and historically specific, saying that "the gratification provided by submitting to authority is not about a timeless submissive drive, but rather a historically determined, psychic state of affairs" (2020, 37)[1936]. What causes human beings to gratify rather than repress these masochistic traits is the pleasure created by appeasing the super-ego and the authority located within. As mentioned previously, in the absence of a strong ego and with the repression of drives, there is a higher functionality of the super-ego and the authority located within it. We gratify the super-ego by submitting to and obeying authority, and ultimately find pleasure in this submission to an external dependency. And this in turn creates masochistic traits. Fromm notes that, "The pleasure of obedience, submission, and the surrender of one's personality, that feeling of 'absolute dependency' are features typical of masochistic character structure" (2020, 39)[1936].

As stated before, for Fromm the existence of masochistic traits necessitates the existence of sadistic traits. He states that, "Psychoanalytic findings show that a characterological structure that includes masochism necessarily also includes sadism" (2020, 40)[1936]. The gratification of authority and authoritarian structures necessitated by the internalisation of authority relations leads to the creation of sadomasochistic traits that then become the authoritarian-sadomasochistic character. It must be noted that there are significant differences between sadistic and masochistic traits, the first having the aim of "making another person into a dependent and defenseless instrument of one's own will, dominating the other absolutely and without restriction, and in extreme cases, forcing him to suffer and express that suffering", and the second with the aim of encouraging the subject "to lose themselves in power, and through this surrender, which in pathological cases can lead to physical suffering, find pleasure and gratification" (Fromm 2020, 41)[1936]. However, like Freud, Fromm finds that while both sadism and masochism are present together, it can be the case in some instances that masochistic traits are suppressed, and sadistic traits are exacerbated. This means that masochistic traits are not present but instead suppressed. In contrast, with the authoritarian character, there are instances

where both sadistic and masochistic traits are present, specifically within societies that have conditions that gratify sadomasochistic traits. “This has the important socio-psychological consequence that a society which produces sadomasochism as the dominant drive structure must provide opportunities that gratify both sides of sadomasochism” (Fromm 2020, 41)[1936].

The Social Psyche

So far, we have detailed Fromm’s analysis in *Studies* of the psychic mechanisms that lead to the creation of the authoritarian-sadomasochist character. Fromm goes on to detail the social conditions that give rise to and gratify these sadomasochistic traits. Fromm’s analysis stresses the role of social psychology in the understanding of the authoritarian character, pointing to the central role of social factors in the development and normalisation of what would typically be viewed as mental disorders. Fromm reminds us that while individuals gratify authority and authoritarian structures by satisfying their super-ego, it is society (and the concept of authority that exists within the social structure) that we initially perceive within our super-ego. It is the idea of authority drawn from the social structure, developed by socio-psychological and socio-economic factors, which leads in turn to the creation of sadomasochistic traits. Fromm writes, “In authoritarian society, the sadomasochistic character structure is generated by the economic structure, which necessitates the authoritarian hierarchy” (2020, 43)[1936]. These hierarchies are inherently present within any society that has a ruling class with subordinate classes. The subordinate individual’s apparent helplessness within society leads to the adaptation of sadomasochistic character. And whilst existence within authoritarian social structures gratifies both masochistic and sadistic yearnings, this gratification significantly affects masochistic character types. For Fromm argues that they perceive their subjection not as a contingent state of affairs brought about and maintained by authoritarian social structures but rather as their inevitable destiny. “He loves not only those conditions that constrain human life and limit human freedom; he also loves being subjugated to a blind and all-powerful fate” (Fromm 2020, 43)[1936].

Although analysed thus far as traits within the individual psyche, Fromm holds that the sadomasochistic character traits also form a part of a larger shared social consciousness which we term the social psyche. This shared social psyche is often class specific. For instance, when discussing the peasant, Fromm notes that:

because of his class situation, the peasant has developed a character in which the predominant feature is the maximum utilization of all these people and goods at his disposal, and in which love, striving for the happiness of the beloved person for their own sake, is a barely developed trait (2020, 19)[1936].

This character was unique to the peasant class and its development was due to the particular “economic and social situation” of that class (Fromm 2020,

19)[1936]. As we have seen, Fromm holds that the repression of drives strengthens the super-ego in developing sadomasochistic traits, and increases eagerness to gratify authority. This scenario is most prevalent in classes that do not have the economic or social means to satisfy their drives. "The dependent class must suppress their drives to a greater degree than the ruling class" and thus the lower class develop a shared social psyche unique to their own social and economic situation (Fromm 2020, 30)[1936]. The opposite holds for those in the upper classes as they have the means to gratify their drives due to their social and economic situation. As they are able to gratify their drives instead of repressing them, the development of the ego is more psychologically significant in these classes as their super-ego does not gain the advantage over their ego. This results in ego development that is greater than that of the lower classes and is one to which the lower classes aspire. Fromm states that,

The ego development of a particular class leading a society becomes partially objectified in that society's culture, and the adoption of the most valuable elements from a previous cultural epoch promotes the ego development of the newly ruling class (2020, 30)[1936].

The objectification of the ego development of the ruling class and the super-ego development of the lower class is a dialectical process. The ego development of the ruling class creates a new objectified culture. The lower classes, unable to engage with this culture due to their social and economic situation, have to repress the drives that seek to satisfy their urges, urges derived from the culture of the ruling class. This repression of drives leads the lower classes to develop sadomasochistic traits and seek greater gratification of authority, which leads to more significant ego development within the ruling class, which in turn leads to a new objectified culture.

The increase in security of the ruling class leads to greater rational efforts to suppress the dominated class upon whose obedience the ruling class depends. And the increasing suppression of the ruled increases the pleasure of the sadomasochistic character in absolute submission to and sympathetic identification with the rulers. However, in addition to providing means for the sadomasochistic character to gratify its masochistic urges, the authoritarian society must of necessity also provide opportunities to gratify the sadistic ones. And here the authoritarian character can compensate for its utter submission to authority by directing its hatred against those that it views as helpless. Then the authoritarian character can experience the power and control that the authority epitomises and that they so manifestly lack through the torment of the weaker party. The objective of this behaviour is not the destruction of the weak, but the experience of power through control which necessitates the continued existence of those subjected to it. Both masochistic and sadistic traits express the same joy in domination, the former in being dominated and the other in dominating. The authoritarian character can exhibit destructive aggression. However, Fromm notes that this urge is experienced not in relation to those viewed as weaker, but

rather against those in authority. The sadomasochistic character develops in response to fear of authority, but the negative feelings are repressed in favour of feelings of love and admiration. These negative feelings however remain and can be expressed, under the guidance of the authority with which one identifies, against rival authorities be they individuals, social groups, or concepts. Then the destruction of that authority is the end sought, and is likely to be pursued in a manner equally as irrational and intensely emotional as was the reverence of the primary authority.

And this in turn has direct political implications for any sort of liberatory praxis directed against the ruling authority. The sadomasochistic character lacks the capacity for independent action, in thought or deed, against authority. However, it can be stimulated to action against authority if there is a significant change in social circumstances, presumably one that caused the authoritarian character to question the effective power of the authority and, detecting weakness, to express the repressed negative emotions towards them. This rebellion, however, is not motivated by the desire to remove authority such that the individual can be free from subjugation and to determine their own course of action. Rather it is motivated by the desire to remove an authority that no longer provokes fear, and through fear, reverence. Though such individuals might join revolutionary members of their own class on the barricades, their motive is not revolution and freedom but a restoration of the oppressive status quo ante, albeit under new management. Fromm comments that the authoritarian character “may well be driven under certain circumstances to a defiant revolt against the existing authority, but as a rule he will then prescribe himself a new one” (2020, 42)[1936]. Thus, a social group of sadomasochistic character always represents a reactionary political tendency against innovative social change.

Applying the Authoritarian Character Concept: Horkheimer’s Egoism and Freedom Movements

After *Studies*, the School’s focus shifted to what Horkheimer termed ‘bourgeois appetites’. This analysis explored the ways in which, historically, the bourgeoisie used the lower classes to further their own interests at the expense of their erstwhile lower-class allies. Abromeit claims that Horkheimer’s essay, *Egoism*, set the Frankfurt School’s agenda for the next decade (2011, 261). Whilst we do not dispute the significance of this work, nor its subsequent influence on the Frankfurt School’s activities, we do feel that it is important to note the extent to which *Egoism* represents the substantial application of authoritarian character concept that Fromm had developed *Studies*. Horkheimer’s analysis of the ‘bourgeois epoch’ directly mirrored Fromm’s analysis of authoritarian-sadomasochist character, albeit in a less psychoanalytic and more historical materialist style of analysis (Abromeit 2011, 283).

In *Egoism*, Horkheimer used Fromm’s social psychology as a theoretical foundation for the analysis of the emergence and development of authoritarian

character traits and bourgeois society's oppressive effect upon the masses. *Egoism's* use of the authoritarian character concept to examine the social psyche of various freedom movements in European history was in effect a demonstration of the concept's practical applications. In this case, for the analysis of the impact of personality and charisma on character development, particularly within the prime socio-economic context. More specifically, in identifying the roots of social domination and oppression in the rise of authoritarian figures, typically members of the bourgeoisie, who gain power through lower class manipulation enabled by favourable socio-economic situations and historical development of social character.

Abromeit notes that, "Horkheimer articulates a distinctive interpretation not only of the intellectual, but also the social and social-psychological transformations of Europe during the dawn of the bourgeois epoch" (2011, 11). Horkheimer wrote *Egoism* to give an understanding of authoritarian character traits in relation to the masses' attitude towards authoritarian bourgeois leaders. Horkheimer used the term egoism, the self, to represent the self-interests of bourgeois society. Each freedom movement analysed represents what Horkheimer called, "bourgeois pseudorevolution with radical populist trappings" intended to solicit the masses into joining bourgeois movements to topple existing elitist structures (1993, 97)[1936]. Horkheimer noted that, due to the small size of bourgeois society, every significant social-economic moment in the history of bourgeois Europe was only made possible thanks to the enlistment of the masses. Through case studies of movements led by bourgeois leaders such as the 14th Century Roman leader Cola di Rienzo, 15th Century Florentine leader Savonarola, the leaders of the Reformation Luther and Calvin, as well the French Revolutionary Robespierre, Horkheimer paints a picture of the recurrent exploitation of the masses by the bourgeoisie. With these European 'pseudo-revolutions' we see an awakening of sorts of bourgeois consciousness that led to the development of a more 'rational' view of political leadership, one where bourgeois society could rationally free itself from the oppression of Feudal elite. Horkheimer speaks of this kind of 'rationalisation' as a "philosophically grounded morality" (1993, 54)[1936]. He states that

One of the causes of bourgeois morality lies in the social need to restrain the principle of competition that dominated the epoch. Thus, the moralistic view of man contains a rational principle, albeit in mystified, idealistic form... It was less necessary to preach moderation in mutual competition to the poor of recent centuries. For them, morality was supposed to mean submissiveness, resignation, discipline and sacrifice for the whole, i.e., simply the repression of their material claims (1993, 54)[1936].

The idea of morality developed here would further exacerbate the 'ego' or self-interest of bourgeois society, contributing to it becoming the oppressor of the masses in a post-Feudal society.

The Authoritarian Character Revisited: Genesis and Key Concepts

Horkheimer states that this 'rationalisation' leads the bourgeois to achieve independence from the 'old' Feudal system.

The bourgeoisie's efforts to push through its own demands for a more rational administration against the feudal powers with the help of the desperate popular masses, while simultaneously consolidating its own rule over the masses, combine to account for the peculiar way the struggle for 'the people' is carried on in these movements (1993, 61)[1936].

Effectively the 'movements' that bourgeois society led against the feudal elite with the help of the masses replaced the entrenched power of the previous elite with their own.⁶ This excluded the masses from the kind of independence that bourgeois society had achieved, particularly in the time period between the end of feudalism and the start of the Reformation.

The main question that Horkheimer was trying to answer in *Egoism* was how it was that, over and over again, the masses were hoodwinked into supporting bourgeois pseudo-revolutions. The answer for Horkheimer lay in a combination of the historical development of individuals and society and the socio-economic circumstances that arise out of these historical developments. This concept of the historical development of individuals and society is effectively the concept of the shared social psyche from *Studies*. In detailing a shared social psyche, Fromm indicated, one needs to understand how each society, or societal group, developed its shared identity or culture. Fromm does this in *Studies* by analysing the impact of socio-economic conditions on the development of a group's shared social psyche. We argue that Horkheimer's analyses perform a similar function on the historical development of certain societies and their respective freedom movements. Namely, the reconstruction of their social psyche, albeit seen through a purely socio-economic lens.

Towards the end of the feudal period, the high rates of poverty and dissatisfaction within society led to a number of movements for change among those outside the ruling elite. Horkheimer states that, "The miserable situation of the impoverished population was their cause, and the urban bourgeoisie played the leading role" (1993, 59)[1936]. Ultimately, on Horkheimer's account, what drew the masses to the cause of the bourgeois leaders was their charisma. Although it should be noted that the charisma of bourgeois leaders would not have been as effective had the socio-economic conditions not been so impoverished. Two factors enabled bourgeois society to further dominate the masses once 'freedom' from the 'old' system had been achieved. Firstly, the combination of years of submission to and domination by the feudal elite prevented the masses from developing the same level of rational conscientisation that bourgeois society had been privileged to. Secondly, the development of the bourgeois leadership's attractive charisma created the conditions for exploiting the masses during and

⁶ Horkheimer sums up this transition from feudal to bourgeois control by stating that, "Dependency is merely changed, not abolished" (1993, 69)[1936].

after bourgeois-led pseudo-revolutions. In effect, socio-economic circumstances produced a psychological state that was susceptible to authoritarianism. These two factors are the essence of the narrative of *Egoism*, the desire for freedom corrupted by self-interested leadership. For instance, in his analysis the Roman bourgeois leader Cola di Rienzo, Horkheimer says that:

Although he and his like seek to offer the masses the spectacle of a freedom movement, at the same time they adopt the pathos of absolute obedience to higher truths and thus present the example of a submissiveness which is to be emulated by their followers' loyalty to the leaders and to the bourgeois forms of life (1993, 68)[1936].

As bourgeois self-interest grew and its use for the masses diminished, there was still a need to keep the masses in check. The bourgeois leadership, lacking any meaningful policy that would grant the masses a degree of emancipation equivalent to that enjoyed by the bourgeoisie, filled that vacuum with their charisma in what then became a cult of personality. Horkheimer comments that, "The less the policy of the bourgeois leader coincides with the immediate interests of the masses, the more exclusively his greatness must fill the public consciousness, and the more his character must be magnified into a 'personality'" (1993, 62)[1936].

Moreover, given the leader's egoism, this cult of personality serves to subject the lower classes to further domination and oppression in the leader's service. Horkheimer sets out a character typology of the 'bourgeois leaders' and the masses that enabled these leaders to succeed in their 'freedom movements'. In all the cases that Horkheimer analyses, there is a distinct set of characteristics that characterise not just leaders but followers. Although specific socio-economic factors are needed to bring about the full development of these characteristics, they are present nonetheless, albeit in a relatively simple form.

Thus, *Egoism*, while not developing any new concepts for the analysis of the authoritarian character, can be seen as a work operating within the conceptual framework of the larger authoritarian character project undertaken by the Frankfurt School. Its importance to the teleological arc of the authoritarian character research project lies not in its conceptual innovation, but in the novelty of its application. It represents a case study of society that employs the key concepts of the project to understand why and how an individual or a small group of individuals can dominate a larger class of people. Horkheimer's major contribution to the project lies in his addition of greater historico-materialist substance in the analysis of the authoritarian character, and thereby a deeper understanding of the effects that socio-economic factors have on the character. And in particular how these factors can prime society for an authoritarian governance.

The authoritarian character research project culminates with Horkheimer's *Egoism*. The Frankfurt School would move from Europe to the USA during the mid-1930s. Whilst Fromm was instrumental in moving the Frankfurt School to the USA,

helping establish it at the University of Columbia whilst a visiting professor there between 1935-1939, his extended absence from the activities of the Frankfurt School due to pneumonia and later the move to the USA left a conceptual gap (Funk 1982, 11). A gap Horkheimer filled with the work of Theodor Adorno.

There had been friction between Horkheimer and Fromm towards the end of the 1930s due to Fromm's increasing critique of Freud's libidinal drive theory. However, Adorno's arrival and the School's financial difficulties contributed significantly to Fromm's departure in 1939. A further contributing factor was Horkheimer's adoption of Friedrich Pollock's state capitalism thesis, as seen in *The Authoritarian State* of 1940. This thesis holds that the traditional market and its regulation of production are replaced by a directly controlled 'pseudo-market' highly influenced by the state, authoritarian and democratic. This state capitalism thesis led to the Frankfurt School taking a new conceptual direction in their analysis of social conditions, from a Freud-Marxist method of analysis to an almost purely materialist one.⁷ So marked was this conceptual reorientation that secondary works distinguish Critical Theory proper from early Critical Theory by using Horkheimer's adoption of the state capitalism thesis as the watershed moment between the two (Jay 1976, 226).

IV. Early Frommian Developments of the Authoritarian Character, or A Brief History of the Authoritarian Character Concept, 1930-1939

Whilst 1936, which saw the production of Fromm's *Studies* and Horkheimer's *Egoism*, represents the obvious starting point for one wishing to familiarise themselves with the School's early research into the authoritarian character, the conceptual development of its method and theory began a number of years before this point. From a historical perspective the danger with focussing on the two works of 1936 by Fromm and Horkheimer is that it makes the project look like a flash in a pan, a brief theoretical moment as opposed to the culmination of a programme that had been in development since 1930. In actuality, the concept of the authoritarian character that Fromm and Horkheimer employed in their 1936 works was the direct result of a method and theoretical framework that Fromm had been developing since he joined the Frankfurt School. And without this method and theoretical framework the authoritarian character concept that appears in the 1936 works of Fromm and Horkheimer could not have been formulated, let alone applied.

Consequently, those seeking a thorough grasp of the historical development of this phase of authoritarian research should explore several works produced before this point. To support this claim, we explore two rather neglected texts

⁷ Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* (2005)[1955] also synthesised later Freud and Marx. However, this synthesis was not based on the initial Freud-Marxist synthesis proposed by Fromm in *The Method* [1932] and was developed by Marcuse long after the conclusion of the School's research into the authoritarian character in 1939.

developed by Fromm prior to 1936, these being *The Dogma of Christ* [1930] and *The Method and Function of Analytic Psychology* [1932]. We will show how concepts contained in these texts share a conceptual and methodological lineage with two of the three key elements that constitute the authoritarian character research project: the shared social psyche and the Freudo-Marxist method of analysis. We argue that the concept of a shared social psyche detailed in *The Dogma*, and the Freudo-Marxist method of analysis employed in Fromm's *The Method*, are essentially the same as the concept of a shared social psyche and the Freudo-Marxist method of analysis that appear in *Studies*. And as we have already shown, these two elements form the backbone of the analysis of the authoritarian character, without which concept of the authoritarian character itself as well as its mode of investigation would not have been possible. As secondary Critical Theory commentators attest, Fromm to this day remains rather unappreciated both in terms of his contributions to Critical Theory in general and the Frankfurt School's studies into authoritarianism in particular (Best, et al. 2018, 55). This section partially addresses this neglect by drawing attention to the significance of Fromm's contribution to the Frankfurt School's early interdisciplinary synthesis of Freud and Marx, the synthesis that made Critical Theory such a penetrating theory of social critique.

Fromm's entry into the Frankfurt School in 1930 provided the School with a resident psychoanalyst trained in the Freudian tradition. Fromm would be the only practising psychoanalyst among the key members of the first-generation of the Frankfurt School. Fromm began his academic life studying psychology, philosophy and sociology at the University of Frankfurt, then moved to Heidelberg, earning his PhD in sociology (Funk 1982, 9). Fromm received psychoanalytical training in Munich and then Berlin, and then moved to Frankfurt, where he created the South German Institute of Psychoanalysis (Jay 1976, 90). He was invited to join the Institute for Social Research as a full member in 1930 by its new director, Max Horkheimer, as director of its social psychology section (Funk 1982, 10; Wiggershaus 1994, 58). Here he continued to formulate the synthesis of Freudian psychoanalytic theory and Marxist political theory on which he had begun to work in the late 1920s with the intention now of applying it to the analysis of a specific social group, the contemporary working class. Freudo-Marxist syntheses had been attempted before but Fromm's method of analysis differed from previous efforts (Funk 1982, 10). Unlike previous attempts to merge Freud and Marx by thinkers such as Wilhelm Reich, Fromm's showed a less doctrinaire attitude to the Freudian canon (Jay 1976, 92). One can see already in his earliest works with the School a willingness to consider the possibility of Freudian psychodynamics without the primacy of sexual drive theories, although at this stage he did not drop Freudian libidinal drive theory entirely. Fromm states that:

I wanted to understand the laws that govern the life of the individual man, and the laws of society – that is, of men in their social existence. I tried to see the

The Authoritarian Character Revisited: Genesis and Key Concepts

lasting truth in Freud's concepts as against those assumptions which were in need of revision. I tried to do the same with Marx's theory, and finally I tried to arrive at a synthesis which followed from the understanding and the criticism of both thinkers (2009, 5) [1962].

Fromm would later claim Marx had been wrongly interpreted by "petit-bourgeois interpreters" and that Freud's Oedipus complex was a bourgeois patriarchal interpretation of humankind's mental state (Fromm 1970, 167, 158) [1932]. It was Fromm's willingness to subject to critique the two thinkers that constituted his own *Weltanschauung* that gave him the intellectual licence to adapt canonical theoretical concepts to meet the needs of a changing psychopolitical landscape.

The concept of a shared social psyche can be seen in Fromm's first significant work while a member of the Frankfurt School, *The Dogma*. This work saw the introduction of Fromm's unique psychoanalytic style in an effort to understand the development of Christianity and its impact on the development of European society. As Jeremy Carrette writes, "*The Dogma of Christ* provides an insight into how Fromm developed the idea of 'social character' and how he identified social class as an essential factor in differentiating religious attitudes" (Carrette 2004, viii) [1930].

In this work, Fromm shows how the differentiation of religious attitudes among the various social classes creates the unconscious psyche of the various social classes. This led to the understanding of character as developing as a shared social psyche. However, at the time of *The Dogma*, the shared social psyche as an idea is mostly a developing concept that delineates a shared social consciousness that is distinct and uniquely developed through history. In examining the development and wider social influence of European Christianity Fromm shows that the development of society's character is shaped by material historical circumstances and that each society's social character is unique. This would later play a key role in the understanding of authoritarianism in the authoritarian character research project, as Fromm's analysis of German society portrays a society that through historical factors was psychologically vulnerable to the effects of strong authoritarian leaders.

The Dogma contrasts the development of Christianity to the Oedipus complex developed by Freud (Fromm 2004, 42)[1930].⁸ Fromm does this by describing the origin of Christianity's dogma as one where a suffering Jesus becomes God by overthrowing the Father-God. The story of the suffering Jesus resonates among the suffering masses who see, and ultimately follow, the suffering Jesus become God by overthrowing the Father-God. God Jesus then seemingly attains the power of the Father-God without becoming the Father-God. Significantly the suffering masses do not question the power of the new God, Jesus,

⁸ As with all of Fromm's work before his expulsion from the Frankfurt School, *The Dogma* was written while Fromm still adhered to the Freudian theory of libidinal drives.

who has overthrown the all-powerful Father-God (Fromm 2004, 58)[1930]. Whereas the story of the suffering Jesus did not resonate with the ruling class of ancient Palestine, who saw the now God Jesus as taking the place of the Father-God. By describing the development in this way, Fromm shows the differentiations of religious attitudes among the various social classes and their impact on the unconscious psyche of those diverse classes.

The core function of *The Dogma* is to blur the distinction between individual psychology and social psychology and show how it is possible for a social group to develop a distinct shared psyche based on the social circumstances of that group. Fromm traces the ways in which the Christian dogma was progressively adapted and modified by a subordinated minority within the Roman empire in response to changes in their socio-economic conditions. As the Christian social group moved from revolutionary identification with the suffering son of God at the point of their socio-economic subordination, to identification with God the Father at the point of their ascendance to the ruling class and their subsequent use of Christian dogma to ensure the “the integration of the masses into the absolutist system of the Roman Empire” (Fromm 2004, 56)[1930]. In *Studies* Fromm analyses the shared social psyche of an authoritarian society, and details the impact of socio-economic factors on the development of sadomasochistic characteristics within it. The analysis of the psyche of society that was embarked upon in *Studies* continues in *Egoism*, a historical study of freedom movements within European societies. This understanding, that human character alters throughout history and undergoes different psychological development as a consequence of its changing socio-economic circumstances, links directly to the authoritarian character research project, and employs the concept of the social psyche developed by Fromm in *The Dogma* some six years earlier.

We turn now to Fromm’s 1932 work, *The Method and Function of an Analytic Social Psychology*. It is in this work, more than any other, that Fromm lays out and justifies the unique synthesis of Freudian psychoanalytic theory and historical materialism that we argue characterises the Frankfurt School’s research into the authoritarian structure. Fromm puts forward his synthesis as the framework for what he terms ‘analytic social psychology’, a field of study that “seeks to understand the instinctual apparatus of a group, its libidinous and largely unconscious behaviour, in terms of its socio-economic structure” (1970, 158)[1932].

Fromm positions both psychoanalysis and historical materialism as thoroughly materialistic theories whose combined potential for the analysis of human social behaviour has been undermined by their capture by bourgeois interests. Bourgeois interpreters of Marx, Fromm claims, attributed to him an economic psychology which posits that a or the fundamental drive of humanity is the urge to acquire. And in so doing these thinkers transformed a psychic feature prominent within capitalist society into a universal human drive. Fromm argues that in actuality Marx’s work contained very few psychological presuppositions

other than that humans fashion their own history, that their actions are motivated by needs, and that their needs increase in the course of human development. He further argues that psychoanalysis can serve as the basis for the materialist psychology absent in Marx's work once it too has been freed from its bourgeois trappings.

For Fromm the key insight of psychoanalysis was that the family unit is the key determinant of individual psychological development, and that the family itself is conditioned by the social structure. He states that,

The family is the medium through which the society or the social class stamps its specific structure on the child, and hence in the adult. The family is the psychological agency of society (1970, 158) [1932].

In this way the instinctual apparatus of the individual is modified by the socio-economic structure. Fromm argues that the significance of this insight was obscured by the tendency of psychoanalysts to universalise the psychic traits of one particular class, the bourgeoisie. The psychoanalysts themselves were bourgeois, and so too were the subjects whose traits they analysed, and as a result the modifications peculiar to that social class were taken to be typical. However, once one has freed oneself from this limited perspective one can use psychoanalytic theory to examine the different ways that the material base conditions the human mind and its behaviour in each social class.

For Fromm a scientific understanding of the inner forces that drive humanity involves grasping the dialectic relationship between external factors in the natural and social environment and the adaptation of biologically determined instincts. Though, in the abstract, the instinctual apparatus is the same for all individuals, in actuality it manifests differently dependent on the socio-economic circumstance of the historical individual. As each individual endeavours to satisfy their libidinal urges and preserve their own existence, these efforts succeed or fail with direct reference to the capacity of the socio-economic structure of society to furnish the means to satisfy these needs. And so, the instinctual apparatus strives to alter its environment in order to satisfy its needs. However, whilst humanity's psychic structure is biologically determined, it is also highly modifiable. And given that its ability to be modified typically exceeds that of the economic conditions, one also finds considerable adaptation of the instinctual structures to the specific economic circumstances. And, says Fromm, it is the family that is "the essential medium through which the economic situation exerts its formative influence on the individual's psyche" (1970, 164) [1932]. It is through the family that the instincts are modified to suit the socio-economic environment.

Having laid out the key principles of his analytic social psychology, and the central role of the family within it, Fromm then details the specific social analysis for which it could be fruitfully employed, namely the relationship between external force and libidinal ties that allow the formation and persistence of class divisions. Whilst Fromm agrees that the threat of external force and rational self-interest go some way towards explaining historical situations in which the

majority are ruled by a minority, they cannot constitute the whole explanation in that they cannot account for the stability of such social arrangements. Only an account which grasps the vital role of the majority's libidinal strivings in stabilising the dependency relationships typical of minority-rule can do so. It is these libidinal ties to the ruling minority, Fromm argues, that constitute the 'cement' that binds class society together and ensure its continued functioning. And these ties of "anxiety, love, trust" express the majority's "libidinal adaptation to the conditions of life imposed by economic necessity" (Fromm 1970, 176) [1932]. In other words, Fromm's Freud-Marxist synthesis was designed to uncover the psychological mechanisms by which the libido forms relations to social authority in adapting to specific economic conditions.

V. Conclusion

In this paper we have revisited the Frankfurt School's early research into authority and the concept of the authoritarian, or sadomasochistic, character which lies at its core. And we have reconstructed the theoretical framework and method of investigation that typify the School's early research into authority. We have demonstrated that the authoritarian character concept, and its application to contemporary society, was conceptually inseparable from the related concept of the social psyche. And that both concepts were themselves embedded in a theory and method formulated through the fusion of Freudian psychoanalytic theory with Marx's theory of historical materialism. All three elements then are inextricably linked to one another, and together define the Frankfurt School's 1936 works on authority. Whilst we recognise that this is but one of many theoretical ways of investigating authority available, we feel that the theoretical scope and coherence of the early Frankfurt School's authoritarian character research, along with the micro and macro levels of its Freud-Marxist analysis, still offer a unique set of conceptual tools for the study of the subject.

Having set forth the theory and method developed for analysis of the authoritarian character, and thereby providing a point of access to it for the contemporary researcher on authority, we then argued that the authoritarian character concept and attendant mode of analysis present in Fromm's 1936 *Studies on Authority and the Family* and Horkheimer's 1936 *Egoism and Freedom Movements* did not spring forth fully formed from the head of Zeus but represents the culmination of an ongoing programme of research carried out by Erich Fromm from 1930 onwards. We have shown in this paper that the Freud-Marxist method is key to its analysis of the authoritarian character and that the Freud-Marxist method of analysis is plainly evident in 1932 in Fromm's *The Method and Function of an Analytic Psychology*. We have also argued that the social psyche was a key conceptual feature of research into authority character, and that it underpins the very concept of an authoritarian character. We have shown that the social psyche concept is patent in Fromm's *The Dogma of Christ*. In other words, that foundational work in the authoritarian character project, that should be of interest

to those seeking a thorough grasp of the authoritarian character, predates the seminal works of 1936 by Fromm and Horkheimer.

We hope that this paper serves several purposes. Firstly, that it draws the attention of scholars of Critical Theory to the wider body of research produced on the authoritarian character and the longer time period over which it was developed. Secondly, that it leads to a greater appreciation of Erich Fromm's contribution to the theoretical development of Frankfurt School Critical Theory. And thirdly that the contemporary analyst of authoritarian leadership might find in the discovery of the full range of Fromm's authoritarian research whilst still a member of the Frankfurt School a new set of conceptual tools to apply to their subject.

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Nathisvaran Govender, Richard Sivil, and Gregory Morgan Swer

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