

Erich Fromm's contributions to sociological theory

Walter A. Jensen

Abstract: As a member of the first generation of the Frankfurt School, a Marxist, and, unlike Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979) and Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969), a clinically trained and practicing psychoanalyst for most of his adult life, Erich Fromm's (1900-1980) work has a lot to offer the field of sociology. However, his sociological efforts have been mostly ignored here in the United States. I would like to rectify this problem by summarizing three of Fromm's key contributions to sociological theory, in particular: (1) his categories of humanistic and authoritarian religion, (2) his theory of social character, and (3) his 'mechanisms of escape' or the psychological tools people use to 'escape their freedom' to choose. The first contribution pertains mainly to the scientific, non-theological study of religion, while the other two pertain to sociological theory, in general.

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