

The Jordan Peterson Phenomena: Why Fromm's ideas and public intellectual vision is essential for responding to reactionary populism

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As a sociologist living in Toronto, I had a ring side seat for watching the remarkable rise to global fame of Canadian psychologist Jordan Peterson in the fall of 2016. Peterson was teaching at the University of Toronto, living within walking distance from my home and was a presence in the local media as a scholar who was skilled at giving lectures and doing TV appearances. At the time, however, he was essentially unknown outside of circles of undergraduate students who had taken his popular »Maps of Meaning« survey class. Increasingly becoming visible and adept at social media and the public performances of lectures, Peterson became world famous in the aftermath of posting three YouTube videos. One offered a critique of Canada's Bill C-16 to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act and Criminal code to include gender identity and expression as a protected class.¹ A second

1 This is a complex issue that is debated all around the world now in different legal-national contexts but in its essentials involves the rights of all humans to be free of discrimination, threats, violence and hate speech due to their identity as transgender, intersex or non-binary individuals. The law was designed to extend protects in Federal Law to those laws that already exists to protect other groups besides gender-diverse people and to take existing Provincial laws to the national level. There are a number of controversies that flowed from these debates, and Peterson's framing of the issues put a lot of attention on the right to choose gender-neutral pronouns (they, or them) or shift from he/him to she/her by choice. There are broader controversies that flowed from this law involving the argument that some feminists have made regarding the right of woman to define single sex spaces (locker rooms, prisons, domestic-violence shelters or sports competitions) in ways that can conflict with the rights of gender diverse in certain contexts. Peterson was particularly concerned about the rights of individuals not to be required to talk about some of these issues without being compelled to adhere to a narrower consensus on the relationship between gender and sex than they feel comfortable with because of either religious belief or understanding of scientific perspectives on human biological sex.

rejected the development and spread of mandatory anti-racism workshops on college campuses. A third encouraged a rejection of »political correctness« among faculty, administrators and students. Initially, this was a local and then national Canadian controversy but soon the Peterson phenomena would be global.

The controversy heated up with threatening letters from his Dean at the University of Toronto leading to rallies, counterdemonstrations, and a debate hosted by the University all covered in the Canadian national media. By the spring and summer of 2017, however, protests preventing him from speaking at campuses along with a widely watched 2018 interview on the gender pay gap on the British Channel 4 news with journalist Cathy Newman made this a global issue. The publication of Peterson's best-selling self-help book *Twelve Rules for Life* a year later in 2018 made him a global intellectual celebrity.

Most Fromm scholars are on the progressive side of the political spectrum therefore most of us are likely familiar with the criticisms of Peterson's views that are common in liberal/left media and in universities. Many of the early most vocal supporters of Peterson's attack on political correctness, especially on-line, were indeed from the right-leaning end of American and Canadian politics even including some far-right, alt-right and neo-fascist activists. Peterson himself eventually clarified his stance as being centrist or classically liberal conservative, distancing himself from the extremists. For Fromm scholars and readers, however, his arguments for markets, his aggressive critiques of feminist politics and, most importantly, his almost obsessive attacks on what he sometimes called »cultural Marxists« and then later »Post-Modern Neo-Marxists« would tend to leave us sceptical and critical of his political views. (For a left critique of Peterson, see Burgis, Hamilton, McManus and Trejo 2019.)²

In the wake of his world book tour and the 2019 debate in Toronto between Peterson and Slovenian Marxist-Lacanian Slavoj Žižek (Peterson and Žižek 2019), however, it had become clear that we were dealing with a global political phenomenon that is not going away. Peterson had reached a level of book sales for *Twelve Rules for Life* that rivaled the early reception of *The Art of Loving* (1956a). Peterson now had many millions of followers in numerous

2 Canadian writer Neil Grey raised important issues with me on the specifics of the debate about Peterson's statements that I learned much from, even though ultimately I have not been totally convinced. Grey is a fair minded and thoughtful writer whose work is worth reading and his views on the Peterson debate, as well as on various cultural political issues, are worth serious consideration. The details of the Peterson controversy will have to be worked out and confirmed by intellectual historians when they write up the history of these culture wars. For now, I would like to thank Neil Grey for pushing me to be as fair as possible.

languages. Readers and listeners are clearly attracted to his Jungian influenced social theory, his therapeutic advice and his provocative political stances. The debate about Peterson's ideas, politics and influence, however, has generated more heat and polarization than insight (for heat, see Wells 2018).

The purpose of this *Fromm Forum* essay is to raise some questions about how a Fromm perspective on the Peterson phenomena might lead discussions in more productive directions. I intent to leave aside a focus on Peterson as an individual, his controversial personality, struggles with prescription drugs, and his rather unusual decisions about diet and health care that almost led to his death in a Moscow hospital. Indeed, I will offer a sociological and theoretical analysis of the similarities and differences between Fromm and Peterson as public social psychologists. The point is not to attack, and certainly not to defend Peterson, but to suggest ways that Fromm influenced scholarship and writings can move debates forward about the reasons for his massive influence and what to do about in our all too polarized times.

We will outline here how Fromm and Peterson are similar sociologically, discuss their differences and raise critical questions about how the debate about Peterson's reception can be improved by attention to the case of Erich Fromm. And we will end with some thoughts on how Fromm scholars can intervene into current political and intellectual debates with insights that can engage in mass public discussions with some of the same audiences that include a very diverse Peterson fan and followers base. Fromm was the major public psychoanalyst and public social psychologist of the 20th century and contemporary Fromm scholars should follow some of the paths he carved out but in new ways given the social media context Peterson has thrived in.

How Fromm and Peterson are similar sociologically

Fromm and Peterson both engaged mass publics with ideas about society, psychology and politics that were partly formed through a combination of social science research and clinical practice. Peterson is ultimately more rooted in the academic world and profession than Fromm ever was, having taught at the University of Toronto for two decades after having done a PhD at McGill University and teaching at Harvard for 5 years. Fromm also did a PhD at Heidelberg and taught at many elite and non-elite research universities and liberal arts colleges over decades including Yale and Bennington College but Fromm's more extensive clinical practice (Funk 2009), involvement in the Frankfurt School circle led by Max Horkheimer (Funk 1882; McLaughlin 1999) and earlier break-out into the publication of best-selling book with *Escape from Freedom* (1941a) at

41 years old meant that the Canadian scholar was more central to academic publishing for a longer period of time as he only wrote a popular book in his mid-50s. Peterson wrote many professional works of psychology in peer reviewed journals on the topics of alcoholism, personality traits and workplace and academic performance, often with multiple co-authors (DeYoung, Quilty and Peterson 2007; Hirsh, Mar and Peterson 2012; Phil, Peterson and Finn 1990). Fromm really only published peer reviewed scholarship in social science from the early 1930s to early 1940s (Fromm 1944a; McLaughlin 1998), mostly penning books with commercial presses after *Escape from Freedom* in 1941 (Fromm 1941a; Fromm 1947a; Fromm 1955a; Fromm 1956a; Fromm 1961b; Fromm 1973a; Fromm 1976a). The academy has become far more professionalized and disciplinary boundaries between sociology and psychology more clear since the 1950s so it makes sense that Peterson's work in peer-reviewed journals would become focused on personality factors at the expense of dual social and psychological dynamics Fromm was able to look at in his social psychology (McLaughlin 2017). With these differences acknowledged both thinkers were informed by insights forged by working with clients in clinical settings. This gave their social science a grounding in personal experiences and emotional logics informed by psychoanalytic theory.

Both Peterson and Fromm combined their clinically based knowledge base with social science and historical research, mostly quantitative empirical studies in psychology journals in Peterson's case and with Fromm, work done on the social character of authoritarianism during Nazi Germany and (with Michael Maccoby) Mexican peasants in the 1950s and 1960s (Fromm and Maccoby 1970b). More recently, Peterson has lectured widely on the rise of Nazism and Communist dictatorships with a particular concern with left-wing authoritarianism, something Fromm also wrote about in *The Working Class in Weimar* (published in 1980 based on research from the 1930s) and in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973a). Both also wrote about the social psychology of religions, from the »Dogma of Christ« in the 1930s, *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (1950a) and *You Shall be as Gods* (1966a) in Fromm's case, and with Peterson his Jungian influenced *Maps of Meaning* (1999) and his sold out lectures and YouTube videos on world religions and myths in the period of his rise to fame from 2017 to 2019.

The similarities between their careers got even more pronounced with the celebrity status Peterson gained with his political self-help book *Twelve Rules for Life* (2018), just as Fromm had also become a global celebrity in 1956 with *The Art of Loving*. Both books were clearly written analytically informed suggestions for general living and loving, respectively. In both cases, the gatekeepers among the academic establishment and the public intellectual elite

were as unimpressed as the popular audiences were engaged and inspired. Neither book involved original research and peer-reviewed scholarship, each were viewed by experts as not being particularly pathbreaking or sophisticated, but both received an enthusiastic response from millions of readings around the world. Each book touched and changed lives, in the Cold War era and other during the era of Trumpism in the United States respectively. And the sales from both books created economic independence and fame for both Fromm and Peterson. Fame was a new thing for the Canadian who had been an obscure tenured professor. For Fromm, the celebrity status that *The Art of Loving* created simply took his fame to a new global level for he had already become famous with *Escape from Freedom* in 1941.

The scholarship, clinical work and self-help writings of both Fromm and Peterson, moreover, were linked to political debates that swirled around each thinker. The controversies emerged because they shared a tendency to link their psychological analysis to political judgements while engaging in provocations and activism. The controversies about the politics of both Fromm and Peterson got more polarized, divisive and often were fought out in dishonest ways as their fame made the stakes higher. Fromm was attacked by conservatives in Cold War America for being too radical and pro-communist, largely because of his advocacy of Marxist ideas and nuclear disarmament (Fromm 1955a; Fromm 1961a; Fromm 1961b). Fromm was also attacked by radical leftists from Marcuse in the 1950s to the New Left radicals in the late 1960s, strangely enough because they saw him as being excessively moderate even conformist, both sets of criticisms that do not hold up under scrutiny (Durkin 2014; McLaughlin 2018). No-one has accused Peterson of being on the left, despite the fact that he had been in the circles of the social democratic New Democratic Party in his youth in Canada's Northern Alberta hinterlands where he grew up. But Peterson shared with Fromm the experience of being attacked relentlessly by his political opponents, in his case for being a far-right sympathizer, a misogynist promoter of incel violence claims that are false even if some of his views about feminism and trans rights can be challenged. Peterson is conservative and often offensive and while strongly oppose Peterson politically and intellectually he is not always wrong (Burgis and McManus: 2020). Debates about political correctness, anti-racist training and tensions between woman's and trans rights are real debates and Peterson was on to some of these issues early, even if often lacking nuance and good sense.

Yet the political sympathies and activism of both thinkers have generally been misunderstood and misrepresented as the media attention tended to distort perceptions of what they actually did politically and what they stood for. Fromm was a life-long socialist and radical humanist, and the view of him as

conformist conservative was wrong, despite the currency that Herbert Marcuse and Russell Jacoby's critiques gained in the late 1950s and 1970s respectively (McLaughlin 2018). Peterson, one could argue, was more responsible for some of the misunderstandings that have circulated about his politics because he was far more provocative and sometimes irresponsible on-line with his attacks on trans activists and academic leftists. Fromm did similar things, it should be said, on a smaller scale with his tendency to exaggerate the Nazi links and fascist implications of renegade psychoanalysts Jung and Rank. If Fromm was overly polemical on occasion, however, Peterson was constant in his attacks on professors and activists as being left-wing extremists. Peterson and some of his most vocal and unfair protagonists deserved each other.

In many ways Peterson was like the sorcerer's apprentice, unable to use the new powers of his sudden fame without causing chaos. In contrast, Fromm's fame and political work developed over decades from his youth as a young Marxist, his democratic socialism in the 1950s and early 1960s leading to his later radical humanism of *To Have Or to Be?* (1976a). Peterson burst on to the scene in a quicker fashion and in a social media saturated world. Over time, Peterson distanced himself from the white nationalists in his twitter feed in the first year of his notoriety, he stopped associating closely with Ezra Levant, Canada's most industrialist far right media figure and he settled into a position on the right of his homeland's politics and the center-right space in Trumps' United States (For a far-right view defence of Peterson see Proser 2019). There was a nastiness and lack of care in Peterson's critiques of the trans activists in the first year of his fame and the extremists among them returned the favour. A significant amount of the sympathy he gained in the last few years has flowed from a reaction among his followers to the often over the top and obviously unfair political critiques thrown his way from those who have attempted to paint him and his followers as Nazis, white nationalists, and extremists. This was often based on out of context video clips, photos and quotations. Peterson is, however, close to Dave Rubin, who was the opening act for *the Twelve Rules for Life* (2018) and Rubin is openly pro-Trump and Peterson has not made his view clear, so it is not unreasonable to view Peterson as neutral, at the very best, in the cultural war in the United States against Trumpism.

A fair-minded observer, however, would have to concede that the issues of self-identification raised by Canada's C-16 debate were more complicated than the liberal orthodoxy of the time suggested and as the UK political class recently decided. Furthermore, debates about cancel culture, left wing extremism, and authoritarianism that we have seen in the past two years cannot be dismissed even if we are more concerned by the challenge to democracy represented by Trumpism and the right in Brazil, Hungary and Poland than

Peterson appears. Fromm actually was quite critical of Marcuse's argument for »repressive tolerance,« an early version of current arguments for de-platforming conservatives and even dissenting feminists and leftists. And Fromm, like Peterson, believed that college students should be told that they should read books from the past, not assuming that they have accumulated so much knowledge in their 20 years of life that ancient wisdom from around the world is now obsolete. Both Fromm and Peterson's teaching, moreover, shared knowledge and insight that transcended the narrow scholarly canons of their discipline, helping explain why they both appeal to general readers and young intellectuals not the specialized scholars in training that tend to dominate the contemporary university system. Both Fromm and Peterson furthermore are existentialist thinkers, exposing students to tough insights about the human condition that are generally avoided in tame introduction to sociology or psychology classes.

How Fromm and Peterson Differ

None of these many ways in which they were similar, however, should lead us to forget just how different Erich Fromm and Jordan Peterson are. Fromm was, quite simply, a fair more original and creative thinker than Peterson. Fromm pioneered an analysis of left-wing authoritarianism in the 1930s decades before Peterson's own musings on the topic (Funk 1982). Fromm further developed his own revision of Freudian psychoanalytic theory while Peterson is largely a popularizer and interpreter of Jungian ideas (Funk 2019). Fromm's first book *Escape from Freedom* (1941a) attained far more influence both among elite scholars and intellectuals than *Maps of Meaning* (1999), a provocative textbook for an interesting undergraduate class not a classic work in social science that is likely to be read for decades as *Escape* will be. Peterson's many co-authored academic articles in peer reviewed journals are competent and scholarly but there is not likely to be the development of a Peterson influenced tradition in mainstream social sciences similar to the scholarship on the sociology of emotions, alienation, politician narcissism and social character that flowed from Fromm's innovative theorizing. Peterson is competent but unremarkable as a scholar and gained fame for his provocations and speaking. Fromm, on the other hand, gained fame for his ideas, and then used his fame to do political work in the mid 1950s to 1968 fighting for a sane society, nuclear disarmament, democratic socialism, an end to the Vietnam war and a new ecological consciousness of »being« while Peterson mostly became famous because of his political provocations, ability to use social media effectively, willingness to stand up, courageously for those who agree with him, against political correctness.

Ironically the attempt of Peterson's political opponents to shut him down on the basis of the quality and originality of his ideas or on the basis of academic criteria often backfired. This was done to Fromm himself when he was attacked as a simplistic popularizer who was not really a sociologist or a psychologist, it was claimed. The popular audiences of both Fromm and Peterson, however, care more about whether the ideas they read allow them to learn things from or be inspired by the books than they care about the academic stature of the authors. Academics and elite intellectuals who disagree with either Fromm or Peterson often try to dismiss them by invoking the criteria of scholarly peer-reviewed status, something that never really works for popular audiences who care far less about academic status than academics themselves do. Rightly so, it should be said. At the same time, however, there are negative consequences to the quality of public intellectual culture if the most influential thinkers are not among the most original and accomplished. Fromm simply is a higher-level thinker than Peterson, pushing psychoanalytic thought in new and interesting directions.

Even more importantly, Fromm had very different politics than Peterson. Fromm's ideas, as two sociologists once put it, were part of the seeds of the 60s (Jamison and Eyerman 1994) while Peterson's views represent, at least in part, a backlash to some of the cultural changes of the post 60s period. Rooted in the utopian and humanist socialist tradition that would take hold in America during the emergence of the movements of the 1960s, Fromm argued for individual freedoms, the values of autonomy, and a concept of love that helped inspire Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement and the black feminist theory of bell hooks. Peterson, while no reactionary white supremacist as his unfair critics often suggested, was certainly critical of the various strains of feminism, black liberation, and socialism that took hold in North America and around the world from the 1970s till the second decade of the 21st century. Fromm was critical of market logics and new technology, at times perhaps overly, one could argue, that is clear that his politics was rooted in the values of anti-capitalism of the orthodox Judaism and the democratic Marxism of his youth.

One of the major differences between Fromm and Peterson is indeed their attitude toward capitalism. Fromm always believed that the values of community, love and productive work, and later the very survival of the planet in the wake of the threat of nuclear war and environmental disaster, were threatened by capitalism as a system. Fromm never accepted the communist alternative and he rejected left-wing authoritarianism, and here Peterson and Fromm are in agreement even if Peterson's anticommunism verged on the paranoid. But the core difference here is that Peterson has entrepreneurial and pro-capitalist

values, forged in the Protestant hinterlands of the Northern Alberta of his youth. Peterson grew up in a part of Canada that was much closer to American capitalism in terms of culture than most other parts of the country. Most of Canada was more influenced by the British socialist traditions that Fromm had sympathy for and wrote about in *The Sane Society* (1955a) alongside of elitist conservatism. Peterson is not a white nationalist or an extremist, but his connections to American conservatives who are far to the right of what is mainstream in Canada, like Ben Shapiro and Dave Rubin, comes naturally and flows from his political philosophy as well as his roots in Alberta.

Peterson is adept at marketing his ideas on social media, first on YouTube and crowd funding programs, something he had years of practice for since he was an entrepreneur on the side selling personality tests to Human Resources (HR) departments in corporations and writing programs to mass clients while primarily teaching at the University of Toronto. Fromm scholars should not be too self-righteous about this, because it is certainly the case that Fromm started his scholarly career with the support of the Frankfurt School network who themselves were sponsored with the money of a German capitalist (McLaughlin 1999). Fromm himself was essentially a small businessperson with his psychoanalytic practice for many years and he made a fortune selling his paperback books with commercial presses around the world. Fromm was a capitalist in practice in significant ways, as was Peterson, but this should not distract from the core political differences between them. Fromm was for the regulation of businesses and media, articulated a communitarian collectivist political philosophy and believed that market values left to their own devices, would create a pathological form of individualism, a dishonest and inauthentic marketing character and would lead to a having mode of existence that threatens both the spiritual health of human beings and the very existence of life on the planet. Peterson, on the other hand, believes that markets and capitalism will improve human life on the planet, leading to more wealth, less poverty, and the creation of an essential bulwark against the brutality of life itself. Fromm and Peterson shared existentialist assumptions about the human conditions, as they were both close readers of Nietzsche and Dostoevsky, but they had different views of human nature that flowed from their distinct political philosophies. Fromm understood how brutal and violent human beings can be, but he put far more emphasis on the possibilities of cooperation rooted in human nature (Fromm 1973a). Peterson's analogy of competitive lobsters who fight each other in endless dominance hierarchies, signals his center-right sympathies (Peterson 2018).

Their different views on technology are reflected in Fromm's relative disinterest in innovative technology, organizational reform in higher education and

electronic media compared to Peterson's central concerns with how intellectual life operates in digital platforms and the economics of new technology and education. Outside of radio which Fromm used effectively in his last years from his base in Switzerland talking about »To Have Or to Be?« to millions, Fromm was largely rooted in print culture from the Talmud to *Escape from Freedom*. One can explain Fromm's attitude to electronic media as flowing from his conservative and religious upbringing or perhaps his understandable reaction to both the movie and radio propaganda of Hitler and commercialization of mass culture he witnessed in the United States in the 1950s. Peterson, on the other hand, started his career as a »public intellectual« on TVO, a public broadcasting institution funded by the government of Ontario. Peterson was an early innovator in using YouTube and Twitter to promote his brand and his politics. Peterson is deeply interested in creating new platforms for intellectual debate, as evidenced by his involvement in creating Think Spot, a network for generally right leaning but also libertarian and non-orthodox thinking. It should be said that Peterson is deeply critical of the modern research university system as was Fromm and his friend Ivan Illich who famously wrote *Deschooling Society* (1971). Peterson, however, thinks about the economics of alternative forms of higher education institutions, something well beyond the concerns that Fromm addressed in his work. And one can't really imagine Fromm being on Twitter or Facebook.

Despite these various differences and similarities, the controversies about both thinkers played out in the mass media in similar ways, 60 years apart. Fromm was attacked by Marcuse in *Dissent* magazine in the middle of the 1950s from the political left, where it was claimed that he was a reformist cultural conservative. Fromm was also critiqued from the right wing of American politics where he was painted as a revolutionary extremist and apologist for Soviet Communist expansionism. Moreover, academics and elite public intellectuals often viewed Fromm as a simplistic popularizer and not a careful researcher or academic scholar. None of this made any sense, as Fromm scholars well understand (Durkin 2014; Funk 2019; McLaughlin 1998). Was he too radical or too conservative? It can't be both. And the arguments that Fromm was a simplistic thinker never held up to serious scrutiny was obvious from any careful examination of the reception of his work in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s among psychoanalysts, sociologists and elite intellectuals. Whatever one thinks about the specific scholarly and intellectual conclusions Fromm came to over his career, dismissing his ideas as simplistic made no sense to anyone who has read him closely.

No-one was confused about Peterson's politics so much to think he was a leftist, but there was also a high level of misrepresentation of his ideas and

views in public debate once he became famous, played out in social media. Peterson was widely accused of being linked to the radical neo-Nazi right or promoting white nationalist ideas, a claim that was clearly not true even though he did say some appalling things and was running in some politically questionable circles especially back in 2016–2017. Peterson was also attacked by academics and public intellectuals in similar ways as was Fromm, being called the »stupid person's intellectual« and not an expert on the issues he discussed in his lectures and social media posts. It is true that Peterson intervened on questions regarding law, trans rights and race outside of his expertise and his understanding of Marx's ideas was shown to be totally inadequate during the Zizek debate in 2019. The response to *Twelve Rules for Life* among elite intellectuals in 2018, moreover, was very similar to how they had responded to *The Art of Loving* (1956) in the late 1950s. Both books gained massive audiences of readers who felt the books helped them understand their own psychological issues, but elite intellectuals viewed the books as just common sense and being nothing original, critiques that really don't apply to this genre of books.

What is useful then about comparing Fromm and Peterson's career and the debates about their work? For one thing, the unfair attacks on Fromm that we are all aware of promoted by his enemies with the Frankfurt School network should make us sensitive to inaccurate attacks on Peterson, even if we fundamentally disagree with him politically and intellectually as I do. Peterson's aggressive and often insensitive approach in raising some generally legitimate questions about the C-16 law in Canada and related debates about ways to protect basic trans rights while also respecting woman's rights along with free speech and conscience represent reasons to be critical of Peterson but his views on many issues were often misrepresented. He was not wrong to argue that laws about defining gender expression and identity separate from sex need to be carefully thought through. Issues about free speech and academic freedom are now central concerns throughout Western universities, and he was correct to point to these issues even if one does not accept his framing of the issues and polemics on one side of the cultural wars. Peterson became famous partly because attempts to stop him from speaking at university campuses like at McMaster University where I teach and the badly prepared and obviously attack on him by the British TV interviewer Cathy Newman gained him sympathy from millions of people. Peterson thinks that gender pay gaps can largely be explained by different male and female personalities and choices, a viewpoint that good labour sociologists could challenge with data. Newman did not exchange or challenge ideas but instead accused Peterson of being a right wing sexist in the middle of the interview with no evidence or real argument, allowing him to expose just the kind of liberal media bias he was tweeting

about, but this time in real time to millions of people in the UK and around the world. After this, he was a household name.

The broader claims that many on the liberal-left were making that followers of Peterson were alt-right extremists, anti-feminist woman hating incels, transphobic bigots, haters of Muslims, and Trumpets were discrediting. It is very clear, from anyone who has read *Twelve Rules for Life*, or talked to Peterson's followers and observed the mass audiences he was getting at lectures and debates that his audience is politically and demographically diverse. There are hundreds of thousands of young people who are moved by Peterson's self-help book and advice for living, some who are on the conservative side, others who are liberal and some who are left. It is deeply counterproductive to assume the political views and question the basic human decency of people who read and engage with Peterson's work without careful evidence of alleged thought crimes. Some readers and listeners are attracted to Peterson because of his Jungian influenced discussions of world religions and analysis of the meaning of myths, fairy-tales and dreams. Others find his ruminations on the authoritarianism of Nazism and Stalinism morally compelling. And some, and there is overlap and complexity here, find his critiques of campus radicals and trans extremists compelling. There are far right followers of Peterson, and in the Canadian context he was aligned and palling around in very public ways with media figures who made the attacks on him plausible even if sometimes verging on guilt by association types of arguments. It is possible to find some of his ideas and political points compelling without agreeing with it all, and thus attacks on Peterson's followers as being right-wing Nazis simply confirmed the validity of his attacks on the authoritarianism of social justice warriors, especially for followers who were not particularly political.

What Fromm Scholars Can Do

The world-wide debate about Jordan Peterson has been counterproductive, and Fromm scholars can play a vitally important role in moving the global discussion forward in at least three ways. Firstly, while the polarized debate about trans-rights, gender pay gaps and political correctness on campus that Peterson intervened in are all far too complex to be addressed or certainly resolved by the application of Fromm's perspective, the specific critique he articulated about cultural-Marxism and left-wing authoritarianism demands a response. Critical theory inspired by Fromm highlights the value of a Marxist analysis of alienation, the pathologies of a market dominated society where feelings are commercialized, and authentic human personalities increasingly become

marketing characters. None of this requires ignoring the brutality of Stalinism and realities of left-wing authoritarianism as Fromm never did. Fromm scholars have an important role to play in the debates about Marxism in public debate today, rejecting Peterson's destructive erasure of the democratic socialist tradition while insisting on the need to critique the left-wing authoritarianism we are increasingly seeing in various deplatforming campaigns as well as the even more dangerous one party state politics we see in the increasingly aggressive People's Republic of China.

Fromm's writings are also so relevant to the debate about the enormous influence of Peterson's argument that young people should »clean their room« before engaging in political activism to change the world. For many on the left, this was and remains a reactionary position that frames individual well-being and happiness in a neo-liberal fantasy framework that over-emphasizes choice and underplays the structural barriers that stand in the way of human opportunities and social justice. Left wing sociologists, in particular, as well as orthodox Marxists, have a particular problem with this aspect of Peterson's philosophy because it challenges their commitments to a purely structural analysis. Clearly individual choices do matter and cleaning one's room or other character-building decisions made over a lifetime are important despite the obvious structural barriers that disadvantaged people face and the need for structural solutions to global problems (McLaughlin 2017).

Fromm, more than any other Marxist and sociologist, offers us an analysis that allows us to argue that young people should be encouraged to *both* clean their rooms at organize and advocate for social change. Peterson's followers are not wrong to perceive that some on the left and among social scientists dismiss the kind of practical life advice that Peterson offers, and even if one disagrees with some of the specifics of *Twelve Rules for Life* (2018) and his political analysis, it is a Fromm inspired social science and radicalism that offers the tools to engage in analysis, social activism and practical self-help and clinical practice. It was Peterson's ability to put together these three elements in the context of this particular Trumpist and populist moment that gained him such a global audience and it requires a response. Fromm scholars understand that trying to address one's personal problems without looking inside with the help of depth psychology can lead to fanaticism dressed up as politics. But dismissing the left social movements of the past 50 years as mostly authoritarianism as Peterson does is deeply reactionary. Fromm scholars have just the kind of the sociological and historical framework, and some of us have the clinical skills (Silver 2017), that are needed in order to offer young people less of a choice in a world that both needs structural change and individual responsibility, reflexivity and choice.

An effective response, moreover, requires social science and politics that gets out of academic elite debates and moves beyond elite intellectual forms of writing, to directly engage mass publics in the ways Peterson does. Fromm's analysis of the insanity of our current market dominated societies is far more grounded and realistic than Peterson's neo-Jungian mysticism. Fromm's social character theory and revision of psychoanalysis speaks to some of the fears, anxiety and feelings of isolation that Peterson's followers experience. Fromm, furthermore, always rejected the kind of left-wing authoritarianism that is driving people towards conservative politics. Not all Fromm scholars should be writing popular books or engaging on social media, as there remains a need for careful social scientific analysis and clinical practice. But when appropriate and possible, and some of this will depend on the state of democratic public debate in one's own homeland, Fromm scholars need to compete with Peterson by engaging popular audiences directly.

Opponents of Peterson's politics make a mistake when they attempt to shut him talks down, get him fired, or shame young people who listen to his videos or attend his lectures. Personal attacks on Peterson and his family, or obvious attempts to discredit his politics by playing »expert cards« won't work and, in fact, build him a more loyal fan base and serve to discredit his critics among broad parts of the public. Fromm never lived to see social media or Twitter, and he very likely would have hated it all, but contemporary young Fromm scholars will have a better sense of how to use these mediums to respond to Peterson's reactionary politics and divisive rhetoric. But this will require meeting his followers half way, and taking the issues Peterson has put on the table and dealing with them in more productive ways (the need for meaning and responsibility, connectedness, and a willingness to confront the core challenges of the human condition with eyes wide open, and an insistence of learning from the great thinkers of the past). When possible, Fromm scholars should engage people in public debate and dialogue in language that can be understood by millions, in English but also in Portuguese, German, French, Spanish and all the world's languages. Now is not the time in world history to retreat into academic silos, as American democracy is being undermined by a narcissistic authoritarian thug and escape from freedom is spreading again in Brazil, Poland, Hungary, Germany and beyond.

Zizek had the right idea in dialoguing in debate with Peterson but his elite cultural audience rooted among graduate students and elite cultural worker alongside his Lacanian framework and connection to old style Marxist language limits his mass appeal. Fromm is no longer with us, but there are brilliant young Fromm scholars all over the world now who respect and understand some of the psychological dynamics we are seeing in our deeply polarized

market culture of narcissism. The demons of fascism are walking again among us and we need sane alternatives that are not yet on the political table, a task for a new generation of psychosocial influenced political intellectuals. Jordan Peterson is not the problem or the issue, his popularity is a canary in our coal mine. It is time for us to write, speak, mobilize, heal, and theorize with the vision for radical hope and social change, revised where it needs to be (Chancer 2017; Durkin 2014), that Fromm left us.

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