As a great admirer of Erich Fromm, I am grateful to see that, after a neglect of many years, there is a renewed interest in this author, as testified by the appearance of several books on him. I recently (Bacciagaluppi, 2013) reviewed a book by Friedman, whose main emphasis was biographical. This new book by Kieran Durkin describes Fromm’s outlook as “radical humanism”. This book is most timely in calling attention to this facet of Fromm’s work, because, as the author states in the Introduction, the present intellectual climate is chiefly opposed to the essentialist notion of a nature of man and of its unfolding in the course of history. The book is also very scholarly. In addition to examining Fromm’s published works, it also makes use of unpublished material, such as correspondence and recordings, contained in the Fromm Archives in Tübingen, and placed at the author’s disposal by Rainer Funk, Fromm’s literary executor.

Fromm’s views are presented in six chapters. At the outset there is a very useful overview of Fromm’s life and writings, from his orthodox Jewish beginnings in Frankfurt to his turn to sociology and psychoanalysis, then his move to the United States in 1934, to Mexico in 1950, and his final return to Europe, in Locarno, Switzerland, in 1974.

The roots of Fromm’s radical humanism are then examined. The author lists three: Judaism, the early Marx, and Freud’s psychoanalysis. In Judaism Fromm was influenced by the prophet-ic tradition and the messianic idea of the unfolding of human potentialities in the course of history. Fromm finally arrived at a negation of theology and at a non-theistic humanism. The basic notion that Fromm got from Marx is that human nature is historically modified by economic and social circumstances. In his relationship to Freud, Fromm moved from an initial acceptance of Freud’s drive model to a challenge of it, while retaining the importance of unconscious mental processes. This challenge led to a rift with the Frankfurt Institute of Sociology, the members of which still agreed with Freud’s drive model. According to Fromm, Freud’s main failures were an insufficient account of relatedness, and his later notion of a death instinct. Fromm views mankind as rooted in nature, but also as transcending it. This is what he calls a basic existential dichotomy, which leads to various “existential needs”.

Kieran Durkin then discusses Fromm’s idea of character. Unlike Freud, who regarded character as stemming from various parts of the body, Fromm viewed character types as comparatively permanent systems of relating. The basic distinction is between productive and unproductive character types. Fromm later added the related distinction between biophilia and necrophilia, and finally that between the having and the being modes. These character types are the core of Fromm’s psychoanalytic social psychology, which may be regarded as his most specific...
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contribution. According to Fromm, society gives rise in individuals, through the family, to the character structure most suitable to its own perpetuation. This character structure, which he calls the social character, is present in the majority of individuals. For example, at present there is an increasing prevalence of the "marketing character". Other character structures, present in a minority of cases, may be selected if the social structure changes, through the process which Fromm calls "social selection". Before World War Two Fromm applied these concepts to a study of the character structure of German workers, and after the war to that of Mexican peasants. Fromm also held that society represses certain experiences, giving rise to the "social unconscious". More specifically, he speaks of three "social filters" of experiences: language, logic, and the taboos on certain ideas and feelings. A basic presentation of Fromm's analytic social psychology is contained in an Appendix to his first major work, Escape from Freedom (Fromm, 1941).

Durkin then discusses various recent authors who, in contrast to Fromm, may be described as anti-humanistic. He lists Althusser, Adorno, Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, Lyotard and Rorty.

The final chapter concerns Fromm's call for a renaissance of humanism, and "for human beings to be treated as ends rather than means" (p. 193) (this is the core of Immanuel Kant's ethics). In The Sane Society (Fromm, 1955) he presents some practical suggestions to achieve this aim.

As I did in a recent article published in The American Journal of Psychoanalysis (Bacciagaluppi, 2014), Fromm's continuing relevance can be emphasized by showing the connections between his work and developments subsequent to his death in 1980, such as Bowlby's attachment theory and the literature on the evolution of altruistic behavior. In particular, although Fromm died before the completion of Bowlby's trilogy, he was quick to see that the concept of attachment provided the biological grounding of his own notion of the basic need for relatedness, and in the Fromm Archives in Tübingen there is a copy of Attachment (Bowlby, 1969) with notes in Fromm's handwriting.

In Durkin's book, some more careful editing would have avoided several mistakes. To give only two examples, on pages 21 and 22 Fromm-Reichmann's first name is twice misspelt as "Freida" instead of "Frieda", and in the References "Cortina" precedes "Chodorow". Another remark concerns Durkin's principle of referring to an author's work by the date of the more recent edition, preceding the original date of publication. Sometimes the latter date is omitted, as on p. 63, where the reader is hard put to realize that Freud (2001a) is actually what the Standard Edition lists as Freud (1912-13), namely Totem and Taboo, and that Freud (2001b) is Freud (1927), namely The Future of an Illusion.

Aside from these formal remarks, this is a book to be highly recommended for pointing to the permanent value of Fromm's contributions.

References
Reviews. “a breath of fresh air—the most vigorous, rigorous, lively, insightful analysis of Fromm’s work I’ve encountered in many, many years” (Daniel Burston, Associate Professor, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh). “a remarkable theoretical exploration—the research here is meticulous” (Lawrence J. Friedman, Professor Emeritus of History, Harvard University). “a remarkable theoretical exploration of Fromm’s social theory—and the research here is meticulous and highly compelling and will likely reinvigorate interest in what Fromm has to say as a social theorist.”

Bibliographic Information. Book Title. The Radical Humanism of Erich Fromm. Authors. K. Durkin. Series Title. Critical Political Theory and Radical Practice. It is characteristic of Fromm’s radical humanism, over and above these proximate accounts, that it confronts the false individualism that reigns today, as well as the pathology of normalcy that sustains it—alienation and idolatry in all their secular forms—and that it does so by proceeding on the basis of a depth psychology concerned with the importance of value and.

For Fromm, in fact, it was possible to read humanism back into human history, at least as far back as the turn to monotheism in what Jaspers (1951) has described as the “axial age”—something Fromm does through the imputation of a common ideational core that can be identified in this 6 M The Radical Humanism of Erich Fromm. Review of Durkin, K. (2014). The Radical Humanism of Erich Fromm. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. Journal of Psychohistory 43, 2 (Fall 2015): 143-155. Durkin, Kieran (2014). The Radical Humanism of Erich Fromm. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. Ferenczi, Sandor (1928 [1927]). The elasticity of psycho-analytic technique (pp. 87-101). In: Final Contributions to the Problems and Methods of Psychoanalysis. Balint, M. (Ed.), Mosbacher, E., and others (Trans.). Thompson, C. (Intro.). New York: Basic Books, 1955. Freud, Sigmund (1914). Fromm, Erich (1947). Man for Himself: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics. New York: Rinehart. Part of a series of articles on. Psychoanalysis. Psychology portal. v. t. e. Erich Seligmann Fromm (/frÉ’m/; German: [fÊ m]; March 23, 1900 â€“ March 18, 1980) was a German social psychologist, psychoanalyst, sociologist, humanistic philosopher, and democratic socialist. He was a German Jew who fled the Nazi regime and settled in the US. He was one of the founders of The William Alanson White Institute of Psychiatry, Psychoanalysis and Psychology in New York City and was associated with the Frankfurt... This thesis attempts to advance the underappreciated thought of Erich Fromm as both a crucial contribution to twentieth century intellectual history and a potentially pivotal point from which to transcend current theoretical impasses. In particular, I argue that Fromm’s radical humanism can participate in the rejuvenation of contemporary social theory, which is still largely constrained by the dual reductionism of positivism and poststructuralism, and that a return to it will encourage renewed theorising of, and empirical engagement with, the connections that obtain between the “psychological” and the “social”, the “essential” and the “constructed”, and the “is” and the “ought.”