

## **Further Problems of Work Democracy\***

**Wilhelm Reich, M.D.**

Reprinted from the *Journal of Orgonomy* Vol. 21 No. 2

The American College of Orgonomy

### **Preface**

This monograph was written between 1937 and 1940 just as the weaknesses of the European democracies were abetting Hitler's victory in Europe. I deal here only with the European state of affairs since I am insufficiently familiar with the American scene. I must emphasize that I have never entertained any political ambitions and prefer working in the politics-free milieu of my own laboratory where a better grasp of human nature is obtainable. As a medical psychologist and biologically oriented psychiatrist, it behooves me to speak out against the emotional plague of our century. As a confirmed democrat, I am dead serious about free speech and leave it to the false democrats to expose themselves as empty freedom peddlers. We advocates of work democracy lean neither to the right nor the left, but only go forward.

Maine, U.S.A.

August, 1940

### **Overview: Preface to "The Living" (Das Lebendige)\*\***

This work comprises the past two decades of my medical and scientific work on the living organism. It was at first only a private journal where I could air out ideas that otherwise might have compromised my safety, my reputation, and some still unfinished formulations.

Few can fathom how I can bestride such diverse fields as depth psychology, sociology, physiology, and now, biology, as well. Some analysts wish I would stick to psychoanalysis; the politicians relegate me to natural science; and the biologists banish me to psychology.

By its very nature, the theme of sexuality runs through all areas of scientific research. The central phenomenon, the sexual orgasm, raises not only psychological and physiological questions, but sociological as well. There is hardly another field of natural scientific research which can better offer a unified schema of the living and thereby obviate narrow, divisive specialization. Sex economy has become an independent discipline with its own research methods and body of knowledge. It is a natural, scientific, empirically based theory of sexuality. I can now unveil what is my own, original work, as well as those aspects which relate to others' work and to the source of those unfounded rumors about my activities.

Sex economy emerged from the cradle of Freudian psychoanalysis between the years 1919 and 1923. My de facto split from the parental source occurred about 1928, while my actual separation from the Psychoanalytic Association did not take place until 1934.

This manuscript is not a textbook but a narrative. A formal exposition could not possibly have conveyed to the reader the inconceivable way in which problems and solutions of the past twenty years succeeded one another or how all of this evolved from the remarkable process of scientific logic. It is not false modesty for me to say I regard myself merely as a functional organ of this logic.

The functional method of research works like a compass in unknown terrain. I cannot imagine a better proof of the validity of the sex-economic theory of the living than this sequence of events: In 1922, I discovered orgasmic potency, the cardinal point in sex-economic theory; this led to the discovery of the orgasm reflex in 1935, and culminated in the finding of its scientific basis, orgone radiation, in 1939. The logical development of sex economy is the key to understanding the mass of interpretations, distortions, and doubts whenever confusion threatens to becloud our clarity of insight.

It is useful to write scientific biographies when one is young. We still have our illusions about people's ability to accept upsetting information. This enables us to stick to the basic facts, resist the myriad temptations to compromise, and not sacrifice clear findings to comfortable thinking, much-needed peace of mind, or world pressures.

The temptation to deny the sexual basis of so many illnesses is far greater in sex economy than it is in psychoanalysis. It was only with the greatest difficulty that I arrived at the term "sex economy," which designates a new scientific discipline; research into biopsychic energy. "Sexuality" is too offensive a term for prevailing society; its significance for life would be too easily forgotten. It will need the work of many generations before sexuality is taken seriously by official science and the lay public; and this may never come about until the life and death problems of our society relentlessly drive us to understand and master the sexual process under that society's protection. Such a problem, for example, is cancer, which is endemic; another is the emotional plague, which spawns dictatorship.

Sex economy is a natural scientific discipline. It is not ashamed of sexual themes, and it bars from its ranks those who have not yet overcome their fear of being sexually defamed by society. The term "vegetotherapy" (the sex-economic treatment technique) is really a concession to decorum. I would have preferred calling this medical technique "orgasmo-therapy" for that is what it is. I had to consider that the latter term would impose too great a hardship on young sex economists just starting out in practice. People laugh maliciously or cynically when their natural longings and religious feelings are mentioned.

I fear that in a decade or two the school of sex economists will split into two warring groups. One group will maintain that sexual functions are subordinate to general life functions and therefore expendable; the other group will wage a stormy radical battle to save the honor of sexual research. Thus, the functional identity and life processes will be forgotten. Or I might give in and repudiate the honest scientific convictions of my early battle years. Likewise, a world taken over by fascism could successfully scuttle our hard work with the help of traditional psychiatrists and party bureaucrats, as happened

in Europe. My friends who are familiar with the Norwegian press's scandal-mongering, fascist-inspired campaign against sex economy know what I mean. So, while there is still time, I must clarify what we mean by sex economy before I myself, succumbing to the pressure of antiquated social conditions, begin to change my thinking and hinder (through my authority) the search for truth by young scientists of the future.

The theory of sex-economic life research can be summarized in a few sentences.

Mental health is dependent on orgasmic potency, i.e., the capacity for total surrender in the natural sex act and for experiencing full sexual excitation at acme. Its basis is a non-neurotic character structure, which implies the capacity to love. Mental illness is the result of a disturbance in the natural capacity to love. It depends as much upon social as upon psychic conditions.

Mental illness is a consequence of society's sexual chaos. For millennia, this chaos has served to subjugate people psychologically to the existing conditions of the time, by internalizing the external mechanization of life. It serves the psychic anchoring of a mechanized and authoritarian civilization by rendering people unable to stand on their own.

Life forces regulate themselves naturally and do not need a sense of duty or compulsive morality, both of which are sure signs of existing antisocial impulses. The latter stem from secondary drives which have arisen through the suppression of natural life and which conflict with natural sexuality.

Those reared in a life-negative and a sex-negative society have acquired a pleasure anxiety which is physiologically anchored in chronic muscular tension. Neurotic pleasure anxiety then impels them to reproduce that life-negative attitude so conducive to dictatorships. It is at the heart of their fear of leading full and independent lives and constitutes the most important influence in every type of political reaction calling for dominion by individuals or groups over most of the working class. It is biophysiological anxiety and represents the nuclear problem of psychosomatic research. Up until now it was the greatest obstacle to research into involuntary life functions, which neurotic can only experience as mysterious and frightening.

Today's human being perpetuates a 6,000-year-old patriarchal authoritarian culture; he does this by armoring himself characterologically, against nature within himself and against social misery outside. This gives rise to alienation, helplessness, sexual misery, the need for authority, neurotic helpless rebellion, and pathological tolerance. Man has alienated himself from the life within as if it were an enemy. This alienation is both biological and socioeconomic in origin and harks back to stages in human development before the emergence of patriarchy.

Compulsory duty has replaced the natural joy in work and activity. Among the masses, human structure has changed in the direction of weakness and fear of life: Authoritarian dictatorships can then arise and justify their existence on the basis of actual human

attitudes, such as childishness and the abrogation of responsibility. The internal catastrophe we are living through is the external result of this alienation from life.

The basis of authoritarian structuring in the masses is not natural parental love but the authoritarian family. Its chief weapon is the suppression of sexuality in the young child and adolescent.

Consequent to the splitting of human structure, nature and culture, instinct and morality, sexuality and productivity become mutually exclusive. The longed-for unity and compatibility between culture and nature, work and love, morality and sexuality remain a dream as long as human beings deny the biological demands of natural (orgastic) sexual gratification. As long as this prevails, genuine democracy and responsible freedom remain an illusion. Helpless subjugation to chaotic social conditions is the hallmark of human existence. The murder of the living triumphs in compulsory education and war.

In the realm of psychotherapy, I developed the technique of character-analytic vegetotherapy. Its basic principle is the restoration of biopsychic motility through dissolution of the characterological and muscular rigidity ("armoring"). This technique for the therapy of neurosis was experimentally based on the discovery of the bioelectrical nature of sexuality and anxiety. They are functionally antithetical directions of the living organism: pleasurable expansion, anxious contraction. Basic to sex-economic research is the orgasm formula of; mechanical tension, bioelectric charge, bioelectric discharge, mechanical relaxation. This turns out to be the general formula in all living functions. From this stemmed our experimental research into the organization of living and nonliving matter, bion research, and more recently the discovery of orgone radiation. The research on sexuality and bions opened up a new approach to the problem of cancer and several other disturbances of autonomic functioning. Man is the only species which does not follow the natural laws of sexuality; this is the direct cause of a host of epidemic maladies. Life-negative attitudes on the social scene lead to mass death in the form of wars, as well as to psychic and somatic derangement of the basic life functions.

The process of sexuality, that is, the expansive biological pleasure process, is the productive life process itself!

This is a loaded observation and sounds almost "too simple." This "simplicity" is the secret that some people sense in my work. I shall try to explain how it was possible to unscramble the puzzle which heretofore barred such problems from human awareness. I heartily wish to convince you that there is no magic or sorcery in this; on the contrary, my theory is very general (albeit rejected) human knowledge of the living. It bespeaks a total alienation from life that these facts and relationships I discovered were consistently overlooked and obfuscated.

This history of sex economy is incomplete without the inclusion of its friends' participation. My friends and coworkers will understand why I must forego appropriately

acknowledging their accomplishments. I can assure all of you who have fought and often suffered for sex economy that without your contributions its total development would not have been achieved.

This presentation of sex economy is made solely from the standpoint of the catastrophic European situation. The triumph of dictatorships stems from the psychic illness of the European peoples who were unable to master democracy socially, economically, or psychologically. It is too soon for me to judge just how far this pertains to the American scene. I am not referring to external interpersonal relationships and social conditions, but rather to the underlying structure of the American people and their society. It will take time to get to know them.

\* Translated by Barbara G. Koopman, M.D., and Sidney B. Heimbach, M.D., from *Weitere Probleme der Arbeitsdemokratie*. Als Manuskript, Nicht im Handel, April 1941. Durch den: Sexpol-Verlag, Europa. Politisch-psychologische Schriften, No. 5. (Included is a 32-page manuscript entitled "Overview: Preface to 'The Living,'" which is serialized herewith in two parts.)

\*\* This excerpt appears at the beginning of the manuscript. It is then followed by the text of *Further Problems of Work Democracy*, which is the title of the entire monograph.