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Wilhelm Reich— The Psychoanalyst as Revolutionary

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DURING the student revolts that shook many European universities in the spring of 1968, the influence of the errant psycho analyst, Wilhelm Reich, was much in evidence. In Paris, Reichian symbols\* depicting the human conflicts produced by societal repression of sexuality were crudely painted on the walls of the Sorbonne. In Berlin, student members of free-living-and loving communes pelted police with softbound copies of Reich's "The Mass Psychology of Fascism." Reich, who died in an American prison in 1957 and who had been expelled from the psychoanalytic movement for his political involvements, was being resurrected everywhere in Europe as a hero/saint to students demanding social reform.

Many American young people are now discovering that Reich is very much their kind of revolutionary, too. Less cerebral than Marcuse, the other well-known exponent of the Freudian left, Reich amalgamated Freud and Marx and created— a credo that was action-oriented and at once anti-intellectual and anti-political. Where Freud had urged rational sublimation and adaptation, and Marx political revolution, Reich advocated the dissolution of the patriarchal family and the authority of the father. Therein lies his appeal to European youth, who feel more constrained by authoritarian family structures than by political institutions.

Reich's appeal to American youth is a bit more manifold. For Reich, when the integrated sexual impulse meets repression, the result is conflict between mind and body. As for D.H. Lawrence and Rousseau, an adolescent's instincts are basically sound and good and it is only society, disguised as the family and as education, that corrupts the young person. Reich was an outspoken critic of all forms of institutionalized authority and a vociferous advocate of individual freedom and self-regulation in sexual behavior and in work. His ideas were irresistible to the anti establishment writers and artists of the late nineteen-forties (a group that included Mailer, Ginsberg, Burroughs, William Steig and sculptress Jo Jenks) and he seems to have equal appeal to the hippie communes of today. Reich also has a following among the many students who feel that required examinations and evaluations limit their freedom and diminish their individuality and humanity. The rediscovery of Reich in America is also being facilitated by the reissuance here of his books in paperback.

THROUGHOUT his career, Reich worked in three different areas: research, psychotherapy and what might be best called social psychology, simultaneously. While it is true that Reich never lost complete contact with reality, it is also true that his contribution in these areas is often strikingly uneven as far as scientific acceptability goes. Reich's early work was generally well regarded. His innovations in psychotherapeutic practice—namely, his method of character analysis—has become an integral part of modern psychotherapeutic technique.

Moreover, Reich's interest in the messages conveyed by the way in which people spoke, held themselves and behaved is a direct forerunner of the modern science of kinesics, the study of how people communicate through body movements and postures. Finally, Reich's early social psychological writing, particularly his "Mass Psychology of Fascism," broke new ground in the study of the relations of social structure to individual character. Reich thusfore shadowed the work of modern writers such as Marcuse, Fromm and Erikson. In contrast, much of Reich's later work, particularly that dealing with the treatment of cancer, is generally regarded as scientifically unacceptable.

Wilhelm Reich was born on March 24, 1897, in Dobrzynia, a part of Galicia which at that time belonged to the Austrian Empire. Soon after his birth, the family moved to the equivalent of an American ranch in the Ukrainian section of Austria where Reich's father raised cattle for the German Government. Reich and his younger brother, Robert, grew up on the ranch and enjoyed the pastoral pleasures of riding and hunting. The Reich family was well-to-do, somewhat proud and much more identified with German culture than with their Jewish heritage. Neither Wilhelm nor his brother was allowed to play with the peasant children or with the Yiddish-speaking children of the ghetto. Despite having been thrown together a great deal, the brothers did not appear to have been very close and both seemed to have experienced loneliness as children.

Reich's mother was an attractive, simple-minded woman who was completely dominated and cowed by her dictatorial and jealous husband. When Reich was a young adolescent, she had an affair with one of the tutors then living with the family. It is likely that Reich bore some responsibility for his father's discovery of the affair and for his mother's subsequent suicide. In her recent biography, Reich's third wife, Ilse Ollendorff Reich, wrote that Reich's part in his mother's suicide might have been one reason why "he was never able to successfully finish his own analysis. There were certain problems he was never able to face."

During the First World War, Reich was an officer in the Austrian Army and served in the Italian theater. He seemed to enjoy military life, which probably appealed to his overwhelming need for activity and for enterprises that could absorb his extraordinary energy and vitality. Reich was one of those people to whom everything comes easily. He learned to ride and to ski with the same facility that he learned to play the piano, paint, sculpture or master difficult academic subjects. After the war he made a brief try at law, found it dull, and switched to medicine. He finished the six-year program in four years and supported himself during the last years of schooling by tutoring other students. Among his fellow students was Annie Pink, whom he married in 1921 and who later became a well-known analyst in her own right.

In 1919, while still a student, Reich attended a lecture on psychoanalysis and was so intrigued that he quickly decided that he wanted to be a psychiatrist. He began to attend whatever psychoanalytic meetings he could, asked searching questions and even challenged some of the more established analysts. Such was his vitality, enthusiasm and obvious brilliance that he was admitted as a member to the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, and began seeing patients, even before he had completed his medical training. Almost from the beginning of his association with the society, Reich had free access to Freud, who regarded him as a young man of considerable promise. Freud was to think otherwise before the decade was over.

REICH joined the psychoanalytic movement at the start of an extremely tumultuous period in Austrian history. Inflation was destroying the savings of most Austrians (even Freud was forced to borrow money, a loan he quickly repaid) and the political crosscurrents were many and disturbing. The times and Reich's personality conjoined to make the next decade and a half a period of hectic, even chaotic, activities and accomplishments. All during this period Reich was teaching, seeing patients, writing and engaging in a variety of political activities. In addition, Reich was also developing a theory regarding the psychosomatic determinants of neuroses.

Reich's consideration of the psychosomatic factors in the neuroses was stimulated by a case that Freud referred to him in 1920. (Reich always treasured his collection of small printed calling cards which Freud used when referring patients to other analysts.) This particular patient's symptoms were compulsive rumination, compulsive counting, anal fantasies and excessive masturbation. Reich noted whenever the patient reported that he had masturbated with complete satisfaction that his symptoms lessened. Reich proceeded to analyze the patient's guilt over masturbation. When this chronic guilt was alleviated and the patient could masturbate regularly with complete gratification, his symptoms subsided to the extent that he could work and socialize to a degree not possible for him before. The patient later married and remained well for as many years as Reich kept in touch with him.

This patient, and others like him, led Reich to reconsider some of Freud's thinking regarding the origin of the neuroses. In his clinical work, Freud had early distinguished between two types of neuroses. One type, the psychoneuroses, included all those cases in which somatic symptoms (such as paralysis, frigidity, impotence, headaches, etc.) were produced by mental conflicts. The other type, the actual neuroses, included all those cases in which the somatic symptoms (mainly anxiety and its consequents such as sweating, palpitation, cardiac irregularity) were produced physiologically rather than psychologically.

Freud at first thought these actual neuroses were produced by a “damming up of the libido” due to enforced abstinence, coitus interruptus and related practices. Freud understood that the undischarged sexual energy was in some way transformed into anxiety. Later, in “The Problem of Anxiety” (1926), Freud modified this view and suggested that anxiety was basically a signal of danger from within—from one's impulses or from one's conscience—much as fear is a signal of danger from without.

Reich, however, took Freud's original description of the actual neuroses, the damming up of the libido or of sexual energy, as the underlying cause of all neuroses. In Reich's view, neurotic symptoms as well as character traits were dead-end channels into which sexual energy came to be diverted as a result of the damming-up process. Therapy, Reich contended, had to be directed toward a destruction of the dams against sexuality. Once sexual energy could flow freely through its normal healthy channels, namely genital orgasm the patient would be free of disturbing symptoms and inhibiting character traits and could fully realize his potential. Reich thus came to regard the fully realized and enjoyed sexual orgasm as the *sine qua non* of individual mental health, and argued that this was as true for women as it was for men.

These ideas regarding sexuality were put forth in Reich's book, “The Function of the Orgasm” (1926). It met a rather cool reception among analysts on both theoretical and clinical grounds. On the theoretical side, Reich seemed to be contending Freud's view that civilization and social progress were purchased at the expense of holding the instincts in check. In Freud's view, divergences of sexual energies into socially healthy channels, which he called “sublimations,” were essential for civilized society. In effect, for Freud, neurotics were those whose attempts at sublimation failed and whose channeled sexual energies became self-destructive rather than socially productive. (A competent surgeon's skill could represent a successful sublimation of the aggressive drive, whereas the ulcerative colitis of a chronically complaining housewife could represent an unsuccessful handling of the same instinct.)

For Reich, in contrast, even sublimations were suspect and only the free and unmitigated gratification of genital sexuality could be truly healthy for the individual or for society. So, while Reich built his orgasm theory on ideas originally put forth by Freud, he reached conclusions that were at variance with those of “The Professor” and they were not well received.

Reich's clinical emphasis on the completely gratifying genital orgasm as the major criterion of individual mental health received an equally cold reception. (One clinician told Reich that he admired Reich's presentation but was glad that he had not written Reich's book.) In response to Reich's claim, many analysts contended that they had patients who attained genital orgasm, yet remained ill. Others argued that the orgasm theory could not explain the war neuroses produced by sudden traumatic events. Still others said the orgasm theory could not account for the research then being conducted by Pavlov in Russia, which suggested that neuroses could be experimentally produced in animals by placing them in conflict situations. Finally, there was a general feeling that Reich's orgasm theory failed to make good physiological sense. Sexual substances simply do not accumulate and produce experiences like those coming from a full bladder, although Reich insisted on using this analogy.

In responding to these objections, Reich tended to ignore much of the negative evidence and responded mainly to the criticism that patients remained ill even while having genital orgasms. To the latter argument, Reich responded that ejaculation itself was not indicative of what he came to call orgasmic potency.

By this he meant complete, reflexive and totally satisfying orgasm, the major criteria of which were the “involuntary contractions of the organism and the complete discharge of the excitation,” as well as the ability to “concentrate oneself with one’s whole personality on the orgasmic experience, in spite of possible conflicts.” ‘A patient, argued Reich, could be orgasmically impotent and still have an orgasm, but it would be a feeble replica of the experience of the orgasmically potent individual for whom or *genii* was a total relief from sexual pressure and a rejuvenating experience.

ALTHOUGH Reich’s theory of the damming up of sexual energy—sexual stasis he called it—is not supported by the preponderance of evidence, his idea that orgasmic potency is a criterion of mental health contains a partial truth. Freud made clear that conflicts over infantile sexual impulses gave rise to the neuroses and that only when these conflicts were resolved could satisfying and mature genital activity occur. Likewise, Erikson suggests that successful intimacy (including sexual intimacy) requires a confirmed sense of ego identity. This is true because intimacy presupposes the ability to give oneself more or less totally to another person and only those with a solid sense of ego identity remain unthreatened by the possibility of incorporating or being incorporated by another person. Thus Freud and Erikson both suggest that mental and emotional maturity are essential prerequisites for orgasmic potency in the Reichian sense. They do not imply, as Reich did, that the reverse is also true and that orgasmic potency is an essential prerequisite to mental well-being.

Despite the negative reactions to his orgasm theory, Reich remained undaunted and convinced that he was correct. Moreover, the orgasm theory seemed to have important implications for the psychotherapeutic and political activities in which he also was actively engaged. It is rather ironic that Reich’s orgasm theory, which is not generally accepted, nonetheless led him to the valuable therapeutic insights contained in his “character analysis” and to the valuable social-psychological insights embodied in the “Mass Psychology of Fascism.” A further irony is that it was not his “wrong” orgasm theory but rather his “right” understanding of character formation and mass psychology which led to his estrangement from psychoanalysis in general and from Freud in particular.

Reich’s ideas about psychotherapy were developing at the same time that he was evolving his orgasm theory, and, like that theory, derived from clinical practice. In 1922 Freud established a Vienna Psychoanalytic Polyclinic for less affluent patients which was modeled after a similar clinic that had already been established in Berlin. Reich was first clinical assistant to the director, Dr. Edward Hitschman, from 1922 to 1928, and was its vice director from 1928 to 1930. While working at the clinic, Reich initiated, in 1924, the famous “Technical Seminar” over which he presided for the next six years. The seminar was concerned with practical therapeutic problems and was very popular among physicians training to be analysts.

In the seminar, Reich and his students presented cases that had not gone well or that had not progressed at all. One common factor in all these therapeutic failures was that the patients, for one reason or another, had not been following the “fundamental rule” of psychoanalytic treatment. The fundamental rule is that the patient must say everything that comes to mind no matter how trivial, stupid, bizarre, hateful or amorous it might be. Such “free associations” provided the material upon which the analyst worked to discover and to make conscious the conflict causing the neurotic difficulty. If the patient would not or could not follow the fundamental rule, then treatment of necessity came to a standstill.

Freud, of course, encountered similar problems in his own patients and had written about “resistances” to the therapy. He also suggested that these resistances (which later came to be described as defenses of the ego) had to be analyzed and interpreted to the patient. Freud had not, however, provided a detailed discussion of the nature of these resistances nor had he provided many clues as to how they were to be analyzed and overcome.

Reich, as a result of questions raised in the technical seminar and his own therapeutic experiments, was the first analyst to present a systematic and detailed method for dealing with the patient's resistances to the fundamental rule. It is this method that Reich came to call “character analysis.”

Freud had demonstrated that dreams, slips of the tongue and pen as well as other errors of everyday life, often signaled the unconscious feelings and desires of the person who made them. Classical analytic procedure involved the interpretation of this kind of material. Reich pointed out that the patient's habitual bodily movements and, expressions, his ways of sitting, standing and talking, also hinted at unconscious material. What these habitual ways of behaving signaled, however, he said, were the patient's customary ways of defending himself from both inner dangers (his sexual or angry impulses and his conscience) and dangers from without (the reactions of others to his behavior).

A man, for example, who habitually puts his hand over his mouth as he speaks could be defending both against the angry words he unconsciously wants to speak and also against getting “hit in the mouth” for saying them. When patients failed to obey the fundamental rule, therefore, Reich advocated repeated interpretation of the characteristic defensive behavior as a point of therapeutic attack and as a way of getting the analysis “unstuck.”

Reich's method of character analysis is illustrated by the case of a 30-year-old man whom Reich treated in Vienna. The patient was impotent and complained of not “getting much fun out of life.” His total manner was inhibited and he gave the impression of a person who was in a kind of huddle with himself. He spoke in a low and hesitant voice and looked at the ground rather than at the person to whom he was speaking. During the analytic hours he complained, “I don't feel anything, the analysis doesn't have any influence on me, nothing comes to mind.” The classical way to handle such a patient was kindly encouragement to try harder or to say more about this or that topic.

Instead, Reich repeatedly focused on the patient's words and behavior and interpreted them as a rejection of himself and of the analysis. Eventually the patient retorted that he was not rejecting the analysis and had, in fact, identified Reich with a close friend. To this Reich replied that perhaps the patient expected the analyst to love him and admire him as his friend did. Perhaps, too, Reich added, the patient's rejection of the analysis stemmed from his disappointment and resentment at Reich's clinical reserve.

The patient then acknowledged that he had always demanded love as a child and that he had continued this pattern as an adult. It made him feel defensive with virile appearing men. After this disclosure, the patient was able to discuss more personal material and the analysis got truly under way. Reich described the results of his new therapeutic procedures in the book for which he is most widely known, “Character Analysis” (1933). In that book, as in many of his later books, Reich used drawings of amoeba-like figures to illustrate his points.

At the same time that Reich was developing his orgasm theory and his method of character analysis, he was also involved with the political activities which engrossed almost all of the young Viennese intellectuals. The name of Marx came up so often that Reich decided to read Marx for himself and he proceeded to devour Marx's writings with the same fervor and single-mindedness that he had ingested Freud's a few years earlier. Reich joined the Socialist party in 1924 and became a very active party member. He worked mainly in recruiting and in education and was more concerned with the humanistic reforms promised by the party than with its political platform as such.

But while Reich accepted the Marxian premise that the working class was exploited by the owners and managers of the middle class, he did not detect a revolutionary spirit in the people. The revolt of the masses predicted by Marx was not taking place. It seemed to Reich at this point that neither Marxian nor Freudian theory, while each contained a certain amount of truth, could of themselves account for the political and social psychological realities of what was taking place in Europe. In effect, Marx lacked an adequate psychology while Freud lacked an adequate sociology.

Reich made a number of attempts to integrate the theories without too much success. He then realized that a mere addition of the two theories was not enough and that something new had to be proposed that would integrate the two systems and at the same time explain the social-political realities of the moment. Reich's solution was presented in "The Mass Psychology of Fascism" (1933).

Reich introduced his major theme by asking why the vast majority of people allow themselves to be exploited, overworked and underfed by the few? The answer, he argued, resides in the fact that the owners of the means of production also set the character structure of the society. It is the middle class which determines the values and standards that predominate within any given society. This value structure is then reproduced within every member of the society by the institution of the family. The paternal, authoritarian family of Western Europe, Reich argued, prepared people from early childhood to accept the omniscience of a powerful authority who was to be obeyed without question. Fascism was the natural political form for the character type produced by the patriarchal family and the potential for Fascism thus existed in any country where a patriarchal family structure was dominant. (From this point of view the progressive equalitarianism of the American family is a healthy sign.)

THE publication of "The Mass Psychology of Fascism" in many ways terminated Reich's affiliation with psychoanalysis, although the official break did not occur until a year later in 1934. Reich's difficulties with his fellow psychoanalysts had been building for a number of years and were at once personal, professional and political. Indeed, it is not clear whether the analysts found Reich's unconcealed romantic affairs, or his orgasm theory, or his political activities most repugnant. What is clear is that Reich managed to destroy most of the goodwill he had established in Vienna with his clinical work and his technical seminar. As Reich became more involved in politics from 1928 to 1930, his writings more and more took on a political, polemical quality. This was embarrassing to Freud, who wished to keep psychoanalysis quite separate from politics in those difficult and delicate times. The discomfort Reich was causing may have been one of the reasons Freud encouraged Reich to move to Berlin, where the Viennese analyst Sandor Rado had agreed to take him for a training analysis. Reich moved his family to Berlin in 1930. The analysis, however, was short-lived because Rado departed for America soon after Reich arrived in Berlin. Reich, in the meantime, was getting ever more deeply involved in political matters.

THE final break with Freud came as a result of a paper Reich submitted to the *Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse* in 1932. The paper dealt with the masochistic character and contradicted Freud's interpretation of how such character types came to be formed. In 1920 Freud published "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," in which he proposed that in addition to the positive life principle (Eros) there was an equally primary negative life impulse (Thanatos), which amounted to a death instinct. Freud then argued that the masochistic person is one who is dominated by Thanatos, the instinct of self-destruction. Reich argued that the masochistic character could be explained entirely by the life principle, Eros, and that there was no need to postulate a death instinct. Reich gave many cogent clinical examples wherein masochistic behavior was seen as an anguished cry for love. Reich showed that the masochistic person was in effect saying, "Look at me, see how I suffer, I am so miserable, love me." Masochism, in Reich's view, was just Eros in disguise. Although other analysts privately agreed with Reich and had many reservations about the death instinct (Reich's rather than Freud's interpretation of masochism prevails in psychiatry today), they hesitated, as Reich did not, to speak out openly against Freud's hypothesis.

When Freud read the paper, he was troubled less by Reich's arguments against the death instinct than he was by the political tone of the arguments. Jones, the editor of the *Zeitschrift*, wrote "The paper culminates in the nonsensical statement that what we have called the death instinct is a product of the capitalist system." Yet Freud recognized the clinical merit of the piece and recommended that it be published along with a statement to the effect that the *Zeitschrift* itself was nonpolitical and that it was not responsible for the political views of its contributors. Freud's suggestion met with considerable opposition from the editorial board and the upshot of the matter was the paper was published together with a 30-page rebuttal by a member of the board.

The whole incident created still more resentment against Reich for the continued embarrassment he was causing the entire German Psychoanalytic Society. This embarrassment became acute with the publication of "Mass Psychology of Fascism," wherein an accredited psychoanalyst of national standing attacked Fascism from the standpoint of what was essentially Freudian theory. Something had to be done, and the opportunity arose the next year. In early August, 1934, Reich received a letter from the analyst Carl Mueller which said that "circumstances required" that Reich's name not appear on the register of members of the German Psychoanalytic Society. The register was being prepared for the 1934 International Congress of Psychoanalysis that was to be held in Lucerne, Switzerland. Reich was, in effect, expelled from the psychoanalytic society for his political views.

Ironically, Reich was also repudiated by the Socialist and Communist parties at about the same time; but for quite different reasons. When Reich moved to Berlin in 1930 he became involved in the mental hygiene movement, which at that time was politically oriented. Since Reich believed that only a revolution in sexual attitudes and behavior could bring about a true political revolution, he emphasized sexual freedom and sex education in his writings and lectures. He also created, with the consent of the Communist party, a "German Association for Proletarian Sex Politics," which, by dint of Reich's avid recruiting, attained a membership of some 20,000 persons. The platform of this party which Reich called a "sex political" platform, contained the following aims which are rather astonishing in their modernity.

- (1) Better housing conditions for the masses of people.
- (2) Abolition of laws against abortion and homosexuality.
- (3) Change of marriage and divorce laws.
- (4) Free birth-control advice and contraceptives.
- (5) Health protection of mothers and children.
- (6) Nurseries in factories and in other large employment centers.
- (7) Abolition of laws prohibiting sex education.
- (8) Home leave for prisoners.

Reich was however, a little too successful in recruiting people to his sexual politics platform. The Communist party leaders began to distrust the interest generated by Reich's sexual reforms and began to fear that this interest might dampen revolutionary ardor or direct that ardor in the wrong directions (i.e. what for them were the wrong directions). Party functionaries put out orders that all of Reich's books and pamphlets were to be removed from party bookstores. Shortly thereafter, the Gestapo went even further and ordered all of Reich's books confiscated and burned. Fortunately, Reich was able to get out of Germany before his name was put on the list of those to be caught and shot.

Whenever Reich was treated badly, as he had been by the German Psychoanalytic Society and by the Communist party functionaries, he got bitterly angry, but he could not or would not direct this anger at those who aroused it. Instead, he turned his rage on those nearest and dearest to him, his friends and most of all his wife. Reich's marriage was already shaky and the anger and abuse he poured on Annie at this time was enough to convince her that she could no longer live with Reich and still retain her pride and integrity as a person. The final separation came in 1933, after Reich and Annie escaped to Vienna from Berlin.

Reich's reception in Vienna was even cooler than he had anticipated. That fact, together with the worsening political situation, made Reich decide to leave Austria. He moved to Denmark shortly afterward, but his sexual-political ideas were too much for Danish authorities, who feared for the morality of their young people. Reich's permit to live and work in Denmark was revoked after six months. Reich then moved to Malmö, Sweden, where the same drama was played over again. Reich left Sweden in the early summer of 1934 and spent the rest of it traveling about, some times clandestinely and under assumed names, in Denmark and Sweden and, quite brazenly, in Germany.

THAT fall Reich moved to Oslo with his common-law wife, Elsa Lindenberg (a ballet dancer from Berlin whom he had met at a May Day parade two years before). One of the reasons that Reich moved to Oslo was that a friend, Otto Fenichel (now famous for his classic "Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis"), had established himself in Norway and urged Reich to join him there. Once Reich arrived in Oslo, however, the friendship deteriorated quickly. In part, the difficulty may have been Fenichel's reluctance to accept Reich's sexual-political views. But part of the problem may also have been the fact that students preferred Reich to Fenichel for their training analyses. This hurt Fenichel's pride as well as his income. In any case, when Fenichel left Oslo for America he left a trail of rumors, in every country he visited, to the effect that Reich had had a mental breakdown and was completely insane. This rumor, which was not accurate, persists today.

Reich's stay in Norway was more prolonged than his sojourn in either Denmark or Sweden. Here he undertook experiments designed to measure and demonstrate the physical reality of the sexual energy whose suppression played such a large part in the personal and social misery of mankind. At first he measured the electric potential of the skin during sexual excitation and fantasy. But the results of the experiments were not satisfying because Reich refused to see sexual energy as merely something electrical and mechanical. Sexual energy had to be alive and pulsating. Inevitably Reich came to think of this energy as no longer confined within the boundaries of the body. It existed in the world at large, not unlike the energy of the sun and was even locked up in inanimate material like sand and coal dust.

Reich then undertook a series of experiments designed to release the living energy bound up in inanimate matter; in effect, to transform nonliving matter into living material. One of the methods used in these experiments was to autoclave (pressure-cook) a solution of 50 per cent bouillon and 50 per cent potassium chloride and then add coaldust or other material that had been heated to incandescence. When the experiment was carried out under proper conditions, microscopic examination of the preparation revealed that small "vesicles" detached themselves from the larger particles, moved about freely, appeared to pulsate and gave off a blue or blue-green glow.

Reich assumed that these vesicles (which he called "bions") were midway between animate and inanimate matter and that they were emanating a kind of life energy. It should be said that Reich was now working outside the scientific system of checks and balances and did not submit his work to scientific journals for review. He could thus reject or ignore negative evidence and alternative explanations for his findings. This he proceeded to do, and published his research, at his own expense, in a book which was rather grandly entitled "The Discovery of the Bion."



Innovations were also occurring in Reich's psychotherapeutic work. He no longer thought of character in psychic terms, but rather as a primarily physical and somatic affair. Instead of "character structure" he began to speak of "character armor," by which he meant the chronic physical attitudes (stooped shoulders, stiff posture and so on) which prohibit people from being free and open.

His character analysis now became a "vegetotherapy," which was a manipulative procedure aimed at eliminating the "armor" of stiffness in all parts of the body. The procedure involved not only massage but also breathing exercises of various sorts. The aim was to free the person to be himself. It was a kind of chiropractic, self-realization therapy. (The practice of vegetotherapy by Reichian analysts in America later gave rise to the false rumor that Reichian analysis involved masturbating patients.)

IN the realm of social psychology, Reich gave up his explicit attempts to relate his work to Marx and Freud and moved instead toward the further exposition of his own sexual politics and what he came to call a "work democracy," a self-regulated, self governed commune type of community. Reich continued to urge sexual reforms as the foundation for any real change within the society and he argued persuasively for sexual education and sexual freedom for the young. He lectured and wrote a great deal on this topic and some of his articles appeared in a book first published in 1936 which in English translation was titled "The Sexual Revolution."

Although Reich's stay in Oslo was relatively quiet for the first two years of his residence there, the publication of his work on bions, vegetotherapy and sexual politics eventually came to the attention of the public. In 1937 a rather vicious newspaper campaign was begun and more than one hundred pieces about Reich appeared in less than a year. Although things were not all one-sided, the majority of pieces were of the kind suggested by the headlines, "Quackery of Psychoanalysis," "The Jewish Pornographer" and "God Reich Creates Life." Oslo was a small enough community so that this publicity made Reich's personal life something of a trial. Although Reich was angered by the campaign, he refused to answer his critics except to say that his work ought to be judged by scientists and not by laymen.

The anger aroused in Reich was again turned toward his wife and friends. It led to a separation from Elsa in much the same way it had led to the break with his first wife, Annie. A few years later, when Reich was well established in America, Elsa, out of desperation (she lost her job when the Nazis occupied the country), asked him for help. Reich could be generous when it came to such things as birthday gifts, but he was penurious when it came to money for running a house hold, or in other cases of real material need. It was one of those realities Reich could not face. He sent Elsa \$25.

REICH'S decision to move to America was largely due to the efforts of a New York psychiatrist, Dr. Theodore Wolfe, who had spent a year of study in Oslo. Wolfe was able to get Reich a two year appointment as associate professor of medical psychology at the New School for Social Research in New York. Soon after his arrival in 1939, Reich rented a house in Forest Hills, where he quickly resumed the pattern of activities he had followed in Oslo, Berlin and Vienna. Reich soon had an institute and a publishing outlet (The Orgone Press) for his books and research articles. When setting up his laboratory, Reich hired Ilse Ollendorf, whom he proceeded to court and marry. Ilse helped to carry on much of Reich's experimental research.

After Reich's discovery of the "bion," which he regarded as embodying a general life energy, he sought a term to describe this energy and finally arrived at the name "orgone," a contraction of the words "organism" and "orgastic." Reich believed that orgone energy was an entirely new form of energy which was at one and the same time radiant and electrical.

Experiments led Reich to believe that this energy was reflected by nonorganic substances like metal and absorbed by organic substances like wood. To collect this energy he therefore built “orgone accumulators,” which were like telephone booths with metal inside and wood or other organic material added on the outside. When any living organism was placed in the orgone box, its temperature rose. Reich was so enthralled with this discovery that he wrote Einstein about it in 1940 and asked for an appointment. The two men met on Jan. 13, 1941. Later, Einstein wrote Reich and told him that he had replicated Reich's findings regarding the increased temperature in the box, but that there was a simpler explanation than that of the accumulation of orgone energy. There was no further correspondence and Reich thereafter referred to the incident as the “Einstein affair.”

ONE of the problems that began to preoccupy him more and more was that of cancer. This preoccupation probably stemmed in part from Reich's response to Freud's stoic suffering after he contracted cancer of the jaw in 1923 (Freud remained a father figure for Reich even after their split). But Reich's preoccupation with cancer was also stimulated by some findings from his continued experimentation with bions. Microscopic examination of bion preparations began to reveal some particles which did not fully develop into bions or which regressed after reaching the bion stage. These abortive bions were elongated red bodies which Reich called “T Bacilli.”

Studies of T Bacilli revealed that they originated from the degeneration or disintegration of living or nonliving protein. In contrast to rot bacteria, which agglutinate after a few days, T Bacilli took months to do so. Furthermore, T Bacilli turned out to be quite deadly. Mice injected with large doses of T Bacilli were dead within 24 hours. Further studies showed that cancerous and precancerous tissue both showed high concentrations of T Bacilli. Research also revealed that fully developed bions, which Reich now called PA bions, tended to attract and to kill the T Bacilli. It was this research that led Reich to begin treating cancer patients with orgone energy.

His reasoning was some thing like this. The PA bions are fully charged orgone units while the T Bacilli are weakly charged with orgone energy. A person with cancer has too many T Bacilli and too few PA bions in his system. By bombarding the patient with orgone energy, Reich hoped to stop the production of abortive bions and at the same time to reinforce the potential of the PA bions to kill the T Bacilli. Although Reich's reasoning was sound, his premises—particularly those regarding radiant orgone energy—were completely at variance with known biological facts and principles. Reich was, however, convinced that his conclusions were correct and he proceeded to place cancer patients in the orgone boxes.

In fairness to Reich, it should be said that he regarded this work as experimental, never claimed he had a cancer cure and did not charge patients for treatment. It was, nonetheless, the dissemination of this material and of a small number of portable orgone accumulators that eventually led to Reich's imprisonment.

The work on orgone energy and on orgone therapy did not absorb all of Reich's energies and he continued writing books that are perhaps still best described as social-psychological. Among these books (many of which have now been reissued by Noonday Press) the most noteworthy are “Listen, Little Man” (1948), “Cosmic Superimposition” (1951), and the “Murder of Christ” (1953). The themes of these books chronicle Reich's transformation from a political and scientific revolutionary to a religious evangelist. In them Reich raged against the characterological rigidity which kept the little man from really living and realizing his own potential.

It was the little man, however, who also impeded the work of the truly alive and ‘creative “big” man, among whom Reich numbered Christ, Giordano Bruno and himself. In Reich's view, the religious savior and the scientific innovator are alike in that they both have a total investment in truth. And this truth, which is at once scientific law and religious faith, holds the only answer for man's salvation. Hence, Reich came to see himself as analogous to Christ in having the answer to man's salvation and in being rejected by the “armored” little man who was most in need of saving.

These books give abundant evidence that Reich never completely lost touch with reality and was, for the most part, rational and comprehensible. It is also true, however, that at times his thinking seemed quite paranoid and ridden with grandiose and persecutory ideas. He began to invent and designate organizations of all kinds such as E.P.P.O. (Emotional Plague Prevention Office), H.I.G. (Hoodlums in Government) and D.O.R. (Deadly Orgone Energy). Reich's fictive organizations were very real to him and later, during his trial, he signed his briefs as "Counsel for the E.P.P.O." In addition, he continued to introduce symbolic drawings and figures (such as the upturned arrow splitting into two which then came at each other) to illustrate some of his concepts.

Reich got in trouble with the law in the United States when his distribution of "orgone accumulators" for the treatment for cancer came under the scrutiny of the Federal Drug Administration. There ensued a number of investigations of Reich's home in Forest Hills and of the steadily enlarging compound of dwellings and laboratories in Rangeley, Me., where Reich hoped to establish a "work democracy" and which he called "Orgonon." (Reich had purchased several hundred acres of land in Rangeley in the nineteen-forties and he, his family and co-workers began spending their summers there. Several conferences of orgonomists were also held during these summers and Orgonon came to be the general headquarters of Reich's research activities. With the erection of winterized quarters, the Reichs moved to Rangeley permanently in 1950. The Forest Hills property was sold in 1952.)

All during this time the Government was building its case against Reich. In 1954, on the basis of accumulated depositions, it got an injunction against the manufacture and distribution of orgone energy accumulators (only about a hundred were ever built) and against all printed material which in any way suggested the therapeutic effectiveness of the device. Reich defied the injunction on the grounds that no court of law (only a jury of his scientific peers) was qualified to judge the merits of his scientific work. It was the start of a long and involved legal battle. Reich's position was not helped by the fact that he refused to hire counsel and by the fact that he had refused to go through the procedures required for him to be licensed to practice medicine in New York State.

History repeated itself again in Reich's reaction to the injunction by the F.D.A. His anger was turned against his wife and his friends. Now it was Ilse's turn to suffer Reich's jealous tirades and abuse. Ilse left Reich in 1954 and took their son, Peter, with her, although Peter continued to see his father afterward and Ilse and Reich remained on reasonably good terms and continued to correspond. Reich's loneliness and frustration during this period were heightened by the death of his good friend, Theodore Wolfe, who had handled so many of the publishing and administrative details of his work. Reich went to the movies, ate solitary suppers of boiled potatoes and, despite an earlier heart attack and failing health, began drinking heavily. He also expensively furnished the dining room at Orgonon in hopes that President Eisenhower would visit him and get him out of difficulty.

There were several hearings in 1955 in which Reich reiterated his refusal to obey the injunction. Again he offered to stand by the judgment of a board of scientifically trained persons. The court said it had no power to convene such a body and set a date for a criminal contempt of court trial. The trial took place on May 3-7, 1956. Reich represented himself and acknowledged that he had refused to obey the injunction, but he also refused to plead guilty. While Reich handled himself well in the interrogations, his summation included many references to H.T.G., referred to F.D.A. agents as spies and hoodlums, and was often quite loose and abstract. The prosecution claimed that Reich and his followers were, keeping F.D.A. agents off the Orgonon premises, sometimes at gun point, and that Reich's demand for a jury of scientists hardly squared with the fact that Reich had never been licensed to practice medicine in the United States.

The jury needed only 10 minutes to decide that Reich had in fact violated the injunction and was in contempt of court. The judge then fined the Wilhelm Reich Foundation \$10,000 and sentenced Reich to two years in prison. An appeal to a higher court failed and Reich was admitted to the Federal Penitentiary in Danbury, Conn., on March 12, 1957. Ten days later he was transferred to the prison at Lewisburg, Pa.

While Reich was clearly in contempt of court, the sentence seems (considering the offense, his age, state of mind and health) rather harsh. Although the prison sentence was unexpected, Reich bore it well and wrote to Peter about the projects he planned to undertake once he had regained his freedom. A parole hearing was set for mid November and Reich was optimistic about an early release. Several days before the hearing, on Nov. 3, 1957, Reich suffered a second and fatal heart attack.

Shortly after his imprisonment, Reich was interviewed by several psychiatrists. They found him to be impressively brilliant, but also quite paranoid and he spoke to them of the conspiracy against him plotted by Moscow and the Rockefellers. Within the confines of his paranoid premises, however, his reasoning was quite logical and consistent. Although Reich's later work on bions, orgone energy and cancer has yet to be fully tested and evaluated by the scientific community, it seems to have some of the quality of his delusions and suggests a logically consistent theoretical edifice based on scientifically untenable premises.

Put differently, Reich's reasoning remained relatively sound but his judgment and ability to test reality were often seriously impaired. Even with this impairment, Reich's later social-psychological books, though marred by the intrusions of paranoid thinking, contain many passages which, in my opinion, will be of lasting value to the study of men in groups.

IF the latex Reich of the "Orgone Box" and the "E.P.P.O." is something of a tragic figure, the early Reich of "Mass Psychology of Fascism" is as much a culture hero to the youth of today as he was to young people 35 years ago, when his courageous revolutionary books gave hope to the dispirited students of Western Europe oppressed by the specter of National Socialism. The nature of the early Reich's appeal to youth was perhaps best described by Reich's oldest and staunchest friend, A. S. Neil (founder of Summerhill, a school for adolescents run on Reichian lines). In a letter written shortly after Reich's trial, Neill said, with the early Reich in mind:

"Reich, I love you ... I cannot bear to think of your being punished by an insane prison sentence ... The fact is that you are being crucified fundamentally because you are the first man in centuries who has preached pro-lifeness, because you are the one and only man to assert the right of adolescents to love completely. In any court your defense should be in big letters, I AM FOR LIFE AND FOR LOVE."