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Review Fromm, E.: Man for Himself

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Reading Fromm's book leaves me with a very ambivalent feeling. The author certainly has something to say but the way he says it gives it a very different meaning from what I think it really signifies.

Humanistic ethics should be based not on taboo but on the principle of productivity. The building of the tower of Babel or Prometheus stealing fire are the symbols of human productivity (p. 149). That of course is the style that characterizes this way of thinking. A myth is taken at its face value, it is not analysed, the Unconscious has sunk into oblivion. If we analyse the myth we see that the Tower of Babel is an erection symbol, the stealing of fire myths mean stealing 'heat' from the gods and both symbolize Eros.

'Genuine love is an expression of productivity' (p. 129) the author says, whereas of course love is derived from the sexual impulse and the sexual impulse is really 'productiveness' in a biological sense. One dream analysis will suffice to show how the author arrives at his '*anagogic*' (Silberer, Jung) constructs.

A well known writer was offered a position where he would have had to sell his integrity as a writer for a lot of money and fame while considering whether or not to accept the offer he had this dream. At the foot of a mountain he sees two very successful men whom he despises for their opportunism,

they tell him to drive up the narrow road to the peak. He follows their advice and when almost at the top of the mountain his car falls off the road and he is killed (p. 165).

Fromm says the message of this dream needs little interpretation; while he slept he knew that the acceptance of the offered position would be equivalent to destruction, not of course to his physical death ..., but to his destruction as an integrated, productive human being.'

All that is needed nowadays in 'psychoanalysis' (?) to write a new book is to forget about the unconscious. The position offered and the mountain peak (narrow passage!) both mean coitus with mother (driving!) and the fall is the work of the super-ego. The humanistic conscience he postulates is based on productivity (p. 156). Productivity is actually the modern form of magic, the main weapon we have in our hand against the 'inner saboteur' (Fairbairn) or conscience (unconscious guilt feeling). Primitives call it magic, in our civilization we speak of productivity but the basic elements are the erogenous qualities of our own body:¹

Quoting Nietzsche the author says:

'Love is a phenomenon of abundance,

¹ Cf. G. Roheim, *Das Selbst. Imago VII.*



its premise is the strength of the individual who can give' (p. 126), i.e. abundance is due to the libido, the word genius primarily signifies genitality and only in a derived sense productivity. The preacher frequently invades upon the scientist as for instance: 'The kind of division of labor as William James calls it, by which one loves one's family but is without feeling for a stranger is a sign of a basic inability to love' (p. 130). If this is so, the overwhelming majority of mankind suffers from this 'basic inability'.

Character is described as receptive, or exploitative or hoarding or marketing or productive (pp. 62–118).

Forget Freud, Abraham and others and we have something brand-new. The receptive is of course the oral ('The mouth is an especially prominent feature', says Fromm, p. 63) the exploitative is oral sadistic, the hoarding anal, the marketing exhibitionistic and the productive genital.

The gist of it is that in a 'non-authoritarian' society there does not have to be an authoritarian conscience, i.e. super-ego (p. 167). Authority can only be eliminated from society when children will be born who are the same age as their parents and when the new-born infant will immediately

sit down to write a novel, or compose music or write a book on ethics. 'Humanistic conscience is not the internalized voice of an authority whom we are eager to please and afraid of displeasing it is our own voice, present in every human being and independent of external sanctions and rewards' (p. 158).

Yet the first voice we actually hear is that of the parents and it is impossible to deny that the 'voice inside' is but the internalized representative of something perceived in the external world.

It is Fromm himself, by the way, who has done more harm to psychoanalysis than anyone else for if I am not mistaken it is he who first suggested 'that the Oedipus complex results from the child's reaction to the pressure of parental authority which in itself is an intrinsic part of patriarchal society' (p. 157).

I have refuted this thesis so many times with facts from the field of anthropology about mild fathers, matrilineal societies and *still* the Oedipus complex that I don't think there is much point even in referring to my own papers. Nothing will convince the '*Zeitgeist*', it is a case with them of *sic volo sic jubeo*.