

This book represents a summary report of the well known attempt of Erich Fromm and various colleagues and students to achieve an in-depth understanding of the social character of peasants who reside in a particular Mexican village. The goals of the study were numerous; central ones include (1) the testing of Fromm's theories about personality, character, and their corresponding social determinants, (2) an evaluation of the potential for change inherent in peasant character types and (3) the empirical depiction of the matrix of character types that can be said to represent a group. Since the late 1950's efforts have been expended in collecting and analyzing data of a sociocultural and psychological sort. Participant observation methods, open-unstructured psychoanalytically oriented interviews, socio-demographic census type instruments, questionnaires designed to elicit projectively rich responses, as well as traditional projective tests (the ~~Rorschach~~ <sup>Rorschach</sup> and T.A.T.) have all been used in the effort to obtain a socio-psychological understanding of how Mexican villagers grow up, live, and meet everyday demands. It is perhaps not an exaggeration to say that this study represents one of the most elaborate attempts to develop a psychologically oriented socio-psychological picture of the population of a bounded community.

A host of social scientists have worked on this project. Fromm and Maccoby in addition to presumably studying directly the villagers and generating original data bearing on this project, have apparently combed the field notes and summary reports of those associated with the project and presented this summary report. Despite the fact that several anthropologists have worked in this village, this final report lacks material that reflects





an anthropological focus. The social and ecologic context of behavior and the basic orientations and dispositions of the peasants; their manner of relating, feeling, thinking; and the rather basic organization inherent in the way they conduct their lives is never presented systematically. This may be a consequence of the authors' decision regarding the nature of their responsibility to their "clients". A condition imposed on their efforts was that data that might prove to be revealing of the personal identity of the villagers be excluded from the report. The authors have conscientiously upheld this condition in producing this report. To repeat, Vignettes, data detailing interactions, personally held values or opinions, and in general material of the sort that descriptively captures the life conditions and perceptions of people is not found. As can perhaps be surmised, from the standpoint of this reviewer, this is a most unfortunate fact since it deprives the reader of the dynamics and feel of peasant and village life and gives the document an abstract, inferential, somewhat discursive and detached flavor. However, it is difficult to be overly critical with a scholarship strategy that is basically well intentioned.

The first chapter lays out the authors' conviction of the centrality of the psychoanalytic concept of character, and contains a rather lucid description of the differences between an intrapsychic framework vis-a-vis the study of human behavior and that of behavioristic social science. Rather than viewing character in libidinal energy terms, the authors stress the structure and process behind a person's general relatedness to the world. This is followed by presentation of the concept of social



character: "The concept of social character does not refer to the complete or highly individualized, in fact, unique character structure as it exists in an individual, but to a 'character matrix,' a syndrome of character traits which has developed as an adaptation to the economic, social, and cultural conditions common to that group." The authors then proceed to describe the method they have devised for the study of social character. The resulting instrument, called the "interpretive questionnaire," consists of probes designed to elicit socially relevant responses that are recorded verbatim and that subsequently afford the analyst-rater to "penetrate" and evaluate the character of the respondent. The question probes making up the questionnaire (which is contained in Appendix A of the book) are designed to avoid closed "preformulated responses" which may relate analytically to discrete variables, but to produce a corpus of information which is then evaluated from a motivational and characterological standpoint.

Chapter 2 reviews important historical factors bearing on the village studied. In a short section of this chapter the authors present a phenomenological profile of how the villagers think, feel, and orient themselves generally on a day-to-day basis. Chapter 3 contains rather elaborate information bearing on socio-economic and demographic factors of the villagers: The age, place of birth, age of arrival at the village, family composition, educational attainment, occupational structure, and data bearing on the land holdings and other possessions of the villagers is presented. The socio-economic scale used by the authors, is then reviewed. This chapter concludes with a description of how the various social classes participate in village social and civic affairs.



Chapter 4, a relatively short one, contains in summary fashion, the bulk of the authors' theoretical framework. "In the process of living, man relates himself to the world (1) by acquiring and assimilating things, and (2) by relating himself to people (and himself). The former is considered the process of assimilation; the latter, that of socialization." "These orientations, by which the individual relates himself to the world, constitute the core of his character. Character can be defined as the (relatively permanent) form in which human energy is structuralized in the process of assimilation and socialization." Types of character include (a) the nonproductive orientations consisting of the receptive, the exploitative, and the hoarding orientations (which correspond to the psychoanalytic oral receptive, oral sadistic, and oral character types); and (b) the productive orientation which corresponds to Freud's "genital character." The mode of relatedness implied by the process of acquiring and assimilating things, thus, is structured characterologically in these types or modes which, it must be emphasized, are not mutually exclusive. Orientations in the processes of interpersonal relatedness (which are taken from Fromm's earlier work) include: (1) symbiotic relatedness, masochism and sadism, (2) withdrawal-destructiveness, (3) narcissism, and (4) love. The authors also make use of the concept "parental fixation," differentiating this in terms of degree of attachment and centeredness on the parental figures (which includes intense fixation on mother, moderate fixation on mother, intense fixation on father, moderate fixation on father, and independence). Finally, the socio-political modes are described, and these include: (1) authoritarianism and traditionalism, (2) submissiveness and the (3) democratic orientation. The preceding sets



of concepts, then, form the core of the framework that orients the study. Examples of the way these variables are scored and measured are presented in Appendix A. The authors have a dynamic and interrelated notion of social character: "In describing the different kinds of nonproductive orientations and the productive orientation, these orientations were considered as if they were separate entities, clearly differentiated from each other. For didactic purposes this kind of treatment seemed to be necessary because we have to understand the nature of each orientation before we can proceed to the understanding of their blending. Yet, in reality, we always deal with blends, for a character never represents just one of the nonproductive orientations or the productive orientation exclusively." "To understand the character system of any individual, it is necessary to take account of the interrelationship between modes of assimilation and relatedness, the quality of incestuous ties, and the degree of productiveness."

In chapter 5, results of scoring the 406 completed protocols, generated by administering the interpretive questionnaire to 200 men and 206 women (95 percent of the adult population of villagers), are presented and reviewed. The authors also employed a factor analytic approach to this rather large body of data (a total of 63 variables dealing with the character construct were employed) and the results of this method of procedure are also presented and discussed. It is obviously not feasible to summarize here the many substantive findings reported. On page 109 appears a short summary statement: "We have distinguished three main types: first, the nonproductive-receptive character which is



the most frequent one; second, the productive-hoarding character; and third, the exploitative character (which is composed of two numerically smaller types, productive-exploitative and unproductive-exploitative)." The chapter ends with a rather general and fluid account of the many sociohistorical factors that are believed to importantly relate to the formation and perpetuation of the principal character types of the village.

#### Chapter 6 reviews

~~the~~ material bearing on more analytic concerns.

In particular, by means of discussion and the presentation of empirical findings the authors attempt to evaluate whether particular character orientations are associated with socioeconomic competence. For example, land holding villagers with a predominantly productive-hoarding character orientation were shown to be more successful than those with an unproductive-receptive mode. The productive-hoarding orientation was also associated with prosperity among the non-land holders. A variety of information of this type is reviewed, leading the authors to conclude that: "The correlations between character and socioeconomic variables are evidence that the hoarding orientation has been the one best adapted to the economic demands of peasant farming in the village. Furthermore, because his character and his work fit each other, the hoarding peasant is likely to be more productive and energetic, indeed more confident and hopeful, than the receptive peasant who finds himself increasingly out of tune with his world."

Subsequent chapters include further empirical material dealing with theoretical concerns, <sup>the material</sup> ~~is~~ <sup>be</sup> much too elaborate to ~~summarized~~ succinctly.

In chapter 7, for example, the character traits that are associated with gender are analyzed and an attempt is made to probe the kinds of relationships



between men and women demonstrating the various character modes. ~~Chapter 8~~ <sup>The</sup> characterological correlates of excessive drinking, a significant problem among the villagers, <sup>are analyzed in depth in chapter 8.</sup> Chapter 9 presents information dealing with the child-rearing and early socialization norms of the village, and also a rather large and diversified set of findings which resulted from administering psychological tests to the children of the village. A very detailed effort is made to delineate the way in which the children's mode <sup>of</sup> assimilating and relating compares and relates to that of their parents. In chapter 10 the authors discuss the manner in which the villagers cooperate with each other in various activities and projects. The influence that character type plays in these activities receives attention. The efforts and consequences of village participation in a government agricultural subsidy program had indicated that peasant individualism and suspiciousness can be significantly overcome. The research staff then engineered two projects (only the second one is detailed in the chapter) designed to elicit and test the extent of cooperativeness among villagers, and their efforts are reviewed in the later sections of chapter 10. The results of organizing a boys' club and involving the village on this project led the authors to conclude that: "Given a new set of conditions, the traditional peasant character can to a considerable extent undergo changes, and traditional peasant behavior can change from antagonism and selfishness to cooperation. The main problem is to find those new conditions which in a systemic way are able to bring about these changes. And this is only achieved by an organization of social life that is conducive to



an increase in the productive elements of the character structure."

In the final chapter the authors review the utility of their method, discussing the desirability (but inherent difficulty) of having a more structured instrument with which to probe social character.

They conclude that a combination of the interpretive questionnaire with the ~~Rorschach~~<sup>Rorschach</sup> is probably optimal, but that in the face of limited

resources and personnel the interpretive questionnaire is preferable to the ~~Rorschach~~<sup>Rorschach</sup>. The chapter concludes by discussing further the theory of social character, in particular the sequence of historical and socioeconomic changes leading to the formation and modification of social character.

I finished the book with several mixed impressions: (1) a feeling of admiration for the individual (or individuals) whose broad vision and humanity engineered this study (though tinged with a little impatience at the doctrinaire tone implicit in the report); (2) a feeling of empathic identification with the authors who have conscientiously labored in the attempt to compile, arrange, and present this rather large body of empirical data (notwithstanding my awareness that this study was well supported and the report is long overdue); (3) a feeling that it is commendable that individuals like Fromm and Maccoby demonstrate as large a commitment as they apparently do for the need to socially ground and empirically test what are essentially intrapsychic and sociohistorical concerns (that many believe do not logically admit of this scientific strategy); (4) a feeling that there is something inherently scientifically useful in the concept of "social character" as formulated by the authors but convinced that they had not empirically demonstrated it to me, and (5) feeling that the larger part of the insights that must have been gained





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by this study were not represented in the book but probably reside in other documents and/or the "minds" of Fromm, Maccoby and others who worked on the project.