

# A Contemporary Prophet

Erich Fromm  
**On Disobedience: And Other Essays**  
New York: Seabury Press, 1981.  
135 pp. \$9.95

Review by  
Jerome D. Frank

Until his death in March 1980, Erich Fromm was honorary professor at the National University of Mexico and adjunct professor at New York University. Among his many books are *To Have or To Be?* and *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*. ■ Jerome D. Frank is professor emeritus of psychiatry at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. He is author of *Persuasion and Healing: A Comparative Study of Psychotherapy*, first and second editions, and of *Psychotherapy and the Human Predicament: A Psychosocial Approach*.

Shortly before his death, Erich Fromm selected the nine essays, all written between 1959 and 1966, for republication in this volume. Presumably he wished them to be his final statement, and indeed they cover a wide range of philosophical, social, and political topics, from the general, such as the opening essay on values, psychology, and human existence, to the specific, such as guaranteed income and unilateral disarmament.

Despite the differences in subject matter, the essays are all variations on a single theme, first powerfully enunciated in *Escape From Freedom*, namely, that modern, bureaucratized, consumer-oriented mass society has transformed man from an end to a means, alienated him from himself and his fellows, and left him with a sense of boredom and inner emptiness that he tries to fill by voracious consumption. The hope for humans to develop their full potentials as autonomous, fulfilled, and loving beings lies in a society organized along the lines of humanistic socialism.

When buttressed by material from many realms of knowledge, as it is in Fromm's major works, this thesis may carry some conviction; but when stripped to its bare bones, as in these essays, it is less persuasive.

Although Fromm has written a major work on human destructiveness, includ-

ing those roots that lie deep within the personality, he seems to imply that the proper organization of society could overcome this propensity. He also underemphasizes the amount of social control implied in his blueprint for humanistic socialism, the organization of which would seem to this reviewer to require as much bureaucratic intervention and control as does today's society. Despite his psychoanalytic background, with its emphasis on the power of unconscious forces, implicit in his prescription for a better world is a strong faith in the power of enlightened human reason to overcome all personal and social obstacles to this goal.

Although the thesis may not fare well under critical scrutiny, viewed as a statement of faith by a knowledgeable, sophisticated, and high-minded student of individual and social behavior, it is impressive. Fromm's views are presented with force and clarity and are supported by many insights. One, for example, is that in all essential respects communism and capitalism are indistinguishable today, both standing in contrast to humanistic socialism, which betrayed itself when it became perverted from a movement for the liberation of man to a movement for the economic improvement of the working class. By thus stressing the motivation of economic gain, it became indistinguishable from capitalism.

This book can be warmly recommended to those who wish to commune with an intelligent, stimulating, well-informed clinical and social psychologist whose views found a special resonance particularly in the optimistic years following World War II. As a secular prophet, he called upon mankind to realize its better self. That his plea has yet to be heeded does not diminish his stature. After all, no prophet has fared better. ■

# Focus Starts With Diagnosis

Simon H. Budman (Ed.)  
**Forms of Brief Therapy**  
New York: Guilford Press, 1981.  
496 pp. \$25.00

Review by  
Leonard Small

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First, be assured that the forms of brief therapy presented here are of psychotherapy, not chemotherapy or some other treatment genre. The 24 authors discuss individual forms of therapy, both dynamic and behavioral, and group forms, both small and large. Types represented include concentrations on crisis, women, marital, and family, with variants of approach such as the behavioral, integrative or interpersonal, and developmental.

The common theme of the different approaches is *focus*, which arises from intention (to help), and leads to expectation (that the help-seeker will be helped). Repeatedly, the following adjectives appear throughout the individual essays: *planned, defined, short-term, time-limited, prescribed, focused, careful, thoughtful, active, directed*. There is even a near-acronym, FSST (focused single-session therapy), and a complete one, STAAT (short-term anxiety arousing therapy). Perhaps the time has come to drop the adjectives *brief* and *short-term*, which according to who it is that is claiming brevity, have come to mean anything from one or more than 200 sessions, and to use the words *focused* or even *intentional* therapies, conveying ideas that enjoy more consensus among claimants.

The striving for focus is evident throughout these contributions: in Mann's emphasis of time limits to achieve the experience of separation and individua-



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