

Review: *Escape from Freedom*, LEWIS B. HILL. *Psychiatry* 5 (1942)

This book must be read by every clinical psychoanalyst who, like Freud, regards psychoanalysis as capable of further expansion and application rather than as a closed, rigid system of thought. Whether one agrees or not, Fromm has presented a concept which calls for careful consideration and test in daily practice. Although Fromm departs radically from certain of Freud's generally accepted conclusions, he accepts his basic concept of the dynamic unconscious, the technique by which it may be studied and the concept of the existence of basic instincts for self-preservation and for satisfactions. The instinct theory is here reduced to a general statement that the human being is a dynamism. Fromm then explains the variations in the characters of men, not in terms of vicissitudes of the libido but in terms of vicissitudes of social experience, which for the normal person are determined by a culture as mediated through parents and teachers; for the neurotic person they are the same with the addition of unusual and individual traumatic experiences in early years. Fromm points out that the means available to a man for the realization of his instinctive needs are limited according to the culture in which he grows. The point is clearly made of the dynamic reciprocal action between culture and persons. By this shift of emphasis in Freudian discoveries Fromm arrives at a different evaluation of the main drives of the human being and at a different conception of anxiety. According to him, the human being is not essentially destructive and sadistic nor are his socially acceptable patterns of behavior and impulses to be regarded as mere sublimation of, or reaction formations to, his animal id. Fromm presents as the essence of the human character—human character having resulted from a long childhood with its dependence upon parents' care and with its consciousness of self—a basic need for love and affirmation and a basic impulse toward the same. He postulates that sadism and destructiveness become major problems only when life is not lived or the person is unable to be spontaneous so that love is not experienced. They are, in short, defensive and protective attitudes. Fromm speaks of primary bonds in infancy which are of necessity severed with the realization of an individual personality. In the absence of love and affirmation, he sees the anxiety incident of being alone. He further sees among the accepted as normal persons various mechanisms of escape from this aloneness. Among these he mentions the authoritarian character which is the normal equivalent of the sado-masochistic character, the purpose of which is to avoid aloneness, either through masochistic insignificance, loss of self, self-criticism or illness, or through sadistic power over others, exploitation of others or humiliation of others. He further distinguishes destructiveness from sadism on the basis that sadism seeks power over others and destructiveness seeks the removal of the dangerous others. Here he emphasizes that destructiveness is more than the simple expression of a presumptive death instinct and is a reaction of un-lived life. Another escape from loneliness is the development of automatic conformity, the loss of self, of spontaneity, of the enjoyment of one's own thoughts, feelings and sensuous satisfactions; and the

substitution of a pseudo self which, believing that it is spontaneous, actually thinks and feels and wishes according to environmental suggestions. The whole theory of the superego takes a different aspect as presented by Fromm. Again one thinks that he is emphasizing something which was implicit in Freudian thinking but has perhaps been neglected. The helpless child, unsupported by parents, invents the magical helper whom he then strives to find in the real world and whom he tries to manipulate. This magical helper may be amorphous, an institute or a person. Fromm sees the well known oral and anal character types in terms of their relationship to this magical helper; the oral types who can do nothing for themselves and are continually endeavoring to manipulate the magical helper to live for them, and the anal sadistic personalities who have become embittered or resigned and who avoid further hurt by withdrawal and denial of relationship with any further magical helper. In this setting he apparently understands much of what is described as transference in the psychoanalytic situation. The Oedipus is, according to Fromm, accurately described by Freud as the nucleus of every neurosis and of normal development as well. The theory of sexual rivalry, however, he feels is not so satisfactory an explanation of the phenomenon as is to be found through this concept, that is, the quest of the magical helper and the struggle for freedom and independence with the conflicting anxiety lest one be completely alone. Many normal persons give up the struggle for freedom in order to achieve a pseudo security which they regard as maturity. In this sense the neurotic has not grown up, in that he is still clinging to the idea of a magical helper. The reviewer senses in this part of Fromm's exposition the same problem which was discussed by Rank as the kernel of neurosis. It would seem that the present explanation is more lucid and more closely related to the observed clinical facts than is that of Rank.

The whole presentation of this book is dispassionate and there is no suggestion of any criticism of Freudian theory for the sake of criticism. Rather, Fromm has tried to apply psychoanalysis to the study of social phenomena and in the course of so doing has become convinced that there is another explanation which is more satisfactory than that of Freud for the same set of facts which Freud observed. Although only alluded to in the present book, which does not profess to be a treatise on clinical psychoanalysis, one must point out the therapeutic implication of Fromm's point of view. It is clearly implied that for the person, as for the group, mental health rather than mere normality, which is itself a sort of standardized neurosis, is to be found in those measures which allay anxiety through a basic remedy for the primary difficulty of aloneness. With reduction of anxiety and of desperate efforts to escape from freedom or from tyranny, it becomes possible to achieve freedom to live and love and to affirm oneself and those whom one loves. It becomes possible in this way to be spontaneous in thinking, feeling and enjoying, and through this spontaneity to achieve a sense of belonging and of being one with one's environment. In short, the neurotic is seen as a person who is holding out for that which is a real and valued goal of living. His neurosis is a matter of the methods which he has used and his recovery depends upon the acceptance of new methods, particularly the achievement of a real relationship rather than the quest for the magical helper.

