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ter." Thomson reports that Boulez sadly said "*Bien sur*" and changed the subject. For Thomson, Boulez is, like Bérard and Duchamp, an artist who has evaded the implications and promise of a brilliant youth.

What Thomson says may be true of Boulez, but what, for example, of Webern? There is little use, at any rate, in looking to Thomson for illumination on the work of his contemporaries—the bias is too strong. But then the bias is the price we pay for the liveliness of mind that produced the vivid evocations of turn-of-the-century Kansas City (with its delightful concern for the differences between Missouri and Kansas), the family portraits, and all the good professional gossip. *Virgil Thomson* is an intelligent, vital, and at times touching, book.

MYSTICAL HUMANISM

YOU SHALL BE AS GODS: A RADICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ITS TRADITION.
By ERICH FROMM. Holt, Rinehart & Winston. 240 pp. \$4.95.

Reviewed by ERICH ISAAC

IN THIS BOOK, Erich Fromm seeks to support his particular *Weltanschauung*—that of atheistic (or nontheistic) mystical humanism—by articulating its roots in the Hebrew Bible and the subsequent Jewish tradition. He attempts to show how the concept of God evolved from that of a clannish authoritarian deity (the God of Eden), to a progressively limited constitutional monarch (the covenant-making God), to the nameless God who reveals himself to Moses ("I am Who I am"), to the God of Maimonides (without attributes of essence). At this point, Fromm believes, the stage is set for "atheism," for the next step would be to eliminate the concept "God" altogether, except perhaps as a "poetical symbol of x." That x is a projection of the primary and mystical ego-transcending experience of man in which he sees himself as an "open system" rather than a fixed entity.

So much for mysticism. As for humanism, Fromm finds evidence

for it in the paucity of biblical theology, in the negative theology of the rabbis, and in the emphatic Jewish insistence on man's freedom of moral action. He retells the talmudic story of Rabbi Eliezer, who called for miracles to prove him right in a dispute against the majority of his fellow rabbis. After a whole series of such miracles failed to shake his adversaries from their position, Rabbi Eliezer cried:

"If the *Halakhah* agrees with me, let it be proved from Heaven!" Thereupon a heavenly voice cried out: "Why do you dispute with R. Eliezer, seeing that in all matters the *Halakhah* agrees with him!" But R. Joshua arose and exclaimed: "It is not in heaven!" What did he mean by this? R. Jeremiah said: That the Torah had already been given at Mount Sinai; we pay no attention to a heavenly voice, because Thou hast long since written in the Torah at Mount Sinai that after the majority must one incline.

As further proof of his thesis, Fromm points to the genre of Hasidic tales in which God is actually called to account by man, sometimes in a formal juridical procedure. He also argues that the Bible is more concerned with the fight against idolatry than with theology, and he interprets idolatry as the worship of a partial self-intelligence, strength, etc.—in the idol. The Bible and Jewish tradition are then humanistic because they conceive of man as finally capable of complete freedom from such false worship and because they make the whole man the measure of all things.

It is difficult to criticize all this, since what Fromm ultimately does is to claim that the mystical experience which others have had of God is the same mystical experience which he has had of "man the open system" and that his own interpretation of that experience is the correct one. He does not, however, want to argue with those who think they see God in their visions; instead, he chooses to emphasize what he has in common with them. Now, it is always a formidable task to deal with someone's interpretation of his own experience or to take exception to it.

The Hungarian Revolution in the perspective of history



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TEN YEARS AFTER

Edited by TAMAS AGZEL

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Nor can one find much fault with Fromm's use of Jewish tradition to support his case, since the current of which he speaks really does exist, and since he is careful to point out that it is by no means the only current.

FROMM'S INTERPRETATION of that tradition, however, is open to question. He sees only man and thinks that the Jewish tradition, too, saw—or progressively grew to see—only man, the proof being that the concept of God comes to be treated as unthinkable, "hidden," "the silent," "the Nothing." Why, then, have God at all? Fromm explains that God was not abolished by Judaism because a religion with God as its central idea could not afford to abandon that concept; he says, however, that Judaism did outgrow it. But to argue, as Fromm does, that the mystics' reference to "the Nothing" means that nothing exists outside themselves, that there is no reality corresponding to their experience, is scarcely to make a logical deduction, unless

one begins with the premise that "There is nothing outside the self."

It is a misconception to assume that negative theology intends to describe the divine; rather, it seeks to avoid a rational determination of God before the essence of the divine is experienced. Rudolf Otto, in *The Idea of the Holy*, has put it very well:

"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." . . . It is instructive that in such phrases as these, in which consciousness would fain put its highest consummation into words, "all images fall away" and the mind turns from them to grasp expressions that are purely negative. And it is still more instructive that in reading and hearing such words their merely negative character simply is not noticed; that we can let whole chains of such negations enrapture, even intoxicate us. . . . All this teaches us the independence of the positive content of the experience from

the implications of its overt conceptual expression. . . .

Moreover, Max Scheler—anticipating just such misconceptions as Fromm's—has pointed out that if negative theology is misunderstood as a rational theory, it necessarily leads to religious nihilism, "yes, indeed, into atheism."

Though he misunderstands mysticism, Fromm is well advised to seek a firm foundation for his radical humanism. In attempting to anchor his vision in transcendence, he shows implicit awareness of the fact that past attempts to make "mankind" the object of the devotion and love formerly reserved for God have usually been followed by the destruction of individuality and freedom. The line leads from Rousseau to Robespierre and Marat, and from there to some 20th-century butchers who raged in the name of humanity. The concept of "humanity" is not simply an empirical one, and when it is falsely interpreted as such there results an attempt to wipe out the objective differences between peo-

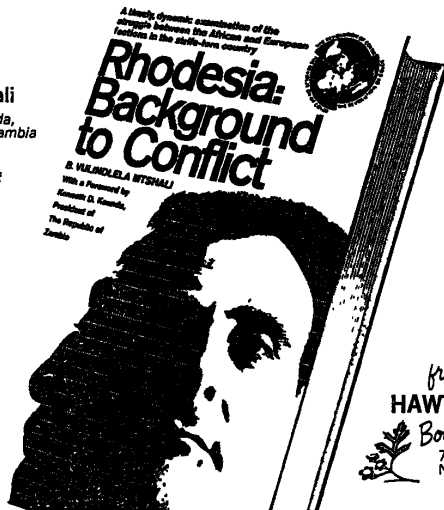
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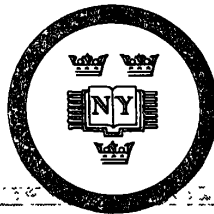
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ple and to negate the individual's value. Thence derives, as has often been shown, the dangerous tendency to pit the numerically greater objects of love against the numerically smaller: mankind against country, nation against tribe, tribe against family, family against person. The goal becomes, to use Bentham's famous formulation, "the greatest happiness for the greatest number." It may be precisely to counteract these dangers that Judaism—though it is certainly sensitive to the claims of humanity—emphasizes the commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."

SINCE FROMM is committed to atheism, however, he cannot accept that commandment. What, then, is the foundation for ethics, and what is the "Halakhah" that is to be followed? Fromm notes that the Jewish *Halakhah* is a mixture of irrational laws and of precepts conducive to the highest development of man. He cannot accept the whole, nor does he believe that the *Halakhah* could stay alive "if the two parts were torn asunder." But the ego-transcending experience of which Fromm speaks is a poor ground on which to build his own ethics, for there is no guarantee that it will lead man to build a "messianic" society. Fromm compares the experience of ego-transcendence to the experience of what Tillich calls the "ground of being," but he seems to forget that the same expression was used by Schopenhauer to describe the experience of a terrible, demonic, blind will. Schopenhauer's conclusions and those of Nietzsche, based on a similar metaphysical concept, would certainly not appeal to Fromm. The former ran away from the experience and the latter abandoned himself to it, but in neither case were the results happy. Perhaps the lesson to be drawn from the story of the rabbis who would not trust the miracles called down by Rabbi Eliezer is not the one Fromm draws—of man's freedom from God—but rather that human experience alone cannot be trusted to point the way which humans must follow.



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