



THE STUDY OF MAN

PSYCHOANALYTICAL thought has been in a state of flux for quite a while now, as efforts continue to revise Freud's original insights and conclusions in the light of clinical experience as well as by intellectual analysis. Among the foremost of such "revisionists" is Erich Fromm, whose most recent book, *The Sane Society* (Rinehart, \$5.00), is here discussed by PAUL KECSKEMETI. In a companion piece, ARTHUR J. BRODBECK calls our attention to a book, J. A. Hadfield's *Dreams and Nightmares* (Penguin, 65 cents), that would overhaul Freud's crucial theory of dreams.

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in: *Commentary*, NY

THE ALL-POWERFUL "I"

XXI (1956, 1) 176-179

PAUL KECSKEMETI

TO THE perennial problem of evil and suffering, there are two perennial answers. According to one, evil and suffering have their origin in the deficiencies of nature. One cannot, then, overcome evil without transcending nature. This is the supernaturalist answer which most religions give to the problem of good and evil: perfect good is a supernatural concept; evil is inherent in nature.

The other answer, which is far more congenial to modern man, locates all essential goodness within nature and traces evil and suffering to deviations from the natural. According to the naturalist view, evil is essentially the frustration of natural needs, while good consists in their gratification. Evil thus can have no natural origin: only extra-natural forces working within society can be responsible for it. It is society which makes man unhappy, by depriving him of the means for satisfying his natural needs.

To the supernaturalists, human life and history are essentially a struggle between natural imperfection and supernatural perfection. Extremists on the supernaturalist side go as far as to consider all nature as evil and corrupt; they consider the satisfaction of all natural needs as sinful or at least suspect. But this is a perversion of the true meaning of the supernaturalist message, both in its classical Greek

and in its Jewish and Christian forms. The main body of this tradition sees in nature an image of supernatural perfection and is hence far from rejecting nature and natural gratification as evil. It merely holds that nature, though tending toward goodness and perfection, is tainted with an element of corruption; this, rather than frustration, is the source of evil. When the evil inherent in it is kept in check, nature is by no means destroyed; it rather achieves a close harmony with the supernatural perfection towards which it tends.

According to naturalism, on the other hand, the essential conflict is that between man and society. Here again we encounter extremists who condemn society and culture as such and dream of a purely "natural" existence in which man is released from all social bonds and all restrictions of morality. But these extremists again falsify the real content of the naturalist message. The main body of the naturalist tradition, far from being anti-social and a-moral, is socially and ethically oriented. The most conspicuous trait of its chief representatives, the thinkers of the Enlightenment and the social reformers and revolutionary idealists who claim descent from them, is their deep humanitarianism and their moral protest against injustice and oppression. They reject existing society because of the frustrations that it imposes upon its members, but they think that



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this defect can be remedied. Once society insures the satisfaction of the natural needs of man, there will be close harmony between human nature and human culture.

Up to recent times, the spokesmen of naturalism, true to a materialist conception of man, equated natural needs with physical, bodily ones—those for food, shelter, medical care, and safety from physical aggression and restraint; with the advent of psychoanalysis, the gratification of sexual needs was added to the list. It was the prevalent frustration of these needs which made society bad; once the satisfaction of everybody's physical needs was insured, man would achieve a perfectly good and happy existence.

This utopia, however, like so many others, began to pall as soon as it neared realization. Evidence now is accumulating to show that mass welfare in physical terms does not necessarily produce a happy society. With frustration of all the basic physical needs nearly eliminated, society can still show severe symptoms of maladjustment and disturbance. Misery and unhappiness are less stark than in the age of widespread physical want, but they are often even more hopeless and less relieved by compensating factors.

When this is realized, the old naturalist position becomes untenable: clearly, the satisfaction of everybody's physical needs cannot be the key to collective happiness. One might infer from this that the naturalist approach as such must be faulty: the conflict between man and society cannot be the basic fact of existence, since man can be despondent even in a benevolent society. But it is equally possible to rescue the naturalist position by revising part of the doctrine so as to account for the new evidence. The despondency that exists in the presence of mass welfare can still be interpreted in a naturalist sense as being due to society's failure to satisfy natural human needs. Only this time we have to re-define the "natural" needs of man as mainly *non-physical*, or rather *non-biological*.

THIS is the approach that is taken by Erich Fromm in his latest book, *The Sane Society*. The book stands squarely in the naturalist tradition: its central argument amounts to a formidable indictment of modern, urbanized culture, on the ground that it systematically frustrates all the needs that are specific to man. But Fromm is equally emphatic in

maintaining that man's specific needs are not those grounded in his animal, instinctual drives. They are, rather, those needs which stem from the conditions of man's existence as *man*, as a being radically different from the lower animals. Man shares a number of biological needs with the other animals, and it is clearly important for him that these needs be satisfied. But the problem that is specific to man is that of *psychic* well-being, of sanity. Man is the only being that can become insane. And man *will* become insane, or at least psychically disturbed, if he lives under conditions that fail to do justice to his specifically human needs.

The older version of naturalism denied the existence of any qualitative difference between man and other animal organisms. Fromm departs radically from this position, and his insistence upon the "higher," non-animal aspects of human existence, as well as his frequent use of religious terms, must scandalize orthodox adherents of the naturalist tradition, to whom the dogma of the essential animality of man and the total rejection of religious concepts are among the most sacred elements of their creed. Fromm's revision of the naturalist position, however, has to be considered as a heresy within the stream of naturalist thought, rather than as the assertion of a radically different point of view, for he still defines the problem of good and evil in terms of the satisfaction versus the frustration of needs—even though, according to him, man has special needs related to psychic health which are not shared by other animals. Also, he holds society responsible for maintaining conditions conducive to mental health. This is the essentially naturalist standard by which he holds that societies must be judged, and in terms of which ours must be considered a failure.

Dr. Fromm maintains that there is nothing subjective or relative about his yardstick of "psychic health." He rejects the notion that mental illness is the outgrowth of a personality structure deviating from what happens to be considered normal in a given culture, so that a person judged "insane" in one society might be accepted as "sane" in another. For Fromm, insanity is not odd behavior, but behavior that is not consonant with the immutable, and objectively ascertainable, basic conditions of genuinely "human" existence. Hence the essence of psychic health cannot be social adjustment. On the contrary: the primary question is whether *society* is "sane," that is,



whether its institutions enable man to live in accordance with his specifically human vocation. If society is not "sane" (as ours, Fromm says, emphatically isn't), then adjustment to it leads not to psychic health, but to psychic disturbance.

WHAT, then, are the specific needs of man that must be satisfied if he is to remain sane, and whose gratification is the main responsibility of the sane society? They are, Fromm says, needs related to "love," "reason," "creativity," and "sense of identity." To be physically healthy, man must be capable of love; he must live in an intelligible world; he must experience the joy of creation. Above all, he must experience himself as an "I," as the unique center of the world. This in fact is the basic need: man emerged as a specific being, set off against the rest of nature, when he developed the sense of being "I." From that point on, his happiness and misery have depended, not so much on the fulfillment of his animal wants, as on whether the circumstances of his life enriched or impoverished this "I" experience. Love, creativity, reason are just different aspects of man's life when he comes into his own as "I." Whereas "alienation," loss of the sense of "I," is the sum and substance of human misery.

Man is fully creative, loving, reasonable only as long as he experiences himself as the sole source of his productive acts, his sympathetic impulses, his problem-solving insights. The moment he senses an outside force directing and controlling his acts and feelings, he is "alienated," unhappy, and psychically impaired. Subordinating the "I" to any outside power is the original sin, the fall from grace. Any act of submissive worship is a sign of alienation; so is the self-denying, submissive form of love, as well as any exclusive (e.g. national) group loyalty. In social life, use of one man's labor for another's satisfaction and profit is the prime instance of "alienation." All these forms of alienation are foisted upon man by society.

From this point on, Fromm's critique of society proceeds along Marxian lines (the whole concept of "alienation," of course, having been taken over from Marx). Western society, our author says, necessarily misses the goal of sanity because it is capitalistic. In capitalistic society man's productive energies are alienated. He does not create as an "I" but labors as

part of an alien machinery. This radically impairs his psychic health, no matter how well his physical needs are taken care of. In his critique of capitalism Fromm by no means neglects such traditional socialist themes as the inequality of incomes and the iniquity of inherited wealth, but his main charge is no longer the one that Marxism has emphasized above all, namely, that capitalism condemns the bulk of the population to a life of want and misery. Fromm admits that Marx's argument from misery has become antiquated; from his own point of view this aspect of the problem is not decisive at all. What really matters is not material want but such necessary concomitants of the capitalistic system as the monotony inherent in mass production, and the worker's dependence on the employer.

Fromm's prescription for making society "sane" is concerned mainly with the last-mentioned point. He does not think that modern society can do away with mass production and monotony, but all can still be saved, according to him, by making the worker's position in the production process "meaningful." All one has to do is to abolish that employer-employee relationship which is the essence of capitalism, and replace it by a system in which the workers themselves take charge of management functions. In other words, Fromm takes up the problem approximately where Lenin, in *State and Revolution*, has left it. He calls this system "communitarian socialism," to be sharply distinguished from Soviet Communism, which merely substitutes new and harsher controls for those of capitalism. According to him, both capitalism and Stalinism deny the fundamentals of collective "sanity"; "communitarian socialism" alone can create a "sane" society.

Many of Fromm's findings about the psychic impoverishment and depersonalization suffered by man in an urbanized industrial society are well taken, but the solution he proposes, "communitarian socialism," seems to me entirely unwarranted. Fromm seems to assume that once operative and managerial functions are combined, man will become a pure "creator," freed from all outside control and dependence. Now it is extremely doubtful whether the operatives in industry can collectively discharge all management functions. But even if they could, problems of power and control would not disappear: man would still have to play other roles than that of the pure "creator."



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If the control functions now vested in management were transferred to the operatives, new forms of regulating and coordinating the behavior of individuals and groups would have to be adopted, and I think these new controls, which would be essentially political, would interfere with individual freedom far more drastically than the mechanisms of the "mixed" free enterprise system in its present form do. Fromm is unable to appreciate this problem: he dogmatically postulates that with the fusion of operative and management functions, there will be nothing in life but love, rationality, and creativeness. It is a beautiful dream. We can only hope that Western society will not be so rash as to take it at face value; the awakening would be terrible.

WHAT explains the recklessness with which Fromm postulates the disappearance of perennial human problems at the magic touch of the good fairy, "communitarian socialism"? I perceive in many of his analyses—not only those of capitalism and socialism, but also others dealing with authority, religion, nationalism, and so on—a pervading fear of being dominated. I don't hesitate to call this fear neurotic. Fromm has shown in earlier works how neurotic cravings to submit, to be dominated, operate in the human psyche and in society, and for this we must be grateful to him. But the fear of being dominated can be just as neurotic as the urge to submit to domination; if the latter induces man to ignore his own powers, the former leads to an equally unrealistic denial of his limitations. Fromm's development of the concept of the "I" experience and its reverse, alienation, reflects a morbid fear of domination and a craving for the unlimited sovereignty of the individual.

This does not mean to say that Fromm is wrong in considering the sense of being "I" in what one feels and does as an essential com-

ponent of psychic health. He is on firm ground when he diagnoses "depersonalization," the impoverishment of the sense of "I," as a sign of severe impairment. But it does not follow that the healthy individual must always have an explicit feeling of being "the center of his world" and the "creator of his acts." The "I" may be there, in all its living fullness, when it forgets itself; it may be dead and depersonalized while proclaiming that it is the center of the world and the originator of its every act.

To my mind, the feeling that I am "the creator of my acts" can only be an illusion. In order to perform the slightest meaningful act, man must stand in an inextricable pattern of give-and-take between the "I" and the "not-I," and it is neither truthful nor sane to assert that in this give-and-take it is always the "I" that plays the originating and leading role. To refuse credit to the "not-I" for what it contributes to my acts is a sign of morbid jealousy. It is neurotic in the full sense of the word, for that contribution exists whether I admit it or not.

Fromm promises the advent of loving, reasonable, and creative man on condition that society recognize the sovereignty of the individual. Society can become perfect because human nature already is; the only thing needed is that society no longer dim the light of natural perfection. This is the promise of naturalism—a promise that to my mind cannot be redeemed. One may deny that absolute perfection is a valid guiding principle at all, and one also may deny that evil exists; in either case, one must reject *both* naturalism and supernaturalism. But if we assume a tension between evil and perfection, supernaturalism, with all its obscurity and extravagance, is basically more reasonable than naturalism. It is unreasonable both to admit the reality of evil and to insist that nature is free from it. If evil exists, we can seek for a *perfect* agent of redemption only beyond nature.

IN DREAMS BEGIN RESPONSIBILITIES

ARTHUR J. BRODBECK

ALTHOUGH Freud's wish-fulfillment theory of dreams was originally received by the world with freezing silence, time, working a familiar revolution, has rendered it both conversationally and professionally *de rigueur*. Adler and Jung formu-

lated alternative theories of dream interpretation and analysis, but neither was worked out with the patient thoroughness Freud lavished on his first major work. And then, too, Freud had a way of making concessions here and there which stole much of Adler's and