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**B O O K S**

*American Challenge* (Pantheon, \$19.95). Currie begins his analysis by asking why crime is so much more prevalent in the United States than it is in other developed countries. If crime is caused by personality traits that are beyond the influence of society or culture (as Wilson and Herr-



stein claim), then why is murder four times as likely in the United States as in Australia, rape three times as common as in West Germany?

Currie identifies two fundamental differences between the United States and the industrialized democracies that have kept crime at far lower levels. The latter, he says, are more egalitarian than the United States; the gap between rich and poor is far less pronounced, due largely to highly developed welfare and social programs. Inequality leads to crime, according to Currie, because "the external conditions surrounding a group will have an effect . . . on the attitudes and values they hold about themselves, about society as a whole, and about the moral weight of illegal activities and the use of violence."

The second reason for the extraordinarily high crime rate in the United States, according to Currie's interpre-

tation, has to do with work—or the lack of it. Currie agrees with Wilson and Herrnstein that there is no consistent relationship between the overall employment rate and crime. But Wilson and Herrnstein conclude that work is unrelated to crime; Currie finds the two inextricable.

Currie argues that the relationship has been difficult to uncover because the simple fact of individual unemployment is in itself insufficient explanation for criminality. Serious crime, he says, is rooted in "underemployment—the prospect of working, perhaps forever, in jobs that cannot provide a decent or stable livelihood, a sense of social purpose, or a modicum of self-esteem." He postulates a powerful association between the high unemployment among inner-city youths and the frightening rise in crime during the 1960s.

This is consistent with Wilson and Herrnstein's basic assumption that people calculate the value of crime and obedience and choose the more beneficial. But Wilson and Herrnstein give short shrift to the notion of making law-abiding behavior more valuable, preferring to emphasize the prevention of crime by increasing the certainty and severity of punishment. As Currie points out, however, the criminal-justice system has become extraordinarily harsh over the past 15 years; we have built prisons at a phenomenal rate, filled them eagerly and kept criminals inside longer. Yet while the incarceration rate was doubling and the prison population swelling, there were 82 percent more rapes, 44 percent more robberies and a 61 percent increase in all violent crimes.

Neither of these books is an un-mixed statement of liberal or conservative values. Wilson and Herrnstein are mindful of the effects of some social forces operating on the individual. Currie acknowledges the naïveté of the ivory tower criminologists of the '60s. In the face of overwhelming human and social damage caused by crime, Currie's is certainly the more

hopeful book. He proposes full and more meaningful employment, rehabilitative programs for certain offenders, interventions in troublesome family situations, less reliance on the criminal-justice system, among other things. His solutions demand that society become more civilized. Wilson and Herrnstein leave no choice but to man the barricades and show up for target practice.

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**Erich Fromm: Final broadcasts**

BY ALFIE KOHN

For orthodox Freudians and Marxists, the word "revisionist" is the crudest sort of epithet. No one is more offensive than he who tampers with revealed truth. It comes as no surprise, then, that Erich Fromm, who spent his life revising and integrating the thought from these two traditions, earned the wrath of many theorists. The fact that he also drew selectively from Buddhism and the Bible only added to the list of his enemies.

Fromm's own brand of neo-Freudianism and social criticism also won him admirers, due in part to his talent at writing for a general audience. Psychoanalysts and Marxists often spend their lives on recondite disputes in professional journals, but Fromm reached out to a wide readership as he grappled with big questions: Is aggression inevitable in human life? How can tyrants like Hitler win adherents? What are we doing to ourselves with our grasping materialism? How can our love lives be more fulfilling?

Mental health and social conditions are inseparable, Fromm taught us. To ask about political freedom is to explore psychological realities, and vice versa. Capitalism does not merely oppress workers; it insinuates itself into the character structure of all individuals, warping values and frustrating potentials. We have the ability to be



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BOOKS

active, loving, productive creatures, and we settle for a dreary, anonymous passivity.

A few years before his death in 1980, Fromm returned to his native Germany to give a series of extemporaneous radio talks. These "meditations"—chatty, avuncular, laced with stories—braided together the strands from each of his major books. Edited by Hans Jürgen Schultz, translated by Robert and Rita Kimber and collected under the rather unfortunate title *For the Love of Life* (Free Press, \$14.95), they read like a kind of Cliff Notes to these books.

Much of what he has to say in these talks seems so uncontroversial—even banal—that it is hard to understand how anyone could react strongly to this man's work. He emphasizes that our relentless goal orientation causes us to miss much that is precious in life. He observes that superfluous affluence deadens us. He points out that love is a faculty that we have to develop. He says the Old Testament prophets have a lot to teach us today. Few readers will be



WILL MASON

astounded or overwhelmed by such opinions.

Even when he criticizes a thinker or a tradition, Fromm usually does so

in a genial, commonsense fashion. His tone becomes somewhat sharper, however, when talk turns to B.F. Skinner's behaviorism or Konrad Lorenz's instinctivism. These theories are not simply inaccurate but have a corrosive effect on our image of ourselves, Fromm believed. We are more than stimulus and response; we cannot be reduced to the legacy of our animal ancestors. "Behavioral psychology may be a science," Fromm says, "but it is not a science of man. It is rather a science of alienated man conducted with alienated methods by alienated researchers. It may be capable of illuminating certain aspects of human nature, but it does not touch on what is vital, on what is specifically human about human beings."

In these talks, Fromm sometimes reveals a delightful, almost childlike perception of the world around him. He never ceased wondering at the magic of dreams, for example, and he comments here that a "creative artist is someone who is creative without having to be asleep"—suggesting that all of us have a touch of the poet at night. On another matter, he tells his interviewer: "When I was ten or twelve, whenever someone told me he was a salesman or businessman I always felt a little embarrassed. I'd think to myself: God, he must feel awful having to admit that he's not doing anything else with his life except earning money. Imagine, having nothing else to do!" Fromm in his 70s presumably recalls this sentiment because the childhood reaction was not only refreshing but provocative: If he was wrong to think that businessmen do feel awful, he still believes they should.

Particularly prominent in these talks is Fromm's penchant for expanding on a psychoanalytic concept, making something rich and existential from a notion that was originally narrow and sexual. Thus, he takes "necrophilia" to refer not simply to a sexual perversion but a "fascination with everything that is dead," a "running away from life." So, too, with

"sadism," which he understands as a desire to control others—an inclination found even in putatively well-meaning parents. "The need to use another person for one's own ends by virtue of one's power over that person is little more than a refined form of cannibalism," he comments.

*For the Love of Life* ranges from the bland to the spicy, from the lackluster to the passionate. It is, above all, a fine distillation of decades' worth of Fromm's thinking, served up in a succinct and eminently readable style.

Alfie Kohn's book, *No Contest: The Case Against Competition*, will be published later this year.

BRIEFLY NOTED

Who, the people?

Bryant Robey, founder of *American Demographics* magazine, is, to put it mildly, fond of statistical trends. How many can truthfully make the claim that Robey makes in the concluding pages of *The American People: A Timely Exploration of a Changing America and the Important New Demographic Trends Around Us* (E.P. Dutton, \$22.50): "I am a fan of the Census Bureau."

Readers who, like Robey, delight in sifting through numerical overabundance to find out where they fit in will doubtless enjoy this book. They will learn, for instance, that of the country's 100 largest cities, Madison, Wisconsin, has the highest percentage of college graduates (26.4) and Warren, Michigan, leads in the proportion of households occupied by married couples (68 percent).

Robey's book is divided into 15 chapters with provocative titles like "Cities, Suburbs and Beyond" and "What Color is Your Collar?" and his narrative is clear and mercifully short on tables and graphs. Unfortunately, however, the discussion in most chapters never really answers the questions implied by the titles, and readers are often left to interpret



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Kohn, A., 1986: Review Fromm, E.: Über die Liebe zum Leben. Rundfunksendungen (1983a, English), In: Psychology Today, Vol. 20 (No. 2, 1986), pp. 74-75.