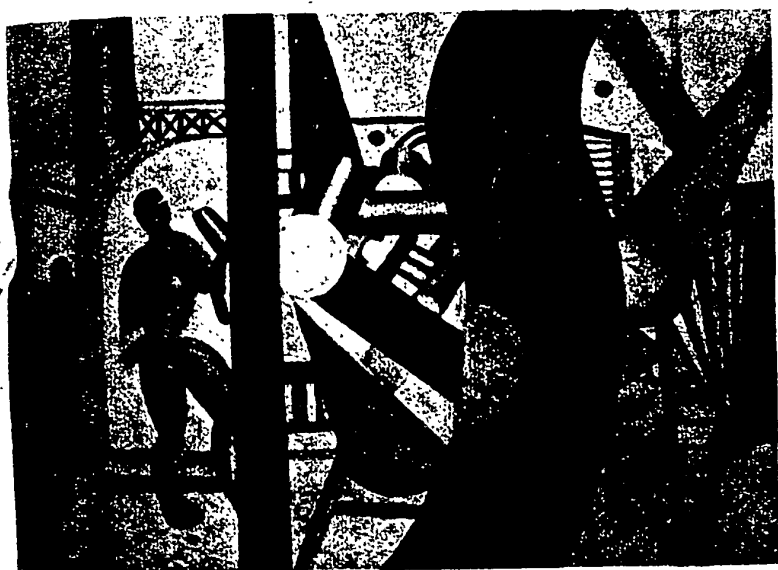




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Painting by Fernand Léger. Photograph courtesy of the Sidney Janis Gallery.

"... cogs in a machine."

## A World of Alienated Men

THE SANE SOCIETY. By Erich Fromm. 370 pp. New York: Reinhart & Co. \$5.

By JOSEPH WOOD KRUTCH

ERICH FROMM, a very unorthodox Freudian, here continues his own much more complicated analysis of what Freud called "Civilization and Its Discontents." As in his previous books there are facts and figures to bolster his striking generalizations and insights. It is an interesting and often convincing book. But it has also one limitation. Mr. Fromm, like most psychoanalytical writers, operates on such a high level of abstraction and deals so freely in large concepts that, without rejecting the general thesis, the reader sometimes begins to wonder if the labyrinthine structure he builds is not in part—though only in part—the product of too active a metaphysical fancy.

Most sociologists, so Mr. Fromm says, are relativists who assume that any society which continues to function is, by definition, "normal" and that therefore only individual members of it can be in any meaningful sense "maladjusted." But there are certain unchanging human needs which a society may frustrate without ceasing to function and that whole society may then be called "insane." In the United States as well as in many of the other most democratic and prosperous nations we have such a society—as is strongly suggested by the fact that in our own case, despite the highest "standard of living" ever known, we have also the highest homicide rate, the highest number of alcoholics and one of the highest suicide rates in the Western world.

This has become possible because both the political scientists who assume that man needs nothing except "prosperity" and the Freudians who assume that he needs nothing

except an opportunity to satisfy his libido are wrong. The modern world seems closer and closer to realizing the ideals of both but it has grown constantly more frustrated and unhappy because the methods by which it has achieved its so-called prosperity and its so-called freedom deny the citizen Love—which Mr. Fromm defines as "Union with somebody, or something, outside one's own self, under the condition of retaining the separateness and integrity of one's own self."

Contemporary capitalistic society denies its citizens an opportunity to love while leaving them political liberty and showering them with material benefits because it denies them both a genuine sense of belonging and a genuine sense of individuality. They have no sense of belonging because neither as producers nor managers nor distributors are they more than cogs in a machine and they have no contact with things as distinguished from parts, processes and calculations.

THE various totalitarianisms are unsuccessful attempts to remedy this situation by too exclusive an emphasis on belonging. Democratic socialism is only somewhat less unsuccessful because it assumes that once man's material needs are satisfied he will inevitably find satisfactions for all his other needs and overlooks the fact that "inasmuch as man is human, the satisfaction of these instinctual needs is not sufficient to make him happy \* \* \* not even to make him sane." Mr. Fromm's own solution is "humanistic communism," which, as he defines it, is closer to the ideal of, say, Brook Farm than it is to the ideal of either Stalinism or the Labor party.

What is going to persuade the world of "alienated" men that this is what they really want? A prophet a hundred times more influential than the Emerson whose "Things are in the saddle" Mr. Fromm quotes, might conceivably do it. It is difficult to see how, without such a prophet, an insane society can be led to sanity.

Teacher, essayist and critic, Mr. Krutch is the author of several books, among them "The Measure of Man" which won the National Book Award in non-fiction this year.