



11. Saturday Review (11.4.1959)

Bypaths on the Road to Vienna

“Sigmund Freud’s Mission: An Analysis of His Personality,” by Erich Fromm (Harper, 120 pp. \$3), in an attempt to illuminate psychoanalysis, peels back layers of the psychiatrist’s psyche and evaluates the findings in terms of his time: Psychiatrist-in-charge of the Lafargue Clinic, Hilde L. Mosse, M.D., is also school psychiatrist for New York City’s Bureau of Child Guidance.

By Hilde L. Mosse

DESPITE the critical attitude of the author, this is intended as an eulogy of Freud and his work. It is a brief study, limited in scope since Fromm does not go into any extensive description of Freud’s theories, or attempt any re-evaluation of them. In a number of previous publications Fromm has written about his attempts to develop the psychoanalytic theory further, but in this book he refers only to “what is the bulk of Freud’s theory, the stage before the discussion of the death instinct.” He tries to throw new light on psychoanalysis by analyzing certain aspects of Freud’s own personality in the setting of the intellectual and social structure of his time.

There is “no doubt,” Fromm writes, that “the origin of psychoanalysis is to be sought in Freud’s personality.” But there is also no doubt that it has to be sought in a much wider context. Any attempt to explain the work and significance of a creative person by psychoanalytic speculation is open to serious question. Actually the work of such a man as Freud, his original scientific discoveries, his theories, his position in the history of science, can never be fully evaluated and understood through any analysis of his personality. There is a great temptation, especially in the field of psychiatry, to explain original and strikingly new discoveries through individual personality traits characteristic of the originator. Of course, there are such psychological connections. But they are never direct and simple. The more universally valid the scientific discoveries, the less is the work explainable by personality traits.

In his biography of Freud, Ernest


Jones makes some interpretations of Freud with which the author of this book agrees, but Fromm’s emphasis and his point of view are different. Without going into the relative validity of these two interpretations, and without agreeing with many details in Fromm’s personality study of Freud, it is still true that this book presents some thought-provoking ideas which are important today.

Fromm stresses social factors and tries to incorporate them into psychoanalytic theory. He arrives at helpful formulations, such as that the phenomenon of repression is essentially social. He calls Freud a middle-class thinker, and tries to relate the development of his theories—and especially of the psychoanalytic movement—to the changing attitude of the middle class and the different stages of capitalism. He states that “Freud’s picture of man never transcended that of the nineteenth-century middle class.” Then he draws a parallel between Freud’s psychological “economic” system, where psychic energy must be saved (for sublimation, for instance) with early capitalism’s picture of a thrifty elite which saves to form and retain capital. He feels that Freud translated this picture of man into his theories. As another example he gives the Freudian theory that man is basically aggressive and competitive; he even goes so far as to say that libido is a fixed quality comparable to property and that Freud speaks of love “as a man of his time speaks of property or capital.”

NOWADAYS when clergymen of all denominations have found that psychoanalysis can be put to various uses, including the propagation of their faith, and when psychoanalysts in turn are anxious to prove that psychoanalysis is perfectly compatible with religious orthodoxy, it is interesting to see Fromm clearly demonstrating Freud’s atheism. Freud saw psychoanalysis as a method by which human beings can be freed from domination by their instincts and illusions. Religion, to him, was one such illusion.

Fromm’s description of some negative aspects of the psychoanalytic movement are scientifically irrefutable, but they arose largely after Freud’s death or out of later social

and personal conditions. Freud could not foresee that psychoanalysis in the United States was to become a profitable and powerful business, with problems germane to the business world, such as monopolistic aspirations with a tendency to limit competition. “Most psychoanalysts,” states Fromm, “. . . are not less blind to the realities of human existence and to unconscious social phenomena than are other members of their own social class.” He points to the bureaucracy which has developed and to the hierarchy “which gets its prestige from the ‘correct’ interpretation of the dogma, and the power to judge who is and who is not a faithful adherent of the religion.” The truth of this and the atmosphere of an exclusive elite created by this attitude within the orthodox psychoanalytic movement became clear to me when I attended the Congress of the International Psycho-Analytical Association in Paris in 1957. This was a closed congress, and a number of psychiatrists, distinguished members of international professional associations and themselves serious students of psychoanalysis, were turned away because they did not belong to the accepted psychoanalytic associations. There could be no possible scientific



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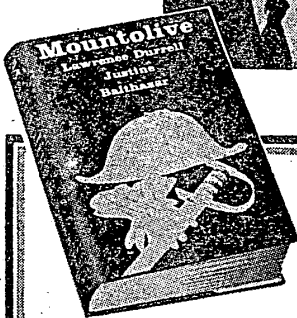
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reason for this pretentious secrecy. Unfortunately, the tendency, as Fromm states, "is that eventually dogma, ritual and idolization of the leader replace creativity and spontaneity."

Like his other books, this book by Fromm has great merit and deserves careful study. It underlines the fact that he occupies a special intermediate position. He is a serious critic of psychoanalytic one-sidedness. But, by not going far enough in his criticism of Freudian theories, he remains within their framework and subject to the very faults which he deplores. His orthodox individualistic psychoanalytic critics therefore have an easy time. They can challenge Mr. Fromm's interpreta-

tions and many of his generalizations.

The very fact that he tries to explain psychoanalysis by Freud's personality demonstrates that he has not made the decisive step needed to develop psychoanalysis in a truly social fashion. His psycho-social parallels, such as libido with property, are not fully convincing because they remain only parallels. His position, halfway toward a real social orientation, indicates that there exists objectively an impasse in the special scientific field of psychoanalysis. And this impasse can be overcome only when we recognize, as does Fredric Wertham in "The Circle of Guilt," that there is a dialectic interaction between social, economic, historical, and psychological forces.

THE AUTHOR: Among the psychoanalysts who did not obtain a medical education, Erich Fromm occupies a singular and honorable place. Unlike so many of his senior lay colleagues in psychoanalysis, he did not "join" the psychoanalytic movement but entered through the front door, so to speak: he obtained excellent psychoanalytic training in Berlin, as did many Americans. He became a recognized psychoanalyst and soon took his well-deserved official place as a member of the International Psychoanalytic Association. The Hitlerian holocaust drove him to the hospitable shores of the United States, where so many of the German-speaking psychoanalysts were received as became their station of carriers of the culture which Hitler wanted to reduce to ashes.

Fromm's name seems soon to have been removed from the roster of the International Psychoanalytic Association; it also failed to find a place on the roster of the American local or national psychoanalytic associations. Be it said here with emphasis that neither Fromm's behavior as a professional man, which was and is exemplary, nor his intellectual and philosophic orientation could be considered responsible for his finding himself outside the official ranks of the psychoanalytic movement. True enough, Fromm might be placed among those who chose the path of Freudian heterodoxy, but many who chose the same path managed to remain within the official ranks of official psychoanalysis, whether they were laymen (a few) or medical men (most). Moreover, a number of individuals and official groups are openly and/or blatantly quite a bit removed from Freudian orthodoxy; there are three psychoanalytic groups in New York alone—all "recognized" by the Psychoanalytic International.

But it is an open secret (particularly since the publication of Jones's biography of Freud) that psychoanalysis, like any other organized movement, is bound to pay heavy tribute to the art of politics, to the struggle for power, to egocentric sensitivities, and to promotional drives. In doing so psychoanalysis may or may not gain ground as a movement, but it is bound to find some of its scientific progress rather frayed at times, and to leave a portion of its best men on the sidelines.

Erich Fromm, after a brief ideological *entente* with Karen Horney, had to choose his own independent scientific road. The result was: he began to pursue the search for the *essence* of man, for the meaning of human struggles, and for the roots and growth and efflorescence of love in the deepest and universal, ethico-philosophical meaning of this word. He came to touch the fringes of Zen Buddhism and the planes of existentialism. Fromm wrote and writes well, with perpicacity and depth. His last book, "Sigmund Freud's Mission," which first appeared in the series of World Perspectives under the editorship of Ruth Nanda Anshen, is typical of what has happened to many psychoanalysts and to psychoanalysis during the past twenty years.

—GREGORY ZILBOORG, author of "Sigmund Freud."



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To say nothing of the volumes yet to come.

L. L. Day
EDITOR-AT-LARGE

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The woman who reads dictionaries



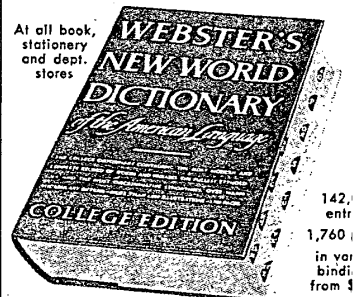
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