

*Man for Himself.* An Enquiry into the Psychology of Ethics. By ERICH FROMM. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949. 12s. 6d.

THE author of this Neo-Freudian approach to ethics is well known for his *Fear of Freedom* in which he outlined ways of escape from the psychological predicament which beset man after the breakdown of the Feudal system and the development of capitalism and individualism. His thesis was that freedom from various constraints was achieved at the cost of a widespread feeling of aloneness in the face of uncontrollable forces and of insecurity in a society whose close-knit structure had been shattered. Several ways of trying to fill this void—e.g. the recipes of Luther and Calvin, subservience to a Leader or to public opinion, mystical absorption, and so on—he regarded as psychological lapses; the only way forward from individualism was along the road of “positive freedom”, which must supplement negative freedom from the old constraints. *Man for Himself* is a detailed attempt to work out what Fromm meant by “positive freedom” in his earlier book and what the philosophers have traditionally called the good life.

The theme of the new book is reminiscent of Bishop Butler. Man has a “primary potentiality” for goodness, or the life of “productiveness”; vice is self-mutilation. The old doctrine of function, as taught by Aristotle, Spinoza and others is revived in a more modern garb. Fromm’s quarrel with his philosophical forerunners is only that they lacked the psychological knowledge necessary to fill in the details of humanistic ethics; his quarrel with modern psychologists is that they have encouraged ethical relativism by their concentration on the irrational sources of conduct. The old philosophers were concerned with the good life for man as such and said a lot of illuminating things about it; modern psychologists tell us only about the causes of maladjustment within a given system of ethical norms without raising the question whether certain types of socially approved character (e.g. the “marketing” type) are “socially patterned defects” which are hindrances to productive living. Psychologists can and should concern themselves with the good life; they can and should provide a system of norms which are objectively valid. Ethics is an applied science concerned with the art of living ancillary to the theoretical science of psychology.

Much of the book is an interesting and colourful psychological description of the type familiar to readers of existentialist rather than Freudian literature. Fromm thinks that there is a universal human nature which derives partly from man’s innate physiological equipment and partly from his earthly predicament. Man’s imagination, reason, and self-awareness are important as his differentiae in so far as they lead to the universal predicament of aloneness, of fear of death, and consciousness of separation from other people and the processes of nature. Man works out all sorts of “frames of orientation and devotion” in order to re-establish equilibrium between himself and the rest of nature. Religious thought and practice is one attempt to do this, though most religions exemplify immature and pre-genital attempts to cope with the situation. The solution lies in “productiveness” or a way of behaving characteristic of Freud’s ill-defined genital character.

To describe a man as virtuous or vicious is to make a remark about his character and not about his temperament. Fromm claims that the failure to insist on this distinction is one of the roots of ethical relativism, whose

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exponents regard ways of life as a matter of temperament. Temperament is an *innate* mode of reaction; character is a system of tendencies acquired in dealing with man's "existential dichotomies". The ethical question is not whether one should be cyclothymic like Goering or schizothymic like Himmler in one's destructiveness; rather it is whether one should be destructive at all, and, if so, towards what. The vicious characters, in Fromm's sense of "self-mutilating", are the receptive, exploitative, hoarding, and marketing orientations. The first three, which correspond roughly to Freud's oral sucking, oral biting, and anal characters are to be found in all societies, though receptiveness will be predominant in an authoritarian society, exploitativeness in a piratical and early capitalist society, and hoarding in a middle class after the rise of capitalism. The marketing type, however, who is what others want him to be, a player of many parts who sells his personality like a commodity, is a product of modern industrialism and commercialism, a recent development in the history of vice. In contrast to these vicious orientations is the virtuous or "productive" character who "comprehends the world" through reason and love, and whose attitude to people and things is characterised by care, responsibility respect, and knowledge. He is the man who realises the potentialities inherent in him, whose activity originates from spontaneity guided by rational decisions on the basis of experience rather than from outside authority or internal compulsions. His conscience is not the internalised voice of authority convincing him of his guilt and unworthiness. Rather he has a humanistic conscience which is a "reaction of our total personality" to its proper functioning and the "voice of loving care for ourselves". The productive man loves himself as well as others, knows what his long-term interests are, and has the integrity to pursue them.

What is to be said about this book? The philosopher's first reaction must surely be to point out the need for Fromm to clarify the relationship of his norms to the facts which are quoted as being relevant to them. Are the norms of "productiveness" counsels of prudence based upon the study of the sorts of character who break down within a society or the sort of "socially patterned defect" that seems to cause widespread unhappiness in a certain culture? And what of this "primary potentiality" for goodness? This seems as vague and indeterminate as the humanistic conscience which is the voice of the "total personality" (including the receptive, exploitative, and hoarding tendencies?). Similarly philosophers would feel unhappy about the doctrine of function being revived together with a universal human nature. Certainly one of the key problems in the nature and convention controversy is to decide what are the invariable and unalterable dispositions of man. Fromm touches the heart of the matter here. But is his hypothesis about the universal predicament of aloneness convincing—especially in view of his own important contribution on the connexion between psychological predicament and the social and economic conditions of the post-Medieval period?

Many more criticisms of a similar kind can be levelled at this recent attempt to justify the ethics of humanism. But one still feels that philosophers who have talked about the good life and Fromm who talks about productive living are talking about a way of behaving which can be practised under a variety of cultural and climatic conditions with similar psychological consequences to the individual. It is hard to believe that temperamental preference alone is responsible for singling out activities and attitudes like creativeness, spontaneity, respect for facts and people,



co-operation, and so on, as characterising the good life. Fromm sees, in his insistence on the importance of distinguishing temperament from character, that it is insufficient to plead in reply to the humanist that these activities are "not my cup of tea" or that one must "make a decision" about this sort of thing. But his failure to discuss the logical status of his norms leaves untouched the crucial philosophical problems which his book raises.

RICHARD PETERS.

*Social Psychology* (Third Edition). By LA PIERRE and FARNSWORTH. McGraw Hill Book Co., 1949.

THIS is a text book designed, I imagine, for the masses of students in U.S. universities who find themselves taking undergraduate courses in "Social Psychology". Its chief interest to an adult audience is the attitude it reveals to this subject.

The authors point out that historically the psychologist has been interested in the nature of the individual human being, the sociologist in the social organisation of men. Together they left out a third question, viz. "the relation between the psychologist's 'individual' and the sociologist's 'society'". "This", they say, "is the general problem with which the social psychologist is concerned." They attack this by contrasting various historical views with what they call the contemporary view about why men behave as they do in communities. Historically, this behaviour has been said to be due to human nature, the search for pleasure, God, instincts, imitation, and so forth. The contemporary view replaces the whole idea of a one-way cause and effect by the notion of "interactionism"—men behave as they do largely because of their interactions with other men. Consequently, it becomes essential to investigate the way in which the human animal becomes a social human being. This process of "socialisation"—to use the standard term—produces a unique result, viz. the "personality" of the individual. For the purposes of analysis, the authors split up the attributes of personality into four types. (1) Those involved in making the individual treat a situation or other person as "a such and such" or "a so and so". They call this phenomenon "personality stereotyping". (2) "Normative attributes". These exhibit the norms of the group, and represent the successes of socialisation into the group. (3) "Deviant attributes". These are peculiar to the individual and represent failures in socialisation. (4) Attributes that lead him to control his deviant attributes and overtly conform. But social disorganisation and malpreparation can upset, in various ways, the process of socialisation, and produce socially atypical and psychologically abnormal modes of adjustment. These are classified and described. The last section consists of listing and describing various social situations where the socialised human being plays his role.

What is the value of all this? The book is sober and well-balanced, if rather dull. It carefully covers the field—or most of it—and provides a bibliography and author index of 70 pages long. It offers a set of verbal pigeon holes by means of which the bewildered student (and perhaps also the instructor!) can try to order the chaotic mass of empirical material at his disposal. It is quite right to emphasise that there is a vast range of questions that neither traditional psychology nor contemporary sociology set out to answer; and it is in these that the social psychologist is interested.

