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## BOOK REVIEWS

MAN FOR HIMSELF. By Erich Fromm. 254 pp. 1947. Rinehart and Company. \$3.

*Man for Himself* Erich Fromm continues the examination of the psychological interrelationships between man and his society begun in his previous book, *Escape from Freedom*. In the earlier book the emphasis was on authoritarianism in government, particularly Nazism, which was the dominating force of the time. He traced the rise of that phenomenon to the powerlessness and loneliness which has generally beset modern man. Nazism was grasped as an anchorage by one group which had been shaken out of its traditional religious and economic securities as a result of the rise of capitalism and the spread of the Enlightenment—the forces which culminated in our Western civilization. In the present volume the emphasis is on authoritarianism in the individual. Fromm seeks an answer to the more general and more comprehensive question: Can man really trust himself to determine his own way of life instead of depending on authoritatively-promulgated ethics, divine or otherwise.

In this age-old problem Fromm feels that psychoanalysis can bring new clarifications from the increased knowledge it has obtained on human motivation. This has been gained from a better understanding of unconscious forces and the recognition of behavior traits as expressions of a more or less definable character structure of an individual. It has made possible a deeper insight into such concepts as love, hate, selfishness, pleasure, etc., and into their rational and irrational elements.

The nature of the contribution that psychoanalysis can make to this problem obviously depends on the theory one is working

with. What this is in the case of Fromm is not always clear. He apparently makes a distinction between "neurotic symptoms" on the one hand and character "orientations" on the other as far as causation is concerned, although he uses the term "neurotic character" at times as equivalent to his "non-productive orientation." At the root of neurotic symptoms, he at one time puts the repression of sexual strivings, and at another time the failure of the child to free itself from parental authority. In the case of the character orientations he discards the Freudian libido but retains its essential organizational framework. In place of libido as the dynamic force he substitutes what he calls "the human situation." Man is a part of nature and yet separated from nature, alone and yet with a need to come together with others, conscious of death and yet helpless in the face of it. Out of this "disharmony of man's existence" stems the genesis of the positive and negative aspects of his relatedness to the world (Fromm's productive and nonproductive orientations to life). Consequently, the two alternative paths of development that man faces—according to Fromm—have their starting points in an essential disequilibrium of man with nature and their goals the reestablishment of lost equilibrium.

There is in this an echo of Freud's concept of an inner force in man constantly pulling him back to his inorganic components though Fromm explicitly rejects the death instinct. It implies a denial of an innate capacity for growth as such in man—that is, without its being primarily reactive. Fromm says in this respect: "There is no innate 'drive for progress' in man." Yet in another connection he speaks of human evolution as "rooted . . . in certain indestructible qualities of his nature which compel him never to cease his



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search for conditions better adjusted to his intrinsic needs.”

The methodology that leads Fromm to derive man's motive force for both his productive and nonproductive orientations in “the human situation” is the old one of comparing man with the rest of animal life and coming to the conclusion that man is a freak of nature, an exception. The rest of animal life lives in harmony with nature; man in disharmony. It is man's weakness that compels him to be man. We know little about the “harmony” of the rest of the animal world with nature except from man's point of view. Perhaps it would be more profitable to accept man's nature and his need and capacity for growth as empiric realities. Actually such a concept is implicit in Fromm's acceptance of the roles that productiveness and faith play in human life.

By deriving his nonproductive and productive orientations from a common causal source, Fromm does not do for the larger behavior patterns what he does for some of their components: distinguish the irrational from the rational elements. Lacking also is much about compulsion and conflict. Presumably the origin of compulsion will be inherent in man's loneliness and will be carried along equally into the positive and negative aspects of man's relationships.

From such premises Fromm would be forced to adopt the framework of Freud's characterology. He would have to have the individual, “blocked in his development . . . , revert to primitive systems which in turn prolong and increase his dependence and irrationality.” The alternative would be to recognize the neurotic or nonproductive individual had created something new in order to cope with his anxieties, which has a highly intricate structure with its own dynamic forces—though it may at times resemble primitive or childlike behavior. Growth may be blocked or given unhealthy direction, but only as a response and growing out of the incompatible dictates of the psychological structure created. With Fromm, the relationship of cause and effect appears too direct; he does not fully include man's work with himself in response to his problems.

What are the social consequences of a theory of human motivation such as Fromm's?

Aside from its oversimplification of the forces involved, there is the question as to wherein lie the perpetuating factors of the neurotic character or the unproductive orientation? With Fromm the emphasis would have to be on cause, whether that is conceived of as “the human situation”, a special kind of authority or society in general, instead of in the vicious circles of the character structure of the individual himself. This does not deny that our society is in many ways destructive of what is best in man. One of the very great merits of this book is the sharpness with which Fromm points this out, especially in connection with his discussion of the marketing orientation. But authority (or “the human situation”) may actually be an externalization of the individual's own inner compulsions instead of being an authority internalized from the outside. In terms of altering society, the responsibility would fall on society, the individual himself being but the helpless product of it. In the case where the individual's own inner psychological chains are recognized, the emphasis would be placed on freeing him, so that he could see that just as he may be a product of society, society is also a product of his—and, furthermore, that he is not helpless.

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This book makes an eloquent plea for the need of reaffirming human values in our life. In bringing to bear on the validity and urgency of this need the evidence from psychoanalysis, Fromm performs a useful and necessary service which can never be done too often. His redefinition and discussion of ethical and philosophical concepts in the light of psychoanalytic insight constitutes one of the most valuable parts of this book.

The object of a humanistic ethics is to allow man to realize his potentialities, to live a productive life. The true focus of morals is not what we do to others but what we do to ourselves; if we can love ourselves, we can love others. It is immoral to stand in the way of our own healthy growth.

In opposition to a humanistic ethics, Fromm posits an authoritarian ethics. His emphasis on authority is understandable from the events of the last two decades. It



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can make null and void all human effort. But within the argument, is he not led to pose the problem as one of a humanistic ethics against an authoritarian ethics from his premise of a straight-line relationship between cause and effect in neurosis? This comes out clearly in his discussion of the authoritarian conscience. "If the authorities did not exist in reality, that is, if the person had no reason to be afraid of them, then the authoritarian conscience would weaken and lose power." There are individuals, especially children, in whom conscience is constituted by the fear of authority and who feel guilty if they do not fulfill its requirements, as they see them. But Fromm pushes this concept too far with the result that he has difficulty in explaining cases of obsessional neuroses in which there is divorcement of conscience from external authorities, and yet these neuroses can be deeply destructive. Here the concept of pride and self-hate of Horney would go further. Similarly with attitudes of pleasing. Fromm would be seeing an individual as pleasing an authority, but the dynamic process that might very well be going on would be the appeasing, placating or rebelling of an individual with a dependent attitude.

His posing of man's problem as one of humanistic ethics against authoritarian ethics also follows from his reluctance to take a clear stand between "orientation" and neurosis, between health and disease. He adds the concept of the "socially patterned defect" in which the individual shares his emotional defect with a majority of the members of a given society and therefore does not become neurotic. There is in this an assumption that a neurosis-producing society would act like a machine and put out a human product with the same thing missing. There is also the assumption that individuals with theoretically the same kind of neurosis could live at peace with each other, which is contrary to everything we know about neurosis. The concept is also in conflict with Fromm's own characterization of a neurosis as the result of "unlived life." Wouldn't it be better then to simply widen the concept of neurosis? This general confusion is heightened by his turning a neurotic symptom into an asset, e.g., sadistic impulse to kindness, as a result

of "productive conflict." Also by not clearly accepting the neurotic nature of a "nonproductive orientation", he must consider masochism alone and although he sees it as imbedded in the suffering that is an inevitable accompaniment of neurosis, he cannot use the total picture as a criterion. However, his analysis of pleasure itself is useful, though at times he seems to do for it what the older psychologists did for instincts, enumerate subdivisions beyond clinical application.

In his discussion of the means-ends problem as it relates to the use of pleasure as a criterion of conduct, it is felt that he has not added to the insights of Spencer and Dewey. The whole concept of means and ends is applicable only when choice is possible. The examples that Fromm gives (e.g., painful treatment to regain health, a woman's pains to give birth to a child) do not properly come within the field of choice. In the case of neurotic drives, with their compulsive elements, choice cannot really be said to be present. Fromm's insistence on the knowledgeableness of ends without means is in conflict with true dialectic thinking. In Dewey's concept of means and ends, action according to a "model of human nature" is implicit in every means.

Can it be that some of these difficulties stem from Fromm's inadequate consideration of the true place of rational authority in human life, beset with dangers though it is?

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From the analytic side, there is much to be criticized in this book. This holds for what it includes as well as for what it leaves out. The book suffers by such omissions. The organization and style are loose and have made it difficult for this reader always to get a consistent idea of Fromm's thinking.

From the philosophic side, there is much that is rich and valuable in this book. This includes his discussions of such concepts as productiveness, productive love and thinking; selfishness, self-love and self-interest; and faith. There are many keen and provocative insights, neatly expressed, throughout the book, though the context in which they appear may not itself always be acceptable.

Altogether, it is a book worth reading, and if you let it, it will stir up many things.

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