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Obituary Erich Fromm

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Erich Fromm, psychoanalyst and social philosopher, who has died at Muralto, Switzerland, aged 79, was a constant critic over 40 years of the dehumanising aspects of modern industrial society.

His most famous book, „The Fear of Freedom“ (1941), argued that totalitarian movements such as Naziism, made their appeal as a refuge from an inhuman environment. For a scholarly work it proved astonishingly popular and was reprinted 25 times over the next quarter-century. Meantime, a stream of well-argued works on various aspects of cultural neurosis made him internationally famous as a prophet of a better world.

Born in Frankfurt, descendant of a long line of Jewish rabbis and son of a wine merchant, he grew up as a devout Jew though he gave up religions practice at 26. By then he was a graduate of Heidelberg and a trained psychoanalyst, though without a medical education.

Originally an orthodox Freudian, he eventually accused Freud of neglecting social and economic factors in his theory of mind. In 1933 he left Germany and became an American citizen. He was on the staff of various universities until he returned to live in Switzerland in 1969.

His influential works, which can be regarded as source books for some „alternative“ lifestyles, insisted that a different way of living and thinking was needed. In „Man For Himself“ (1947) he encouraged individuals to form their own ethical standards rather than blindly follow authority. In „The Sane Society“ (T1355) he saw modern man as a prisoner of the institutions and objects he had created. A spiritual rebirth was needed to restore sanity.

In his next work, „The Art of Loving“ (1956), he saw love as the only sane answer to human problems but maintained that dehumanising pressures needed to be overcome before a mature love could develop. Other notable books included „The Forgotten Language,“ „The Dogma of Christ,“ „The Heart of Man,“ „Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis,“ „The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness“ and „The Wellbeing of Man and Society.“