

Escape from Freedom

Erich Fromm , Martin Luther (Quoted)

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If humanity cannot live with the dangers and responsibilities inherent in freedom, it will probably turn to authoritarianism. This is the central idea of *Escape from Freedom*, a landmark work by one of the most distinguished thinkers of our time, and a book that is as timely now as when first published in 1941. Few books have thrown such light upon the forces that shape modern society or penetrated so deeply into the causes of authoritarian systems. If the rise of democracy set some people free, at the same time it gave birth to a society in which the individual feels alienated and dehumanized. Using the insights of psychoanalysis as probing agents, Fromm's work analyzes the illness of contemporary civilization as witnessed by its willingness to submit to totalitarian rule.

Escape from Freedom Details

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From Reader Review Escape from Freedom for online ebook

Maica says

Fromm approached the theme of freedom on a multi-perspective basis, drawing insights from historical events, religious dogmas, economic movements, socio-biological and anthropological relationships, and psychological phenomena in understanding how in humanity's quest for freedom and individuality, the price paid is the burden of isolation and alienation - if he has no genuine end on what to do with his new-found 'freedom'. Which then results in a back-and-forth process of seeking back the lost sense of belongingness through submission to a higher authority exemplified in the sado-masochistic personality - a seemingly contradictory characteristic of individuals who seek domination over others and/or submission to someone/something higher in authority.

What is striking was Fromm's drawing of examples from personalities who exhibited these negative characteristics of sadism and masochism from each of the aforementioned perspectives: Luther and Calvin, Hitler - and examined them on the context of their work and the impact they made on whom they exerted influence to.

The mechanism of the new market seemed to resemble the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination, which taught that the individual must make every effort to be good, but that even before his birth, it had been decided whether or not he is to be saved.

His view of the phenomena of humanity's alienation and finding ways to escape from the burden of freedom was deeply depressing because he forces the reader to confront the facts, especially on humanity's inability to take responsibility for oneself by either resorting to domination or subjugation.

Supplementary Review

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Mikael Lind says

Yes, this is still a very important book even though it was written in 1942. It is mainly focused on the concept of freedom from the medieval times to the period before WWII. He points to weaknesses both in the (at the time) communist East and capitalist West, but (not surprisingly) his fiercest critique is that of the nazi ideology and the kind of man that Goebbels and Hitler wanted to create (a subordinated, disciplined creature, with a lack of critical thinking, etc.).

One thing in particular is interesting in this book. Fromm makes it clear that human beings have certain traits that are in accord with their nature, but that these traits can be hidden to view - human beings can delude themselves and act against their own good, even though they believe that they are actually acting according to their free will. It's easy to see why Fromm clashed so much with behaviourists, but - even though some of Fromm's opinions, colored by those of his teacher Freud, are a bit outdated - it's easy for me to say that Fromm is definitely the winner and Skinner the loser.

As Fromm points out, one can be fooled by a poison that tastes good but nonetheless kills you, and of course society can work in the same way as a whole. Look at how we mistreat our mother Earth and her natural resourses, endangering our whole species because whe want a certain material standard. That human beings want to preserve their own species is maybe not an objective fact, but it is still an ideal that one can contrast different lifestyles towards.

Bottom line: Fromm's main point is that human beings want freedom - this is part of our nature. However, if society at large is a cold and unfriendly space, and our mental life is plagued with difficulties, many human beings tend to search for extreme solutions just to feel safer; they can't handle the freedom given to them and so authoritarian alternatives show their ugly faces. Still true today, so therefore I recommend this book to everyone.

Safa Rawashdeh says

Shima says

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Huyen says

My rating of this book varies from one chapter to another. The first chapters explaining the attempts of Lutherism and Calvinism to fill the void freedom created during the early era of capitalism were good. Basically, when the feudal system was being replaced by capitalism, man was more free, but also more isolated and insecure. The solution offered by Protestanism was total submission to God and work as a means of searching for a sign of salvation. That laid the groundwork for the unhealthy mentality of submission or domination as the panacea for the isolation and aloneness in the modern time.

The middle part of the book where Fromm analyses the modern society is not quite original (possibly because his argument has been so popular that I've come across it too many times) and quite repetitive. (the words isolations/ powerlessness/ insignificant were used 3 times per page, which makes them really insignificant/ powerless). In the chapter about the psychology of Fascism, his remark that "as a matter of fact, certain features were characteristic of the middle class: their love of the strong, their hatred of the weak, their pettiness, their hostility" was quite unfounded and arbitrary. The last chapter on democracy and freedom was the best one. I didn't expect Fromm to provide a solution to the miserable state of the modern man, but surprisingly he does. His answer sounds reasonable, attainable and inspirational.

Ryan says

Certainly of all the nonfiction I've read this year, I would recommend Escape From Freedom above all others. This is my first time reading Fromm and I'm thoroughly impressed.

This work addresses topics which are very important to me: individuality, authoritarianism, freedom and how it all relates to our modern, democratic society. Fromm draws a causal link between the freedom gained for the individual in the transition to modernity, and the reactionary rise of the authoritarian personality. Fromm brings into his analysis many of the social issues addressed in our contemporary media: the coercion to conform, the desire to be a part of "something greater," the loss of authentic thought and action all emerge as consequences of what he calls "the escape from freedom."

The book is roughly divided into three portions: first is a history of the transition from medieval to modern society, then an analysis of the psychological factors at work in contemporary society, and finally a dissection of authoritarian societies with a vision of potential alternatives. Fromm's basic thesis is that in moving from a regimented, organic medieval society to the comparatively open capitalist society, the individual is placed in an uncertain, possibly frightening state of freedom. This freedom creates a basic psychic tension that the individual then seeks to alleviate through various methods which can be commonplace, neurotic, or empowering.

The whole thing is, for Fromm, analogous to the process of individuation as described by Jung. The youth grows and leaves the nest, by necessity during the emergence of an individual self, which exposes him or her to the dangers and responsibilities of self-directed life. This is the tale of the fall from grace, Adam and Eve ejected from Eden. Similarly, the medieval life represented for people a closer integration with nature and society, womb-like; Fromm even argues that death didn't represent the terrible boogeyman as it does today, being as this was before the creation of the individual as such.

Capitalist society, on the other hand, forces the individual to decide upon his or her own life, creates a freedom of motion and fluidity of social stations, and subjects one's livelihood to the whim of the marketplace. The emergence of early capitalist society is then matched by the emergence of Protestantism (Luther and Calvin), created in response to the changing psychological landscape of modernity. These religions, argues Fromm, attempt to reverse or negate the emergence of the individual by offering psychological / spiritual coping strategies. That this directly leads to the so-called protestant work ethic which enabled the further development of capitalism was precisely Weber's much-celebrated thesis. An important notion here is that religions and worldviews aren't reached by necessary, rational conclusion (as early modern philosophers would maintain), but instead arise in order to address psychological conflicts created by our social modes.

However, it doesn't end with Protestantism. In contemporary times, one may attempt to flee the responsibility of individuality by recourse to authoritarianism, sadism, and/or masochism, which restore concrete social order ("a place for everything, and everything in its place") but which can never fully or satisfactorily resolve the inner conflict, since nothing can reverse the physical or social condition of individuation.

One of the many things I absolutely loved about this book was that Fromm was writing right around the start of WWII, though before there was widespread public knowledge of the holocaust, yet he did not need

evidence of war crimes to seriously indict the society of Nazi Germany. Today we focus heavily on empirical evidence (the holocaust, the world war) that shows the Nazis to be a tragic mistake, but Fromm needs none of this to see the truth and lay it out plainly. That Nazi society was perverse and authoritarian, with its worship of strength and contempt for the weak, with more sympathy for power than for justice, was sufficient in itself to for Fromm to see that no good could come of it.

There is just so much good material in this book, I can't possibly touch on it all. It ties together so many disparate portions of my own thought, and gives voice to so many ideas and feelings that I wasn't sure anyone else had. It articulates why I've always had a deep and instinctual distrust of conformity as a default mode for behavior: not for any specific reason, but that it represents a false, easy way out of taking responsibility for one's own decisions. It is a true weakness, a weakness of character and conviction.

A strong current in my thought is the notion of the authentic: being true to one's own deeply-held feelings, not hiding them or replacing them with what one "should feel." The authentic consists of actual, original, and true expressions of one's own real, original, human self: that which flows naturally from children, before it's beaten out of them by peers and by school.

The alternative is what I describe as "anti-life," the stifling and shaming of feelings deemed inappropriate (shaming men for daring to cry, for instance), the replacement of self-expression with cold conformity. Every little one of these daily injustices is an affront to the self, and with sufficient repetition, they kill the heart.

Fromm absolutely nails all of this, discusses its role in our contemporary society, and its emergence as a consequence of our social organization. He ends on a positive note, explaining how all of these reactionary postures can be avoided by rising to the challenge of individuation, growing as a person, and not surrendering one's self. (Another thing I loved Fromm for: he says the average, socially "healthy" individual has simply given up their autonomy and adjusted to a sick society, whereas the neurotic is someone who, maladjusted though they may be, has refused to do so. This anticipates the transition of psychiatry from Freud's position to Marcuse's.)

Anyway, the whole thing is quite easily readable if a little repetitious at times. The analysis of contemporary society can be a bit dated and obvious to the modern reader. Fromm's psychology carries a bit of Freud with it, which while not fatal to his argument, is perhaps unnecessary. It's a quick read, and I thoroughly recommend it.

Zahra Taher says

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Maggie says

Existentialism has always fascinated me as the condemnation to freedom of mankind is such hard felt in society I'm living in.

This book is quite an easy read when compared to Sartre's, Beauvoir's or Nietszche's.

The willingness of choice, human act, and thinking has been deem sinful since the dawn of civilisation—Adam and Eva being ousted from Eden in the name of infringement of Gods will - to make the choice of having knowledge and ability to think.

The powerlessness and insecurity of our generation is so overwhelming that we turn to common believes and try so hard to fit into the norms that we barely know who we are, why we live and how to live. As the fall of the churchs gives rise to a new authority which exerts nfluences on our wants and acts in a way we hardly aware. Education means to produce cogs for the great machine of capitalism, with the least emphasis of inviduality and thinking.

We think we have freedom but which is so supercially confined to the limited choices we make in our daily lifes, which movie to watch, which job to take. The cheap and shallow excitement comes at the expense of the flattened and insensitive thinking of any individual. We become numb to rules, we take discomforts as a must to the means of survival, and worst of all- that we are so dependent on the given values (capabitily, money, status) to form our identities.

Powerlessness and insecurity are contagious that we rely so much on the groups we involve ourselves in. Being with parties of equal grounding makes us feel more real and safer at the expense of the chance of one being himself. But these mere social bondings only feed him with temporary and supeficial redemption that he will always feel alone with the minimal chance of being recognised of who he really is. The aloneness will never cease until the one chooses to live a life according to his genuine will.

So pathetic is our generation that we dont think- we take in the dose without knowing whats wrapped inside the sweet-coloured coating. Human- I see as living animal which sustains the growth of intelligence of a mankind that is disruptive and distructive to our humane sense, like technology is isolating people from each other, fabricated machines exile people to wonderland, market creates our needs - the essence of mankind - what makes us human is dwindling and withering.

We spend all our lives to get 'what we want', but without knowing who we are, how dare we are to uphold such a notable notions.

Looking at the way we judge and value things, rationality is now defined as - the insanity seen in the past or hopefully non sense to be judged by the future, if by any chance people will think again.

We crave because we see ourselves lacking.

That is a sickness, anyone sees?

Ahmad Sharabiani says

?Die Furcht vor der Freiheit = The Fear of Freedom, Erich Fromm

First published in the United States in 1941. In the book, Fromm explores humanity's shifting relationship with freedom, with particular regard to the personal consequences of its absence. His special emphasis is the psychosocial conditions that facilitated the rise of Nazism.

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Rihab says

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Noor says

Araz Goran says

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Ameera H. Al-mousa says

Manar says

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