

My Reading List

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I read – A LOT. I record the books I'm reading here with a summary and analysis of what I think of them as a recommendation to others. These are books that have influenced my philosophies and helped me develop my value system.

The Sane Society [1955] – Eric Fromm

This is a great book by sociologist and psychoanalyst Erich Fromm. Fromm was from Germany and he moved to the United States.

Society is mentally ill

It deals with the concept of mental health, and reverses the idea that mental illness is the problem of specific individuals failing to adapt to society. He proposes that the reverse is true – the usual panaceas don't work for some people to help them adapt to a sick society.

It's a hard concept to get your head around, but Fromm has influenced many other thinkers and writers. I see him quoted and referenced all the time.

Humans do not serve society

One of the main points that stand out is Fromm saying that society should exist to serve human beings – but we normally view and treat it the other way around. He says society does not reflect the natural state of human beings but it is currently encouraging certain innate potential trends that we have.

He quotes the many high rates of suicide, homicide and alcoholism in Western industrialised society. His book is frequently critical of modern capitalism, and he points out that rampant consumerism is a departure from the capitalism of the seventeenth century.

Humanistic psychoanalysis

He argues that all human beings are born with natural desires that produce a state of

mental health – the desire to belong, to love, to create and so on. He calls this concept "humanistic psychoanalysis", in contrast to the blank slate psychoanalysis that was popular at this time.

Fromm argues that it's difficult for us to fulfil these innate desires. Although humans are by nature are very adaptable to any conditions, a factor influencing our success as a species, having the wrong conditions produces suffering.

Instead of true fulfilment, society offers us various substitutes such as television and newspapers, consumerism, and alcohol. Fromm wrote this in the post-war industrial boom, around the time when people also had colour TV for the first time. He obviously had many reservations about this.

Innate human needs

Fromm provides a model of humanity as being born with some innate human needs that must be fulfilled as a prerequisite for mental health. This counters the idea that human beings are driven by only the sexual or destructive impulse, which was a popular notion at the time.

These needs are:

- Relatedness vs Narcissism
- Transcendence–Creativeness vs Destructiveness
- Rootedness–Brotherliness vs Incest
- Sense of Identity–Individuality vs Herd Conformity
- The Need for a Frame of Orientation and Devotion–Reason vs Irrationality

One of the most interesting points he made was that in order to be properly related to others, a person must first become an independent individual.

He argues that to be capable of genuine "love" (and he uses this word) someone must be complete on their own, or they are only capable of a selfish neediness that is not really love.

Truly revolutionary for his time.

An answer to Freud

Much of the book is an answer to Freud, who he argues has inaccurately reduced humans to the sexual drive.

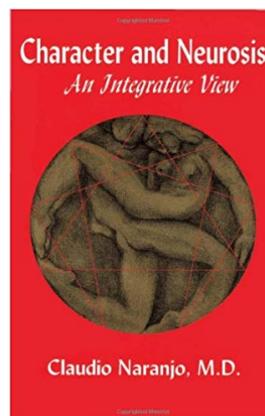
Fromm argues that the sexual instinct is one drive among many. I frequently notice Freud being criticised in other works by psychoanalytic theorists, notably also Karen Horney and Carl Jung. I think this concept presents a much more rounded picture of human nature, and answers some of the criticisms I have of psychoanalysis as a discipline.

Freud was an influential and revolutionary thinker, but we are nonetheless struggling against his legacy. I believe Freud is responsible for many mainstream misconceptions about psychoanalysis, and this stops many people benefiting from insights offered by psychoanalytic theory.

Final remarks

I find *The Sane Society* very illuminating. The text is extremely readable and Fromm communicates his meaning clearly. You can't help but be transfixed by the depth and breadth of his ideas. This book is still relevant in 2018 as it was in 1955, if not even more so.

Character and Neurosis [1994] – Claudio Naranjo, M.D.



The non-fiction book about the integrations between psychology and the Enneagram and Claudio Naranjo is one of the best books I've ever read. It relates each Enneagram type to a specific mental disorder and Naranjo's descriptions of the 'character' of each type is uncanny.

Claudio Naranjo, M.D

- Claudio Naranjo - integrative typologist from Chile who wrote Character and Neurosis
- He was big in the sixties when there was a lot of awakening conscious movements and spent time at Berkley, California
- No affiliation to any particular group
- Combines the enneagram and neurotic types
- It's a simple and symmetrical theory containing assymetrical complexity
- Learned from the Sufi master in Arica (Gurdjieff)
- He brings together character study, psychoanalysis, and spiritual traditions

Theory behind Character and Neurosis

- Object relational view of development
- Social learning theory
- We cannot truly separate traits from motives
- Each behavioural trait is linked to a cognitive trait and a motive
- Spiritual darkness is equated with loss of being
- Personality disturbance relates to an illusion of fulfilment
- William Sheldon and the three dimensions of human temperament relating to the three biological layers of the embryo
- Ectoderm, endoderm, and mesoderm
- Gurdjieff founded the institute for the harmonious development of man and spoke of the Law of Three
- Hans Eysenk
- Factor Analysis as the measurement of the human mind
- Oscar Ichazo and Protoanalysis
- Naranjo says neurosis is characterological
- It's a mixture of unconsciousness, aversion, and craving
- A person is motivated by lack rather than abundance
- Freud maintained that frustration of libidinal processes but modern psychoanalysts revise this theory as a lack of love and adequate parenting

The personality and the character

- Personality is the false self and the conditioning of our experience
- We developed a personality to survive but this isn't really who we are
- The individual becomes fixed in their response and they are mentally "asleep"
- They don't respond to situations as they are but according to patterns they learned early in life

- Your character is either an identification with one of your parents or a reaction against one of them
- Either way, it means abandoning your true nature called your "essence"
- I notice many links with Pete Walker
- Essence is a process of free functioning
- There is a psychodynamics of the enneagram
- The forces that motivate the formation of character in childhood are not the same forces that keep it there in adulthood

The passion of each type

- The passion is kept in place by a cognitive distortion that prevents us from acting freely
- Each point on the enneagram is related to the others but some have a stronger relationship than others
- Type four is like a failed three that responds to an ability to live up to the idealised image with a sense of lack
- Being ruled by your passion means because motivated by a sense of lack instead of seeking abundance
- Character disorder results from a corruption of the and lack of self

The Enneagram and spirituality

- Cognitive distortions are an inability to apprehend reality and find fulfilment
- The path to spiritual fulfilment lies in moving away from what we think provides us with a sense of self and "journeying through emptiness"
- The Enneagram is ultimately a spiritual tool based in ancient Christian traditions

Final remarks

Ultimately, this is a spiritual book that teaches the reader how to use the Enneagram to find spiritual fulfilment. It combines many of the 'humanistic' disciplines to form a cohesive view of how one should live their life. Liberally doses of philosophy also inform Naranjo's book and I'd recommend this book to any serious student of the Enneagram.
