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Psychology and the Human Dilemma Rollo May

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ROLLO MAY. *Psychology and the Human Dilemma*. Princeton, N. J.: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1967. 221 pp. \$2.95.

Dr. May, a psychologist and author of such previous books as *The Meaning of Anxiety* and *Man's Search for Himself*, is a supervisory and training analyst at the William Alanson White Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Psychoanalysis as well as an adjunct professor in the Graduate College of Arts and Sciences, New York University.

The fourteen chapters which comprise this book are, in fact, a series of separate essays which have their origins in lectures, articles, etc., produced during the last twelve years. These are grouped into four major sections: (1) our contemporary situation, (2) sources of anxiety, (3) psychotherapy, and (4) freedom and responsibility. There is no index, and the only bibliography is in the form of a section at the end of each chapter called "notes," where several references are listed with a few of the author's comments.

In reading this book, this reviewer was impressed by the clear and lucid style in which May presented his ideas. May is not tendentious, confused, or trying to impress—but rather straightforward and direct. While he is unacquainted with the "religious life" and obviously lives in an intellectual world which sees religion or religious commitment as having little relevance to the twentieth century, his vision of man is basically open-minded, nondogmatic, reflective, and subject to change if given sufficient evidence. However, one example of his intellectual "provincialism" is seen (p. 73) where he speaks of the anxiety which the threat of death offers ". . . unless one holds beliefs in immortality which are not common in our culture." Anyone who reads the Gallup Poll knows that the majority of American people believe in immortality and life after death—and Rollo May's comment above tells us more about his values and those of his associates and patients rather than people in general in our culture.

While Dr. May speaks from the viewpoint of a psychologist and psychotherapist, the issues and topics he discusses have relevance and significance for all persons concerned about man's role in the universe of things and his struggle and search for identity. For that person with the security of a strong religious commitment this book will give a glimpse into another world—the soul of the man without roots, with shift-

ing or dissolving values—or in short—the existentialist. As our society becomes increasingly secularized, this kind of man and his kind of personal problems will become (and are becoming) increasingly epidemic. Dr. May analyzes such current social problems as the student riots at Berkeley and the dependence on drugs (tranquilizers, LSD, etc.) and considers these behaviors as often inadequate ways of coping with our age of anxiety. He believes (as does this reviewer) that anxiety and guilt are extremely important prerequisites to change, that values and valuing are essential for mental health, as are honesty with self, self-insight, courageous facing of flaws and short-comings, and self-commitment to healthy, rational goals. Concerning the aims of psychotherapy, he states that we should no longer be seduced by the ubiquitous idea of adjustment—the “true” goal should be the full confronting of one’s own existence, even though in doing this, one may be *less* adjusted to society and may well carry *more* conscious anxiety. This is something most Latter-day Saints may well contemplate as the values of their religion become increasingly disparate from a society and culture which are radically changing. He states in many different ways that freedom can never be separated from responsibility. He expresses concern about the increasing sexual promiscuity of our age, where sex is often used in the service of security—to overcome one’s own apathy and isolation. Sex is something we can do when we run out of conversation; it is the substitution of bodily intimacy for personal relationship. Promiscuous sexuality is frequently a neurotic way of coping with anxiety; it leads to increased depersonalization, and alienation, not love, growth, fulfillment, etc.

His chapters at times are a little redundant: he differentiates neurotic and normal anxiety a number of times. But this is not overdone, and I do not see it as any major flaw. With regard to the unconscious, he tries to have his cake and eat it too by both minimizing it and still saying it is important. This probably reflects some of his own unresolved conflicts in trying to be an existentialist and psychoanalyst at the same time. I can see this book being used as a supplementary text in classes in philosophy, psychology, or religion, and would, in general, recommend it as being sober, well-balanced, stimulating, and relevant to the above-mentioned fields.

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