

REASON AND ECSTASY: PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL NOTES ON THE EMERGING COUNTERCULTURE

by Don Browning

In the following pages, I want to show the relevance of two contemporary disciplines for addressing some of the human problems especially acute in modern times. The two disciplines I have in mind are the psychoanalytic ego psychology associated with the names of Heinz Hartman, Robert White, and Erik Erikson, and the school of process philosophy, generally linked with the name of A. N. Whitehead. These disciplines have special relevance for two of the dominant characteristics of modern societies, that is, pluralism and rapid social change. In addition, I find these resources to be helpful for evaluating some of the anthropological issues in writings of selected leading exponents of the counterculture.

Before venturing on my critique of selected issues in the literature of the counterculture, I want to discuss why I believe pluralism and rapid social change constitute the major problems of modern societies. First, let it be said that these two social phenomena are not new. In some form or other, they are as old as the human condition. It is true, however, that within the last two hundred years, with the rise of industrialization, technology, advanced urbanization, and international travel, pluralism has become more visible and the rate of

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social change more accelerated than ever before in the history of man.

Anomie and arbitrary control are the major social by-products of rapid change and pluralism. It is important to understand how both of these phenomena tend to occur simultaneously in modern societies. Many contemporary analyses of our social situation oppose these two consequences and tend to weight their diagnosis toward either anomie or arbitrary control. Some analysts believe modern societies are deficient in the kinds of social controls, cultural directives, social pathways, opportunities, and rewards that are necessary to lead people into a satisfying sense of belonging and a minimal level of conformity. Sociologists are likely to hold such a view, and names such as Émile Durkheim and Robert Merton are often associated with such a view.

Other commentators, often associated with the humanities more than with sociology, assert that modern societies exercise too much social control and are too rationalized, technologized, and bureaucratized. Spokesmen for this point of view stress the decline of freedom in modern societies. They abhor the standardization of factory and office; the preoccupation with procedures, rules, and regulations; the expansion of methods of surveillance such as police, FBI, CIA, wire tapping, and infiltration of citizens groups; and the far too frequent use of force and violence as guarantees of social order.

Both styles of analysis, of course, are right—but only half right. Only when we recognize pluralism and rapid change as the crucial social facts energizing modern life can we understand how modern man can simultaneously experience both a disconcerting sense of anomic freedom and a heightened sense of arbitrary, perhaps violent, control.

Change and pluralism tend to disrupt the patterns of expectations, norms, and values which give organic coherence to communities. Since patterns of work have much to do with forming a society's system of norms and values, technologically induced changes in occupational styles affect greatly a society's overall organization of normative expectations. Occupational specialization tends to create occupational subgroups which develop their own characteristic normative patterns, thus fostering the pluralism characteristic of advanced societies. Pluralism and change create a kaleidoscope of groups and subcommunities with conflicting behavioral and cultural patterns. At the points of interface between conflicting groups, individuals are likely to feel both anomie and arbitrary

control, that is, a sense of loneliness or formless freedom and autocratic manipulation. Many people in modern societies are not firmly attached to any community. Hence, the normative pattern of both their communities of birth and other communities such as occupational group, corporation, or state may sometimes be experienced as external, arbitrary, manipulative, and sometimes even violent. Modern man experiences at one and the same time too much freedom and too much control and both for the same reasons. Pluralism and excessively rapid change rob him of a settled sense of community, whereby freedom is experienced as a familiar sense of decision and latitude within the boundaries of self-accepted and shared norms and values.¹

Every society has its duly appointed or self-elected priests and shamans whose task it is to counsel people in the art of handling life's transitions. The present twofold experience of anomie and arbitrary control has evoked divergent prescriptions from this corps of sanctioned and unsanctioned guides. Roughly speaking, they divide themselves into two schools of thought—the school of *ecstasy* and the school of *control*. Some, focusing exclusively on the increased sense of arbitrary control, promote responses of expressiveness, release, consciousness expansion, and boundary destruction. Other counselors, preoccupied with the heightened sense of anomie, advocate various disciplines of individual responsibility, social planning, or patterns of environmental constraint and reinforcement.

In this essay, I want to address some of the prominent spokesmen heralding the new culture of ecstasy. We are, in our time, witnessing the rise of a variety of ideologies of ecstasy, touching the practices of therapy, education, politics, and religion. At the same time, over a longer period of time, there has been developing a therapy, education, politics, and religion of control. The two movements seem to be hardening their lines of defense. In choosing to address primarily the new culture of ecstasy (frequently called the counterculture), I do not suggest that their errors are more grave than the culture of control. The culture of control is older and enjoys the privileges of established power. The culture of ecstasy has appeared (or reappeared) more recently and makes more noise. For reason of their novelty and current popularity—and not because of the special gravity of their sins—they merit the special attention of the essay.

The breadth of the new culture is remarkable. What is common to its various manifestations is a united opposition to external control (or to what is felt as external control). There has developed, in recent years, a rather well-delineated therapy, education, politics,

and theology of ecstasy. The therapy of ecstasy and its attendant psychologies has been of central importance for the entire movement and has had seminal influence on the other areas of practice. Most schools of modern psychotherapy can be construed as promoting various types of liberation from various forms and patterns of social restriction and control. Freud himself is the exception to this general trend. Freud was an elitist and political conservative; he aspired only to replace the arbitrary and unconscious restrictions of the superego with the conscious restraints of an enlightened ego informed by psychoanalytic interpretation and insight.² However, he did believe that society should "loosen its collar" a bit in the area of sexual restrictions. In spite of this, he was basically distrustful of human sexuality, and he by no means was as radical as he is often interpreted to be.

Themes of liberation and ecstasy, although modestly present in Freud, are more pronounced in Jung. Jung developed a more telling critique of Western society than did Freud; he was especially critical of its high evaluation of masculine activism, extroversion, and rationality. His therapy often served to liberate people from these typically Western patterns of control.

Wilhelm Reich, who died in an American prison for selling across interstate lines a little black box alleged to contain orgon energy, is the stellar example of a psychoanalysis of ecstasy. He is the first of the Freudian Marxists, an enemy of the patriarchal family and a celebrant of the curative powers of orgasm. He has had crucial influence on Norman Brown and Herbert Marcuse and a host of contemporary artists and writers.³

In recent times, the schools of therapy associated with the names of H. S. Sullivan, Carl Rogers, and Eric Berne can all be construed to have developed therapies of ecstasy. Sullivan helped free patients from a contradictory and confining "self-system" (Mead's internalized "generalized other"). Rogers liberated clients from internalized "conditions of worth." Berne adjusts socially embedded "patterns of interaction" or "games people play." The third and fourth forces in psychology associated with the names of Abraham Maslow, Fritz Perls, and William Schutz emphasize values of expressiveness, self-actualization, experiencing, authenticity, and openness.

These movements in therapy and psychology have provided, in one way or another, many of the insights into human nature assumed by the education, politics, and religion of ecstasy. John Leonard and Ivan Illich in education; Norman Brown, Herbert Marcuse,

and Charles Reich in political theory; and Thomas Altizer, John Cooper, and Sam Keen in religion all use, in some fashion, the resources of one or other of these therapies of ecstasy. It is for the very reason that the cultural overflow of modern psychology and psychotherapy has been so important for the culture of ecstasy that I intend to take a deeper look at some of the psychological assumptions of selected representatives of this newly emerging counter-culture.

REASON, MODERNITY, AND THE COUNTERCULTURE

I would like to restrict my remarks to the most prominent exponents of the culture of ecstasy—namely, Norman Brown, Theodore Roszak, and Charles Reich. I will not address all of their ideas, but confine myself primarily to their criticism of the role of reason in a technocratic society. Reason is generally considered to be a philosophical category. Of course, it can also be approached as a psychological category, and it is from this perspective that I primarily will be addressing it in this essay. Yet my remarks will indeed stray into the province of philosophy insofar as I will be drawing in my response to Brown, Roszak, and Reich not only from psychoanalytic ego psychology but also from the philosophical psychology of Whitehead.

Reason may indeed be the privileged category from which to address the twofold effects on human personality of rapid change and pluralism, that is, the effects of normless freedom and arbitrary control. Reason, according to Whitehead, is the faculty which achieves adaptive order for man by criticizing and selecting the novel possibilities which the transitions of experience present.⁴ To say that rapid change and pluralism are the hallmarks of modernity is to suggest that modern societies are being overwhelmed by the anarchy of unassimilated and uncriticized novelty. If this is the case, it may be that the difficulties with modern societies has to do with the breakdown of reason as that faculty which orders and renews life through the criticism and selection of novel possibilities.

Brown, Roszak, and Reich share many ideas in common. They all believe that contemporary technocratic society is basically inhuman. They also believe that the kind of human energies and mental processes which go into the support of this kind of society are dehumanizing and repressive. These men contend that Western technocratic society is sustained by certain mental processes which they variously refer to as "mind" (Brown), "intellective" or "objective consciousness" (Roszak), "linear and analytic thought" or "reason"

(Reich). Each of these writers is calling for a new organization of human energies which will somehow go beyond intellection, objective consciousness, or reason. In urging Western man to go beyond reason, they point to the possibility of a society organized around what are variously referred to as nonintellective powers, feelings, spontaneity, or shamanistic ecstasy.

In reviewing the writings of these men, one quickly learns that their attack on the rationalizing processes underpinning technocratic societies is really only an attack on that narrower form of reason which Paul Tillich often referred to as "technical" or "controlling" reason.⁵ Their critical remarks do not address that fuller and more human kind of reason which Tillich referred to as an "ontological reason," that is, the classical understanding which saw reason as effective in man's cognitive, aesthetic, emotional, and practical activity, enabling the mind to grasp the essential structures of reality.⁶ It is a shortcoming of their polemic against reason that they focus entirely on technical reason and disregard completely this more classical understanding.

These three men vary considerably in terms of the radicality of their attack on reason and the extremity of their call for an ecstatic response. Brown is by far the most radical, Reich the least, with Roszak running back and forth between them in a considerable state of ambivalence. On the one hand, Brown believes that the totality of modern technological life and the forms of rationality which support it are utter disease, repression, and death—mind "at the end of its tether."⁷ Considerably more conservative than Brown is Reich who believes that the modern technocratic society, as sick as it is, is simply assumed by the youth culture of today (Consciousness III) and thereby constitutes the presupposition of the more spontaneous style of life that it is evolving.⁸ Between them is Roszak, who for the most part sides with the uncompromising position of his hero, Brown, but who in the last pages of his book, *The Making of a Counter Culture*, seems to opt for some kind of compromise with the technocratic society. Actually, all of these men seem to be searching for a way to orient Western life around something other than technical reason but seem unable to articulate this short of a totalistic denunciation of reason in its entirety.

Brown builds his case on explicitly psychological grounds. His *Life against Death* is a radically romantic interpretation of Freudian psychoanalysis. The book is an exceedingly complicated exposition and reinterpretation of some of Freud's major ideas. Although he systematically rebuilds many of Freud's major concepts, in other in-

