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Review

Reviewed Work(s): Encounter with Erikson by Donald Capps, Walter H. Capps and M. Gerald Bradford; Psychohistory and Religion: The Case of Young Man Luther by Roger A. Johnson

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number of fields: history, anthropology, archaeology, neurology, and psychology. The reader may be hard pressed to evaluate the quality of evidence without an expertise in all of these fields. Jaynes does fall short of the mark even as an academic psychologist, his specialty. Jaynes claims (p. 33 ff.) that consciousness is not necessary to learning via conditioning. By presenting this as a generally accepted thesis, Jaynes has ignored the significant body of evidence mounted against this claim. Many learning researchers today promote just the opposite view: that conditioning without awareness is impossible in human beings.

When dealing with areas outside his specialty, he may encounter more serious difficulties. Jaynes can be caught time and again showing gaping holes in his knowledge and tripping on his own attempts to show off. Thus, in his discussions of Old Testament religion he offers the claim, by no means universally accepted, that the *khabiru* of the ancient Near East are the Hebrews of the Old Testament, and suggests that "... *khabiru*, softened in the desert air, becomes *hebrew*" (p. 294). The attempted jump from Akkadic to English lands Jaynes smack on his face. Other attempts to cope with the mysteries of Semitic languages, such as "*The Nabiim who naba*" (p. 299) are not more successful.

When evidence is collected from so many varied fields of scholarly endeavor and presented in such a coherent way, the skeptical scholar tends to become wary. After all, each of us knows from his own field how equivocal findings are, how complicated issues are, and how difficult it is to reach an agreement when studying human beings in action.

There are many substantive difficulties as well. A major deficiency in the theory regarding bicameral societies is an explanation of how the social system actually functioned under the bicameral consciousness, and how social order was maintained. Still, the book includes a great number of stimulating observations from the variety of fields it attempts to cover. The book may be viewed as neurological *Totem and Taboo*. It attempts an impossible reconstruction of historical events with the help of only fragmentary knowledge. Like *Totem and Taboo* this is an adventure in bold speculation, buttressed by strong intuition and conviction but impossible to prove conclusively.

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## *Truth or therapy*

ENCOUNTER WITH ERIKSON. Edited by Donald Capps, Walter H. Capps, and M. Gerald Bradford. Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1977. 429 pp. \$3.50.

PSYCHOHISTORY AND RELIGION: THE CASE OF YOUNG MAN LUTHER. Edited by Roger A. Johnson. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977. 198 pp. \$10.95.

The publication of Erik Erikson's *Young Man Luther* in 1958 was an important landmark in our recent intellectual history. With his fascinating study of Luther, Erikson introduced a new method—and vision—which he called psychohistory. Along with his earlier probings in *Childhood and Society*, the work of Theodor Adorno, Erich Fromm, and Wilhelm Reich from the Marxist tradition, and the culture-and-personality school in anthropology, *Young Man Luther* sought to extend the psychoanalytic vision from the private and therapeutic to the public and historical realm.

Erikson's work also belong with Trilling's *Beyond Culture*, Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*,

Brown's *Life Against Death*, and Rieff's *Freud: The Mind of the Moralists* as re-assessments of the Freudian legacy from outside the narrow confines of professional psychoanalysis. Freud's speculative daring and his feel for cultural implication were rescued from the often unimaginative hands of the ego psychologists who had made a new scholasticism out of Freud's revolutionary theory. If there had been any doubt before, Erikson *et al* established Freud as a permanent fixture in the modernist pantheon, a figure of wide cultural import, rather than the founder of a narrowly circumscribed therapy and theory of psychic functioning.

To Erikson, the Protestant Reformation *was* the great modern revolution. With this he did not, however, enter the lists as a champion of the Weber thesis, since Erikson unfortunately all but ignored Weber, nor was his work intended to confirm Marx's contention that capitalism had been the most revolutionary force in human history. Rather, for Erikson, our very notion of the self derived from the revolt which Luther began in 1517.

Where Fromm and Reich sought to effect a rapprochement between Marxism and

psychoanalysis in the early 1930's, *Young Man Luther*, reflecting perhaps the spirit of the 1950's, undermined the ritual hostility between psychoanalysis and Christianity. If there was ever a religious innovator who exemplified the complex interweavings of personal psychology, family experience, and religious concern, it was the young Luther. Erikson's study was anything but a reductive hatchet-job on a man who provided from his own often scatological mouth the raw materials for such an effort. And in Erikson's hands religion was no opiate of the masses or projection of infantile desires; it was the very guarantor of personal identity and psychic health. It allowed Luther to take revolutionary public action and to claim personal responsibility for his own life. In working out his own identity with fear and trembling, Luther spoke to and for millions who experienced similar psychic tremors. What Eric Fromm, whom Erikson also scarcely mentions, considered as a corrosive, anomic individualism, Erikson saw as a revitalizing ideology and relevant faith.

With the entrance of the new theology of individual justification by faith, western Christianity turned resolutely inward. If salvation depends upon an *attitude* rather than good works or ritual enactments or common membership in the spiritual and institutional body of Christ, then the Protestant individual is assured pride of place. The state of his soul and his psyche becomes more important than the demands of others or the communal faith(s) of the old culture. Hegel was more correct than he could have known when he proclaimed that "all are free" under the Germanic historical dispensation. And what began with the unique individual abjectly before God was to be superseded in our century by the more familiar figure of the individual nervously prone before the analyst.

This extended lead-in to the two books under review—*Psychohistory and Religion* and *Encounter with Erikson*—is necessary since, for all the two books' virtues, they are woefully short on essays tracing the cultural implications of Luther's revolt or placing Erikson's study in its own cultural context. This shortcoming need not be belabored, since the contributors to both volumes are primarily scholars in religious studies. Their purpose is not to bury Erikson under mountains of criticism, but to praise (and apply) his understanding of the psychology of religion and the complex interaction of soul with psyche and to assess the ethical implications of his meditations on history.

Erikson emerges from the two collections of essays as a religious thinker who has attempted to explore the overlapping areas of religion, psychology, and politics. Luther, Freud, and Gandhi become in his hands the key figures in the evolution of western and, now, world culture toward new modalities of salvation, cure, and political action. A sort of world-historical religiosity seems to be the

*telos* of Erikson's work.

Since it is impossible to do justice to the strengths or to assess the weaknesses of all the essays included in *Psychohistory and Religion* and *Encounters with Erikson*, I would like to identify four separate, though related, areas in Erikson's work which seem to emerge from the essays as problematic.

First, though the historians who contribute essays come across as stodgy, they effectively demolish Erikson's account of Luther's childhood and its link with Luther's identity crisis and his mature theology. But Erikson got himself into trouble unnecessarily here. Despite his concern—an excessive one, I think—to avoid charges of reductionism, Erikson likes to fasten on *actual* events or experiences as crucial in the life-history of a Luther. The price he pays, however, is the neglect of the orthodox, but more subtle, Freudian contention that infantile trauma or childhood experiences often are fantasized or screen-memories which receive heightened significance "after the fact." Thus Luther's father need not have actually been excessively brutal or insensitive to his son's needs. What was crucial was that Luther remembered him as such and projected onto God the negative attributes which he allegedly experienced in his father.

This issue leads to the especially important essays by Roger Johnson ("Psychohistory as Religious Narrative") and Donald Capps ("*Gandhi's Truth* as Religious Biography"). Both emphasize that Erikson's psychobiographies are "ideological" and are not simply biographies of fascinating historical personages. Johnson shows how Erikson's "construction" of Luther's life demanded a demonic figure, i.e., Hans Luther. Capps demonstrates the way in which the Gandhi book is constructed along the conventions of religious biography: theme and event, heroic pattern, ritual, and myth. This is not to make the trivial point that Erikson, like the normal biographer, shapes his evidence. Rather Erikson was out after larger game than "mere" scholarship or regular psychological studies are.

A third issue which recurs throughout the two volumes is the relationship between psychological cure (i.e., identity) and religious salvation. William Meissner's provocative essay forces us to consider more closely Erikson's concept of identity. On the one hand Erikson sees identity as a qualitative achievement in which the individual attains some sort of "health" and pursues constructive, life-enhancing goals. If we take identity in this sense, then we must wonder with Meissner why Luther later suffered severe depression, displayed a virulent anti-Semitism, and maintained more than a perfunctory belief in the devil. On the other hand, identity can also be understood in a descriptive sense: it denotes the state in which the individual can act without being overpowered by inner doubts

and divisions. But the problem here is that one cannot distinguish the achievement of identity with Luther and Gandhi from Hitler's newly found sense of mission after World War I.

Meissner, operating from a Christian perspective, distinguishes between genuine and false identity. The former is sustained by faith, while the latter is shaped by ideology and is characterized by the "need for enemies," one of Luther's most salient characteristics. But Erikson's theoretical system does not make explicit such a distinction. Erikson's notion of "negative identity" is a descriptive term and begs the question of why some individuals arrive at it rather than an identity which is in some way constructive for themselves and others. Nor for that matter does Erikson assess the reasons for the millions of deaths which followed in the wake of the movements which Luther and Gandhi led. The problem of evil and suffering remains in Erikson's evolutionary framework.

Finally neither Erikson nor his critics engage the issue of the "truth-value" of religion. Here Erikson follows in the very American spirit of William James, that appealing aficionado of religious experience, who was never himself convinced that such experiences issued from a transcendent source. (See Robert Michelson's interesting essay "Identity and Conversion" in *Encounter with Erikson*.) Clearly, Erikson is

convinced of the pragmatic value of religion in individual and collective life. And much of his work, particularly the Luther and Gandhi books, outlines a psychology of religion. But one must ask, is that *all* the great historical religions consist in—elaborate, historically effective systems of therapy? Or to return to an earlier question: is the New Testament faith really about the achievement of identity? Except for Meissner and Bert Kaplan in his essay on *acedea* in *Encounter with Erikson*, most of the contributors avoid this thorny problem—a curious position for those concerned about religion.

I suspect that Erikson's coyness on this matter indicates that he, like James, sees religion as essentially therapeutic. And to say "therapeutic" is to be reminded of the startling omission of mention of Philip Rieff's work in either collection of essays. Erikson's work, if the consensus of contributors of essays is to be believed, is most centrally about the possibility of faith after Freud, the emergence of a new world-view. But of truth there is little mention in Erikson. Gandhi's truth is finally not Luther's, nor is either Freud's.

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### *A gourmet appetizer and mulligan stew*

THE BIOGRAPHICAL PROCESS: STUDIES IN THE HISTORY AND PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION. Edited by Frank E. Reynolds and Donald Capps. The Hague: Mouton. Distributed in the United States by Humanities Press, 1977. xi + 436 pp. \$31.25.

In 1972-73 a number of faculty members at the University of Chicago decided on a joint seminar in which specimens of biography were presented relevant to two established fields of study: "History of Religion" and "Religion and Psychological Studies." This endeavor, later augmented to include invited papers for a book that was envisaged, led to this very heterogeneous work. Because the essays embodied such diverse methods and strikingly different styles, the editors (who contributed essays of their own as well) undertook a search for order. The result is a splendid introduction of thirty pages which in my opinion merits a title of its own.

Reynolds and Capps, the editors, wisely chose not to introduce and describe piecemeal the subsequent papers, but to analyze the state of affairs

in biographical writing and research, with special emphasis on works encompassed by history, anthropology, and psychology of religion, and to leave the papers as diverse illustrations of their findings. Without their introduction, which might well be called "A Critical Study of the Biographical Process," the reading of the subsequent papers would have been a frustrating business; therefore, I will mostly try to convey the order that Reynolds and Capps perceive.

Some recent "grandfathers" of biography loom large in the editors' minds: Eliade, Erikson, Kretschmer, Kris, Radin, Kluckhohn, and Rank, all of whom have struggled with one or another facet of the mytho-historic nature of biographical writings in the history, anthropology, and psychology of religion and who have bequeathed certain approaches to the contemporary scene. From their landmark texts and the works of others, Reynolds and Capps distill three separate assessments of the biographical process.

First, historians of religion have addressed "sacred biography," i.e., accounts written by devotees of a religious founder or savior. Reynolds