BOOKS and REVIEWS

The Exploding Metropolis

By the Editors of Fortune. 193 pp. New York. Doubleday & Company Inc. $3.95.

Reviewed by
TOM PHILLIPS

"This is a book by people who like cities," says William H. Whyte, Jr., in his introduction to "The Exploding Metropolis."

"Everybody," Whyte continues, "it would seem, is for the rebuilding of our cities . . . But this is not the same thing as liking cities. It is the contention of this book that most of the rebuilding under way and in prospect is being designed by people who don't like cities. They do not merely dislike the noise and the dirt and the congestion. They dislike the city's variety and concentration, its tension, its hustle and bustle."

The several editors of Fortune, whose articles make up this fascinating book, elaborate well upon the thesis set forth by Whyte. In doing so, they demolish several theories now, unfortunately, reguarded as gospel by those with the power to change the face of the city.

DOWNTOWN, the editors point out, is for people. But the planners who dream of changing downtown apparently do not realize this. Consequently, this is what their shiny new projects will look like:

They will be spacious, parklike, and uncrowded . . . They will be stable and symmetrical and orderly. They will be clean, impressive, and monumental. They will have all the attributes of a well-kept, dignified cemetery."

The trouble with the planners, the editors point out, is that they forget cities are for people and not the other way around.

BY DESTROYING the unique "tradition and flavor" which mark this nation's great cities with an overabundance of expressways, civic centers, sterile redevelopment centers and lifeless towers, the planners succeed only in driving the citizens to the suburbs and exurbs.

This in turn complicates the problems already facing the city, since it is the citizens of the parasitic border communities who demand the most from the city proper while contributing the least.

The problems facing the great cities of this nation are many, but they are not insurmountable. Imagination, strong leadership and the aroused interest of the citizenry are a few of the needs suggested in "The Exploding Metropolis."

As the editors observe: "Designing a dream city is easy; rebuilding a living one takes imagination."

The Work of Saint Francis

By MacKinlay Kantor. 107 pp. Cleveland, 1958. The World Publishing Co. $2.75.

Reviewed by
James J. Dolan

Blanco is a Spanish lad who has known only poverty and want, and who, because of his perfectly natural desire for some of the little material things in life, has become a petty thief and finds himself a ward of Brother Marco in a reformatory.

Kantor very deftly and powerfully tells the story of how Blanco plans, escapes, avoids the police and finds his boyish dreams of wealth come true when he is sole witness to the auto accident of two rich tourists.

Like a deus ex machina, shapes on the landscape seem to Blanco a vision of Saint Francis and Brother Marco and set up the conflict in which the nobler elements within Blanco prevail. He sacrifices his dream of freedom and wealth in order to bring aid to the desparately injured tourists.

ALTHOUGH quite short, Kantor's story brings the reader very close to the working of Blanco's mind and lets him almost feel the suffering, sense the scheming and then glory in the winning of the great conflict.

Strangers When We Met

By Evan Hunter. 375 pp. New York. Simon and Schuster. $4.50.

Reviewed by
Donald A. Yates

"Strangers When We Met" reads much like a documentary report, an extended and detailed one. What it reports on is marital infidelity.

As he examined far below the surface of a "tough" high school "Blackboard Jungle," so has Evan Hunter gone far beyond the surface implications and complexities of infidelity. This novel relates, from the first moment of the affair to the tragic end of one of its participants, the lustful liaison between architect Larry Cole and the wife of another man.

The story is set in a low-priced suburban subdivision where both participants live with their families. Fully aware of their responsibilities and their allegiances, the two young people surrender to the appeal of the circumstances, to the seeming propitiousness of the moment in their lives.

AT FIRST slowly, tentatively, they approach each other and discover that there is a mutual appeal. Once this is clear to them—and thinking that this much is sufficient justification for their intimacy—there is no restraint, and Larry's feelings for the woman begin to increase to a point beyond his control.

She is sincere, but she is not what Lary thinks she is. He is committed to finding this out while experiencing an acute period of crisis and doubts about his feeling for his own wife and family.

THE AFFAIR, of course, is too demanding to be kept entirely secret, and when another man in the subdivision makes his knowledge known to Larry, the latter's wife becomes more susceptible to hurt than one might suspect, not knowing the third party's lecherous tendencies.

The climax of the story seems unmotivated, and suggests an air of fatality not present in the first 350 pages.

The Idea Of Freedom

By Mortimer J. Adler. 620 pp. New York. Doubleday. $7.50.

Reviewed by
Byron Farwell

The product of the labor of The Institute of Philosophical Research, created and headed by Mortimer Adler, is an exhaustive and exhausting study of the concept of freedom.

Complete with hundreds of footnotes, a 22 page index, and a 41 page bibliography, this two-and-one-half inch thick tome is guaranteed to frighten away the casual reader and the philosophical dilettante.

Before getting into the actual discussion of freedom, there are 122 pages of philosophical discussion and controversy, including disagreements about definitions, dialectical hypotheses, the use of dialectic, and the future of philosophy.

THE MEAT of the book takes up a variety of concepts. For example, there are sections on "the variety of external circumstances," "the variety of acquirements," and "the variety of natural endowments." There is also a good bit of impersonal discussion on "self." This takes the form of three major sections on "self-realization," "self-perfection," and "self-determination." All this, of course, is discussed in its relationship to freedom.

But in spite of chapters with titles such as "Creativity through Choice as an Element in the Meaning of Self-Determination," the book is perhaps as well written as the depth of its subject allows in so comprehensive and scholarly a work.

MORTIMER ADLER has devoted a considerable portion of his adult life to the classification of great ideas and he has done a remarkably good job of it so far. His earlier "Syntopicon" broke down 443 great books into 102 great ideas and indexed them. Wtih this effort—a lifetime's work for most scholars — behind him, Adler in 1952 set about an even greater task: to summarize all the wisdom of the western world. "The Idea of Freedom" is the first step toward that ambitious goal.