

marsh shapes and frustrations, with an unassailable sense of the joyful and inevitable births yet to come.

Bertrand Mathieu

THE APOGEE OF MALIGNANT AGGRESSION

The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness. By Erich Fromm. Holt, Rinehart & Winston, New York. \$10.95.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY has abounded in examples of destruction and violence on a depersonalized, unprecedented scale. Violence and cruelty existed in other eras, but modern technology has made possible the devastation by human beings of other human beings at long distances, and the makers of policy in the world's superpowers have had the luxury of disposing of human lives without ever having to accuse themselves of anything more serious than being "tough-minded." The students of human behavior have been unable to understand the phenomenon, and the discussion of human aggression has in general been sidetracked in the sterile debate between two schools of thought: those that view aggression as instinctive, and those that view it as learned.

Erich Fromm, in his masterful new work, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, at last moves beyond the nature versus nurture controversy, synthesizing the work of psychologists, anthropologists, historians, and other social scientists to propose some new hypotheses about the sources of violence between human beings. While he does not fully accept either theory, he discusses both Freud's instinctivism, which is related to Freud's discussion of the death instinct, and that of Konrad Lorenz, which views human aggression as having the same source as aggression in animals and as being basically defensive (for example, defense of territory). Fromm then contrasts these instinctual theories with the behaviorism of B. F. Skinner, who argues that, genetic endowment aside, behavior is determined by reward and reinforcement.

Fromm discusses the two positions, criticizing each as incomplete, and then proceeds to offer his own analysis, which draws on both but is considerably more than a synthesis. In Fromm's view, human aggression cannot be understood until it is divided further into two categories: defensive aggression, which is basically the aggression seen in animals and which is the subject of Lorenz's work, and malignant aggression, a characteristic only of humans, which involves violence and killing without any social or biological purpose. Malignant aggression, then, is the equivalent of destructiveness, and it is with this concept that he is concerned during the major part of the book.

For Fromm, malignant aggression is a character-related passion, associated with various psychological disorders such as sadism, masochism, and necrophilia. It results, Fromm argues, from "the interaction of social conditions with man's existential needs." Therefore, the two variables which must be studied in relation to the phenomenon are precisely social conditions and human needs, both factors generally ignored by earlier theorists. Fromm proceeds to argue that as civilization has advanced beyond hunter-gatherer societies into societies characterized by hierarchy and the extraction of economic surplus from one social stratum by another, social conditions have fulfilled less and less those psychic needs which individuals feel. These needs involve an object of devotion and feelings of relatedness, unity, and rootedness. They may be met by a "life-furthering" syndrome, characterized by love, justice, reason, and solidarity; or by the "life-thwarting" syndrome, a combination of elements such as sadomasochism, destructiveness, greed, narcissism, and incestuousness. The way of meeting social conditions may be a response of solidarity, brotherliness, love, and transcendental mystical experience; or it may be drug addiction, depersonalization, and anomie.

Fromm illustrates the destructive syndrome with a number of examples, such as the actions of Stalin, who practiced extensively both physical and mental sadism, and those of Hitler, a necrophiliac or "death-lover." It is easy for the reader to extrapolate beyond and think of examples of malignant aggression in more recent times, such as the Christmastime bombing of North Vietnam in 1972, and the ghastly example of a society turned necrophiliac, as in the Colombian violence of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, in which 300,000 people died in an arbitrary and erratic socialization of the most abnormal and chaotic personal violence.

In this work, Fromm has dramatically illustrated what most people are unwilling to face: that modern society, far from moving away from the era of barbarity and human violence, has, in the twentieth century, brought it to its apogee. Though Fromm himself indicates that the position which he takes in this book is "one of rational faith in man's capacity to extricate himself from what seems the fatal web of circumstances that he has created," it is impossible to put this book down without a sense of urgency born of despair at the human condition. The reader can only hope that the world will be fortunate enough to have other critics who will follow Fromm's lead and who will be able to indicate directions for society which will lead us back to unity, a respect for and closeness to others, and a new community.

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