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## Analyzing Aggression

THE ANATOMY OF HUMAN DESTRUCTIVENESS. By Erich Fromm. Holt, Rinehart & Winston, \$10.95.

◆ THIS audacious, provocative and often lucid work was originally conceived as the initial volume of a comprehensive work on psychoanalytic theory. Fromm realized that to analyze aggression and destructiveness successfully he would have to transcend the discipline of psychoanalysis; hence, this treatise teems with insights gleaned from a conscientious (if often selective) review of relevant literature in neurophysiology, animal psychology, paleontology and anthropology.

Fromm's attempts to construct a global view of the problem of destructiveness are not completely successful. But his work is suggestive and stimulating. Impatient with fuzzy and equivocal uses of the concept of aggression, he declares that if acts of destruction, protection and construction are all defined as aggression, then we are trapped in a theoretical quagmire. Yet the issue of the origins and nature of human destructiveness remains. As Niko Tinbergen notes, "Man is the only species that is a mass murderer, the only misfit in his own society."

Fromm acutely dissects the parade of orthodoxies concerning instincts and human passions. He sharply disagrees with Konrad Lorenz's *On Aggression*, which simplistically carries over into human society neoinstinctivist theories originating in the selective study of animal behavior. Fromm is equally critical of the "territorial imperative" hypothesis of playwright Robert Ardrey and the neo-behaviorism of B. F. Skinner. He declares that only an in-depth analysis of our entire social system can uncover the roots of human destructiveness.

Fromm asserts that such is the variety in the degrees of destructiveness among human beings that we can scarcely assume that destructiveness and cruelty are innate. In fact, he finds that "the degree of destructiveness increases with the increased development of civilization, rather than the opposite." The author then differentiates between "benign-defensive" and "malignant-destructive" aggression, and between organic drives and those rooted in man's character. Though he proceeds from the perspective of psychoanalysis, Fromm stresses the sociobiological point of view, departing markedly from the classical Freudian libido theory.

To Fromm, the character-rooted passions are a "sociobiological, historical category." Existentially, man seeks drama and excitement. Tragically, when he cannot achieve higher satisfactions, "he creates for himself the drama of destruc-

tion." Thus, when the implicit principle of society becomes "the conquest of nature by the machine" and humans are entangled in the perverse socialism of the war system, it is no wonder that the cry is "Long live Death." The simple clarity of death becomes more tolerable than the ambiguities and frustrations of life.

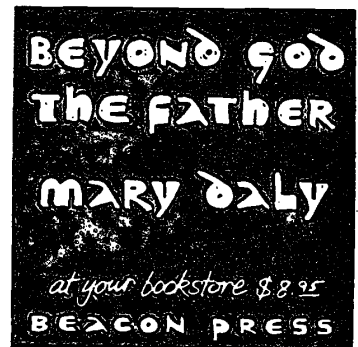
Fromm casts his scholarly net widely, meticulously critiques the work of Freud, and updates his own writings. Given his audacity, it is not surprising that portions of this volume are problematic. Despite several attenuated sections devoted to the problem of war (that most sophisticated and terrifying form of mass destructiveness), Fromm avoids a sustained discussion of this phenomenon. His analyses of biophilia (the love of life) and necrophilia (the love of death) are fascinating, but the concepts continue to be imprecise as diagnostic categories.

His brief discussions of Himmler and Stalin and the more detailed treatment of Hitler reflect acute clinical insight. But the key question remains: How far can psychobiographies of particular individuals carry us toward an understanding of mass organized violence? It is, after all, governments rather than individuals that wage war. Fromm himself suggests, that in a different sociopolitical context, Hitler could not have achieved

supremacy. Hitler was neither madman nor genius, nor was he unique; it was the societal situation that allowed him to secure his horrifying ascendancy. Ultimately, then, Fromm's analysis suffers most when he explains sociopolitical phenomena in dominantly psychological and clinical vocabularies.

Despite these limitations, Fromm's examination of human destructiveness constitutes a radical humanist affirmation that man can indeed avoid the ultimate catastrophe. His investigation will surely stimulate others to address more completely that sociopolitical realm within which Fromm himself finds the crucial triggers for both creativity and malignant aggression.

RICHARD O. HATHAWAY.



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