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Fromm explains options

# Two different aggressions recognized

**The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness**  
By Erich Fromm  
Holt, Rinehart & Winston,  
527 pages, \$10.95

Although it is not generally known Sigmund Freud in the 1920's formulated a new theory involving the death instinct or what might be called the passion to destroy. This passion to destroy is, according to Freud, as powerful as the life instinct or the passion to love.

In 1966 Konrad Lorenz wrote a book entitled *On Aggression* and in 1967 *The Naked Ape* appeared. There were other books as well but all of them had as their major theme man's aggressive behavior. These books concluded that such destructive behavior is the result of innate instinctive behavior. This theory is called instinctivism. The opposite view, the most widely accepted psychological theory today, is that of behaviorism. Behaviorists believe that man acts as he does because of social conditioning.

Erich Fromm, the celebrated and respected author of this book, believes there is another option in explaining man's behavior. Fromm writes that two entirely different kinds of aggression must be recognized in man.

The first which he shares with animals and could be considered instinctive is labeled by Fromm as benign aggression which operates in the service of survival. This benign aggression stops when the threat to survival has stopped.

The other type Fromm identifies as malignant aggression, occurring when man kills without biological or social purpose, is absent in most mammals except man and its satisfaction in lustful depending on destructiveness and cruelty as motivating forces. It is this malignant aggression that Fromm sees as the advancing danger to man's existence as a species. The main thrust of this book is to scrutinize and then to analyze the nature and the conditions of this destructive aggression.

Fromm's latest book is not for the casual reader. It is a complex and demanding work that obviously demanded a great deal of thought and consideration from its author. Only the most concentrated effort can succeed in those sections of the book that deal with neurophysiology, paleontology and anthropology. Some prior knowledge in these areas is essential if any real comprehension is to take place.

This is a book that looks carefully, very carefully, at great masses of evidence-involving the respective instinctivist and

behaviorist theories.

The largest section of the book deals with Fromm's theories on aggression, both benign and malignant. Here he details the passions of man and he explains they can only be understood if they are recognized for what they are: "man's attempt to make sense of life and to experience the optimum of intensity and strength he can (or believes he can) achieve under the given circumstances."

He recognizes that while the life-furthering passions are conducive to solving problems in life so are destructiveness and cruelty a way of handling the problems that life brings. Fromm further points out that understanding cruelty and destructiveness is not condoning them. By understanding them we can hopefully reduce the social conditions that foster them. Necrophilia is the passion to destroy life, the attraction to all that is dead, decaying and purely mechanical.

Fromm's new work, although it is frequently technical, is never mechanical. It speaks with feeling as well as thought. While it speaks of decay, its message is growth. Its passion is constructiveness and the never-ending possibilities of love and life.

*Robert Kelly*

