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RELEASE NO. 403  
FOR RELEASE ON OR AFTER  
FEBRUARY 5, 1974

Columbia Features, Inc.  
36 West 44th Street  
New York, New York 10036

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IT'S MY OPINION

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By Irene Corbally Kuhn

A book of some 521 pages, with fourteen pages of bibliography consisting of the titles of books and papers by well over 300 scholars and writers, is a formidable book, indeed, if only in the gross weight of its scholarship. When it is the work of the German-born and-educated Erich Fromm, the distinguished psychoanalyst, social philosopher and author of twenty other highly acclaimed books, it must be taken seriously. Its title, too, "Anatomy of Human Destructiveness" (Holt, Rinehart & Winston), is further evidence this is no lightweight intellect flitting through the dark corridors of the human mind and personality.

Dr. Fromm's book which he considers his greatest achievement, his masterwork, really, is a long analysis of man's condition. It is almost as if Dr. Fromm had put the United States and American society on the couch in his office. With the nation prone on its back he was able to extract the country's account of its past, starting with its sharp, bloody wrench from the Mother Country, the cutting of the umbilical cord attaching it to its colonial parent, the years of trail and error, of steady and often painful progress through nearly two centuries to our violent present.

Dr. Fromm finds the nation in a sad state. Our rampant industrialism, he avers, is not a blessing but a curse which has tended to diminish man and make his life seem unimportant to him. We have become the world's most destructive society, he says.

American society has soured for Dr. Fromm, now 73 years of age, and no longer the optimistic youth who came here from Germany forty years ago. Many will agree with him but millions of Americans, of whom I am one, feel differently.

When Dr. Fromm came to this country in 1934, after graduating from the Berlin Psychoanalytic Institute and completing his graduate studies at the University of Heidelberg, Hitler had been Chancellor of Germany for one year. Then, in 1934, after Nazi conspirators assassinated Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss, of Austria, and Germany's President von Hindenburg had died, Hitler consolidated the offices of President and Chancellor and became Germany's Fuehrer.

The young scholar Fromm left behind him all this and the succeeding horrors in his native land when he became a naturalized citizen of the United States. His great success in this country does not warrant his description of us as "the world's most destructive society." There are many things wrong with our society, but they

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are the same things which are wrong in other Western societies and, indeed, worse things are present in the totalitarian societies.

Some of our troubles derive from a tendency to blame errors on others, and from refusal to accept individual blame and personal responsibility. But this is a present to our society from the psychoanalysts who sat at the feet of the Viennese Guru, Dr. Sigmund Freud. They gave their patients a way to escape blame and shame for their acts by putting the burden on the patient's mother. Even in literature, and especially such filthy nonsense as the bestselling "Portnoy's Complaint" a few years ago, it was his mother who made Portnoy the mess he was-- according to the author. It has become accepted practice for many everywhere to "pass the buck."

In all this passage of arms between scholars, and especially the behaviorists, the jealously-held views of one at variance with another's, cannot but confuse students and followers who then further obscure the truth by a razzle-dazzle of their own modern theories which they proceed to promote.

Dr. Fromm may be an optimist in his personal life, one who says he believes there is a moral residue in America composed of our religious and humane tradition and hopes for a triumphant vindication of human dignity.

But are we not entitled to assume pessimism and despair have taken him over? In his dedication to his profession, the decades spent in exploring the unhealthy caverns of man's mind, Dr. Fromm has seen more shadow and storm than sunshine. A scholar who has been closeted so long with mental demons is, perhaps, a prisoner of his own theories, unable to discern the vast, fertile greenness of American society, its health and vitality, for the wasteland of these dark theories and imaginings.

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