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Necrophilous Nazis et al.

By DAVE KUSHMA

of Human The Anatomy Destructiveness by Erich Fromm. Holt, Rinehart and Winston. 521 pp, \$10.95.

social theories of psychologist Erich Fromm are significant, if for no other reason than that they have gained wide

books

circulation and acceptance in both scholarly and popular circles, with the publication of such books as Escape from Freedom and The Art of Loving. The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness is the attempt of Human self-proclaimed "radical humanist" to explain the lust for violence and brutality as a seemingly inevitable aspect of the behavior of "civilized" man. In so doing, Fromm challenges the most basic assumptions of his professional contemporaries and delivers a blistering scientific indictment of progressive technical culture.

Fromm is critical of the instinctivist theory, as proposed by Konrad Lorenz in On Agression. that all aggressive behavior, in man as well as in animals, is based upon an innate, propensity

higher, more complex ones. It erns to lead to the rationalization that nothing can be done about destructiveness and cruelty, since they are inevitable products of "human nature." Essentially, the instinctivists' idolatry of Dar-winism is nothing more than "romantic, nationalistic paganism."

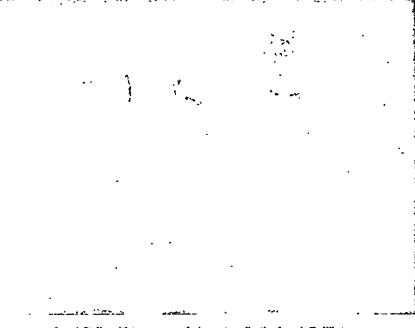
He comes down equally hard on B.F. Skinner's neobehaviorist theory-that acts of agression result strictly from social conditioning. Branding Skinner "a naive rationalist who ignores man's passions," Fromm subman's passions, Fromm sub-mits that behaviorism places self-interest above all other values, and justifies human exploitation. Ultimately Fromm dismisses both instinctivism and behaviorism as "either-or" theories that refuse to admit the possibility of man's personal responsibility for his actions.

Believing that human des-tructiveness can be seen as the specific interaction between a given character structure and a given social structure, Fromm postulates the existence of two distinct types of aggression. benign and malignant. All animals share equally the potential for benign aggression, a biologically-adaptive defensive biologically-adaptive defensive response to threats against vital interests. But human existence is more complex: man can percieve future threats to his wellbeing as well as present ones; he can be brainwashed into

sense of his life, to relate to the human and natural worlds around hum, to act, to feel, to devote himself toward a goal. This is accomplished through the

modern man as more intent upon the acquisition and assimilation of things than upon the formation of relations with other people. This concern, when found in an

burgeois respectability with his dismal failure in high school and as a commercial artist. and suggests that the Nazi ideology he formulated was



Joseph Stalin, with two women admirers at a collective farm in Tadjikstan

use of the character-rooted passions, which largely take the place of instincts in man.

Malignant aggression characteristic only characteristic only Homo sapiens, and consists of cruelty and destruction done to no purpose except the satisfaction gained from the performance itself. Contrary to common belief, the prehistoric society of hunters and food-gatherers was characterized by a minimum of destructive (or even defensive) aggression and a maximum of sharing and cooperation, according to the anthropological evidence Fromm presents. He suggests that violence and cruelty grew in direct proportion to the spread of "civilization" and the role of

Why should this be so? Fromm considers the question from two standpoints—the historical and the psychoanalytical. The increased productivity of modern society, the division of labor, the establishment of surplus product, the formation of patriarchal elites—these factors had detrimental as well as beneficial effects. War became a viable method of achieving economic growth. The dense crowding of industrial centers, urban resulting in poverty and reduction of living space, also fostered increased aggressiveness. As technical and cultural progress became more important than personal freedom, the destruction of an accommodating social structure caused individual isolation. depression, impotence, boredom.

Having described the social character which was conducive to the development of mangnant aggression, Fromm uses the tools of psychoanalysis to determine the individual determine the individual character structure which will manifest such behavior. He sees

individual whose characterrooted passions are irrational (i.e., which tend to weaken the adequate functioning and growth of the character structure) may show itself in any of a number of mental illnesses related to malignant aggression, such as sadism, masochism, and narcissism.

Related to sadomasochism in Fromm's syndrome of character-related passions resulting in malignant aggression necrophilia: the attraction everything dead, decaying OL purely mechanical, the will to destroy life for the sake of destruction. This is contrasted with biophilia, the passionate love of life, and this dichotomy suggests to Fromm the fun-damental human alternative. The necrophilous character admires property over human interaction: the "love" he feels for his fast car is literally real. He worships technology as a substitute for life and regards his body as an instrument for economic success rather than self-actualization.

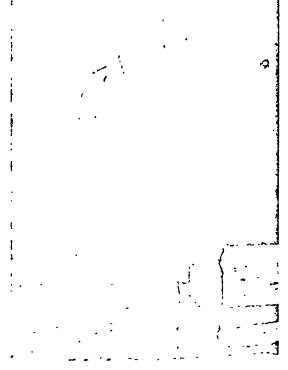
The most fascinating segment of Fromm's book is his extended psychobiographical treatment of Adolf Hitler-a clinical case of necrophilia. A similar technique was used in showing the presence of the nonsexual-sadistic character in Joseph Stalin, and anal-hoarding sadism in Heinrich Himmler. Fromm demonstrates that Hitler's narcissism was fed by his doting mother and aggravated by his stern, authoritarian father. His His laziness, boredom, a felt lack of freedom as a child could be overcome only through his engagement in war games with other boys-an activity he continued up to the age of sixteen. Fromm contrasts Hitler's fantasies of achieving wealth and

rationalization for the destructiveness of his necrophilous character. His choice of character. His choice of "defective" humans as fit ob-jects for slaughter reflected his psychopathic passion to apart living structures."

No attempt will be made here to refute or champion Fromm's major theories because the book is worth reading in any case: this is not solely due to the intrinsic significance of the book's subject, but also to the manner in which Fromm argues his case-a far more interesting presentation brief, selective recapitualation presented here.

The objections which may be raised to the book deal more with form than with content. Fromm's prose style has a tendency to become lumbering and repetitive, occasionally lapsing into jargon or the cliches of revolutionary rhetoric. At times, he will quote at excessive length from the works of other scientists who support his positions, and dismiss-or ignore-the existence of opinions to the contrary. The reader is thus left to wonder how many of the original conclusions drawn in some parts of the book are really Fromm's own.

Given the nature and scope of his undertaking, however, these are minor flaws, to be forgiven. What Fromm says—that What Fromm says-that destructive aggression is not mevitable and may be reduced significantly without going beyond freedom and dignitymeans a great deal more than how he says it. This is scarcely a new concept, but one which has new concept, out one which may traditionally met with cynical indifference by students of "human nature." Fromm proposes a humanistic approach that is radical only in the sense that it demands changes that can and should be made.



An anal-hoarding sadist (Heinrich Himmler) chats with a "clinical case of necrophilia" (Adolph Hitler).

to act violently. In other words, fighting is not primarily a reaction to environmental stimuli, but a manifestation of inner excitation seeking taneous release. Fromm refutes this hydraulic concept, as well as Lorenz's attempt to "prove" its validity by drawing analogies between simple life forms and

imagining dangers where none really are; and his range of vital are much irterests Specifically, he must satisfy existential needs as well as physiological, survival-oriented ones.

By "existential needs" Fromm means man's striving to make