



stake that infidelity really does not matter? Will it mean that there is so little psychological dependency in the relationship that a threat of its loss is only a minor misfortune, not a major catastrophe?

How many people can one love or be attached to at the same time? If one is “true”—in one’s own fashion—to several persons at once, what is the quality of the relationships? Does anyone really have enough resources to supply the psychological dependency needs of several persons?

*The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness.* By Erich Fromm. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973. 478 pp. \$10.95.

Reviewed by Sophie Loewenstein, Ph.D., Simmons College School of Social Work, Boston, Massachusetts.

Erich Fromm in *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* addresses himself to perhaps the most urgent contemporary problem on which the survival of mankind has come to depend. The forbidding bulk of the book should not discourage a busy reader, for the book provides generous rewards in terms of comprehensive knowledge of the available research and theories on aggression as well as stimulating and exciting new insights into human nature. A lively literary style carries the reader forward without effort.

The first half of the book is devoted to an almost painstaking refutation of prevailing theories of aggression that regard it as instinctive—the traditional psychoanalytic view—or as a phylogenetically programmed propensity—the ethologists’ view, best expressed by Konrad Lorenz. Both schools view aggression as an inevitable part of human nature which must find more or less destructive paths for expression.

For the major refutation of these views, Fromm draws on paleontology and anthropology. He depicts neolithic society as having been essentially peaceful and egalitarian, and he describes a number of primitive “life-affirming” societies which practice mutual trust, cooperation, and kindness. In such societies, he found a minimum of competition, envy, greed, and exploitation—characteristics that gained ascendancy with the advent of increased productivity, private property, and the establishment of the patriarchal family. Fromm reinforces and agrees with Ashley Montagu who also emphasizes the destructive nature of such values as power, glory, success, and honor. Both authors use the anthropological veto: If there are times and places where a certain view of human na-

ture does not apply, then such a view must be culture-bound and does not reflect innate traits.

Fromm is equally opposed to a behavioristic view that regards aggression like any other form of learned behavior, under the control of wisely administered positive and negative reinforcement schedules. He resists a view of man as a helpless puppet pulled by the strings of instincts and conditioning. He argues that B. F. Skinner’s “theory rings true because it is (almost) true for the alienated man of cybernetic society” but suggests that humanity’s survival depends on the preservation of freedom and dignity, flaunted by Skinner. He also reminds us that situations alone, even when extreme, do not shape behavior; even in concentration camps some men were able to preserve a measure of freedom and choice.

For a humanist like Fromm, any understanding of behavior that omits motivation and intent is meaningless. However, this reviewer feels unsettled by Fromm’s view that it is the intent rather than the results that most matter in viewing behavior. In interpreting the Milgram experiment on obedience, Fromm is not devastated by the inclination of the majority of subjects to submit to authority to the point of violence; rather, he takes solace from the fact that most subjects electrocuted others (or thought they did) with great mental anguish and reluctance. A dead child at My Lai is a dead child, regardless of the soldiers’ mental anguish.

In the second half of the book, Fromm dissects every aspect of human destructiveness, from accidental, defensive, conformist, and instrumental aggression to malignant aggression, describing and examining causes of each kind. Fromm’s careful differentiation of the various forms of aggressive behavior is an outstanding distinction of his book. He distinguishes the innate impulse to attack when vital interests are threatened—an impulse present in all animals—from the malignant, lustful, and willful cruelty and aggression peculiar to man alone. The omission of such a distinction leads Anthony Storr to equate aggression with learning and mastery and to obscure rather than enlighten the problem. Fromm’s careful differentiation of distinct forms of aggression allows the social reformer to consider different remedies for each type of aggression.

At the end of the book, Fromm gives profiles of contemporary historic figures who have practiced malignant aggression, showing how aggression can be a “character-rooted passion.” Although these profiles make absorbing reading, they were not enlightening to this reviewer,



## Book reviews

who found them descriptive, rather than explanatory. Stalin is portrayed as an example of a man whose sadomasochistic character structure drove him to seek absolute control over the life and death of others. Himmler is described as a spoiled mamma's boy; his mother sent food packages to her son in military service. Himmler's central flaw is described as an extreme form of an "anal-hoarding, bureaucratic, authoritarian character." To explain Hitler, Fromm revives a diagnostic label, the necrophilous character who suffers from a passion to destroy all living things. It is never clearly explained how Hitler acquired such a character. Both Hitler and Himmler had apparently loving mothers, forcing this reader to abandon reluctantly the idea that cruelty arises mainly from the lack of a basic attachment experience. However, both Hitler and Himmler suffered humiliating blows to their self-esteem in adolescence. Gregory Rochlin's thesis relating aggression and violence to injured narcissism and excessive narcissistic vulnerability might have provided a more unifying theme than the malignant character structures hypothesized by Fromm.

These profiles leave the reader with the vague impression that much violence in history is simply caused by a few highly pathological individuals, a theory which is actually contrary to Fromm's real conviction, expressed elsewhere in the book, that destructiveness can only flourish in a sick society. The main thesis of Fromm's book is to convince the reader that human nature is not innately evil, thus making the hope for building a better society not a utopian dream but an urgent necessity and possibility. This book displays Erich Fromm's vast erudition and his devotion to humanistic scholarship. This reviewer recommends his book highly.

*Consumers in Trouble. A Study of Debtors in Default.* By David Caplovitz. New York: The Free Press, 1974. 352 pp. \$10.95.

Reviewed by Patty Berg Dingle,  
Family Service of St. Paul,  
St. Paul, Minnesota.

*Consumers in Trouble* is a statistical study of default debtors in four major United States cities—New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Detroit. The author answers by use of statistics two major questions: why debtors default and what happens to them after they default.

His study focuses on consumers who de-

faulted on either installment loans or installment purchases of merchandise. It is limited to cases where some type of legal action was initiated. The above factors—only four cities and two types of consumer credit surveyed and inclusion of only default debtors with legal action filed—point out the narrow scope of the study. However, a comprehensive study of credit would cover volumes. David Caplovitz points out these limitations throughout the book.

Caplovitz reveals near-horrors in credit transactions. He uses case examples to explain how the phenomenal growth of installment credit has been a boon to deceptive and fraudulent marketing practices and how the law has failed to keep abreast of the abrupt changes. He points out many needed changes in our credit and court systems. Aside from the mountains of statistics, there is a wealth of knowledge in the book. Credit terms and legal terms are explained simply and precisely. A novice in the credit field with any interest in the subject could gain a usable foundation from which to expand.

He studies the sociological impact of harassment, repossession, and garnishment. These findings correlate closely with what this reviewer finds in working on a day-to-day basis with consumers, credit, and creditors. Collectors eventually must take note of the reverse effect harsh techniques in the collection of money have on the debtor. It would be impossible to review all the empirical data presented in the book, which is comprehensive, yet simple to read. It is an absolute must for anyone working in a financial counseling position.

*Providing Adequate Retirement Income. Pension Reform in the United States and Abroad.* By James Schulz, Guy Carrin, Hans Krupp, Manfred Peschke, Elliott Sclar, and J. Van Steenberg. Hanover, N.H.: The University Press of New England, 1974. 330 pp. \$15.00.

Reviewed by Joseph B. Kelley, D.S.W.,  
School of Social Work,  
San Diego State University,  
San Diego, California.

The six authors of *Providing Adequate Retirement Income* utilize a general framework to analyze retirement income in five countries: Sweden, West Germany, Belgium, Canada, and the United States. In addition, a simulation analysis is utilized to play out German-type and Swedish-type social security systems for the United States.

A central analytical concept is the replace-