

Of Human Cruelty And Its Origins

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

PROFESSIONAL concern over the increase in human violence has moved from the stage of fascination to the level of real anxiety. Physical confrontations between individuals are exceeded only by growing hostilities between nations. Erich Fromm, the noted psychoanalyst, has dug beneath the surface manifestations of this problem, and in his latest book, examines some of the hidden forces which created it.

Optimists who have felt all along that "man is getting better and better" will get no encouragement here. Indeed, Fromm makes it uncomfortably clear that human cruelty has increased, not decreased, as civilization has advanced. Dr. Fromm's books, and there have been twenty or more, have usually been asso-

ciated with optimism. Earlier titles include "The Art of Loving" and "The Recovery of Hope." This one, however, deals more with the dark underside of human nature.

The chief contribution of this particular book, to me at least, is a much-needed clarification of the wide spectrum of destructiveness within human beings. This ranges from the defensive syndrome to a malignant one, and even these terms are not synonymous with aggression. Fromm maintains that defensiveness is not unique to man, that all animals have a built-in instinct for survival. The malignant form of destruction, however, is not innate in other animals, whereas in some people, at least, it takes the form of sadism, and even a kind of necrophilia, the preoccupation with death and decay.

The author is also helpful in his discussion of B. F. Skinner, the behaviorist, and Konrad Lorenz, the instinctivist, plowing a middle ground between them. He is still the rational-humanist, and has faith

in man's capacity to solve the problem. Man may be "the only primate that kills and tortures his own species," but man has also been known to change his personal attitudes, and he certainly can change his environment.

The study is scholarly but will probably be too technical for popular readers. We are all acquainted with words like frustration and hostility, but this book is not for the Reader's Digest crowd.

Just as we cannot talk of Man these days without at least a nod at Woman, we should be cautious to remember that we are dealing with individual people as well as "homo sapiens"; different societies, too, must be treated differently. The proper study of mankind is man, as Pope once said, but we shouldn't fall into the trap of universalizing concepts. Maybe we should ask for another study by Fromm, not so much on why man destroys, but why man also builds; not just why we still make war, but why some persons work for peace.



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