

BOOKS

CLEANING UP FREUD

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

Erich Fromm is such a reasonable and humane man that one almost feels guilty criticizing him. Nonetheless *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* is an irritating book, and since it has already received several friendly reviews, perhaps this is the proper time and forum for the opposition to be heard.

Fromm has a single topic: the causes of aggression. He devotes the first third of the book to a critique of two popular explanations of human destructiveness, those of the instinctualists and the behaviorists. The former, represented here by Freud and Konrad Lorenz, argue that aggression is innate. Lorenz supports his contention with analogies drawn from animal behavior, while Freud's rests on abstract metapsychological considerations. The behaviorists, most prominently B.F. Skinner, hold that aggression is a product of conditioning, and in a number of clever experiments they pretend to demonstrate that any person can be programmed to destroy.

Fromm effectively dissects the weaknesses of both positions. In fact his critique is the only fully satisfactory portion of the book. The instinctualists, he shows, mistake a good deal of purely defensive behavior for aggression, and they are unable to account for the virtual absence of destructiveness in many societies. The behaviorists, for their part, ignore the underlying continuities in character development, as well as the basic biological and psychic needs that define the limits of conditioning.

When one turns from the critical to the constructive parts of the book the waters gradually cloud. Obviously Fromm wants to occupy a middle ground between his two antagonists, preserving the sense of psychological continuity championed by the instinctualists but allowing for the influence of circumstance—understood now not in the behaviorists' narrow sense of conditioning but as the more enduring realities of family and society. Unfortunately, no clear picture emerges of what

combination of individual, familial, and social factors can be expected to produce aggression. The exposition is further confused by Fromm's infatuation with the existentialist doctrine of radical freedom. On more than one occasion he asserts that human beings can to a considerable extent make of their lives what they will. If such is the case, then surely any effort to sort out the causes of aggression becomes meaningless.

I don't wish to dwell on the book's failure to provide a clear and ready explanation of human destructiveness. The matter is doubtless complex, the variables many, and the empirical work necessary to such an explanation far from complete. The book is annoying not primarily because of its inconclusiveness but because of its intellectual mannerisms.

For one thing it is insufferably pedantic. There are endless distinctions and definitions, many of which immediately disappear from view. It is as if one were permanently stuck in the introduction. Italics are applied with the heavy hand of an Indian chef dispensing curry. And we are forever being told what will be discussed "later on," the last such announcement coming only twenty-five pages from the end of the text. Granted these are matters of style, but they nonetheless distract from one's pleasure in reading the book.

Much more serious is Fromm's lack of intellectual rigor. He has a weakness for uplifting but unpersuasive generalizations about love, justice, creativity, and life. He also posits fine-sounding but dubious psychological propensities, such as "the need for a goal," or the need for "a frame of orientation and devotion." He is, in short, relentlessly tender minded, despite his somber and dispiriting topic.

Most objectionable of all is a habit of mind that might be called prurient sexlessness. It is not simply that Fromm dismisses sexual experience as "trivial" and "transitory"—a mere reflection, not an integral component, let alone a determinant, of character structure. If that were all, one could with conscience respect his opinion. But in fact he insists on abusing the language and categories of those intellectuals, such as Freud, who hold that sexual experience is of absolutely primary psychological importance.

For example, Fromm calls the two principal varieties of human destructiveness "sadism" and "necrophilia." Now, as we all know, sadism and necrophilia are sexual practices, recognized as such by every authority on human sexual behavior from the Marquis de Sade to William Masters and Virginia Johnson. Fromm, however, takes issue with this consensus. The sexual manifestations of sadism and necrophilia, he tells us, are but special instances of a general psychological orientation, and far from the most important. He is thus led to posit two new categories



of behavior: nonsexual sadism, defined as “the passion to have absolute and unrestricted control over a living being,” and nonsexual necrophilia, defined as “the passion to transform that which is alive into something unalive.” It is at this point that my anger is aroused. Even granting that these passions exist, why not simply call the first authoritarianism (or dominance, or something of the sort) and the second destructiveness? Why, in other words, impoverish the language by pinning manifestly sexual labels on forms of behavior that one insists all the while have nothing to do with sexuality? I can only conclude that one does so for prurient reasons.

It is not merely sexual categories that Fromm cannibalizes. Nearly all the bodily functions to which Freudians have attributed weighty psychological significance are treated similarly. Thus there is much talk about “anality,” particularly in Fromm’s discussion of Heinrich Himmler and Adolph Hitler, whom he treats as representatives of, respectively, the sadistic and necrophilic character structures. But anality turns out to have very little to do with anuses, feces, or elimination. It is simply Fromm’s lurid term for the traits of orderliness and pedantry. This usage would be justified had he retained the psychoanalytic derivation of such traits from the manner in which anal functions are handled in childhood. But of course he will have none of that. Again, he is entitled to his opinion, but he ought more honestly to speak simply of orderliness and pedantry rather than seeking to cash in on the shock value of psychoanalytic terminology while ignoring its substance.

Fromm reached the height of his popularity in the 1950s, and his influence cannot be dissociated from the complacency of that decade in our intellectual and cultural history. He stood for moderation, for the retreat from dogmatism (not only Freudian dogmatism but Marxist dogmatism as well—witness his transformation of Marx into an existential humanist in *Marx’s Concept of Man*), and for the conviction that personal fulfillment lay within each individual’s grasp. To be sure, his politics were to the left of those of most fifties intellectuals, but the differences were of degree rather than kind. In the 1960s, quite understandably, he suffered an eclipse, as more tough-minded and radical intellectuals, such as his old adversary Herbert Marcuse, came to the fore. One wonders, now, whether he will stage a comeback in what are shaping up as the conservative seventies. Many of the prerequisites for such a renaissance are there, including a tolerance for the religious enthusiasms of the moribund counterculture. Still, I doubt that *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* will enjoy the success of *The Art of Loving* or *The Sane Society*. It is too scholarly (as well as too political) to appeal to the audience that now reads *I’m O.K.—You’re O.K.* and *How To Be*

Your Own Best Friend, yet not scholarly enough to win the respect of academics (in nearly a hundred pages devoted to psychobiographies of Himmler and Hitler there is not a single reference to the two most prominent scholarly students of these subjects, Peter Loewenberg and Robert G. L. Waite). Unless therefore I misjudge the nostalgia mania, Fromm is no more likely to regain the limelight than Rosemary Clooney. He is now a figure out of our past, to be remembered with some annoyance and embarrassment, if also with a measure of affection.

Paul A. Robinson

BECAUSE AND BECOME

THE GEOGRAPHICAL HISTORY OF AMERICA OR THE RELATION OF HUMAN NATURE TO THE HUMAN MIND. By Gertrude Stein. Introduction by William H. Gass. Vintage. \$1.95.

“For a very long time everybody refuses,” Gertrude Stein wrote in 1926, “and then almost without a pause almost everybody accepts.” Yet almost without a pause, for a very long time indeed, Gertrude Stein has remained among the refused in modern literature. If at all, she is known as an early and intelligent advocate of Picasso’s art, as the literary midwife who scrubbed down Hemingway’s just-born style, or simply as an eminence who presided over a salon through which passed one by one the great artistic figures of her period—Picasso, Braque, Matisse, Calder, Lipschitz, Thomson, Pound, Wilder, Hemingway—artists whom everybody eventually accepted. The brief flare of celebrity that surrounded Gertrude Stein when she toured the United States in 1934–35 not only distorted her literary achievement (she was celebrated as the writer of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, not of *Tender Buttons* or *Lucy Church Amiably*), it also somewhat garishly reduced her complex style to an avant-garde version of Gracie Allen’s whimsical double-talk. Outside the circle of her notable friends and on her own, she seemed merely droll, someone to be drawn out and then patronized. When she was asked the meaning of “a rose is a rose is a rose” at the University of Chicago, she saw at once the questioner’s ironic presumption. “But I notice that you all know it,” she declared, “you make fun of it, but you know it. Now listen! I’m no fool. I know that in daily life we don’t go around saying ‘. . . is a . . . is a . . . is



entitled "Assuming Responsibility" in *Journey to Ixtlan*. After a heated discussion in which don Juan attempts to show Castaneda that once he (in childhood) had signified agreement with his father's plan to go swimming with him, it was his responsibility to fulfill his side of the bargain even if his father did not, Castaneda asks: "Why do you tell me all this, don Juan? Why are you doing this to me?"

The gravity of this conversation in which don Juan calls the attention of his apprentice to the responsibilities inherent in personal commitment and implicitly offers himself as a remedial parent belies the reviewer's overemphasis on the manipulative, the tempting, the clownish and illusionary aspects of the relationship.

Marie Coleman Nelson, Smithtown, N.Y.

Mr. Crapanzano replies:
Ms. Nelson has been "held back by the invisible wall of metaphor." There is no difference between the "journey within" and the "journey without," at least in the don Juan-Castaneda scheme of things. The "manipulative, the tempting, the clownish and illusionary" are not at loggerheads with the serious, the spiritual, the grace, and the therapeutic. To translate don Juan into a "remedial parent" and to describe his relationship to Castaneda in "psychoanalytic parlance" — I made use only of a metaphor from psychoanalysis — is to lose sight of the uniqueness of the relationship and, ultimately, of the significance of the books.

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