



FROMM-Online

Fromm on Aggression

Is man an instinctive killer, fated by his genes to be cruel and aggressive? Or is he a product of his environment who, with proper conditioning, would be gentle, peaceful and loving? Perhaps the most notable advocate of the "instinctivist" theory is Konrad Lorenz (*On Aggression*), co-winner of the 1973 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. Lorenz found instinctive aggression in animals and suggested that man is similarly programmed by evolution. Behaviorist B.F. Skinner, conversely, has long argued that man can be conditioned to forsake his violent ways. Now Erich Fromm, 73, social philosopher, psychoanalyst and bestselling author (*The Sane Society, The Art of Loving*), has written a new book, *The Anatomy of Human Destruction* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston; \$10.95), that challenges both schools of thought.

Lorenz is a fine observer of animals, Fromm concedes, who unfortunately "decided to venture out into a field in which he had little experience or competence, that of human behavior." Men and animals do fight instinctively to protect their vital interests—Fromm calls this "benign" aggression—but "only man seems to take pleasure in destroying life without any reason or purpose other than that of destroying." It is this "malignant" aggression that Lorenz has failed to identify and that now threatens man's very survival.

Manipulated Man. Fromm cites evidence to show that man's "malignant" lust for blood is not instinctive. He argues that "cooperation and sharing was a practical necessity for most hunting societies," and that historically, "warlikeness grows in proportion to civilization."

Yet Fromm does not agree with B.F. Skinner's plans for altering man through altering society. "Skinner," he writes, "recommends the hell of the isolated, manipulated man of the cybernetic age as the heaven of progress." According to Fromm, reinforcing peaceful behavior is not enough unless the reinforcers take into account Freud's discovery that the forces driving man are often unconscious. In spite of the emphasis he puts on man's passions and unconscious drives, Fromm believes that the most important determinant of a man's character is society. Echoing arguments he has sprinkled throughout a score of earlier books, Fromm cites Mesopotamia's urban revolution in the third millennium B.C. as being the fall from Eden. At that point simple rural egalitarian society began giving way to cities, authoritarian rule and organized industrial and military power. Alienated from his work and no longer free, man

needed new ways to express his humanity, to demonstrate that he could still affect the world around him. Thus warps of character appeared: sadism, the passion to control others, and necrophilia, the attraction to death and destruction. That sadism and necrophilia still are character traits in the 20th century, Fromm demonstrates through chilling psycho-biographies of Sadists Stalin and Himmler, and the necrophilous Adolf Hitler.

Fromm is often eloquent as a chronicler of society's sicknesses, but he gives only cursory attention to their cures. Sadism will disappear, he says, "when exploitative control of any class, sex, or minority group has been done away with." This can be done "only if the

behaviorists. As with Skinner, his recommendations that society change its "system of production, ownership and consumption" depend on faith in man's manipulability and desire to change.

Lefty Liberation

The nervous tic afflicting the Tokyo grade school girl was so severe that her entire body shook every time she twitched. When she was finally brought to Tokyo Psychiatrist Soichi Hakozaiki, the diagnosis was surprisingly simple. The girl was lefthanded, and her mother had been trying to make her use her right hand by binding the left with tape. Two days after mom's therapy was stopped, the tic disappeared.

The reason for the forcible correction of the child's "defect" remained, however. In Japan there is a deep-seated prejudice against lefthanders that goes back so far in time that its origins are unknown. It is especially strong in rural areas, where teachers used to beat lefthanded pupils, and girls still pretend to be righthanded in order to get married. If their secret is discovered, they run the risk of being divorced.

Intrigued by the problems of his young patient, Psychiatrist Hakozaiki began examining the plight of Japan's 5,000,000 southpaws. He soon discovered that there were many other lefthanded children who were developing minor neuroses as a result of being forced to use their right hands.

Uphill Battle. Over the past five years, Hakozaiki, who is righthanded himself, has become Japan's leading spokesman for lefty liberation. In 1968 he wrote a bestselling attack on the old prejudices called *Warnings Against Rightist Culture*. Three years ago, he founded the Japan Lefthanders League to encourage lefthanders to come out of the closet. Today the league's 1,500 members receive a monthly bulletin to boost their self-esteem and remind them of such famous lefties as Michelangelo and Harry Truman.

Throughout Japan, thousands of supporters have written to Hakozaiki offering thanks and encouragement. Bolstered by the response, Hakozaiki is carrying the fight to new fronts as well. He has persuaded several Tokyo department stores to stock specially designed scissors, golf clubs and tools for lefthanders. Now at work on a second book on the subject, Hakozaiki is also designing a special manual for the art of brush writing, which poses particular problems for lefthanded schoolchildren. Though Hakozaiki sees a "long uphill battle" ahead for his movement, there are indications that the prejudice against lefthanders is beginning to ease. One sign of progress is a record that has become one of Japan's top ten hits. Its title: *My Boy Friend Is a Lefty*.



PSYCHOANALYST ERICH FROMM
Reducing man's lust for blood.

whole [social and political] system as it has existed during the last 6,000 years of history can be replaced by a fundamentally different one."

At times, Fromm's premises seem as sweeping as those utopian prescriptions. His picture of the peace-loving primitive man is unconvincing ("Wars among primitive hunters are characteristically unbloody"). His explanation for the rise of patriarchal rule during the urban revolution seems equally shaky ("No longer the womb, but the mind became the creative power, and with this, not women, but men dominated society").

In the end, in spite of the distinctions Fromm tries to make between his approach and Skinner's, he falls victim to his own criticisms of the be-

(R) Anonymus 1974