VIRGINIAN PILOT
NORFOLK, VA.
D 130,013 SUN 185,116

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Man's Hate Viewed

THE ANATOMY OF HUMAN DESTRUCTIVENESS. By Erich Fromm. Holt, Rinehart & Winston. 521pp. $10.95.

Is man inherently aggressive, with destructiveness in his genes, as Nobel laureate Karl Lorenz would have us believe? Or is he conditioned to aggressiveness by his environment and by social influences as suggested by B. F. Skinner? Whatever the answer, there's no gainsaying the fact that man is the only species which destroys its own kind in mass killings unknown elsewhere in nature.

So far the definitive answer to this crucial conundrum is and remains elusive. The scores of biologists, analysts, animal psychologists, anthropologists, and even paleontologists quoted by Erich Fromm in this, probably the most important of his books, give some notion of the complexity of a problem that goes to the heart of human nature and behavior.

It is not sufficient to admit that man is the only species that kills fellow-man on a massive scale. Each century has witnessed the magnification of this destructiveness thanks to advancing technology. What remains unchanged is the impulse which drives man to commit these acts.

Fromm takes a position somewhere between Lorenz and Skinner. To begin with, he refuses to regard man as inherently aggressive. Man, he concedes, possesses an "innate", but harmless aggressiveness directed to survival which he shares with his animal ancestors. Fromm calls this "benign" aggression. "Malignant" aggression is not performed out of necessity or for biological reasons. It is an acquired human characteristic and not instinctive.

Here Fromm makes an intriguing point. Primitive societies were most likely not the "brutal, destructive, and cruel" prototype of "man the killer" who evolved later. These early groups were matriarchal, whereas man's full measure of destructiveness was reached in patriarchal societies. One is attempted to believe that if women had headed the governments involved in the two world wars, they might never have occurred. (This, of course, is pure conjecture. It should be noted parenthetically that in the two most recent wars—India-Pakistan and the Middle East—women leaders were involved.)

Fromm also parts company with Freud in his view that sexuality is the basis for most human passions. Instead, he substitutes necrophilia (a love for the dead, for killing), and as exemplars gives us Stalin, Hitler, and Himmler, through whom Hitler had his mass killings performed. Fromm's detailed analyses of these three men are fascinating studies in psycho-history.

Stalin's behavior, Fromm argues, is a textbook example of physical, non-sexual sadism. Stalin's behavior demonstrated "the wish to show people that he had absolute power and control over them. By his word he could kill them, have them tortured, have them rescued again. He had the power of God over life and death."

As for Hitler, Fromm argues that his actions in ordering the killing of millions of Jews, Russians, Poles and his final order for the destruction of all Germans cannot be explained as justified by traditional reasons of state but as "the product of a deeply necrophilous man." Himmler is an example of the sadistic authoritarian who developed "a passion for unlimited control over others."

In reaching his conclusion that man is not genetically aggressive but acquires a "malignant" aggression Fromm has what seems to me a logical answer to a problem which grows more perilous and insistent with each generation. He quotes figures to show that in the 17th century there were 239 battles, in the 18th 781, and in the 19th 651, and in the 20th 892 up to 1940, since when the number has appreciably increased. Obviously it is not man's inherited characteristics as aggressor that are responsible for this startling increase but rather his acquired aggressiveness backed by new technology.

Psychiatric and/or psychological expositions are normally enunciated in a professional bafflegab that the general reader finds confusing and intimidating.

I am glad to report that **The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness** is not only a landmark book but one written in standard English comprehensible to any intelligent reader.

JOHN BARKHAM.
The Saturday Review

Erich Fromm