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# Aggressiveness inherited or acquired?

By JOHN BARKHAM

The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness. By Erich Fromm. Holt, Rinehart & Winston. 521 pp. \$16.95

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 state that man is the only species that kills fellowman on a massive scale.

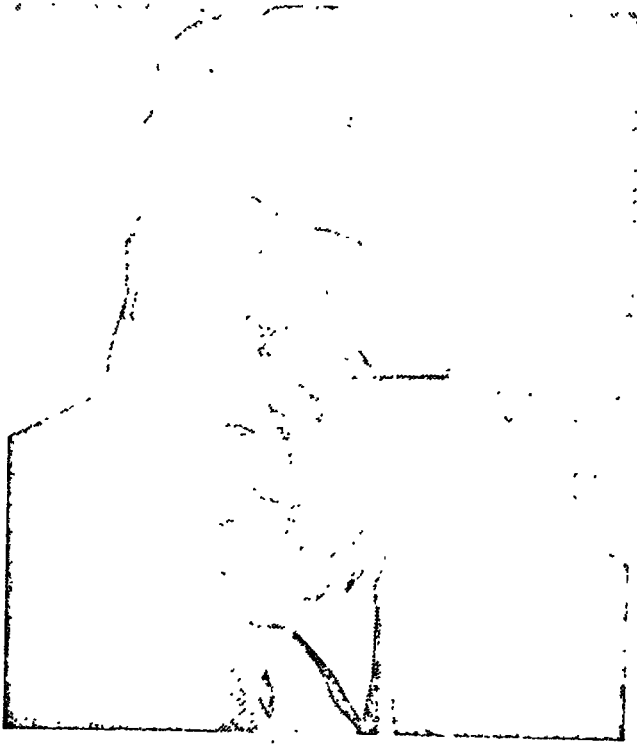
Fromm takes a position somewhere between Lorenz and Skinner. To begin with, he refuses to regard man as inherently aggressive. Man, he concedes, possesses an "innate" but harmless aggressiveness directed to survival which he shares with his animal ancestors. Fromm calls this benign aggression. Malignant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

In reaching his conclusion that man is not genetically aggressive but acquires a malignant aggression, Fromm has what seems to me a logical and persuasive 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, 731, 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 ones, brought about by new technology.

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

I am glad to report that "The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness" is not only a



Erich Fromm



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