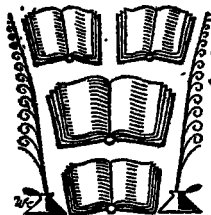


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World of Books



'Anatomy of Human Destructiveness'

John Barkham

IS MAN inherently aggressive, with destructiveness in his genes, as Nobel laureate Konrad 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, the fact is man is the only species which destroys its own kind in mass killings unknown elsewhere in nature.

In "The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness," Erich Fromm takes a position somewhere between Lorenz and Skinner. 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.

★ ★ ★

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 tempted to believe that if women had headed the governments involved in the two world wars, they might never have occurred. (Yet parenthetically, 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 analysis of these three men are fascinating studies in psychohistory.

★ ★ ★

IN REACHING his conclusion that man is not genetically aggressive but acquires a malignant aggression, Fromm has what seems to be 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 238 battles; in the 18th, 781; in the 19th, 651; in the 20th, 892 up to 1940, since appreciably increased.

Obviously it is not man's inherited characteristics as aggressor that are responsible for this startling increase but rather has acquired aggressiveness backed by new technology.

Psychiatric and or psychological expositions are normally enunciated in a professional baffle-gab that the general reader finds confusing and intimidating. This one is not (Holt; \$10.95).



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