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Rosen¹ offers as an example of such essential or primary aggression the Viking Berserksqang. However, according to recent investigation, it appears probable that the Viking's going berserk falls into the category of drug-produced psychoses. Fabing² has recently shown that it probably was caused by eating a poisonous mushroom of the genus Amanita, containing a substance which, like lysergic acid, produces a psychosis-like state. Phenomena of this sort then obviously are not an expression of an innate primary aggression but rather a pharmacological effect, obtained within a certain ritual. Similarly, the violent outbursts in psychosis may be caused by some biochemical disturbance and, in this sense, would not present an expression of a primitive "instinct" or destructive drive of the human animal.

1. Rosen, V.H.: - Some Problems Incident to the Concept of Primary Aggression. Presented in Panel E, Winter Meeting of the American Psychoanalytic Association, New York City, 1956.
2. Fabing, H.D. On Going Berserk: A Neurochemical Inquiry. Sci. Monthly 83: 232-237, 1956.

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To express it in a somewhat different way: the specifically human danger is the coupling of aggressive instincts with constructs at the symbolic level. In human aggression, there are indeed primitive biological drives, but we must not forget the other, symbolic component which makes human aggression infinitely more dangerous and cruel than the biological struggle for existence in the subhuman world. In still other words: the superego is not only a censoring apparatus as was emphasized by Freud, but is a tremendously creative force, both in the way of construction and destruction.



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So the symbolic framework (the so-called quasi needs) is at least just as important as inborn tendencies or instincts.— Also this symbolic world "cuts both ways." On the one hand it leads to the most catastrophic manifestations of aggression such as ideological warfare; on the other hand it may be able to check the aggressive tendencies in man. It may do so either by checks imposed on aggression by symbolic structures of conventions, morals, and religion; or by transference from the biological to the symbolic level, as when killing the enemy is replaced by a rather mild form of aggression such as economic competition or playing chess and bridge.

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The second point may be expressed in one sentence. Suicide is an exclusively human phenomenon; animals do not commit suicide. It appears that self-destruction in man is again intimately related to the symbolic world in which he lives, and which in a certain way has a life of its own. So an individual will commit suicide if his symbolic world demands it or breaks down.

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Unfortunately, we do not live in a world where the maxim, Love thy neighbor as thyself, is practicable. Our world is a world governed by the struggle for existence. Hence, as Karl Menninger¹ has aptly shown, a destructive element is present in almost all our activities, from tilling the soil and raising and slaughtering animals for food to Michelangelo's violent attack on marble - everywhere destructive energies, some of them employed for constructive goals.

1. Menninger, K., Love Against Hate. New York, Harcourt, Brace, 1942.

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The real problem enters if we see, in the human species, destructive tendencies and behavior that apparently are not in the service of the preservation of the individual or the species; that "essential aggression" which, according to Waelder,¹ cannot be explained without postulating a destructive drive. This destruction per se, including self-destruction, I take to mean the concept of "death instinct."

1. Waelder, R., Critical Discussion of the Concept of an Instinct of Destruction. Bull. Philadelphia Assn. 6: 97-109, 1956.

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Now I wish to offer a thesis which, so far as I can see, transcends the orthodox psychoanalytic view. I will state it thus: There is no doubt about the presence of aggressive and destructive tendencies in the human psyche which are of the nature of biological drives. However, the most pernicious phenomena of aggression, transcending self-preservation and self-defense, and including self-destruction, are based upon a characteristic feature of man above the biological level, namely his capability of creating symbolic universes in thought, language, and behavior. In a somewhat different formulation we may say: only a minor part of so-called "essential destructiveness," such as crimes of violence, the destructive mob, the self-mutilation of the maniac, is purely on the level of the primary process. The much more devastating part is essentially connected

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with secondary processes.



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Human behavior, to a large extent, is not governed by the primary and basic biological needs granting the survival of the individual and of the species; that is, the need to gratify hunger in order to keep the organism going, and the sexual drive in order to maintain the species. Rather, human behavior is governed by quasi needs, that is, needs arising within a certain symbolic framework. These quasi needs extend from "keeping up with the Joneses," the problem of the new car, or the cocktail party which must be given, to world-shaking political programs and the problems of the genius and martyr in science, art, and religion.

I believe that, in particular, the problem of aggression cannot be satisfactorily visualized without taking into account this aspect of human behavior.



Indeed, most of the examples quoted by Waelder¹ for "essential destructiveness" or a "primary aggressive drive" fall precisely in that symbolic level. I take it for granted that, in a phenomenon like Hitler or Stalin, there is an expression of innate destructive tendencies of human nature, and that, according to psychoanalytic explanation, this was elicited by frustrations in early childhood, such as unsatisfactory mother-child relationships. But I would like to emphasize that the grand expressions of aggressiveness are always within a symbolic framework, or to speak in Freudian terms, that it is necessary to analyze aggression in the framework of the secondary as well as the primary process.

(false application of prim. - see p. 124)

1. Waelder, R., Critical Discussion of the Concept of an Instinct of Destruction. Bull. Philadelphia Assn. 6: 97-109, 1956.