



ERICH FROMM



THE ANATOMY OF HUMAN DESTRUCTIVENESS

FROM THE INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *THE ART OF LOVING*



The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness

Erich Fromm



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Preface

THIS STUDY IS THE first volume of a comprehensive work on psychoanalytic theory. I started with the study of aggression and destructiveness because, aside from being one of the fundamental theoretical problems in psychoanalysis, the wave of destructiveness engulfing the world makes it also one of the most practically relevant ones.

When I started this book over six years ago I greatly underestimated the difficulties I would encounter. It soon became apparent that I could not write adequately about human destructiveness if I remained within the limits of my main field of competence, that of psychoanalysis. While this investigation is primarily meant to be a psychoanalytic one, I also needed a modicum of knowledge in other fields, particularly neurophysiology, animal psychology, paleontology, and anthropology, in order to avoid working in too narrow and, hence, a distorting frame of reference. At least I had to be able to check my conclusions with the main data from other fields to make certain that my hypotheses did not contradict them and to determine whether, as was my hope, they confirmed my hypothesis.

Since no work existed that reports and integrates the findings on aggression in all these fields, or even summarizes them in any one specific field, I had to make such an attempt myself. This attempt, I thought, would also serve my readers by offering them the possibility of sharing with me the global view of the problem of destructiveness rather than a view taken from the standpoint of a single discipline. There are, it is clear, many pitfalls in such an attempt. Obviously, I could not acquire competence in all these fields—least of all, the one in which I started out with little knowledge: the neurosciences. I was able to gain a modicum of knowledge

in this field not only by studying it myself but also through the kindness of neuroscientists, a number of whom gave me guidance and answered my many questions and some of whom read the relevant part of the manuscript. Although specialists will realize that I have nothing new to offer them in their particular fields, they may also welcome the opportunity of a better acquaintance with data from other areas on a subject of such central importance.

An insoluble problem is that of repetitions and overlapping from my previous work. I have been working on the problems of man for more than thirty years and, in the process, focusing on new areas while deepening and widening my insights in older ones. I cannot possibly write about human destructiveness without presenting ideas that I have of the new concepts with which this book deals. I have tried to hold down repetition as much as possible—referring to the more extensive discussion in previous publications; but repetitions were nevertheless unavoidable. A special problem in this respect is *The Heart of Man*, which contains some of my new findings on necrophilia-biophilia in a nuclear form. My presentation of these findings is greatly expanded in the present book, both theoretically and with regard to clinical illustration. I did not discuss certain differences between the views expressed here and in previous writings, since such a discussion would have taken a great deal of space and is not of sufficient interest for most readers.

There remains only the pleasant task of expressing my thanks to those who helped me in the writing of this book.

I want to thank Dr. Jerome Brams, to whom I am much indebted for his helpfulness in the theoretical clarification of problems of behaviorism and for his never tiring assistance in the search for relevant literature.