



“WAR WITHIN MAN” //

A PSYCHOLOGICAL ENQUIRY INTO THE ROOTS OF DESTRUCTIVENESS

BY ERICH FROMM

A STUDY AND COMMENTARY IN THE BEYOND DETERRENCE SERIES

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Throughout most of his intellectual career, Dr. Fromm has been a critical student of the theories and social philosophies of both Marx and Freud. Among his many books on social and psychological issues are: *Marx's Concept of Man*; *Sigmund Freud's Mission*; *Psychoanalysis and Religion*; *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*; and *The Art of Loving*. Dr. Fromm has been a prolific lecturer since the early 1930's when he came to America. More recently he has become one of the major commentators on the issues of world peace. Among his books on this general topic are: *The Sane Society*; *May Man Prevail*; and *Escape from Freedom*. His forthcoming book on the Psychological Root of War and Destructiveness deals with issues related to the topic of this essay.

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The sculpture used on the title page is by Giacomo Manzú, titled DAVID, and is from the book GIACOMO MANZU, by Anna Pacchioni, published by Edizioni del Milione, Milano, 1948.

The present posture of nations has made more men the world over anxious about the future than ever before. But anxiety needs to give place to imaginative planning. Obsession with old theories of military power, defense or deterrence has prevented the fullest exploration of alternative policies. To replace methods which even in the past have often failed, which are out of line with the new psychological and technological situation, and which are negative rather than contributing to the general spiritual and physical welfare, many fruitful lines of thought need following. And there are many able thinkers willing to help.

The American Friends Service Committee, with its varied and long-standing concern for promoting peace, aims in a series of pamphlets under the title "Beyond Deterrence" to present fresh thinking in several unexplored approaches to the current human predicament.

—Henry J. Cadbury

PITIRIM A. SOROKIN

Professor Pitirim A. Sorokin, professor emeritus of sociology, director of Research Center in Creative Altruism, Harvard University.

JUST NOW I do not have time for a serious discussion of E. Fromm's paper. In brief, I am in agreement with his position in regard to the threatening explosion of a new World War but I have a serious doubt in regard to his variation (much better one) of the Freudian theory of death-instinct. Neither the necrophilic nor biophilic "instincts" can really account for why some persons become killers while others sacrifice their lives to save the life of a fellow man. Nor why the rate of the grave forms of murder: of matricide, patricide, uxorcide, etc. of all the kings and absolute rulers of England, France, Russia, Germany, Turkey, Japan, Italy, Ancient Roman Empire and so on is from twenty to fifty times higher than the rate of the ruled population. (See the actual figures in my *Power and Morality*.) Shall this be explained by the theory that the necrophilic instinct is so many times stronger and more frequent among the kings and rulers than among the ordinary population?

Likewise, the Freud-Fromm theory does not account at all for why the curves of movement of wars and revolutions and their casualties greatly fluctuate from period to period in the history of Greece, Rome, and each of the Western countries. (See the movement of wars and internal revolutions and their casualties in Greco-Roman and the Western history from 600 B.C. to the present time in my *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, vol. III.) This theory likewise does not explain at all why the twentieth century happened to be the most murderous and bloodiest century out of all the

preceding twenty-five centuries of Greco-Roman and Western history—measured by the absolute and proportionate number (per 1,000,000 of respective populations) killed in wars, revolutions, riots, individual crimes of this century.

“Instincts” are supposed to be constant and not liable to vary greatly. As such, they cannot and do not explain at all an enormous fluctuation of mass and individual murders of man by man in various social groups and in the life history of the same society at various periods of its history. Similarly they do not satisfactorily account for why some individuals are becoming murderers and necrophiliacs while an overwhelming majority of human beings remain free from such crimes.

These remarks mean that Freud-Fromm’s theory is quite inadequate for these explanations. Causation of wars, civil wars, and enormous contrasts in the rate of killing of human beings in different groups and periods is much more complex and less well known than the Freud-Fromm hypothesis suggests.

Some of the factors of making human beings more loving and less sociocultural-murderous, indicated by Fromm, are more sound and correct; but his outline of these factors is too general and vague and incomplete. At the present time, I believe, we possess a more adequate knowledge of these factors than are sketched by Fromm. (See my *The Ways and Power of Love*.)

Finally, the typological portraits of the necrophiliacs and biophilicists, drawn by Fromm, need also serious corrections. For instance, many ascetic saints (Occidental and Oriental) would fall into Fromm’s “necrophiliacs” (especially such persons as St. Francis of Assisi); meanwhile, factually, most of them were the sublime apostles of love, and of “the reverence for life.” According to Fromm’s typology, almost all Buddhists beginning with Gautama Buddha and most of the Buddhists of the first five centuries of Buddhism, have to be put rather into the class of the necrophiliacs; meanwhile, they have had so great a reverence for life that they refused to kill even poisonous snakes.

These brief remarks can possibly explain why Freud-Fromm’s theory of psychological causes of war appears to me doubtful and inadequate in its scientific validity.