

History is a laboratory in which this state of affairs is demonstrated.

Permit me to say something about the sadistic character. There it depends, above all, on what one means by sadism. Freud—and it is popularly understood to be so extensively—understands sadism to be essentially a sexual phenomenon. On this point he finds support in the generally known fact that, for many people—apparently, for men more than for women, but that is again very uncertain—sexual excitement and sexual satisfaction are connected with it, when they torture another person, inflict pain on him, insult him or humble him. Now Freud has explained that sadism is a partial drive of sexuality that corresponds to an early stage of development of the libido, which then, however, has been produced independently in the case of certain people for certain reasons, and expresses either the entire content or at least an essential part of their sexual desires.

According to my view, sadism is a much more general phenomenon than that described by Freud. At the nucleus of sadism, I see the passion to control another being, that is, to completely control, to have in my power, to do with him what I will, to be, so to speak, his God, to be almighty. This situation is realized in the form of injuring someone else, to humble him physically, so that he cannot defend himself. With sadism, it must be that the other person is helpless and weak. Sadism never has a strong person as an object. One could clearly see that in the case of the Nazis; one can see that generally in sadistic psychology, that which is attractive is power over the weak. The strong one is admired, the weak one stimulates.

Naturally, there are also many other forms of complete control that are not necessarily those of physical pain or of manifest humiliation. You will find many sadistic manifestations in relationships between people that are based on the situation where one possesses complete control over the other. You see that in the case of parents, teachers, nurses, prison guards and, to a large degree, in the case of people who are in an elevated position or social situation, the kind in which one has power over others. And he who has the power uses it in order to control others. The rough forms of sadism, in that one is beaten, injured bodily or reviled, those are naturally the clearest expressions and manifestations of sadism. But they are perhaps not even the most important at all. The most important are to be found in the relationships between people: they are the attempts of one person to gain omnipotence over others.

One can recognize a person with sadistic character quite easily: he is unfriendly, unloving, in the final analysis unsure, unproductive, he feels himself debased, and all that matters to him is to control everything and everybody, just as far as he can. Take a simple example: you see a postal official behind the counter; at 6:00 p.m. he goes off duty. It is shortly before 6:00, there are still two people standing there who have been waiting for a long time. *But exactly at 6:00 p.m. he closes his counter and goes away.* If you look at this person closer you will perhaps see around his thin lips a quite slight tinge of a smile of maliciousness or of enjoyment, because he has the power to compel these people to return the next day, and they have stood in line in vain. I don't bring up the question here, whether he would actually be compelled by the postal regulations to close the counter at exactly 6:00 p.m., or whether he could have worked on for two minutes longer. I am also not speaking of the ques-

tion that he would probably give as an answer: *would I have stayed longer at my place of work each day, when would I then get home?* This would probably explain the situation rationally, if this tiny feature of satisfaction were not so apparent, which is recognizable in sadists.

The behaviorists cannot see this feature, for one cannot prove it scientifically. There is no instrument with which one can grasp it. One could perhaps photograph the feature, but possibly this feature would not be recognizable in a photo. But any person who is the least bit sensitive recognizes the face of a sadist.

Q: To what extent does that actually have to do with character? In what respect are character and sadism connected? You said that sadism originates from an incompetent situation and is a deep-rooted need. Wouldn't that amount to the same thing with instinct?

Fromm: Yes. I should have explained that more precisely. An instinct would not depend upon external conditions. Instinct is so strongly established that it is lacking in some people under certain conditions and emerges in others under certain conditions. Instinct really means that a quite definite manner of reaction is built into the brain that, to be sure, is not completely independent of external circumstances, but that still functions essentially autonomously, reacts spontaneously and leads to certain motivations. Take, for example, sexuality. There one can say: that is an instinct. One does not find that with one group of people sexual desires are present and with another group of people simply are omitted. Naturally, sexual drive is stimulated by certain objects. We know, however, that if these objects are lacking, in spite of this, sexual desires and fantasies are present.

Q: Just before *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* appeared, you wrote in an article in *National-Zeitung*: "Probably the most important source of aggression and destructive rage is found in the bored character. Boredom in this sense, is not conditioned by external circumstances, not by the lack of stimulation, for example as in the experiments in which sensual perceptions are shut out, or as in the isolation cell of a prison. It is a subjective factor in man himself, an incapacity to enter into a real interest in things and people in his environment." It goes on to say: "The increase in boredom is caused by the forms and structure and the functioning of our modern industrial society."

Perhaps you could expand somewhat more upon your statement, "probably the most important source of aggression today," and also illustrate more precisely the conditions under which the destructivity develops?

Fromm: That is not simple, because there is a whole series of conditions for destructivity. One is that life has its meaning, so that the person no longer has any sense, although he feels, to be sure, he is alive, he also has a life is running out through his fingers like sand. He has no happiness. He never has anything that makes him feel established as a person. Insofar that he feels powerless with respect to his own existence, he has something in common with the sadist. Finally, he has a "resentment" against life, as Nietzsche calls it. He is alive because he is alive without ever having lived.