



The Insanity of Normality: Toward Understanding Human Destructiveness

By Arno Gruen

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THE INSANITY OF NORMALITY: TOWARD UNDERSTANDING HUMAN DESTRUCTIVENESS by ARNO GRUEN According to Sigmund Freud, man is born with an innate tendency to destruction and violence; in THE INSANITY OF NORMALITY, the psychoanalyst Arno Gruen challenges that assumption, arguing instead that at the root of evil lies self-hatred, a rage originating in a self-betrayal that begins in childhood, when autonomy is surrendered in exchange for the "love" of those who wield power over us. To share in that subjugating power, we create a false self, an image of ourselves that springs from a powerful and deep-seated sense of fear. Gruen traces this pattern of adaptation and smoldering rebellion through a number of case studies, sociological phenomena - from Nazism to Reaganomics - and literary works. The insanity this attitude produces, unfortunately, goes widely unrecognized precisely because it has become the "realism" that modern society inculcates into its members. Gruen warns, however, that escape from this pattern lies not simply in rebellion, for the rebel remains emotionally tied to the object of his rebellion, but in the development of a personal autonomy. His elegant and far-reaching conclusion is that while autonomy is not easily attained, its absence proves catastrophic to both individual and society. "With compassion and conviction Dr. Gruen carefully exposes the undiagnosed and undisclosed insanity unwittingly accepted as normality... This is a text for leaders and followers, for conformists and rebels alike, for members of the healing professions who seek to repair the destructive fallout from our pursuit of normality and for all who strive for a more compassionate and saner social order." -Montague Ullman, M.D. DR. ARNO GRUEN was born in Germany and emigrated to the United States as a child in 1936. After completing his graduate studies in psychology at New York University, he trained in psychoanalysis under Theodor Reik. Dr. Gruen has held many teaching posts in this country, including seventeen years as professor of psychology at Rutgers University. Since 1979 he has lived and practiced in Switzerland. His groundbreaking first book, THE BETRAYAL OF THE SELF, was published by in 1988. THE INSANITY OF NORMALITY was first published in Germany by Kösel Verlag under the title Der Wahnsinn der Normalität-Realismus als Krankheit: eine grundlegende Theorie zur menschlichen Destruktivität. The book was first published in English in 1992.

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Editorial Review

From Kirkus Reviews

A psychological treatise of some originality and depth that shoots itself in the foot through the absurdity of its applications. Gruen (*The Betrayal of the Self*, 1988), a German psychoanalyst practicing in Switzerland, sets out to overhaul the Freudian understanding of violence as an innate human drive. He maintains instead that destructiveness is the product of self-hatred, which invariably can be traced to childhood anger over the exercise of parental authority--or, more precisely, over parents' tacit demand that their authority be recognized as absolute. The immediate result is a confusion of identity, through which the child tries to take on parents' desires and expectations and deny its own. The underlying resentment that builds up, and that tries to tear down the "false self" that has been erected, is often interpreted as a form of self-destruction. Gruen maintains that it is in fact a form of self-assertion, one that can be thwarted only at great psychic cost. On a theoretical level, his case holds together, but it is hardly backed up by the examples that he offers, which amount to little more than a catalogue of left-wing paranoias. The origin of Gruen's thesis seems to be connected with the spectacle of German fascism--which forced the author and his family to flee Europe in the 1930's--but he never really tries to identify what social conditions in Germany at that time fostered psychological deformity on such a titanic scale. It also stretches credibility to have Richard Nixon held up as an exemplar of the same schizophrenia that produced the Nazis ("Every one of Nixon's actions throughout his political career was characterized by contempt for humanity"). A chapter on Peer Gynt puts Gruen on more reliable ground, letting him illustrate his points with less ideological distraction--probably the most persuasive section of a generally unconvincing effort. A private and highly idiosyncratic meditation on the nature of evil, masquerading as clinical psychology. -- *Copyright ©1992, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

Language Notes

Text: English (translation)

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From the Back Cover

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