



Our Own Worst Enemy

Norman F. Dixon

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We like to believe that such phenomena as the rise of Adolf Hitler or the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl are the result of isolated and unrepeatable aberrations of human behaviour, yet there is little evidence, in the Star Wars era, to support such a view. In this book, as challenging and original as his highly controversial study *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence*, Professor Dixon demonstrates that seemingly unrelated global events form a pattern which, when subjected to psychological analysis, points to alarming realities in our conduct of world affairs. He argues that the characteristics evolved by our ancestors over millions of years as being vital for survival - aggression, conscience, parental protectiveness, egotism, a capacity for boredom, and faith in the value of group decisions - are far from adequate for dealing with the complexities of modern life: indeed, man has been described as a shoal of piranhas, directed by a computer, which has been programmed by an archbishop! Citing man-made and natural disasters, prune and porridge phobias, mass murders, and military catastrophes from the Maginot Line to the Bay of Pigs, the author shows all too clearly how the self-destructive side-effects of human behaviour are propelling us towards extinction. Today the world's fate lies in the hands of leaders who, Professor Dixon claims, have an above-average chance of being neurotic, irrational, paranoid and egomaniacal. In his words, 'a potential for destruction on a scale hitherto undreamt of lies in the hands of a few ageing individuals who, in terms of personality, motivation, state of stress and cerebral efficiency, should hardly be trusted with the weekend shopping.' The book is not a polemic for nuclear disarmament, and if his analysis of the predicament he uncovers is bleak, it is not despairing. He offers some solutions which may forestall, if not prevent, world destruction - provided we act now.

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