



Humanity Against Itself: The Retreat from Reason

Benjamin Kovitz M.D.

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In this broad overview of humanity's predicament, psychiatrist Benjamin Kovitz illustrates the parallels between anxiety in the individual and discord in civilization as a whole. Kovitz emphasizes that civilization rests upon the precarious foundation of human nature, with its age-old tendencies toward self-deception, violence, and pursuit of power. He argues that resistance to facing our hidden motives is what lies at the core of political and religious strife as well as individual anxiety.

At the heart of the book is an illuminating chapter on the meaning of anxiety, explaining with clarity and detail how the pathology arises, how it is expressed, and how it can be relieved. The complexities of the condition are portrayed in vivid clinical examples, often using the patients' own words. Kovitz takes issue with the current practice of relying solely on psychiatric medication without addressing the patient's understanding of what his or her symptoms mean.

On the societal level, Kovitz shows how evasion of reality complicates our efforts at progress and peaceful coexistence, despite the advances of science and democracy, and how defensive behavior among nations can culminate in war.

Turning to religion, Kovitz explores the psychological underpinnings of our need for religion and briefly summarizes the major world faiths with an eye to their underlying attitudes and assumptions. While pointing out the contradictions inherent in a literal approach to religious dogma, the author appreciates the need for faith that transcends logic. In a psychiatric evaluation of the life of Saint Teresa of Avila, Kovitz recognizes pathological anxiety yet respects the therapeutic value of her religious visions.

Writing with eloquence while avoiding psychological jargon, Kovitz elucidates our human dilemmas with a clarity and depth that can help us move toward sanity in an unpredictable and troubled world.



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