

Book Reviews

CURES FOR HUMAN VIOLENCE

Violence, Monkeys and Man

By Claire Russell and W. M. S. Russell. Pp. x + 340 + 12 plates. (Macmillan : London, October 1968.) 63s.

THE Russells' book is, first and foremost, intended as an answer to Konrad Lorenz's book *On Aggression*. Lorenz argued that aggression was a useful force in animal society. This was, he said, fundamentally true of human society as well, in so far as it was the mainspring of the male competitive drive. Because of technological advances, however, large-scale (as opposed to individual) aggression had got out of control in man, and the most we could hope to do was to channel it into harmless outlets such as football matches.

To this, the Russells reply that aggression has not the "spontaneous" quality of a "primary drive", emerging in one form or another regardless of circumstances. They relate its appearance to stress of various kinds. Stress is some kind of intolerable frustration or provocation, resulting from shortage of certain key scarce resources, chiefly space and food. What we must do, therefore, to reduce both crime (intra-societal aggression) and war (extra-societal aggression) is to reduce the provocations and frustrations; more concretely we must reduce the birth rate and work towards a more egalitarian share-out of wealth both within and between nations.

My own sympathies are with the Russells, not Lorenz, but this does not mean there are not certain problems left to quarrel over, which I shall mention. We should note, however, the politically reactionary nature of Lorenz's argument as opposed to the policy-oriented and constructive approach of the Russells. Science, including social science, cannot afford to ignore the political implications of its discoveries. It is particularly impressive that the Russells have found a progressive philosophy that is compatible with their biological bias. For the book relies heavily on studies of other species, especially non-human primates, for its interpretation of the nature of human affairs.

Having established that "human violence . . . has never been more prevalent, dangerous or costly than

it is today" (page 14), the authors contrast the "unconditional" (violence-is-innate) and the "conditional" (violence-is-a-response-to-stress) arguments, and then make their first two points with a series of examples: history favours the conditional view, and stress is on the increase in modern industrial affluent society.

Several studies of monkeys and apes are reviewed. Some fifteen field studies, made in natural conditions, indicate that aggressiveness between animals living together is rare. On the other hand, studies of the same species made in captivity indicate that here aggression between cage-mates is frequent and, sometimes, severe. Because food shortage is not the cause and, except in one notorious case, sex ratio is not the cause either, crowding itself would appear to be at the root of the trouble.

The patterns of violence seen in crowded monkey societies are described. Processes that, in the wild, have a positive function in reducing aggression within the group are seen to get distorted in the cage situation and to lead to unduly protracted, widespread and vicious fights. Among the various processes of escalation is redirection, in which resentment against superiors is vented on inferiors. Turning to man, the Russells find evidence of all the processes at work in the monkey cage in crowded human society. But humans, unlike caged monkeys, can turn their aggression against outsiders and so in man we have the phenomenon of mass redirection against foreigners, which provides, according to the Russells, a partial explanation of certain wars, including the current war in Vietnam.

After a disturbing analysis of the increasing extent of poverty, child-killings and other forms of violence in our modern cities where people are desperately short of space, and of the continued curtailment of individual freedom by, for example, rehousing in high flats, the book pinpoints the continuing population increase as the chief factor responsible. The recommendation thus put first and foremost is birth control. Other suggestions are sound-proof walls, horizontal rather than vertical housing, provision of comforts such as baths, reduction in the number of persons per room in slum areas, and a general recognition in future planning of the need for individuals to have some privacy. All this is unobjectionable and basic socialist philosophy; thanks to the Russells it now has a biological reference as well as the conventional political and moral ones. If the Russells' recommendations seem straightforward enough, their analysis is nonetheless one of the most original pieces of thinking in social science.

What is needed now is an integrated treatment of the various faces of aggression. This must start from an acceptable definition of the word "aggression" which at present has different meanings for different kinds of specialists. Violent aggression, the Russells have shown, is a behaviour distortion that can be produced by stress in the social environment. We need to know more of the non-social sources of violence. Is the normal (that is, non-stress) expression of this behaviour the self-assertive aggression Lorenz finds in all species? If so, how, at the physiological level, does self-assertion turn into violence? And is there a genetic contribution? Does not the correlation of violent criminality with the male sex, and the high proportion of men with the XYY syndrome among violent criminals, indicate that aggressiveness is influenced by the Y chromosome?

Finally, if population reduction is the cure for violence, much work is needed to show how it might be brought about. Kingsley Davis has shown that some nations do not want an effective birth control programme because they fear loss of military strength, and that even where the use of contraceptives has become commonplace the effect has been to reduce the growth rate of the population, not the size of the population itself.

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