

Kissing and making up

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Peacemaking Among Primates. By Frans de Waal. *Harvard University Press: 1989.* Pp. 294. \$29.95, £23.95.

FRANS de Waal's first book, *Chimpanzee Politics* (Harper & Row, 1982)* caused a stir. It transformed a colony of chimpanzees at Arnhem Zoo in the Netherlands from the subjects of academic research almost to the status of players in a soap opera. Stunning photographs, crisp prose and insightful stories combined in a compelling saga of power and sex among the apes. Backed up by careful research published elsewhere in scientific journals, *Chimpanzee Politics* was easily accessible to the general public, making it perhaps the closest captive counterpart to Jane van Lawick-Goodall's *In the Shadow of Man* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988). Given this background, it is not surprising that expectations were high for de Waal's next effort.

Peacemaking Among Primates is in many ways more ambitious, though de Waal has sacrificed depth for breadth. He tackles not one but four species of non-human primates: in addition to chimpanzees, bonobos (or pygmy chimpanzees), rhesus macaques and stump-tailed macaques are studied. Moreover, he also seeks to compare the findings to another species of primate, *Homo sapiens*. Thus the book invites comparison with the works of other 'ethologizers' (to use Hilary Callan's term) such as Irenaeus Eibl-Eibesfeldt, Konrad Lorenz and Desmond Morris.

The author's avowed aim is "... to correct biology's bleak orientation on the human condition". This is done on the explicit assumption that the study of animal behaviour sheds light on the roots of our own society. Thus de Waal's appeal to the general reader is a prescriptive as well as a descriptive one, and this is a source of both strength and weakness in the book.

The first chapter sets out the rationale. The main theme is that scientists studying the "social fire" of aggression have concentrated on the ignition of the flames but have ignored how these flames are later extinguished. De Waal argues that group-living organisms both compete and

cooperate, so that in order to stay together they must manage the former to enjoy the latter. The necessary process is reconciliation. Relationships must be repeatedly serviced and renewed and never taken for granted, and each species handles this differently, in its own social framework.

For chimpanzees, much of the peacemaking was described in *Chimpanzee Politics*, to which the chapter in the new book is largely a sequel. Ironically, it

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Stump-tailed macaques: "ritualized conflict resolution... made all the more impressive by their striking individual differences in appearance".

details the fatal effects of failed reconciliation, when the dominant male is killed by others. As with field studies of wild chimpanzees at Gombe, there is an air of 'loss of innocence' about the emergence of deadly violence after years of apparently peaceful relations. The 12 pages over which the story unfolds are gripping.

The chapter on rhesus macaques is the least surprising given how much this south Asian species of monkey has already been studied in a multitude of settings. De Waal emphasizes the foundational role of matrilineal rank but goes beyond this to talk of social classes, and of the female community's collective support for the system. Rapprochement in rhesus monkeys is less a matter of explicit reconciliation than of implicit tension-breaking.

Stump-tailed macaques get the least

space but come across in many ways as the most interesting of the four species. Their reconciliations are often elaborately orgasmic, both homo and heterosexually. Their conflict resolution seems highly ritualized — from mock wrist-biting to multiple embracing — and is made more impressive by their striking individual differences in appearance. A detailed field study of this species in south-east Asia is long overdue.

Bonobos continue to fascinate, though it is not yet clear whether the differences between them and chimpanzees are ones of style or substance. Curiously, work on captive bonobos lags behind that on wild ones. De Waal's is the principal behavioural research project, on the biggest colony, at San Diego Zoo. Bonobos are playful hedonists, fond of pulling faces and varied sex. Sexual relations are the currency for negotiating possession of resources or moderating aggression.

One can assess de Waal's treatment of the four species of non-human primates in terms of the three 'false dichotomies' which he raises early on in the book. The real problem is the dichotomy between field and laboratory studies, and is thus one of validity. One can never properly simulate a tropical forest in a temperate zoo, but one can try to simulate the crucial social and environmental variables. This works better for some species than for others. A community of chimpanzees in nature virtually never gets together; in captivity a group of chimpanzees is *always* together. Phenomena arising from this — such as females mediating in males' disputes (as described by de Waal at Arnhem) — have not been seen in the wild, and so although they may be suggestive, they may be artefacts of captivity.

De Waal's treatment of the fifth species of primates, ourselves, is the most frustrating. No one would doubt the importance of reconciliation to human beings at many levels — personal, familial, institutional, international. But here telling incidents and plausible speculation are not enough; anecdotal cross-cultural comparisons are provocative but not conclusive. De Waal is aware of the gaps in knowledge and bemoans them. His final chapter should be seen mostly as a consciousness raiser, serving to stimulate much-needed research on peacemaking in human primates. □

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*A paperback edition of this book was published earlier this year by Johns Hopkins University Press. Price is \$12.95.