BOOK REVIEW

Klama, J. *Aggression, the myth of the beast within.* (edited by J. Durant, P. Klopfer, and S. Oyama, from a text by J. Durant, E. Honore, L. Klopfer, M. Klopfer, P. Klopfer, T. Kohn, B. Lessley, N. Nur, and S. Oyama. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1988.

"Beast knows beast; birds of a feather flock together." (Aristotle, Rhetoric, Book 1: 2:25

Aggression is a steady boarder at the table of the comparative psychologist, for it is a whale among the fishes in the sea of concepts that invite attention and resist identification and clarification. One reason for the confusion, these authors claim, is that the concept has both a "scientific image" and a "social reality" (p.2): it is time, the book argues, to change both. The past problem and the current danger, it is argued, is that analyses of aggression turn, tacitly or obviously, (it is the tacit that causes the problem) toward the "conclusion that beneath the superficially diverse range of phenomena embraced by the term there lies a unitary biological "base" — an aggressive "instinct" perhaps, whose origins may be traced far back in animal evolution." (p.6-7).

The "base" leads to the myth of the beast within. Here is a myth in both senses of the word: it is a false explanation, a myth in the sense that storks' delivering babies or Santa Claus is a myth; and it is a myth in the much larger and more interesting sense of the word; an idea that never makes itself perfectly evident but survives tucked away in our views of ourselves. The notion that human kind is basically sinful is an example of one such myth; and the notion that human beings are basically good is another.

Aggression is a complex myth (as are all the Great Myths), for our thoughts become twisted when we mix myths, as we are apt to do. For example, we cannot decide whether aggression is part of the human beings' good or evil self: like the image of the trickster in Jungian thought, it appears now one way, now another. We explain behavior by reference to aggression, but the explanation only reinvents the greatest and most troublesome myths of all; who are we, why are we here, and what ought we to be doing.

Having set this foundation, more or less, in Chapter 2 the book takes up brief reviews of the myths set forth by Darwin, Galton, Freud, Lorenz, and Mac Lean. Dawkins and sociobiology are given like, but untitled, attention and explanation. A section on the appropriate epistemology for understanding aggression is set forth in Chapter 3: this

section leads to a sensible discussion of questions that must be asked, questions that should not be asked, and the traps that appear between. The table being set, the full menu is now opened: these courses are chapters on cultural anthropology; genes, hormones, and learning in animals; human development, models of aggression, the evolution of conflict, and "Aggression revisited," Chapter 9, wherein, the reader might assume, the meal will settle.

Before we nibble more deeply into this promising offering, it is sensible to comment on the style of this book. The text, perhaps the first of its genre since the writing of the scriptures, is composed by having one set of editors rework the "a text" prepared by a larger group. The editors are among the larger group. The product is given a pseudonym.

The affect on this reviewer resembles an invitation to supper at which one is a stranger, but senses right away that the others have important relationships. The visitor is confused as to whom is related to whom, who knows whom; indeed, why anybody, in particular, is invited to the first place. There is a general topic, and all agree to speak to it. As the meal progresses, the conversation turns from the hosts' remarks to expositions by others. Sometimes, the listener suspects, others are speaking more to one another than to the topic. The result is that the guest devotes the energies to concentrated detective work in trying to understand the direction and plan of the discussion. The food is forgot, if it ever mattered, for the invitation was not truly to share. On second thought, the guest is a little annoyed at the suspicion of having been invited chiefly to admire the preening. Next morning, the guest awakes thoroughly confused, willing to consider him or herself a "bad" guest. Eventually, these feelings turn to further annoyance upon the realization that, most often, but not always, it is bad hosts who make bad guests.

Why do I think myself to have been a bad guest—an inconsiderate reader? The fault is not all mine. First, I now understand, the text speaks to itself: it is not truly directed to the reader, as occurs when an author truly wants the reader to understand. A good host strives to enjoin the guest in the conversation. No opportunity here: this guest is either talked around or lectured at. My hosts suggest, for example, that I have not paid sufficient attention to certain sets of studies, and descriptions without obvious purpose result. My hosts suggest that I am sufficiently insensitive to the evils of psychosurgery to be brought to task for my innocence. It is assumed that I lack the education or thought to grasp the myth of predestination. I am unlikely to know what Darwin really wrote, as my experience is certain to be second-hand. I am made to feel as a child at table, a table from my view composed of hordes of large and loud adults addressing one another, but not me — or rarely me.

The pity is that this book, surely in its opening chapters, understands that our studies of aggression is one way in which we invent myths

by which we understand ourselves. If this is not new ground, it is a welcome examination of an important and demythifying interpretation The text here is informed: it is work of thoughtful scholarship. There is attention to the needs of the reader, as there is an honest attempt to inform and explain. Here is the work of a writer who is teacher one who succeeds by wanting me to understand and learn. As is true of many a meal where there is too much wine, the text fails to keep the pace.

The writing now takes the style of the term paper: oddities creep into the text and crudities into the meal. For example, the discussion of Egas Moniz on 118-119 follows the argument and historical information set forth by Valenstein (1986), but the reference to Valenstein's work appears en passant on p.123 after a discussion of the work of Jose Delgado a Scientific American format is suddenly adopted (p.117) as people are introduced as "a mid-Victorian neurologist; a Harvard physiologist, a Yale neurophysiologist, and a German neurophysiologist." Lorenz's model is repeated (p.26, 106), but not truly expanded, and we wonder how the explications are related? Freud's ideas, worthy of a major heading and discussion (23-25) rate this comment in the chapter on models — "Freud's ideas were expressed in metaphor and myth rather than in the operational terms of science, and it is at once pointless and presumptuous to dissect them in the current thinking about motivation." (p.110). Small matters, to be sure, but burps and belches during dinner nonetheless.

At times the reader is treated as mindless: the connection between phrenology and contemporary studies of brain localization is served up as some special dish, but no special point is made of it. This visitor's difficulty with Chapters 4-8 is simply that I leave each course uncertain as to what I am to understand that assists me in judging the argument of the initial chapters. It is one thing to admire a bird's coloration and display: it is quite another to grasp the meaning.

The final chapter, "Aggression revisited," which might finish the meal successfully, argues that "violence is still with us" (p.146) and takes up human rape, infanticide, and crime. The work ends, almost, with this "The conclusion to be drawn from our inquiry into the science and politics of aggression is not that there are pacific angels rather than aggressive monsters inside our heads." (p.155) And, a little later, "Can we keep our constructions of aggression where they belong, serving us as we strive to understand our own behaviour and that of other animals so as to improve the immediate and long-range prospects for us all? We can but only if we resist the temptation to project our hopes and fears onto our scientific constructs." (p.155) The book concludes with such messages they are wise ones: they may lead us to understand our own myths

and they cannot be said too straightforwardly to all who would understand behavior and its origins.

Douglas K. Candland
Program in Animal Behavior
Bucknell University
Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, 17837 USA