

Book Reviews

STIMULUS EXTREMISM

The Human Zoo. By DESMOND MORRIS. London: Jonathan Cape. 1969. Pp. 256. Price 35s.

'Under normal conditions, in their natural habitats, wild animals do not mutilate themselves, masturbate, attack their offspring, develop stomach ulcers, become fetishists, suffer from obesity, form homosexual pair bonds, or commit murder. Among human city-dwellers, needless to say, all of these things occur. . . . Other animals do behave in these ways under certain circumstances, namely when they are confined in the unnatural conditions of captivity. The zoo animal in a cage exhibits all these abnormalities that we know so well from our human companions. Clearly, then, the city is not a concrete jungle, it is a human zoo.' (*The Human Zoo*, p. 8). Dr. Morris argues that 'present social conditions are highly artificial for our simple tribal species' (p. 172) and that much of the abnormal behaviour of man can be explained as being due to his living in an 'unnatural environment'. In this way he tries to explain continuous striving for status, abnormal sexual activities, high levels of aggression and constant attempts to relieve boredom. We are warned that unless conditions are changed the human zoo may 'proliferate into a gigantic lunatic asylum, like one of the hideously cramped menageries of the last century' (p. 248).

While Dr. Morris is an expert on animal menageries, readers of this journal may count themselves experts on lunatic asylums. They will want to know whether the scientific study of the causes of abnormal behaviour in animals can help in the understanding of abnormal behaviour in man. Unfortunately they will not find in this book an account of the findings of such research, whether carried out by ethologists or psychologists, but rather a discursive popular ramble in which Morris expresses his own views on anything from religious trances (p. 87) to local government (p. 34). They should not be taken in by such phrases as 'from a zoologist's standpoint' or 'zoologically speaking'.

At no point in the book does Morris make his thesis clear. He never states with what he is contrasting the urban 'super-tribe'. If the contrast is with rural 'tribes' (viz. p. 246) then surely it would have been relevant to consult and quote epidemiological studies on the incidence of psychiatric and other behavioural abnormalities in rural and urban

environments. The only evidence that Morris quotes relates to suicide. But suicide does not occur in animals (not even lemmings) whether in their natural environment or in zoos, and is thus not clearly relevant to his thesis. If the contrast is with primitive 'tribes' (viz. p. 232), why does Morris not quote the relevant cross-cultural studies? He cannot argue from the fact that there are stresses in cities (p. 37) to the conclusion that there must therefore be a higher incidence of behavioural pathology in advanced than in less advanced cultures, unless he can show that these stresses are greater than those experienced in more primitive communities, such as hunger, disease and high infant mortality. Finally, if the contrast is with 'tribes' existing before the agricultural and urban revolutions, what data exist on the incidence of psychiatric disorders at that time? Morris cannot argue that since that was man's 'natural environment' he could not have shown behavioural abnormalities, since that is what he is trying to prove, namely that abnormal behaviour is the result of an 'unnatural' environment.

Morris argues (p. 21) that the study of modern non-human primates may provide clues as to the life of early man. But with whom should human 'super-apes' (p. 122) be compared—with savannah baboons who live in an environment similar to that of early man, or with chimpanzees and gorillas to whom man is more closely related? If Morris chooses to make comparisons with baboons he should say why he does not think the data on other monkeys and apes are relevant, since the differences in the social organization and behaviour within non-human primates are as great as the differences between those of non-human primates and man. Furthermore, it might be more valid to compare the 'urban super-ape' with non-human primates living in an urban environment than with those in cages. Yet, though the evidence on rhesus monkeys living in urban environments in Northern India shows an increased incidence of intra-group and inter-group aggression as compared with rural and forest-living monkeys, there is no evidence of an increase in other behavioural abnormalities.

It is sometimes not clear whether Morris intends what he says to be taken seriously. Does he really believe that human violence is to be explained partly or mainly in terms of a biological mechanism for population control; if so, why does he not say

which historical wars he believes to have been caused by over-population (p. 150)? And does he really think that an adequate explanation of the proliferation of 'neuroses and psychoses' (p. 151) as well as of 'homosexuality, fetishism and bestiality' (p. 151) as well as other sexual disorders can be given in terms of over-population? Again, Morris is often content with loose analogies between animal and human behaviour. Is it reasonable to argue that a female monkey making the common submission or appeasement gesture of sexually presenting while taking food from the ground is engaging in a form of prostitution or 'commercial sex' (p. 99)?

The most important objection to Morris's thesis is that man's large cerebral cortex has evolved to enable him to adapt to a very wide range of environments, and it is not clear which is man's 'natural' environment. Where an animal is adapted morphologically and behaviourally to a specific environment, that may be seen as its 'natural' environment. The fact that man's present environment is different from that in which he lived over 10,000 years ago cannot be used as evidence that his present environment is 'unnatural' except in the sense of 'novel', and Morris produces no evidence that man cannot adapt to new conditions, even if not to all conditions. Why should it be supposed that we are not 'biologically equipped' to deal with environments other than that of a South African savannah?

The Human Zoo will no doubt be a best seller, like its predecessor *The Naked Ape*. It contains the right mixture of dogmatic assertion and colourful exaggeration to ensure success. Furthermore, it makes use of the principle that Morris calls 'stimulus extremism', which states that 'when selected stimuli are magnified artificially to become super-normal stimuli, the effect can further be enhanced by reducing other (non-selected or irrelevant) stimuli' (p. 207), a principle which can, as he says, be applied to the selection of subject matter for books.

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AN AUTHORITATIVE EXPOSITION

Depression: Clinical, Experimental and Theoretical Aspects. By AARON T. BECK. London: Staples Press. 1969. Pp. 370. Price 65s.

During recent conversation Professor Beck referred to his book as 'Oh, that thing'. It must be taken as a flippant and disarming remark, for he has attempted an extensive survey of depression based on many years of clinical experience and experimental work. However, the reader may feel uneasy. In a definitive work, ought not the literature to have been more

exhaustively reviewed; alternatively, in an exposition of Dr. Beck's own work is not much of the literature reviewed irrelevant? Happily the author shuns such rigid consistency. He selects his authors and comments pertinently in each field. He succeeds in supplying historical background and contemporary discussion in such proportion as to give insight into recent advances without a boring catalogue of names for the sake of completeness. We may not always agree with his choice of references, but selective bias is more than offset by his catholic approach, and those who are used to thinking of psychotherapists as one-sided individuals will be surprised at the objective style and the comparatively small area given to dynamic theory. In addition the writing is readable and has the endearing and increasingly rare quality of avoiding 'padding' and obfuscatory jargon—a further proof of scholarship.

The book is divided into five parts. (1) Clinical aspects of depression, includes a review of the literature, examines the meaning of the term depression, gives a detailed list and description of symptoms amplified by some of Beck's own findings, and discusses the claim of depression to be a clinical entity and its place in classification; unfortunately it predated Kendell's monograph, so we are deprived of the author's comments on Kendell's contribution. On the whole Dr. Beck discounts the neurotic-psychotic division, and concludes that no case has been made for retaining the separate category of involuntal melancholia.

The setting for the author's own views on the basic dysfunction in depression is prepared by the statement 'the representation of depression as an affective disorder is as misleading as it would be to designate scarlet fever as a disorder of the skin'. He defines depression in terms of five attributes: (1) a specific alteration in mood; sadness, loneliness, apathy; (2) a negative self-concept associated with self reproaches and self blame; (3) regressive and self punitive wishes, desires to escape, hide or die; (4) vegetative changes, anorexia, insomnia, loss of libido; (5) changes in activity level, retardation or agitation.

In Part 2 the author reviews the experimental aspects of depression. Genetic studies he finds interesting but unproven; biochemical studies, equally unimpressive, require confirmation. The investigators are criticized for their frequent failure to control for such variables as age, sex, and dietary state. While these criticisms are certainly valid, Beck seems to dismiss the findings too easily. His aim here seems to be more chastening than didactic. He also considers Freudian theoretical formulations of depression as 'so complex and remote from observables in the