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Peace Leaflets

A Starting point for Dialogue

WHY I ALWAYS GET INTO A FIGHT

(From the Diary of Village Schoolmaster)

My student G. – a notorious brawler – was kept in one day. For extra work I assigned him an essay on the topic "Why do I always have to fight?"

For that purpose I gave the following directions:

- I don't expect you to write a long composition.
- I expect you to carefully think about the topic.
- I expect you to give an honest answer.

The result was a composition consisting of two sentences:

"Because they always call me a country bumpkin! And then I show them!"

Commentary:

To punish the student because of his fighting would have an effect comparable to treating only the symptoms of an illness instead of its cause.

Cause and ensuing effect can hardly be better described than in the two short sentences above.

Conclusion:

The student could have been helped by creating situations in which he would feel like a useful and needed member of the classroom community. Just making him realize his attitude was wrong would not have been enough. ¹⁾

Commentary:

This vivid example might lead one to think that all human behavior can be explained exclusively as reaction. In this case, it would be sufficient to eliminate negative actions or influences. This would ward off aggressive behavior and create enough space to permit the sublimation of aggression.



As it happens, aggression cannot be explained solely as reaction. Konrad Lorenz writes in his well-known book "The So-Called Evil":

"Precisely the recognition of the fact that the urge for aggression is a true and primal instinct of species-preservation, makes us realize the full extent of its dangerousness. It is the spontaneity of this instinct which makes it so dangerous." ¹⁾

We can conclude that the primal species-preserving instinct of aggression could be credited with the continuance of the human race. However, given the possibilities of the atomic age, this same primal instinct now constitutes a potential for an enormous danger. ²⁾

Nevertheless, the situation is not hopeless. Konrad Lorenz continues on to say:

"To Freud goes the credit to have, for the first time, recognized aggression as an independent characteristic. Furthermore, he demonstrated that the lack of social contact, especially the loss of it (loss of love), are among the most influential factors."

As Freud concluded, the dangers inherent in that "lack of social contact" should not be ignored either by family or community.

The Sicilian artist Emannuele Modica ³⁾ has been travelling throughout Italy for twenty years, in order to advocate for peace and non-violence by means of a mobile exposition. His father was killed by the Mafia when he was seven years old. He explained to me that after this shock there seemed to be two ways open to him: either to go after the murderer and revenge the assassination of his father, or to become a warning voice and a fighter for peace. He chose the latter.....

Since homo sapiens is without doubt a creature capable of learning – how otherwise could he have survived so long? – there is no reason to join the ranks of cultural pessimists. May this "optimism in spite of everything" be reinforced by the inclusion of these examples. The sublimation of the instinct of aggression is by all means possible.

¹⁾ Konrad Lorenz, "The So-called Evil" dtv 1974, page 55/56

²⁾ Annotation of the author: Precisely because of this conclusion, Konrad Lorenz's work has been – primarily in the countries across the Atlantic – not altogether free of controversy.

³⁾ His oil painting "La Pace Nel Mondo" is displayed in the lobby of the First Austrian Peace Museum in Wolfsegg. Upper Austria