The ‘Evil’ Mind: Pt. 3. Cruelty and ‘Beast-In-Man’ Imagery

by Johan M.G. van der Dennen

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Probably the first authors to discuss cruelty in relation to ‘primitive’ warfare were Steinmetz (1892 et seq.) and van der Bij (1929), after the initial 19th-century evolutionist attempts by Helvetius, Bain, Sully, Spencer, and William James.

In his Social Statics Spencer (1851) gave an account of cruelty – linking it to the hunting way of life of our ancestors and ‘primitive’ peoples – which was probably entirely salonfähig at that time. On looking at the facts, Spencer stated:

He will find that human beings are cruel to one another, in proportion as their habits are predatory. The Indian, whose life is spent in the chase, delights in torturing his brother man as much as in killing game. His sons are schooled into fortitude by long days of torment, and his squaw made prematurely old by hard treatment. The treachery and vindictiveness which Bushmen or Australians show to one another and to Europeans, are accompaniments of that never-ceasing enmity existing between them and the denizens of the wilderness. Amongst partially-civilized nations the two characteristics have ever born the same relationship. Thus the spectators in the Roman amphitheatres were as much delighted by the slaying of gladiators as by the death-struggles of wild beasts. The ages during which Europe was thinly peopled, and hunting a chief occupation, were also the ages of feudal violence, universal brigandage, dungeons, tortures (Spencer, 1851; reprinted in Peel, 1972: 19).

There is a kind of cruelty which is, as it were, the negative of empathy, which is the wanton cruelty of the sadist. On the other hand, there probably is also a kind of cruelty which stems from ignorance and lack of empathy, as in the fairly common torturing of animals by children, or as manifest in the ‘dull’ cruelty of the psychopath. Perhaps there exists a third kind which
stems from ‘psychic numbing’ (or callousness), which may be considered to be a carefully inculcated, instrumental cruelty.

Concerning the second category, Tylor (1881) stated: “The lower races of man are so wanting in foresight to resist passion and temptation that the moral balance of a tribe easily goes wrong, while they are rough and wantonly cruel through want of intelligent sympathy with the sufferings of others, much as children are cruel to animals through not being able to imagine what the creature feels”.

Is Cruelty Confined to Humans?

Is cruelty confined to the human species, or does something of the kind exist in nonhuman species? In the words of Rapoport (1974): “If by ‘cruelty’ is meant the inflicting of pain or distress on others for its own sake rather than incidentally to, say, predation, instances of cruelty are difficult to find in non-humans.

While callousness is simply lack of identification with others, cruelty is, on the contrary, evidence of identification with the ‘opposite sign’ as it were. Cruelty is the property of deriving pleasure from the suffering of others, just as empathy is sharing the suffering of others. The bill of particulars charging man with cruelty is long indeed, and perhaps it is true that man is the only really cruel animal. But this may be precisely because man is also the only animal capable of empathy, since both cruelty and empathy presuppose identification with the object of brutality or of compassion. Cruelty and empathy are two sides of the same coin. Aggression and empathy may be nearer each other than either is to indifference.

The unmistakable practice of cruelty for cruelty’s sake depends on the same human faculty that on other occasions manifests itself in love and compassion – the ability to transcend the self and to guide one’s actions by imagining how the other feels” (Rapoport, 1974).

May (1969, 1972) relates cruelty to the incapacity to establish contact. “To inflict pain and torture at least proves that one can affect somebody”.

Kortlandt (1972) observed that exploratory behavior in chimpanzees may occasionally include aggressive elements (torturing, dismembering and killing). For example, a chimpanzee in captivity may gently swat to death a tame laboratory rat or mouse with which he is playing. He does this, however, with a ‘mild’ manner, accompanied by ‘clinical’ facial and gestural expressions, and when in a contemplative mood. The killing, in this case, is only an accidental by-product of the investigate process.

On the other hand, chimpanzees show extremely cruel behavior in their occasional infanticides (combined with cannibalism), and their ‘lethal male raiding’ (i.e., the chimpanzee equivalent of human warfare).

Bygott (1974, 1979), Jane Goodall (1979 et seq) and Goodall et al. (1979) recently reported on the intercommunity relationships of the Gombe (Tanzania) population of chimpanzees, especially episodes of what Goodall literally called ‘primitive warfare’.

Goodall describes several such lethal male raiding episodes in some (gruesome) detail. “It seems”, she states, “that we have been observing a phenomenon rarely recorded in field
studies – the gradual extermination of one group of animals by another, stronger, group” (Goodall, 1979). Why, she wondered, would the aggressors attempt to kill, maim or injure their victims instead of merely chasing them away?

Bygott (1979) and Goodall et al. (1979) emphasize that the males actively seek out agonistic interactions with the adjacent community during their patrolling. Also Nishida (1979, 1980) and Itani (1982) have observed similar group antagonism in chimpanzees, which was described by Itani as a “skirmish in a war”. On the patrolling behavior of some ‘warrior groups’ Itani also reports: “they looked as if they were aiming for the best chance of encountering another group”, or as if they were looking for an opportunity to ‘hunt down’ conspecifics and inflict fatal injuries (Manson & Wrangham, 1991). Furthermore, the attacks were all characterized by “unusual brutality and persistence” (Bygott, 1979), and the observers could not escape feeling that the aggressors were ‘intentionally’ trying to kill their victims. As Itani (1982) phrased it: “antagonistic interactions of a group versus an individual, or a group versus another group, with the intent to kill, is peculiar to chimpanzee society” (cf. Ghiglieri, 1988; Goodall, 1986; Goodall et al., 1979; Manson & Wrangham, 1991).

Interestingly, intercommunity encounters involve mostly males. Females (usually while in estrous) sometimes accompany males on patrol, but they do not typically initiate ‘hostilities’ (Goodall et al., 1979; Wrangham, 1975). Another intriguing observation is that the intense excitement shown by the aggressors during and after the attacks rather easily ‘spills over’ into hunting and killing other primates (red colobus or baboons), which might suggest that at least in some instances similar motivational mechanisms may be involved in both intraspecific violence and interspecific predation (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1975; Bygott, 1979; Vogel, 1989).

Ghiglieri (1987) and Alexander (1989) speculate that the raiding strategy may be a pattern common to the human-chimpanzee-bonobo (HUCHIBO) clade: “Unlike gorillas and orangutans, males of the chimpanzee-bonobo-human clade retain their male offspring predominantly, live in closed social groups containing multiple females, mate polygynously, restrict their ranging to a communal territory, are cooperatively active in territorial defense, and, apparently, when a neighboring community weakens, the males of some communities make a concerted strategic effort to stalk, attack, and kill their rivals as do men” (Ghiglieri, 1987). Especially, the combination of male-male cooperation, ‘proto-ethnocentrism’, group-territoriality and female transfer has been singled out as the starting condition for lethal intergroup violence (Goodall, 1986; Ghiglieri, 1987, 1988, 1999; Alexander, 1989; Manson & Wrangham, 1991; Van der Dennen, 1995; Wrangham & Peterson, 1996).

Perhaps species with a more elaborate cognitive make-up need extra strong group demarcations, the strength of which must be somehow related to the species’ affective system. Maybe chimpanzees, like our own species, have very strong imaginations (schemata or mental representations) of we and they (‘proto-ethnocentrism’ or what Kawanaka [1973] called “a consciousness of belonging”).

Besides the general, more elaborate cognitive make-up, there may be highly (content)specific cognitive mechanisms involved, which would also, at least partly, explain why ‘war-like’ intergroup conflict is actually so rare in mammals in general, and primates in particular. One should not loose sight of the fact that, despite the impressive list of species which do, thousands of other species do not have ‘group aggression’ in their behavioral repertoire. In a similar vein, Tooby & Cosmides (1988) reasoned that the distribution of war in the animal kingdom is limited by the same factor that limits the emergence of the multi-individual
(polyadic) cooperation on which war depends: specific cognitive preadaptations, and a distinctive coalitional psychology.

According to Manson & Wrangham (1991), the similarities between chimpanzee and human lethal male raiding seem to suggest a common evolutionary background.

Goodall (1986) herself explains the chimpanzee proto-warfare in terms of the idiosyncratic pattern of chimpanzee territoriality and preadaptations common in chimpanzees and early humans. Granted that destructive warfare in its typical human form (organized, armed conflict between groups) is a cultural development, it nevertheless required preadaptations to permit its emergence in the first place. The most crucial which Goodall identifies are cooperative group living, group territoriality, cooperative hunting skills, weapon use, and the intellectual ability to make cooperative plans. Another basic preadaptation, according to Goodall, was xenophobia: an inherent fear of, or aversion to, strangers, expressed by aggressive attack. Early hominid groups possessing these behavioral characteristics would theoretically have been capable of the kind of organized intergroup conflict that could have led to destructive warfare. Chimpanzees not only posses, to a greater or lesser extent, the above preadaptations, but they show other inherent characteristics that would have been helpful to the dawn warriors in their primitive battles:

(a) If the early hominid males were inherently disposed to find aggression attractive, particularly aggression directed against neighbors, as (at least some adolescent male) chimpanzees appear to do, this trait would have provided a biological basis for the cultural training of warriors.

(b) In humans cultural evolution permits pseudospeciation (Erikson, 1966). In its extreme form pseudospeciation leads to the ‘dehumanization’ of other groups, so that they may be regarded almost as members of a different species. This process, along with the ability to use weapons for hurting or killing at a distance, frees group members from the inhibitions and social sanctions that operate within the group and enables acts that would not be tolerated within the group. Thus it is of considerable interest to find that the chimpanzees show behaviors that bear strong resemblance to, and hence may be precursors to pseudospeciation in humans. First, their sense of group identity is strong; they clearly differentiate between ingroup and outgroup, between individuals who ‘belong to us’ and those who do not. This sense of group identity is, Goodall claims, far more sophisticated than mere xenophobia. The members of the Kahame chimpanzee community had, before they split, enjoyed close and friendly relations with their aggressors. By separating themselves, it is as though they forfeited their ‘right’ to be treated as group members – instead they were treated as strangers. Second, the patterns of attack strikingly differ from those utilized in typical intracommunity aggression: AThe victims are treated more as though they were prey animals; they are ‘dechimpized’”.

Diamond (1992) wondered why these chimps are such inefficient killers compared to humans: AChimps’ inefficiency as killers reflects their lack of weapons, but it remains surprising that they have not learned to kill by strangling, although that would be within their capabilities. Not only is each individual killing inefficient by our standards, but so is the whole course of chimp genocide. It took three years and ten months from the first killing of a Kahama chimp to the band’s end... “.
Two further aspects of chimpanzee behavior are of interest in relation to the evolution of behavior associated with human intergroup conflict: (a) In the chimpanzee, as in humans, cannibalism may follow intergroup conflict; and (b) Chimpanzees appear to possess the cognitive sophistication which is a prerequisite for the genesis of cruelty: they are capable to some extent of imputing desires and feelings to others, and they are almost certainly capable of feelings akin to human sympathy and empathy (Goodall, 1986).

The Faces of Cruelty

Fromm (1973) has argued that we must distinguish in man two entirely different kinds of aggression. The first kind, which he shares with all animals, is a phylogenetically programmed impulse to attack (or to flee) when vital interests are threatened. This ‘defensive’ or ‘benign’ aggression is in the service of the survival of the individual and the species, is biologically adaptive, and ceases when the threat has ceased to exist. The other type, ‘malignant’ aggression, i.e., destructiveness and cruelty, is specific to the human species and virtually absent in most mammals; it is not phylogenetically programmed and not biologically adaptive; it has no purpose, and its satisfaction is lustful.

Man’s ‘hyperaggression’ or destructive aggression is not due to a greater aggressive potential but to the fact that aggression-producing conditions are much more frequent for humans than for animals living in their natural habitat.

Fromm thus takes a position in direct contradiction to Freud’s theory of a ‘death instinct’ (Todestrieb) to explain destructive activity in man.

Fromm believes that cruelty and destructiveness are manifestations of malignant aggression peculiar to man. He postulates two forms of destructiveness: spontaneous destructiveness and destructiveness that is bound in the character structure.

Examples of spontaneous destructiveness are vengeful destructiveness and ecstatic destructiveness. Vengeful destructiveness is a spontaneous reaction to intense and unjustified suffering inflicted upon a person or the members of the group with which he is identified. It differs from normal defensive aggression in two ways: (1) it occurs after the damage has been done and hence is not a defense against a threatening danger; (2) it is of much greater intensity and is often cruel, lustful, and insatiable. Ecstatic destructiveness occurs in ritualistic, primitive orgies or states of trance organized around rage and destructiveness. Examples of cruelty and destructiveness woven into the character structure are sadism and necrophilia.

Sadism is different from the wish to kill inasmuch as the sadist does not want so much the physical destruction of his victim as the sensation of complete control and power over him. Through sadism a living being is transformed into a thing – not, as in killing, into a ‘dead’ corpse – but into a living corpse, into a thing which has no will of its own, into the sadist’s thing. In one necrophilous person the wish to kill may be dominant, in another the wish to torture – yet they are usually both present and necessarily so, because they are rooted in the same orientation. “All factors that make man into a psychic cripple turn him also into a sadist or a destroyer”.
According to Heller (1979) it is a matter of course that sadism may not be derived exclusively from the aggressive drive; long ago Freud has demonstrated that the ‘libido’ is at least as much a motive of sadism. If we abstain from a direct identification of ‘libido’ with sexuality, something that is not characteristic of Freud himself, then we must accept this explanation as an incontrovertible fact. Sadism is distinguished from all other forms of destruction aimed against man by the fact that it procures pleasure, causes enjoyment. The release of rage may well result in a release of tension, but not in sensual enjoyment. If we bang our fist on the table, this gesture does not imply enjoyment on our part; and if we strike somebody out of rage, this act does not cause pleasure. Or rather, insofar as it also causes pleasure (and this is only possible in the latter case), sadism already plays a part in the gesture. Since rage is not enjoyment and, at the same time, it is a compulsive force at the time of the appearance of the given stimulus, it cannot be planned and cannot be retarded. By dint of will-power it may be possible to diminish the duration of the fit of rage, but it may not be increased (for then it would become manipulated). On the contrary, the act of sadism can well be planned, may well be delayed, extended; what is more, intentionality and purposefulness are essentially part of it. It will suffice to think of Justine by the Marquis de Sade. The sexual sadists in the novel have planned with gothic fantasy the ‘situations’ in which the victims of their sadism are most apt to be humiliated. There is rage among animals, even if the stimuli provoking it form but a small percentage of the stimuli that provoke human anger, but there is no sadism among animals. The capacity for purposeful action is an intrinsic part of sadism, as is planning and, what is perhaps even more important, so is the perverted relationship between subject and object.

In the majority of cases the sadist subject is not ‘enraged’ against his object. But this object can only be a subject-object. No one can be sadist with regard to a mere object. The pleasure of the sadist is derived from the fact that by his act he is proving the power of his own subject: the power of turning another subject into a mere object. Only a subject can be turned into an object. What is more, in the process of becoming an object, the ever more humiliated, more trampled subject always ‘manifests’ his own subjectivity. A former prisoner at Auschwitz told about a Lithuanian member of the SS that before shooting to death women prisoners picked at random he would always shout at them: ‘Weinen’. He only derived pleasure from shooting the woman to death if she cried, and begged for her life, if he was able to convert the subject into mere object. The desire of the sadist is not simply to destroy the other, but rather to torture or destroy on the basis of an imagined ‘libretto’. This is a perverted form of playfulness: the other person has to perform the rites of the conversion from subject to object. All this, of course, is valid not only in case of the physical destruction of the other, but also for sadism that destroys its spiritual and moral subject, the so-called ‘intellectual sadism’. The other is made into an object by being changed into mere instrument. Therefore it would be absurd to talk about sadism as a manifestation of some kind of ‘instinct’. It is not related to the only biological constituent of aggression, namely to anger. It may be compulsive in the case of certain individuals, as in the case of those who kill in the course of some sexual act, but it is not compulsive in most cases. Sadist personalities are psychopathological cases, but in the case of non-sadist personalities rational and moral motivation may always prevent the realization of sadist impulses, whereas these motivations are not capable of preventing anger.

Among the majority of ‘primitive’ peoples we never meet with sadism, as far as action is concerned, and it is only among a small minority of modern men that we meet with sadism realized in behavior or action. Yet rational and moral factors may considerably codetermine
sadist action and behavior in general. To refer once again to the Marquis de Sade, they were the conscious ‘apostles’ of the principle of pleasure and egotism (Heller, 1979).

The genius of Freud can also be seen in his detection, even if concealed by his theory of instincts, of the affinity between the weakness of the ego and sadism. The weaker the ego, the less it can identify with its own self, the less self-assurance finds strength in sensible actions, the more the need for self-identity appears in a perverted form.


**Ferociousness (overt brutality)**

Consider the extremes of overt brutality: mutilation, torture, and peremptory executions.

Mutilation: punishment not by death, but by life at its lowest level. The amputation of feet or hands, or ears – so common in ancient Rome, China, Mesopotamia, Palestine and in the Arab societies; the gouging out of eyes. The intent is not merely punishment, but prolonged misery and humiliation.

Mutilation might be combined with execution, always in a public form. Clearly, public humiliation is at the essence of the phenomenon.

Torture: the deliberate prolongation and refinement of pain, usually dramatized and timed to maximize psychological dread. Torture has been routinely used in many judicial systems as part of the examination of prisoners before trial. Yet as a system for collecting evidence it is inefficient, precisely because it usually produces whatever reports or fabrications the victims think their torturers wish to hear. Clearly, according to Collins, the purpose of torture is not on this level; it is not to gather evidence, but to enforce submission. The cruelty is not incidental; it is the main purpose.

Peremptory executions: the awesomeness of the powerful lord was usually demonstrated in his death-dealing powers: Attila the Hun with his piles of skulls, King David with the heads of his enemies displayed on a spike. This was the extreme dramatization of arbitrary authority.

Peremptory executions, torture and mutilation are all characteristic of iron-age (agrarian) societies which are highly stratified around a patrimonial form of government. These, indeed, are the most highly stratified societies in world history; and the stratification largely takes the form of external relations of dominance. These are conquest states, often over ethnically diverse areas; administration is tributary rather than intensive, with the local social structure left intact.

Torture and mutilation, then, are distinctively human acts; they are indeed advanced human acts. This distinctively human violence becomes symbolic; torture and mutilation are above all forms of communication usable as threats and supports for claims of complete domination.
In this perspective, cruelty bears a relation to technological and social evolution. The refined reflexivity of mutilation and torture reflects a more subtle development of human cognitive faculties than the direct emotional arousal of the war-hunt or human sacrifice.

This is borne out by the types of societies in which each of these is commonly found. War-hunts are found primarily in unstratified primitive horticultural, hunting, or pastoral societies.

Human sacrifice is found primarily in advanced horticultural societies, especially around the institution of the divine king or reigning priests, and reflects the gulf between dominant and dominated groups.

The extremes of refined cruelty are found in advanced iron age societies, with their great military powers and their high degree of warfare.

Human sacrifice is one of the cornerstones of human history. It lies at the heart of so many religions that classics scholar Walter Burkert (1983) believes it may even have given human society its form. He suggests renaming our species *Homo necans* – ‘man the killer’ (Watson, 1995).

Anthropologist René Girard (1977) describes sacrifice as “the most crucial and fundamental of rites... and also one of the most commonplace”.

There is something in this. A man shot to death by arrows lies buried at the main entrance of Stonehenge. And just a few miles away, in the centre of the Bronze Age circle known as Woodhenge, archaeologists found the body of a three-year-old girl with a split skull (Burl, 1987). The Greek historian Pausanias tells of the dismemberment and communal eating of a child sacrificed in the sanctuary of Zeus on top of Mount Lykaion.

Bridges, houses, temples and forts throughout Europe, Asia and the Pacific contain ‘foundation sacrifices’ designed, it seems, to ensure that they were imbued with the proper spirit. The Judeo-Christian tradition began with the sacrifice of Abel by his brother Cain.

Human sacrifice appears to have been the engine too of New World (Maya, Aztec, Inca) cultural evolution (Watson, 1975).

According to Ridley (1996) we frequently and universally anthropomorphize the natural world as a system of social exchanges. “The gods are angry because of what we have done... If we please the gods – with sacrifices, food offering, or prayer – we expect to be rewarded with military victory, good harvests or a ticket to heaven”. We bribe the gods or spirits to be propitious.

One might suppose that the monotheistic or philosophical world religions, with their universal brotherhood and their explicit ethical concerns, would indicate an historical break away from explicit cruelty and towards altruism. Some of them, such as Christianity, have even been formulated as primarily religions of ‘love’. But in historical fact, this is not the case. The world religions arose with the development of cosmopolitan states, ‘world empires’ transcending the previously localized and self-contained kingdoms and their legitimating local gods. Moreover, the world religions have everywhere played a predominantly political role, especially in their early phases, providing the legitimation as well as the administrative
apparatus for the large-scale state. In the case of Islam, religion provided the organizing vehicle for a military coalition.

Thus, the world religions, far from indicating a break with violence, represent a new form in its organization. Moreover, that form is the most inegalitarian and efficiently stratified form in world history; the iron-age, agrarian societies in which the universalist churches arose supported some of the cruelest forms of stratification ever seen. The moralities of the world religions, generally speaking, contributed more to the extension of violent cruelty than to its mitigation (Collins, 1974; Cf. Stratton, 1923; Weber, 1915).

Callousness and Bureaucratization

According to Collins (1974), callousness is cruelty without passion: the kind of hardship or violence people may inflict on others without a special intent to hurt. The subject of the violence is simply an instrument or an obstacle, and his suffering is merely an incidental (usually ignored) feature of some other intention. In this sense, the structural conditions for callousness must be very different from those that produce ferocious violence.

Callousness is found in all societies throughout history, but it is especially characteristic of certain types. Callous cruelty is especially characteristic of large-scale, bureaucratic organization, the violence of the modern army and state. Indeed, the structural organization of bureaucracy seems uniquely suited to the perpetration of callous violence. Bureaucracy is typically hierarchic, and hence, routinely enforces relationships of domination and submission. But both the means and the ends of bureaucratic action deal not with the individual person and his subjective feelings, but with segmented elements of individual lives.

Asceticism

Asceticism, at its extreme, is a turning inwards of cruelty, directing it towards oneself. In its origins, asceticism was purely personal, a form of self-denial valued for its supposed key mystical experience. Asceticism becomes organized social cruelty when an ascetic religion becomes part of the on-going, secular social structure. In this, Christianity is the prime example.

Thus, we find the height of ascetic atrocities – purgatorial actions – during the Reformation and Counterreformation in medieval Christianity (Collins, 1974; Trevor-Roper, 1967; Thomas, 1971).

The Causes of Human Misery

Reflecting on the causes of human misery, Barrington Moore (1970) perceives “an explicit social purpose behind these massive slaughters, tortures, cruelties, behind the desolation, disease, and starvation that have strewn the record of human history. But it is not a purpose in the older semitheological sense of leading up to a final liberation from misery”.

There appears to have been some group purpose behind nearly all cruelty ranging from the grisly initiation rites and punishments among pre-literate groups, to the tortures and brutalities of the Nazi concentration camps, as well as the horrors of our own day. The general role of cruelty, Moore submits, is to sustain or to subvert and overthrow a specific social order. There
is very little cruelty in the human record that one can identify as random or purposeless or primarily for the pleasure to be derived from watching the victims suffer. This observation does not mean that the pleasure does not exist. It is obvious that there is such a pleasure, or that such a pleasure can be an only too easily acquired taste.

The general and recurring sociological causes of cruelty and conflict are explicable in terms of what appear to be quite general sociological processes characteristic of (1) the formation of cooperative human groupings; (2) consequent struggles among these groups; (3) the creation of formal or informal rules of conduct within and among social groups; and (4) the tendencies of these rules to break down.

Moore makes the important observation: “Whether or not human beings have an aggressive instinct or a drive for power, recurring and, I think, unavoidable social situations put them in circumstances where they have to behave as though they had such instincts”.

Why are human conflicts and cruelty so widespread in time and space if they are not the necessary consequence of some powerful biological urge? “The essence of the answer that makes sense to me”, Moore maintains, “is that the mere existence of independent or ‘sovereign’ political units is by itself sufficient to set in motion rivalries and insecurities that will before long have these units at each other’s throats. By itself the existence of these units can generate social processes that make human beings behave aggressively. They have perhaps always had a more than adequate biological capacity for such behavior, a capacity now almost infinitely multiplied as the current outcome of cultural and social evolution”.

In international relations – the “organized cannibalism of politics among states” – Moore points to fear of conquest by a foreign enemy to explain the ubiquity of mutual destruction. There is, as has often been observed, no security in being just as strong as a potential rival; one has to be stronger.

**Psychodynamic Theories of Cruelty**

Some psychoanalysts have attempted to explain the more cruel forms of human aggression and violence psychodynamically by postulating an ‘essential destructiveness’ or ‘destructive drive’ (e.g., Federn, 1952; Waelder, 1960; a.o.). Much of the evidence for such ‘essential destructiveness’ or ‘primary aggression’ comes from psychopathology. Thus, Waelder refers to the fact that “a psychotic may strike his head with an axe with full force, and... repeat the assault if he has the strength left to do so”, and to “the sudden outbursts of catatonic, reaching out without warning from what seemed to be a state of indifference, to a lightning attack”. In disturbed behavior of these kinds, which are frequently observed among psychotics, aggression is starkly manifest, and provides in Federn’s and Waelder’s view the real basis for the assumption of a destructive drive (Freeman, 1973).

Walker (1899), in his *A History of the Law of Nations*, presents a scholarly survey of the practices that marked warfare from ‘the earliest times to the Peace of Westphalia, 1648). These practices, with but rare exceptions, exhibit extremes of destructiveness and cruelty, and, indeed, the epochs surveyed abound with happenings that differ scarcely at all from the phenomena of psychopathology (Freeman, 1973) Some indication of their nature is conveyed in this typical excerpt from Walker’s *History*, referring to the Middle Ages:
When Basil II (1014) could blind fifteen thousand Bulgarians, leaving an eye to the leader of every hundred, it ceases to be a matter of surprise that Saracen marauders should thirty years later be impaled by Byzantine officials, that the Greeks of Andramyttium in the time of Malek Shah (1106-16) should drown Turkish children in boiling water, that the Emperor Nicephorus (961) should cast from catapults into a Cretan city the heads of Saracens slain in the attempt to raise the siege, or that a crusading Prince of Antioch (1097) should cook human bodies on spits to earn for his men the terrifying reputation of cannibalism (Walker, 1899; quoted in Freeman, 1973).

The years that have elapsed since the Peace of Westphalia have not been without progress; but the course of human history has continued to be marked by wars, revolutions, massacres, rebellions, and riots which have been characterized by destructiveness and cruelty no less extreme than that of earlier epochs.

The full realities are, indeed, of a kind that cannot be generally published, and those who observe them readily repress much of the horror they have experienced. Dillon (1896), for example, in his account of the Armenian massacres, after giving details of cruelties and mutilations of a gross kind, adds that there were others which ‘cannot be described, nor even hinted at’. Indeed, in accounts of such behavior one constantly encounters the epithets ‘unbelievable’, ‘indescribable’, ‘unimaginable’.

Any scholar who is prepared to examine objectively the evidence of history will be led, Freeman (1973) believes, to the same conclusion as that reached by Durbin & Bowlby (1938), that no group of animals is Amore aggressive or ruthless in their aggression than the adult members of the human race”.

Indeed, Freeman (1973) adds, human aggression is never more terrifying than when at the service of the dogmatic and delusory group ideologies characteristic of *Homo sapiens*.

It has often been observed that the extreme nature of human destructiveness and cruelty is one of the principal characteristics which marks off man, behaviorally, from other animals. This point has been cogently expressed by the biologist Portman (1942): A[W]hen terrible things, cruelties hardly conceivable, occur among men, many speak thoughtlessly of ‘brutality’, of bestialism, or a return to animal levels... As if there were animals which inflict on their own kind what men can do to men. Just at this point the zoologist has to draw a clear line: these evil, horrible things are no animal survival that happened to be carried along in the imperceptible transition from animal to man; this evil belongs entirely on this side of the dividing line, it is purely human...”.

The history of the more ‘primitive’ peoples confirms the conclusions Freeman reached for the partially civilized. Davie (1929), having surveyed the ethnographic evidence, came to the conclusion that “war plays a prominent part in the lives of most primitive peoples, and is usually a sanguinary affair”. With few exceptions, the ethnographic evidence shows warfare among ‘primitive’ peoples to have been endemic and, on occasion, internecine (Freeman, 1973; cf. Van der Dennen, 1995; Keeley, 1996).

‘Primitive’ cultures also exhibit many bizarre expressions of human cruelty and aggression, in sacrificial rites, ceremonies of initiation, ritual mutilations, headhunting and cannibalistic cults, and murderous societies (like those of the thugs of historical India or the ‘leopard men’ of Africa).
These diverse forms of symbolic behavior are paralleled by the highly aggressive fantasies to be found in mythologies and fairy-tales throughout the world, and in the frightful torments of the various hells of human religions. Here we are dealing with delusional beliefs which have become shared and traditional; it is certain, however, that they are all, finally, endopsychic in origin and, therefore, products of the human unconscious.

Comparable evidence is to be found in the dreams, fantasies, and play of children. Again, as anyone who cares to study the history of blood-sports or the productions of the film industry can establish, spectacles of violence are a predominant element in the entertainments popular among men. Indeed, field observation shows that expressions of pleasure are basically associated with the witnessing of destruction and the infliction of hurt (Freeman, 1973).

**Unorthodox Theories of Cruelty**

Mumford (1961), in *The City in History*, argued that it was when men came to live together in cities – in about 5000 B.C. – that they began to make war. The birth of the city made warfare inevitable because boundary disputes could no longer be solved by saber-rattling (C. Wilson, 1984). But it would be a mistake to imagine that, because he marched against his neighbor, man suddenly became ruthless and cruel. In fact, there is a certain amount of evidence that cruelty was a fairly late development.

Sargon of Akkad was not particularly ruthless, and this may be why his empire lasted such a short time; in his last years, many cities rose up against him. Later kings recognized the importance of sternness and terror (C. Wilson, 1984).

No doubt, part of the attractiveness and persistence of the prevailing view of war as a cultural invention is due to the fact that the (alleged) beginning of war coincides with the commencement of *codified* history, with written records (from Akkad, Sumer, Babylon and Assyria) of predatory and internecine warfare and horrible accounts of devastating destruction, massacres of entire populations, and remorseless, unimaginable cruelty (Van der Dennen, 1995; Carlton, 1994; Dyer, 1985).

Consider the boast of Shalmaneser III of Assyria who in his conquest of the mountain peoples of Uratu (modern Turkey) says that he dyed the ground with their blood as though it were wool, and that he impaled the defenders on sharpened stakes and stacked their severed heads against the walls (Piotrovski, 1969: 47). We know this because he boasted of his deed on bronze gates he had erected in the city of Imgur-Enlil, near his capital of Niniveh. The Assyrians had the reputation of being particularly ruthless even in the ancient world, but Shalmaneser’s behavior was by no means unusual” (Dyer, 1985).

Or that of another Assyrian conqueror, Sennacherib, who when he took Babylon (680 BC) – that most famous and oft-devastated of ancient cities – said, AI levelled... its houses... destroyed them and consumed them with fire. I tore down... the outer and inner walls, the temples and the ziggurats [temple towers] built of brick, and threw the rubble in the Arahtu Canal. And after I destroyed Babylon, smashed its gods and massacred its population, I tore up its soil and threw it into the Euphrates so that it was carried by the river down to the sea” (Welland, 1982: 147).
Het palet van Narmer geeft een beeld van de triomfantelijke terugkeer van de Boven-Egyptische veldheer na de verovering van Beneden-Egypte. Tot bovenmenselijke afmetingen uitgedijd, schrijdt de koninklijke veroveraar achter een trotse drom vaandeldragers naar een dubbele rij onthoofde lijken van vijanden. Beneden, in de gedaante van een stier, vertrapt hij een verslagen tegenstander en haalt de muren van een versterkte stad neer. Men gelooft, dat de begeleidende tekst een buit opsomt van 120.000 gevangenen, 400.000 ossen en 1.422.000 schapen en geiten.

In dit gruwelijke werk van een archeïsche Egyptische kunst hebben wij de hele tragedie van het militarisme, zoals zij sedert de dagen van Narmer steeds weer is voltrokken door de Sennacheribs en Tamerlans en Karel de Grotes van twintig verschillende beschavingen, tot op onze eigen militaristen in de westere wereld van heden” (Toynbee, 1952: 117).

Wanneer wij de anderhalve eeuw van steeds verbitterder oorlogvoering overzien, die in 745 v. Chr. begint met Tiglath-Pileser III’s bestijging van de Assyrische troon en in 605 eindigt met de overwinning, die een Babylonische Nebuchadnezzar bij Carchemish op een Egyptische Necho behaalde, valt het oog in de eerste plaats op de historische mijlpalen, vertegenwoordigd door de opeenvolgende ‘knock-outs’, waarmee Assyrië hele gemeenschappen vernietigde – steden tot de grond toe verwoestend en hele volken gevankelijk wegveroerend. Wij denken aan de verwoesting van Damascus in 732; de verwoesting van Samaria in 722; de verwoesting van Musasir in 714; de verwoesting van Babylon in 689; de verwoesting van Sidon in 677; de verwoesting van Memphis in 671; de verwoesting van Thebe in 663; de verwoesting van Susa omtrent 639. Van alle hoofdsteden der staten, die binnen bereik van Assyrië’s arm lagen, waren alleen Tyur en Jeruzalem aan de vooravond van de verwoesting van Niniveh in 612 ongeschoend. De verliezen en de ellende, die Assyrië zijn buren berokkende, zijn onberekenbaar” (Toynbee, 1952: 87).

Voor de grote meerderheid van hen, die de naam Timoer Lenk of Tamerlan nog iets te zeggen heeft, roept deze naam de herinnering op aan een militarist, die in een tijdsbestek van van vier en twintig jaar evenveel gruwelen bedreef als in een eeuw waren bedreven door een reeks Assyrische koningen, van Tiglath-Pileser III tot en met Assurbanipal. Wij denken aan het monster, dat in 1381 Isfarain met de grond gelijk maakte; dat in 1383 in Sabzawar van twee duizend gevangen een levende grafheuvel bouwde en hen toen geheel inmetselde; dat in hetzelfde jaar in Zirih 5.000 mensen hoofden tot minarets opstapelde; dat zijn Loerische gevangenen in 1386 levend in de afgrond wierp; dat in 1387 in Isfahan 70.000 mensen afmaakte en de hoofden der vermoorden tot minarets opstapelde; dat in 1393 het garnizoen van Takrit uitmoordde en hun hoofden tot minarets opstapelde; dat in 1398 in Delhi 100.000 gevangen afmaakte; dat in 1400 de 4.000 christelijke soldaten van het garnizoen van Sivas na hun capitulatie levend begroef; dat in 1400 en 1401 in Syrië 12.000 totens van schedels bouwde; dat in 1401 in Bagdad handelde zoals het 14 jaar eerder met Isfahan had gehandeld” (Toynbee, 1952: 113-14).

But these accounts still leave unanswered the question how *Homo sapiens sapiens* became such a cruel creature. One of the odder attempts to explain wanton killing and cruelty was made by a Hungarian anthropologist Oscar Kiss Maerth, in a book called *The Beginning Was the End* (1971). Maerth’s theory takes as its starting point the evidence for widespread cannibalism among our ancestors. Basing his theory on his study of modern head-hunters in Borneo, Sumatra and New Guinea, Maerth argues that the eating of human brains stimulates intelligence and increases sexual excitability. Early man ate the brains of his enemies – perhaps believing he could absorb his courage and other virtues – and discovered that it made...
him more intelligent. It also caused him to become obsessed by sex. At the moment, Maerth’s theory can be neither proved nor disproved, since there is no evidence that the eating of brains produces the effects he alleges (C. Wilson, 1984).

Lorenz’s (1966) theory is far less heterodox, but it is open to equally strong objections. He suggests that harmless species, such as doves, have no appeasement signals to stop aggression, because in normal circumstances they cannot do one another a great deal of damage. Man, he says, being basically a harmless creature, without tusks or claws, also lacks appeasement signals. This explanation has been challenged by Elaine Morgan in a book called *The Descent of Woman*; she points out that man still has strong canine teeth, which must at one time have been far bigger. Baboons have similar teeth, and they have appeasement signals.

In *African Genesis*, Ardrey (1961) put forward the hypothesis that when man learned to kill with weapons his life became more violent and dangerous, so that it was the most skilful killers who survived. He later had to admit that this failed to explain why early man made war on other tribes. In a later book, *The Social Contract*, Ardrey (1970) had another suggestion: that man became dangerous when he ceased to be a hunter and became a farmer. The habit of hunting was still in his blood, and he turned from hunting animals to making war on men. This view had to be abandoned when Ardrey discovered that in the earliest of all cities, Jericho – dating back to 6500 B.C. – the citizens had built three sets of walls, as well as an enormous defensive moat.

In 1972, Ardrey debated with Louis Leakey about the origin of war. Leakey agreed that the likeliest date was about 40,000 years ago; but his reasons were quite different from Ardrey’s. He noted that Cro-Magnon man learned to make fire about 40,000 years ago. So man could sit around after dark, instead of being forced to his bed. And so for the first time, they could indulge themselves in conversation, and the children could sit and listen. Story telling became an art, and most of the stories were about hunting and clashes with other hunters. For the first time, man began to think in terms of ‘them’ and ‘us’. This was Leakey’s own imaginative theory of how man’s imagination became possessed by war (C. Wilson, 1984).

C. Wilson (1984) argues that xenophobia, the feeling of ‘non-fellowship’ towards fellow human beings, is just as likely to be found among primitive people as among the ‘underprivileged’ in a modern city. In *Crowds and Power*, Canetti (1960) cites an example of intertribal warfare in South America in the early twentieth century. A warrior of the Taulipang tribe described in detail how they annihilated the neighboring tribe called the Pishauko. The quarrel seems to have started about women, and some Taulipang men were killed. The Taulipang decided that that the Pishauko intended to destroy them, and that the only solution lay in striking first. Canetti describes how they crept up on the Pishauko village at night, when everyone was in the communal hut. The Taulipang warriors cut their way through the lianas of the stockade, then rushed into the hut and began laying about them with their clubs; after this they set the hut on fire. AThe children wept. All the children were thrown into the fire... The Taulipang seized the fallen Pishauko one after the other and cut them right into with a forest knife... Then they seized a dead woman. Manikuza pulled her genitals apart with his fingers and said to Ewana: ‘Look, here is something good for you to enter’". 
Here we see the close juxtaposition of the elements of cruelty (throwing the children into the flames), vindictiveness (cutting the bodies in two) and sexuality (Canetti, 1960; C. Wilson, 1984).

In *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, Jaynes (1976) argued that the individuals of the early civilizations were entirely lacking in what we would call ‘self-consciousness’. Those early civilizations were ‘bicameral’. Men were not responsible for their actions; they obeyed the voice of the gods. And then, very slowly, consciousness (i.e. self-awareness) began to develop. The first sign of this ‘change of mind’, says Jaynes, can be found in Mesopotamia. And it is at this point, according to Jaynes, that cruelty first becomes a commonplace of history. It is in the Assyrian carvings of about this period that we first see illustrations of men and women impaled, children beheaded. This, then, is Jaynes’s fascinating if highly controversial account of the coming of self-awareness and of cruelty. It is open to one very obvious objection; that it is practically impossible to imagine complex human beings – such as Sargon of Akkad or Hammurabi – without self-awareness (C.Wilson, 1984).

According to C. Wilson (1984), (violent) crime is an unfortunate waste-product of human evolution. Human intelligence involves the power of foresight, and foresight enables a man to calculate how to achieve comfort, security and pleasure. It also makes him a potential criminal, for the simplest way to achieve what he wants is to go out and grab it.

Man developed the left brain to escape his narrowness. It has the power of reaching beyond the present moment: the power of abstraction. And it does this by turning reality into symbols and ideas. The left brain is fundamentally a map-maker. The ‘map’ concept explains the problem of crime. A man whose actual acquaintance with the real world is fairly limited looks at his map and imagines he can see a number of short-cuts. Robbery is a short-cut to wealth. Rape is a short-cut to sexual fulfillment. Violence is a short-cut to getting his own way. Of course, each of these short-cuts has major disadvantages; but he is unaware of these until he tries them out in the real world. So crime is the outcome of man’s greatest evolutionary achievement; his ability to make ‘maps’ (C. Wilson, 1984).

Like Lorenz, Storr (1970: 35) is in no doubt that aggressive behavior is based on “an endogenous, instinctive impulse that seeks discharge”. Storr reviews the evidence cited by Lorenz and concludes that aggression is an instinct, that aggression plays a positive role in animal life because it contributes to optimum spacing, sexual selection, defense of the young and the creation of social order, and that aggression in man has played a positive role in his evolution because it has contributed to the maintenance of social order [remember that Lorenz was a ‘good-for-the-species’ advocate]. Storr sums up this section with a remark attributed to Washburn: “Throughout most of human history, society has depended on young, adult males to hunt, to fight, and to maintain the social order with violence” (Storr, 1970: 58).

Storr was a practicing psychotherapist and in *Human Aggression* he was concerned to fuse the understanding of human aggression that he had gained from Lorenz with his own background in psychoanalysis. But, in doing so, he is very careful to distinguish his own viewpoint from those psychoanalysts like Melanie Klein, whom he claims have regarded man’s aggressiveness as “a deplorable impulse which ought to be eliminated”. Rather, Storr argues, psychoanalysts have to come to terms with the fact that aggression is “a necessary part of our biological inheritance with which we have to learn to co-exist, and which has served and serves to preserve us” (1970: 17).
How then does Storr characterize this ‘necessary part of our biological inheritance’? For him, aggression subsumes an exceedingly large part of human behavior; indeed he quotes approvingly the words of another psychoanalyst, Winnicott, that “aggressiveness is almost synonymous with activity”. For Storr, it seems, aggression includes all human activities that cannot be linked to interpersonal dependency. Aggression is “the basis of intellectual achievement, the attainment of independence, and even of the proper pride which enables a man to hold his head high among his fellows” (1970: 11); it is drive to “explore and master the environment, to act independently” (1970: 67), and it includes the needs for “disagreement, controversy, and even competitive striving” (1970: 83) (Siann, 1985: 107).

For Storr, identity arises in opposition, and thus the striving for identity is a derivative of the aggressive instinct, while the need for the support and company of others is a derivative of the child’s dependency urges. It is quite clear in reading Storr that for him the shaping of identity is always an oppositional process. Identity is maintained by differentiation, and differentiation for Storr inevitably requires competition. Human beings are seen as necessarily and desirably competitive, for “Utopias in which men did not compete or struggle would be unimaginably tedious: mass associations of indistinguishable non-entities. Man can only be safe from strife when in the womb or in the grave: both fine and private places which we may long for or regret. But in the one the dynamic of life has hardly begun, while in the other it has disappeared for ever” (1970: 83-84).

Thus, for Storr, human development is characterized, both during childhood and adulthood, by the individual’s attempt to reconcile two opposing and innate tendencies: an affiliative need for dependency and support, and an oppositional need, deriving from the aggressive instinct, to strive against and compete with others. This second drive is ‘Janus faced’ – that is, it may manifest itself both as a positive, constructive force or as a negative and malign one (Siann, 1985: 108-9).

**Storr: Aggression and psychopathology**

For Storr, the satisfactory resolution of the aggressive drive is an integral part of healthy sexual relationships. But in *Human Aggression* he is also concerned with ‘psychopathological’ aspects of aggression – that is, with “individuals who have developed in such a way that they have been unable to come to terms with their own aggressive drive. In such individuals, aggression is either repressed and turned inwards towards the self; or else disowned and attributed to others; or else expressed in explosive and childish forms. In other words, these individuals have been unable to integrate their aggression in a positive way, and can therefore be regarded as mentally ill or maladjusted” (Storr, 1970: 101).

The four forms of psychopathology which Storr considers to be largely attributable to the inadequate resolution of the aggressive drive are depression, schizoid behavior, paranoia and psychopathy.

Storr is also concerned to account for “man’s unique capacity for cruelty”. This Storr sees as arising largely as a result of two more severe forms of psychopathology, “paranoid hostility and psychopathic hostility”.

In discussing cruelty, Storr suggests that it is necessary to differentiate between aggression and hatred. For while aggression is largely positive in nature, hatred represents the negative
aspect of aggression: “Aggression turns to hatred when it comes to contain an admixture of revenge; and the tendency to persecute those who are already defeated, or who are obviously weaker than the aggressor” (1970: 126). Hatred is to be explained, according to Storr, in terms of the ‘aggressor’s’ need to revenge himself for past humiliations (Siann, 1985: 109-10).

Storr claims that man’s propensity to behave cruelly to his fellows is rooted in the ‘normal’ course of childhood development. The paranoid and psychopath, for Storr, lie at the one end of a continuum of paranoid characteristics; ranging along the rest of the continuum are the rest of us: “Although most obvious in the insane, the capacity for paranoid projection is, regrettably, not confined to them. Indeed, we must assume that the whole of mankind possesses some underlying potential” (1970: 131). And it is this paranoid potential that explains, according to Storr, “man’s unique capacity for cruelty”.

The key to this capacity, for Storr, lies in the universal experience of childhood, where all individuals experiencing the position of being totally helpless acquire some of the characteristics of paranoia. Because we have all been at the mercy of adults who at some stage have disregarded our needs and desires, we not only store up the need to avenge this humiliation but also to understand what it feels like to be a victim. This combination of hostility and identification fuels a desire to avenge ourselves when others suffer, and so when we come across others who are suffering we not only wish to see them continue to suffer but we also wish to intensify their suffering. “Upon this basis also rests man’s capacity for cruelty. His wish to torture and humiliate someone over whom he has already proved his superiority is clearly related to his ability to enter imaginatively into his enemy’s agony” (1970: 133-34). It is this scenario from early childhood that accounts for man’s potential for torture and scapegoating (Siann, 1985: 112).

**Erich Fromm and The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness**

In *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1977), the German-born American psychoanalyst Erich Fromm produced the most comprehensive theory of aggression to merge from within the ranks of psychoanalysts. In this book he not only presented his own overview of the whole field of aggression, but also surveyed much of the earlier work on aggression in the areas of physiology, ethology and psychology.

Using the term ‘aggression’ to cover emotions and behavior which are motivated to enable the ‘aggressor’ to preserve or enhance his or her own position, Fromm centers his approach around four premises. There are, first, that man, like most other animal species, has a ‘built in’ potential for defensive aggression and that such aggression is fundamentally benign. Secondly, the pathological aspects of aggression that man displays, such as cruelty and destructiveness, are not due to this inbuilt potential, but to aggression-producing conditions in the environment. Thirdly, cruelty and destructiveness can be woven into the character structure of individuals by their early emotional social experiences. Finally, intensive explorations of the early experience of historical figures like Stalin, Himmler and Hitler can be used to substantiate his claim that early experiences condition character structures which are basically cruel, sadistic and exploitative (Siann, 1985: 114-15).

‘Benign’ aggression
'Benign' aggression is the term Fromm uses to distinguish emotion and behavior which, while causing suffering to others, is motivated by causes other than the desire to inflict cruelty and destruction.

Under the term ‘benign aggression’ Fromm groups three different categories. First, defensive behavior; secondly, what he calls pseudo-aggression; and finally behavior which, while it involves fighting or harming others, is not primarily directed by motivations concerned with the desire to harm others.

In discussing the category he calls ‘defensive aggression’ Fromm argues that it is in the interest of all species to have a ‘phylogenetically programmed’ set of possible responses to threats (1977: 139). Basically he considers such responses fall into two categories: rage and attack, and fear and flight.

Drawing on some of the earlier studies of hypothalamic stimulation and on the work of Mark and Moyer, he claims that there is a great deal of evidence to support the hypothesis that specific areas of the brain are mobilized when an animal or person is threatened. Such mobilization prepares the individual for a set of flight responses or a set of fight responses. Both sets of responses are biologically adaptive and both are essentially reactive. Unlike Storr, Fromm does not believe there is an innate drive for aggression. Rather he argues that there is a potentiality for fight or flight which is aroused only in the face of threat. When this happens, whether in man or animal, the individual concerned, if moved to fighting, is not motivated to destroy for the sake of destruction, but is primarily motivated to defend him or herself. Thus ‘defensive aggressiveness’ is ‘built in’ in the animal and human brain and serves the function of defense against threats to vital interests (1977: 251).

Fromm thus believes that there are ‘benign’ aspects of aggression in both man and animals which stem from the need for defense. Man is, however, far more likely to be aroused to such defensive aggression than animals for three reasons, all of which are linked to man’s greater cognitive and emotional range. First, man, unlike other species who perceive only ‘clear and present danger’, is endowed with foresight and therefore may foresee dangers; secondly, man sometimes reacts to imagined rather than real threats, as for example occurs when people react to propaganda; and thirdly, man has a far wider range of vital interests than other species, extending from the need for food and physical shelter to the need to defend values and ideals.

Furthermore, Fromm lists a number of categories of what he calls ‘pseudo-aggression’ – “those aggressive acts that may cause harm, but are not intended to do so”. These acts include accidentally hurting others, hurting others in sport or play and ‘self-assertive aggression’. This last term refers to being aggressive in the sense of “moving towards a goal without undue hesitation, doubt or fear” (1977; 256).

Self-assertive aggression, for Fromm, is more characteristic of the male than the female. For “since the male capacity to function sexually is a basic requirement for the survival of the species, one might expect that nature has endowed the male with some special aggressive potential” (1977: 257).

The third category of what Fromm calls ‘benign aggression’ covers a wide variety of behavior, a great deal of which most of us would hesitate to call ‘benign’. It includes conformist aggression – when, for example, a soldier fights only because he is directed to and
he considers it his duty to obey orders; instrumental aggression, where the aim is to obtain something desirable rather than to destroy or harm another; and finally, the aggression that occurs in war.

Although conformist aggression, instrumental aggression and war all harm others, for Fromm they are saved from ‘malignancy’ because they are directed not by any destructive urges, but by a whole complex of motivations springing from the wide range of human behavior and emotion. Thus Fromm, castigating those whom he sees as offering a simple-minded and superficial explanation of war, writes: “It has become fashionable to consider war as caused by the power of man’s destructive instinct... [But] The thesis that war is caused by innate human destructiveness is plainly absurd for anyone who has even the slightest knowledge of history” (1977: 283). War, according to Fromm, is not only a strategy for obtaining economic or political ends, but may also provide for the combatants “more subtle emotional motivations... that have nothing to do with aggression”. It may supply an excitement and stimulation that is absent from the “boring routine of everyday life” (1977: 289). In short, for Fromm, war answers needs that have little to do with innate drives for aggression and much to do with the pressures, limitations and constraints of the societies that enter into them (Siann, 1985: 115-17).

Malignant aggression

“Malignant aggression... is specifically human and not derived from animal instinct. It does not serve the physiological survival of man, yet it is an important part of his mental functioning. It is one of the passions that are dominant and powerful in some individuals and cultures, although not in others... its generation results... from the interaction of various social conditions with man’s existential needs (Fromm, 1977: 294).

While Fromm’s delineation of benign aggression is relatively straightforward, his conception of malignant aggression rests on a complex infrastructure of premises about human nature. Briefly, he believes that man, unlike other species, is rooted in biological contradictions. These contradictions arise out of an evolutionary development which have allowed man to emerge as a species with the minimum of innate programming and the maximum of cerebral development. As a result, man is the only species to be self-aware. This self-awareness, according to Fromm, enables man to appreciate the true nature of his condition; his relative powerlessness in the face of natural forces and his inevitable individual oblivion in death. Lost, powerless, and separate from nature, man is driven “to find new ways of relating himself to the world to enable him to feel at home” (1997: 304). He is driven, in short, to satisfy what Fromm calls his ‘existential needs’.

Fromm lists these existential needs as the need for an abiding system of values and belief in order to give life focus and meaning; the need for reciprocal personal relationships; the need for an inner sense of personal unity or identity; the need to feel effective; and the need for stimulation and excitement. How an individual meets these existential needs depends, according to Fromm, on two sets of conditions. The first of these concern his or her own personal emotional experience, while the second concerns the particular culture in which the individual lives.

These twin sets of circumstances dictate whether the strategies the individual chooses are basically constructive or basically destructive. Malignant aggression is potentiated when the only strategies available are destructive.
For Fromm, then, malignant aggression is always a possibility. Though not innate, it is nevertheless “a human potential rooted in the very conditions of human existence” (1977: 305). When people are not able to satisfy their existential needs with positive strategies such as “love, tenderness, striving for justice, independence [and] truth”, they will turn to the use of negative strategies, such as “hate, sadism, masochism, destructiveness [and] narcissism” (1977: 305). Thus, for Fromm, the central question in the quest to control malignant aggression is to identify which circumstances predispose the use of such negative strategies. Or, as he himself puts it, “the problem is to examine in what manner and to what degree the specific conditions of human existence are responsible for the quality and intensity of man’s lust for killing and torturing” (1977: 253, Fromm’s italics).

In *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*, Fromm strives for a solution to this problem by outlining two categories of malevolent aggression, and suggesting how they are potentiated. The first category concerns ‘spontaneous’ forms of aggression and the second, the category to which he devoted the major part of the book, malignant aggression which is ‘bound in the character structure’.

Turning very briefly to ‘spontaneous’ forms of malignant aggression, it seems that Fromm considers this is likely to occur when individuals or groups are subjected to a particular extreme and traumatic set of experiences, and that it can take the form of either ‘vengefulness’ or ‘ecstasy’. Vengefulness occurs when the individual or group has been subjected to intense and unjustified suffering, and becomes driven by the need to avenge their own pain. It is exemplified in the notion of blood revenge, “when revenge is a sacred duty that falls upon the member of a family, clan or tribe who has to kill a member of the corresponding unit if one of his people of his people has been killed” (1977: 363). Ecstatic destruction on the other hand, though also a response to a particular set of circumstances, occurs in ritualized orgies or states of trance that certain societies use in order to give vent to extreme rage. Both forms of spontaneous destructiveness, however, are relatively harmless, according to Fromm, in that they do not characterize an individual lifespan but are specific responses to particular sets of circumstances. On the other hand, when aggression is ‘bound in the character structure’ it is particularly destructive, for it will characterize the whole of the individual’s way of life (Siann, 1985: 117-19).

*Cruelty and destructiveness woven into the character structure*

For Fromm a central premise of human psychology is the belief that each individual has his or her own particular ‘character’. This term refers to “the relatively permanent system of all non-instinctual strivings through which man relates himself to the human and natural world” (1977: 302, Fromm’s italics). According to Fromm, differences in character are rooted in differences in social experiences, both personal and cultural, although ‘genetically given’ dispositions may also play a part. Some individuals, according to Fromm, experience so destructive an early environment, both personal and social, that predispositions to behave in particularly destructive and cruel ways become bound in the character structure.

Consider, for example, Fromm’s view of what he calls the ‘sadistic character’. Sadism is one of the answers to the problem of being born human when better ones re not attainable. The experience of absolute control over another being, of omnipotence as far as he, she, or it is concerned, creates the illusion of transcending the limitations of human existence, particularly for one whose real life is deprived of productivity and joy. Sadism has essentially no practical
aim; it is not ‘trivial’ but ‘devotional’. It is the transformation of impotence into the experience of omnipotence; it is the religion of psychical cripples. “For the sadistic character everything living is to be controllable; living beings become things. Or still more accurately, living things are transformed into living, quivering, pulsating objects of control. Their responses are forced by the one who controls them. The sadist wants to become the master of life, and hence the quality of life should be maintained in his victim. This is, in fact, what distinguishes him from the destroying person. The destroyer wants to do way with a person, to eliminate him, to destroy life itself; the sadist wants the sensation of controlling and choking life” (1977: 388).

Such a character, according to Fromm, is shaped by the interaction between a variety of forces. At the level of individual experience, a child who is severely and arbitrarily punished and who is made to feel impotent and unworthy may satisfy his or her denied existential need by compensation, and may endeavor to control the environment in much the same way as he or she has been controlled by dominant adults. He or she would, according to Fromm, be likely to develop the syndrome of character traits Freud referred to as ‘anal’: stubborness, orderliness, parsimoniousness, extreme punctuality and extreme cleanliness.

But while developing anal traits might lead to a life of sterility and rigidity, the possession of an ‘anal character’ would not necessarily lead to the display of sadistic behavior. For this to happen, the social as well as the individual environment would have to be propitious. For “a person whose character is sadistic will be essentially harmless in an anti-sadistic society” (1977: 307-8). It is only in a society which, by being exploitative in itself, is conducive to sadistic behavior at the general level, that the potential sadist is able to extend his or her potential for malignant aggression.

Malignant aggression is manifested not only in sadistic behavior, where the prime impulse is to control and dominate, but also, according to Fromm, in the behavior that results from the impulse to destroy. This impulse dominates the character type Fromm labels ‘necrophiliac’. For (nonsexual) necrophilia is “the passionate attraction to all that is dead, decayed, putrid, sickly; it is the passion to transform that which is alive into something unalive; to destroy for the sake of destruction; the exclusive interest in all that is purely mechanical. It is the passion to tear apart living structures” (1977: 441, Fromm’s italics).

Necrophilia, for Fromm, like sadism, is rooted both in individual and social conditions. At the individual level it rests on the distortion of the relationship with the mother at the oedipal stage, when the child, instead of developing ‘benign incestuous bonds’ with the mother, develops bonds that are pathological in that the mother is not related to as a real, affectionate, warm love-object but is related to as a phantom who is at times attractive and desirable and at other times cold and repelling. This distortion of the early bond with the mother leads to a predisposition to relate to other people in a shallow manner, for example by sadistic control or by ‘narcissism’. Narcissism occurs when the potential necrophiliac demands boundless admiration. Once again, individual experiences do not by themselves lead to destructive behavior. For that to occur, as with sadistic behavior, the social environment must also offer an appropriate climate. Such a climate is provided by social conditions in which technology, organization and alienation dominate; when the emphasis is on technique rather than feeling, and when lifeless machines assume dominance over warm human relationships (Siann, 1985: 119-20). In brief, “all factors that make man into a psychic cripple turn him also into a sadist or a destroyer” (1977: 576).
Storr (1991) argued that human violence and cruelty are predominantly concerned with power relationships. One of the most unpleasant features of human violence is that it is often employed upon a victim who is entirely helpless and at the mercy of the attacker.

The invention of weapons which kill at a distance has overridden any lingering inhibitions against killing other human beings. It has also facilitated the commission of acts of cruelty. A pilot who drops napalm upon people he cannot see may do so with no feeling of guilt. If he were ordered to pour gasoline over a child and then ignite it, he might well recoil and disobey. Yet the injuries inflicted would be closely similar. As Lorenz (1966: 208) has argued: “The deep, emotional layers of our personality simply do not register the fact that the crooking of the fore-finger to release a shot tears the entrails of another man”.

Although there have been many protests at the amount of blood spilled in the films of Sam Peckinpah and others, it is still violence sanitized and made tolerable because we know it is faked. When a man is shot in the stomach, we do not see his guts hanging out. We do not see people in agony vomiting and losing control of their sphincters. The media do not depict violence; they depict a bowlderized version of violence (Storr, 1991: 155).

**The (Blood) Revenge Motive: Sweet Revenge**

Cruelty may be supposed to be related to the universal human motive of blood revenge. The same psychisms that make revenge sweet may be underlying the satisfactions associated with cruelty; cruelty, of course, is a prominent component of revenge.

Mansfield (1991) has argued that nonhuman animals have no revenge motive and, indeed, do not need one. A defeated male buck, who has been fighting a rival for a female in heat, moves on to feed in another part of the woods; the bereaved mother bear, whose cubs have been killed by a male, ignores the infanticidal male (and may later even mate with him); the hyena driven off from its meal by lions simply seeks a new source of food. Nor can one easily see what biological function continued anger in such a situation could perform, since the initial object of aggressive energy (the female in heat, the cubs in danger, or the dead gazelle) is gone beyond recall. To remain angry is to lock emotional and physical energy in the past instead if using it to achieve physical satisfaction and growth in the present.

But revenge as a motive for action seemingly involves just such a locking of energy into the past, since it involves the desire to inflict pain upon another in retaliation for an injury suffered in the past. It serves no obvious biological function since it does not provide sex, food, or security; indeed all of these may be sacrificed to its pursuit. Instead it provides primarily an emotional satisfaction: the present pleasure in another’s pain. The explanation for this neurotic, backward-looking desire seems to lie in three distinctively human characteristics: our unusually highly developed capacity for remembering and conceptualizing; our long period of dependency as children; and our dependency on learned rather than genetically coded patterns of behavior (Mansfield, 1991: 44).

Kelsen (1946), and many others after him, concluded that lethal retribution is an ancient and cross-culturally universal recourse of those subjected to abuse. This generalization seems to gibe so well with intuition and common experience as to be unexceptionable (Daly & Wilson, 1988). However, some anthropologists may be startled by its apparent contradiction with the results of Keith and Charlotte Otterbein’s (1965) well-known cross-cultural study of feuding.
These authors stated that “Feuding, the dependent variable, was defined as blood revenge following a homicide” (p. 1470), and then declared that such “feuding” was “absent” in 28 societies out of a sample of 50, and “infrequent” in an additional 14. There is no genuine contradiction with the present conclusion. The Otterbeins’ (1965) seeming allegation that blood revenge was “absent” in a majority of societies depends upon definitional idiosyncracies (Daly & Wilson, 1988).

The fact that revenge is not necessarily taken against the killer himself – and moreover that the preferred target is an individual of status equal to the original victim – provides the clue to the motivation of feuding: the fragile balance of power – indeed the balance of terror – between rival lineages. Feuds (and small-scale warfare) ultimately have to do with material and reproductive rivalry. The constant specter confronting each fraternal interest group is defeat or extermination by rivals: the theft of one’s women, the loss of one’s lands, the end of one’s line. In chronically feuding and warring societies, an essential manly virtue is the capacity for violence; head-hunting and coup-counting may then become prestigious, and the commission of a homicide may even be an obligatory rite of passage, as in the Sepik River peoples of New Guinea (Daly & Wilson, 1988).

The urge for vengeance seems so futile: there’s no use crying over spilt milk, and spilt blood is equally irrevocable. Many anthropologists and other writers have marveled at the endurance of vengeful motives and at the effort expended and suffering endured in pursuit of their satisfaction. Avengers may exult even in suicidal acts of retaliation.

Why should revenge be sweet? Its attainment is not obviously fitness-promoting. To the contrary, the avenger incurs risks to his own life, while neglecting more clearly practical pursuits, and if he succeeds, he risks provoking further retaliations against himself and his genetic relatives. “Spiteful” motives – those which entail the embracing of costs to oneself (ultimately in fitness) in order to inflict costs on a rival – cannot readily evolve by natural selection.

The counterargument is of course the utility of vengeance in deterrence. In a competitive world, it is important to convince dangerous rivals – whether individuals or lineages, and whether more or less powerful than oneself – that one can only be exterminated at unacceptable costs to the exterminator. And a believable threat of retaliation must be a genuine one. Herbert Spencer (1897) placed this deterrent function of revenge in a Darwinian framework almost a century ago:

Among members of the same species, those individuals which have not, in any considerable degree, resented aggressions, must have ever tended to disappear, and to have left behind those which have to some extent made counter-aggressions... Every fight is a succession of retaliations – bite being given for bite, and blow for blow. Usually these follow one another in quick succession, but not always. There is a postponed retaliation; and a postponed retaliation is what we call revenge. It may be postponed for so short a time as to be merely a recommencement of the fight, or it may be postponed for days, or it may be postponed for years. And hence the retaliation which constitutes what we call revenge, diverges insensibly from the retaliations which characterize a conflict. But the practice, alike of immediate revenge and of postponed revenge, establishes itself as in some measure a check upon aggression; since the motive to aggress is checked by the consciousness that a counter-aggression will come; if not at once then after a time (Spencer, 1897, pp. 361-2).
What is harder to explain than the revenge motive itself is the widespread concern with *equity* in vengeance, with “evening the score”. Why not a *life* for an eye, and a massacre for a murder? Well, of course, these things *do* occur: Minor provocations have triggered painstakingly programmatic family exterminations and genocides countless times in human history. When the extermination of an irritating rival clan looks to be practical – that is to say achievable without such severe losses as to make the killers vulnerable to other rivals – then such extermination is manifestly thinkable by tribal (and not so tribal) minds. Thinkable and do-able, as well: People plan massacres and they carry out their plans.

The powerful positive affect associated with measured retaliation – the sacred duty, the spiritual fulfillment, the icy satisfaction of revenge – may well represent the human psyche’s evolved response to the fundamental cost-benefit structure of enduring social relations among potential rivals (Daly & Wilson, 1988).

Already in 1893, Emile Durkheim (as quoted in Lopreato, 1984: 142) captured the deep rationality and irrationality of revenge: “It is an error to believe that vengeance is but useless cruelty. It is very possible that, in itself, it consists of a mechanical and aimless reaction, in an emotional and irrational movement, in an unintelligent need to destroy; but, in fact, what it tends to destroy was a menace to us. It consists, then, in a veritable act of defense, although an instinctive and unreflective one”. On the long-term advantages of vengeance in solving commitment problems see also Frank (1988).

Vengeance can be commonly defined as the infliction of harm in return for perceived injury or insult or as simply getting back at another person. Stuckless & Goranson (1992) have outlined the distinctions between revenge or other similar constructions such as retaliation, hostility, reciprocity, and retribution. Vengeance can have many irrational and destructive consequences for the person seeking vengeance as well as for the target. The person seeking vengeance will often compromise his or her own integrity, social standing, and personal safety for the sake of revenge, yet little is known about the predictors of vengeful behavior (Cota-McKinley, Woody & Bell, 2001: 343).

Revenge fulfills a wide variety of goals, including righting perceived injustice, restoring the self-worth of the vengeful individual, and deterring future injustice. Central to the concept of revenge are perceptions of personal harm, unfairness, and injustice and the “anger, indignation, and hatred” associated with the perceived injustice (Kim & Smith, 1993: 38; see also Stuckless & Goranson, 1992). The perceived injustice must be righted or undone, and revenge, despite social taboo, is often seen as an acceptable means of doing so.

Are men or women more vengeful? Early research by Stuckless & Goranson (1992) lends some support to the contention that men have more positive attitudes toward vengeance; they also found substantial positive correlations between vengeance and trait anger. Such findings are consistent with previous research reporting that males score higher on general measures of aggression (Baron & Richardson, 1994; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974, 1980). Wilson & Daly (1995) point out that violence is a male resource where broad sex differences emerge. “Men possess evolved morphological, physiological, and psychological means for effective use of violence” (Wilson & Daly, 1995: 118; see also Daly & Wilson, 1988, 1990; 1993; Wilson & Daly, 1985). Research by Kendrick & Sheets (1993) offers additional support for sex differences. They found that males recall more homicidal fantasies than females: “Males also reported longer and more detailed fantasies and were more likely to imagine strangers and coworkers as victims (Kendrick & Sheets, 1993: 231). Males’ greater acceptance of
interpersonal aggression may correlate with acceptance of attitude related to revenge and participation in vengeful behaviors (Cota-McKinley, Woody & Bell, 2001: 344).

Jacoby (1987) notes that “the very word ‘revenge’ has pejorative connotations” (p. 4), and, as a motive, it is publicly rejected by modern society. Despite contemporary rejection, vengeance is most likely as old as human social behavior, and it has a long, varied, and colorful history in both religious and secular realms. Christianity and its Jewish heritage provide many interpretive challenges regarding vengeance. The Bible provides conflicting notions of revenge. The Old Testament presents several instances of justified revenge by human and by God, and humans may even call out for God to seek vengeance for their innocent suffering. The Old Testament presents a God whose vengeance is to be known and feared (Cota-McKinley, Woody & Bell, 2001: 344-45).

The (Violent) Beast Within

Like so many other important mythic themes in our culture, the myth of the beast within has its roots in classical Greek philosophy, its trunk in early Christianity, and its branches in a great diversity of modern philosophy and science (Klama, 1988).

The Beast Within as unbridled horse

According to Plato, thought or reason was locked in eternal battle with animal passion (‘the Wild Beast in us’), and only through willpower and self-denial could the passions be contained. Even under the best of circumstances, however, eruptions of evil and unpleasant animal desires occur (Republic, Book 9; Similarly, Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics).

Freud’s view of human nature was also a variant of the idea of the beast within. The relationship between ego and id was, he wrote, like “a man on horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse” (Standard Edition, Vol. 19).

In Civilization and its Discontents (1930), he extended this dualistic philosophy of human nature (Eros and Thanatos) into a theory of the inevitable conflict between the demands of instinct and those of civilization. Dismissing as an ‘untenable illusion’ the idea that human are fundamentally good but corrupted by circumstance, he portrayed aggression as ‘an innate, independent instinctual disposition’; and the sombre question with which he left his readers was whether and to what extent humankind would succeed in mastering the beast within.

Freud’s pessimistic beliefs about human nature would put Ardrey or Dart to shame, as exemplified in his essay Reflections on War and Death (1915): “The very emphasis of the commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill’ makes it certain that we spring from an endless ancestry of murderers with whom the lust for killing was in the blood, as possibly it is to this day in ourselves”.

Lorenz’s (1966) ethological analysis of the human condition was a romantic and Rousseauian version of the idea of the beast within. For Lorenz, humans were uniquely out of step with their own aggressive natures, and thus uniquely at risk of causing their own – and everybody else’s – demise. Lorenz warned in the metaphor used by Plato and Freud that, “Man must know that the horse he is riding may be wild and should be bridled” (Evans, 1975).
Tinbergen (1968, 1976) is most concerned about ‘Man’s Agonism to Man’ which he attributes to an admixture of intraspecific aggression and interspecific predatory tendencies (which he calls a ‘supermotivation’) that has plagued our species from the beginning.

The Beast Within as primitive savage

As early as the first decade of the sixteenth century, Sebastian Cabot had paraded in England three Eskimos, taken captive on his voyage to the Arctic in 1502. A contemporary described the natives as flesh-eating, primitive specimens who ‘spake such speech that no men coulde understande them, and in their demeanour like to bruite beastes’ (Hakluyt, 1582, quoted in Nash, 1972).

The accounts from the Frobisher voyages and other adventure stories and journeys of exploration were filled with descriptions of crafty, brutal, loathsome men. Other unsettling accounts also became available through the translation of Spanish and Portuguese writers (...). In all these works Englishmen of the day could read accounts which suggested that the people of the New World were not only primitive – simply by not being English one was that – but bestial, cannibalistic, sexually abandoned, and, in general moved entirely by passion rather than by reason.

But another vision of the native was simultaneously entering the English consciousness. Columbus had written of the “great amity towards us” which he encountered in San Salvador in 1492 and described a generous, pastoral people living in childlike innocence (Nash, 1972).

There were, for example, theological precedents for something very close to the Hobbesian state of nature. Calvinism, with its emphasis on man’s wickedness, could easily be phrased in language recognizable to Hobbes’ readers. Without religion, Calvin declared, Amen are in no wise superior to brute beasts, but are in many respects far more miserable. Subject, then, to so many forms of wickedness, they drag out their lives in ceaseless tumult and disquiet”. Like an animal, man “follows the inclinations of his nature”, and, “so depraved is his nature that he can be moved or impelled only to evil”. Thus, “all man’s faculties are, on account of the depravity of nature, so vitiated and corrupted that in all his actions persistent disorder and intemperance threaten because these inclinations cannot be separated from such lack of restraint. Accordingly, we contend that they are vicious” (Calvin, 1536, quoted in Ashcraft, 1972).

During the Beagle voyage, Darwin had been frankly horrified by his first encounter with the uncivilized inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego. These people, whom he saw as representative of “man in his lowest & most savage state” (Barlow, 1933), appeared to be locked into a brutal and degrading struggle for existence. How, then, had humankind advanced from such a state to a condition in which the nobler sentiments of beauty and goodness were able to flourish? Darwin regarded this as a biological problem that his new theory ought to be able to tackle.

The outlines of Darwin’s resolution of this difficulty are clear in the notebooks. As product of the evolutionary process, Darwin accepted that humans possessed a number of rude and selfish instincts fitting individuals for survival in the struggle for existence. But, he suggested, at a key stage in their development, primitive humans had banded together in groups for mutual protection; and at that point, natural selection had begun to favor more advanced, altruistic sentiments fitting individuals for cooperative life in society. The conflict between selfish and social instincts occurred in animals as well as in humans; but in humans alone
there existed the capacity to reflect upon past conduct. In cases where the selfish had temporarily mastered the social instincts, Darwin argued that such reflection would produce feelings of dissatisfaction and regret; and in such feelings lay the origins of guilt. In a key passage, Darwin observed that the possession of powerful and barely controllable instincts “is far from odd... with lesser intellect they might be necessary & no doubt were preservative, & are now, like all other structures slowly vanishing... Our descent, then, is the origin of our evil passions! – The Devil under form of Baboon is our grandfather!” (Gruber & Barrett, 1974).

Since for Darwin there was an archaic beast within human nature in the form of an evolutionary legacy of selfish instincts, it was only by future heritable change that real improvements in the human condition could be achieved.

“In the last chapter of *The Descent of Man*, published in 1871, Charles Darwin recalled that the first time that he had seen primitive people was on a wild shore in Tierra del Fuego. They were naked: worse, they were ‘absolutely naked’. Their hair was tangled, their expression was wild and startled, and they excitedly frothed at the mouth. They had no government and they had barely any arts, ‘like wild animals’ they lived on what they hunted; and they were merciless to members of other tribes... In that mental picture the once-noble savage had been reduced to little more than a twitching fossil” (Blainey, 1988; italics added).

**The Beast Within as Killer Ape**

Raymond Dart had written that man was, at heart, violent, cruel and a killer, and that these attributes were inbred as a result of mankind’s evolutionary history as a carnivorous cannibal. For, “The loathsome cruelty of mankind to man forms one of his inescapable, characteristic and differentiative features; and it is explicable only in terms of his carnivorous and cannibalistic origin” (Dart, 1953). (Also compare “Man’s predecessors seized living quarries by violence, battered them to death, tore apart their broken bodies, dismembered them limb for limb, slaking their ravenous thirst with the hot blood of victims and greedily devouring livid writhing flesh” [Dart, 1957])

After his initial contact with Dart, Ardrey began to develop a series of beliefs about human nature. Most of these beliefs were related to man’s predisposition to violence and conflict. The first of these concerned man’s use of weapons. This happened, according to Ardrey, as man moved from a vegetarian to a flesh diet. This move was accompanied by the use of weapons, the change to a two-legged posture, the increasing use of the thumb and the enlargement of the brain. All of these led carnivorous man to overcome his earlier progenitors. And so Awith his big brain and his stone handaxes, man annihilated a predecessor who fought only with bones”.

Today, it is generally recognized that the ‘killer ape’ hypothesis is a totally inadequate interpretation of the evidence (Montagu, 1968; Leakey & Lewin, 1977, 1979; Leakey, 1981; Bailey, 1987; Klama, 1988). To take just one example, it has been shown that the damaged bones that Dart and others took for the results of early hominid aggression are far better explained by processes such as leopard predation (Brain, 1981; Johanson & Shreeve, 1989; Klein, 1989; Vencl, 1991; Keeley, 1996).

Some of the skulls of *Homo erectus* from Zhoukoudian (Choukoutien), China give every indication of having been intentionally damaged around the foramen magnum (the hole at the base of the skull through which the spinal cord enters the cranium). In this case, it has been suggested that the damage may have been connected with the extraction and eating of the
brain; but before jumping to the conclusion that our ancestors were ‘innately aggressive’
towards one another, we would do well to recall that several living hunter-gatherer
communities are known to practise so-called ‘endo-cannibalism’ (i.e., the eating of members
of their own social group). Very often, however, this is done as a way of venerating or
acquiring the virtue of deceased relatives and friends; and this, whatever else we may think of
it, can hardly be counted as a form of interpersonal aggression.

The Beast Within as apeman

“The Platonic imagery of the Beast Within – the source of ignobility, the incarnation of
rampant carnal lust and destructiveness – intensified in the later 19th century and converged
with instinct-psychology formulations of man’s ineradicable violent urges. In 1870,
anticipating MacLean’s triune brain and Bailey’s phylogenetic regression theory, Henry
Maudsley (Body and Mind) claimed that there was a brute’s brain within man’s modern brain,
as revealed by morbid psychology and the ‘degeneration of insanity’... Weismann’s gene
theory and his ‘law of retrogression’ led to the [fin de siècle] eugenics and degeneration
alarm, both morally and physically... French psychiatric theory after the revolutions of 1848,
from Morel and Taine to Zola and Le Bon, was saturated with awareness of disorder
infiltrating the human system, while Cesare Lombroso’s fatalistic image of ‘criminal man’
belonged to the political culture of post-unification Italy... There was evoked a fatalistic
language of innate human criminality, bellicosity and atavism” (Crook, 1994: 76-77).

“Hence, when Neanderthal man’s skeleton was found, it was reconstructed not in accordance
with the anatomical functional traits it exhibited, but in accordance with its reconstructor’s,
Professor Marcellin Boule’s, conception of what such a prehistoric man ought to look like!
And so, for several generations, the world has had perpetrated upon it a creature called
‘Neanderthal man’, characterized by a bestial face, a bull neck, knock-knees, and a stooping
gait, usually holding a club in one hand and dragging a female by her hair with the other”
[Montagu, 1965]).

The Beast Within as phylogenetic regression

Several authors have argued against a unitary aggressive drive:

“[I]f we accept that a process of natural selection can act on a certain form of aggression that
serves – for each of the individuals displaying it – a certain purpose in particular
circumstances, it is difficult to see how evolution could have given birth to an ‘all-purpose’
aggressive drive [since it is supposed to express itself in a variety of forms of aggression
which serve a multitude of purposes under very varied circumstances, and since, when no
fellow-creatures are within reach, some animals are reduced ‘to discharge their anger on other
objects’]. An aggressive drive of this kind rather looks like a real biological nonsense, liable
to lead the animal kingdom rapidly to its disappearance” (Karli, 1991). “In short, there is no
evidence that a widespread unitary aggressive instinct exists” (E.O. Wilson, 1978).

“In the rut, red deer stags engage in escalated fights involving roaring contests, parallel
walking, and head clashes; but how far any fight goes, who initiates the first direct attack, and
who eventually gives way, are all dictated by what one contestant does in response to the
moves that are being made by the other (Clutton-Brock & Albon, 1979). Just imagine the fate
of some poor psychohydraulic stag who, upon entering such a contest in his first season as a
mature animal, was unfortunate enough to be burdened with a bucketful of aggression [i.e., a
full Lorenzian aggression reservoir]. Responding massively to the slightest provocation from older and stronger animals all around him, such a stag would almost certainly suffer severe injury in his very first contest; and his chances of living to fight another day, let alone of ever having any offspring, would be slim indeed. This, presumably, is one very good reason why Lorenzian aggression reservoirs have never evolved” (Klama, 1988).

“Tinbergen [1976] uses the term *supermotivation* to refer to potent blends of several emotional-motivational subsystems in humans. Nowhere is the fusing of basic urges more evident than in the phenomenon of *agonistic behavior*, which apparently evolved to help animals cope with conflict, both within and between species.

It is evident that aggression can rarely be separated from its evolutionary *frère d’arme*, fear. Actually, fear often serves to inhibit gratuitous expressions of aggression, and the aggression (attack) : fear (inhibition) balance is the prime consideration in both understanding and controlling human forms of violence (Valzelli, 1981).

It is important to recognize that whereas aggressive behavior alone may be pleasurable, the agonistic experience may be perceived as basically unpleasurable depending on the amount of fear operating. Although there are no doubt exceptions to this rule, fear is generally antagonistic to gratuitous, excessive, enjoyable forms of aggression and violence. It is when the attack is too weak or powerless to respond that gratuitous aggression is likely to occur. It is in attacks on the weak, the vulnerable, and the defenseless that we see the most pernicious forms of pleasurable, predatory aggression.

The true essence of aggression lies in its motive force, the substructure for which are, in large part, phylogenetically continuous with lower species and thoroughly wired-into the adaptive hardware of the organism. The higher cortical functions of intelligence, reflection, choice, language, imagination, and so forth, do not produce aggression, but rather serve to prime it, elicit it, inhibit it, elaborate it, and otherwise color its many manifestations [and especially justify it.

Human aggression is, no doubt, species-specific as Holloway (1968, 1974) correctly asserts, but not because it is something truly different or transcendent: Its distinctiveness more likely emanates from the capacity of the human intellect – through rationalization, obfuscation, and denial – to take the primal clay of aggression and shape it into some arbitrary creation of culture (Bailey, 1987).

This is also one of the main reasons why sexual paraphilias are so addictive and compulsive: “Almost all sexual perversions or paraphilias occur in males – bestiality, exhibitionism, fetishism, voyeurism, child molestation, etc. Aggression in the service of sexual access (e.g., rape, forced copulation) is frequently seen in males, but rarely in females (Zillman, 1984). In general, there seems to be a compulsive urgency to male behavior that makes the male of the species a feared and dangerous creature, especially when he is in a regressed state. Thus, in phylogenetic regression, the male often becomes more dangerous and threatening – as primitive aggression and sexuality rise to the surface – whereas this need not be true for the female who may become more dependent and passive in the regressed state” (Bailey, 1987). “It is pleasurable to behave at a purely sensual, physical, unthinking level – regardless of whether the act is making love or making war” (Zimbardo, 1973).
“Phylogenetic regression theory views the killer ape notion as an exaggerated, oversimplified, caricature of the truth, but, yet, true to a degree. At no time in human history was man, as a matter of practice, a rampaging bloodthirsty monster genetically programmed for random killing. Neither is man endowed with spontaneous, cyclic drive to injure and kill that must be periodically satisfied. But man possesses the ready capacity to kill, and probably always has. The predatory theme runs deep in human protohistory making cruelty, destructiveness, and pleasure-in-violence highly probable but not necessarily inevitable” (Bailey, 1987).

The Triune Brain

MacLean’s (1973 et seq.) doctrine of the ‘triune brain’: Briefly, this is the theory that humans possess three structurally and functionally distinct brains in one. Arranged rather like the successive layers of an onion, these distinct brains embody the successive stages of higher vertebrate behavioral evolution. The oldest, ‘reptilian’ brain houses the most basic instincts; the next, ‘paleomammalian’ brain (or limbic system) looks after the more complex emotions; and the youngest, ‘neomammalian’ brain is responsible for the most elevated attributes of the human mind, Thus, MacLean considers that we are beings “under the joint direction of three different mentalities” (MacLean, 1982).

In man, the neocortical mantle is thought to be the seat of logical and mathematical reasoning, knowledge and understanding, analytical and synthetic processes, invention and fantasy, philosophy and religion, mediation and intuition. However, in man, too, some behaviors and aspects of mental disease suggest a regression of brain functioning to a predominantly paleomammalian [limbic] or reptilian level. In this last instance, as has been observed in animal experiments, the breakdown of social, familial, parental behavior, and personal care is often accompanied by the emergence of asocial, hostile, and aggressive behaviors, and ‘reptilian’ man emerges (MacLean, 1973 et seq.; Valzelli, 1981).

In actuality, such ‘phylogenetic regression’ reflects a general process of primitivization, dissolution, and hierarchic disintegration, which involves both ontogenetic and phylogenetic components (Meerloo, 1962). The proportionate loading of each is the crucial issue in primitive behavior, e.g. pathological aggression, determining whether primarily atavistic or merely repressed material is called up. For example, the vicious ‘biting’ attacks of Ted Bundy on his victims appear nothing less that regressively recovered predatory patterns of orality mixed with other forms of sexual violence, although his general animosity toward women was no doubt ontogenetically acquired. The phylogenetic component in deep regression is often subtly interblended with other regressive material and is only evident on close analysis. Nevertheless, the phylogenetic component often is one of the most important factors in the causal array subserving pathological forms of aggression” (Bailey, 1987).

A review of the neuropathology of aggression (due to lesions or neoplasms of specific brain tissue) by van der Dennen (1983) concluded that: “(1) A variety of neural substrate changes, preferentially involving the so-called limbic system, may result in pathological aggression, most probably by damaging the fight/flight neural circuitry; (2) Lesions of the Central Nervous System may give rise to at least two distinct kinds of pathological aggression: (a) paroxysmal rage outbursts of an impulsive, relatively uncontrollable nature, related to an ‘offensive aggression’ circuitry in the limbic system; and (b) self-defensive striking out and assaultiveness due to delusional beliefs, hallucinations, and paranoid ideation, preceded and
accompanied by overwhelming emotions of fear and terror. This conclusion confirms the distinction in offensive and defensive systems as reported in many animal studies. It also points to the conspicuous role of fear: indeed, fear might well be the most forceful precipitant of human violence”.

More or less specifically human forms of collective violence like war and genocide, however, can hardly be considered to be products of phylogenetic regression. On the contrary, these are rather products of human (bounded) rationality and inventiveness:

“One states may fight – indeed as often as not they do fight – not over any specific issue such as might otherwise have been resolved by peaceful means, but in order to acquire, to enhance or to preserve their capacity to function as independent actors in the international system at all. ‘The stakes of war’, as Raymond Aron has reminded us, ‘are the existence, the creation or the elimination of States’. It is a sombre analysis, but one which the historical record amply bears out.

It is here that those analysts who come to the study of war from the disciplines of the natural sciences, particularly the biological sciences, tend, it seems to me, to go astray. The conflicts between states which have usually led to war have normally arisen, not from any irrational and emotive drives, but from almost a superabundance of analytic rationality... in general men have fought during the past two hundred years neither because they are aggressive nor because they are acquisitive animals, but because they are reasoning ones: because they discern, or believe that they can discern, dangers before they become immediate, the possibility of threats before they are made” (Howard, 1983, italics added).

What the record indicates is that in the major disasters in our history, individual aggressiveness for selfish motives played an almost negligible part compared to unselfish loyalty and devotion to tribe, nation, religion or political ideology. Tribal wars, national wars, civil wars, religious wars, world wars, are waged in the purported interest of the community, not of the individual, to decide issues that are far removed from the personal self-interest of the combatants. No doubt the lust for rape and plunder provided occasional incentives for a minority, but for the great majority the primary motive was fanatical loyalty, to the point of self-sacrifice, to king and country, leader or group. In other words, the main trouble with man appears to be not that he is an excessively aggressive creature, but an excessively loyal one... The number of victims of individual crimes committed in any period of history is insignificant compared to the masses cheerfully sacrificed ad majorem gloriam, in blind devotion to the true religion, dynasty, or political system. When we speak of ‘blind devotion’ we implicitly recognize the uncritical nature of the self-transcending urge in forming attachments to a person, group, race, flag or system of beliefs (Koestler, 1968).

“[T]he image of humanity, warped by bloodlust, inevitably marching off to kill, is a powerful myth and an important prop of militarism in our society. Despite its lack of scientific credibility, there will remain those ‘hard-headed realists’ who continue to believe in it, congratulating themselves for their ‘courage to face the truth’, resolutely oblivious to the myth behind their ‘reality’” (Ferguson, 1984).

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