

War & "Human Nature"

Shimko, ch. 5, notes by Denis Bašić

Is there something about human nature that leads to war?

- *Though most **realists** do not explicitly endorse **instinctual theories of war**, there are some obvious parallels with their negative view of human nature, especially for classical realists.*
- *The opposing view sees **war as a culturally learned practice**, a form of collective violence rather than a manifestation of an individual-level aggressive instinct. This perspective is more consistent with **liberalism's** positive assessment of human nature, as well as **feminist and constructivist** perspectives stressing the socially constructed nature of many human behaviors.*
- *Though much of this debate has been defined in terms of the familiar **nature-or-nurture divide**, in the final analysis it might be more useful to think in terms of a **combination of nature and nurture**.*

War as a Part of Human Nature

- *Psychologist Anthony Storr appears to agree:*

“That man is an aggressive creature will hardly be denied. With the exception of certain rodents, no other vertebrate habitually destroys members of his own species. No other animal takes positive pleasure in the exercise of cruelty upon another of his own kind.”

- *Stating that humans behave like animals in war is something of **an insult to animals**, since there are virtually no other creatures who do to their own kind what we do to ours.*
- *The question of why human beings systematically prepare for and carry out the large-scale slaughter of members of their own species is perhaps the central question for anyone interested in our fate on this planet.*

Persistence & Brutality of War

- *By one estimate, there have been only 292 years of peace in the world over the last 5,600 years, and during that time more than 3,500,000,000 people have died in, or as a result of, more than 14,000 wars.*
- *This includes not only the obvious **military and civilian casualties**, but also deaths from the common consequences of war—**disease, famine, and civil violence**.*
- *Other studies arrive at somewhat different figures but do not change the overall picture: War is almost certainly the second leading cause of death in human history, behind only the diseases and conditions associated with old age.*

War as a Result of Human Maliciousness & Instincts

- *Exactly what it is about human nature that supposedly leads to war varies, and the concept of human nature is itself quite fuzzy and elastic.*
- *Some treat human nature in a philosophical or theological sense involving foundational assumptions about human motivation, whereas others approach it from a biological perspective, emphasizing instincts and evolutionary imperatives.*
- *For some, the element of human nature that leads to war is an innate aggressive drive or instinct. Others see war as resulting not from aggression per se, but rather from human greed, irrationality, or group-forming tendencies.*
- *Whatever the specifics, human nature explanations of war imply, either explicitly or implicitly, the inevitability of war.*

War as a Learned Behavior

- *On the other side of the debate are those who see **war as learned behavior**, the culmination of a socialization process that encourages us to think about aggression, violence, and other social groups in ways that make systematic killing acceptable, even desirable in some situations.*
- *War does not come “naturally,” like sex; it is something people learn, and must sometimes be coerced to do.*
- *War is more like slavery and wearing black to funerals, learned social practices that can change, than it is sex, which is a biological drive.*

Nature vs. Nurture Debate

- *In very simplistic terms, disagreements about the relationship between war and human nature are specific examples of the age-old **nature-versus-nurture debate** over which human behaviors are inevitable reflections of some unchangeable part of the human makeup and which are social practices amenable to alteration.*
- *Although any explanation for something as complex as war inevitably combines elements of both nature and nurture, there is usually **a sufficient difference in emphasis** so that it is possible to place different theories on either side of this divide.*

Are human beings by Nature Aggressive?

A response of psychology



William James

American psychologist

1842-1910

- Early psychologists like **William James** believed that all humans and societies possess some **deep-rooted aggressive drive** that combat and war seemed to satisfy. **This aggressive drive could not be suppressed, but it might be redirected and diverted toward more peaceful activities that involved similar challenges and exertions.** Thus, James suggested the need to create a “moral equivalent of war.” Youths might be conscripted to plant trees and build roads or dams rather than to kill the young men of other societies. Such programs would inoculate them with the same “social vitamins” as war without causing the same destruction to life and property.

Are human beings by Nature Aggressive?

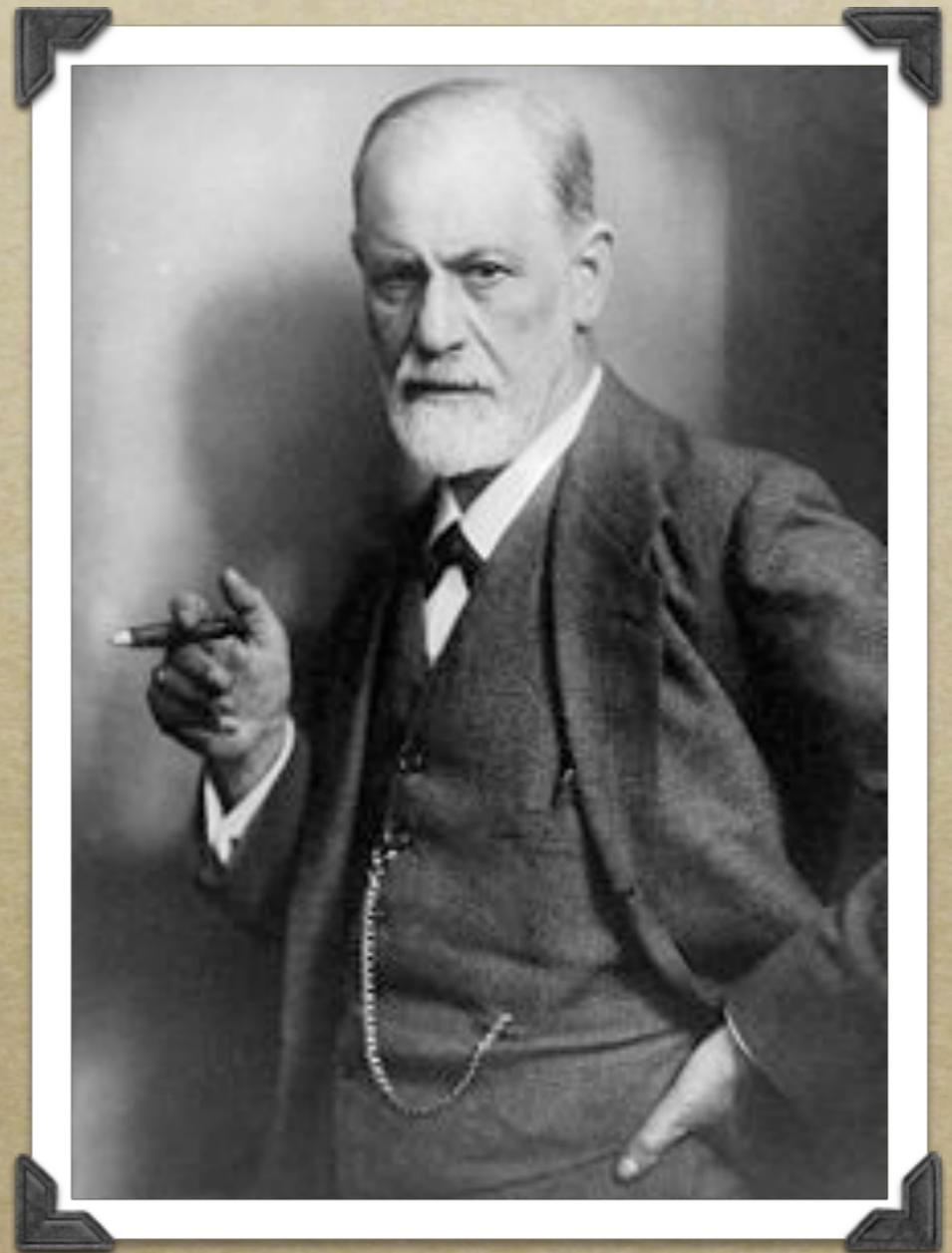
Another response of psychology: Freud

- Along the same lines, Sigmund Freud also believed
 - that the aggressive behavior of mankind stemmed from **deep-seated unconscious drives**;
 - that an explanation for such aggressiveness might be related to the existence in man of **the life instinct (Eros)**, which seeks to preserve and unite, and **the death instinct (Thanatos)**, which presumably has as its goal the removal of all tension, stimulation, and excitement in the individual. (This death instinct is centered inward, and the logical outcome of its hold is suicide - aggression directed toward the self.)
 - that life and death drives do not exist in isolation; they **interact** with each other and modify each other;
 - that man lives because **the life instinct counters the death instinct** and channels the drive away from the self and toward others;

Are human beings by Nature Aggressive?

A response of psychology

- that **overt aggression** is thus the result of internal aggressive drives being redirected at others;
- that aggression must not only be released in some way or another but that **man gains a certain amount of satisfaction from the release.** In other words, man needs to satisfy these aggressive drives, though not necessarily by means of overt aggression.



Sigismund Schlomo Freud
1856-1939

The Nature-Nurture Debate

Nature: Ethology

- **Ethology** is the science of animal behavior.
- **Konrad Lorenz** - the father of ethology (work: *On Aggression* 1966)
- **Robert Ardrey** (works: *African Genesis*, *The Territorial Imperative*, *The Social Contract*) - promoter of the idea
- The major thesis of the ethologists is that man is a product of two million years of biological evolution.
- According to **Lionel Tiger**, men remain “*fine-honed machines for the efficient pursuit of game*” ... “*biologically or genetically wired for hunting - for the emotions, excitements, curiosities, the fears and the social relations that were needed in the hunting way of life.*”

- **Raymond Dart**, and **Robert Ardrey** as well, have argued
 - that man is a direct descendant of a **killer ape**, *Australopithecus africanus*;
 - that this particular ape was not only **carnivorous**, but **cannibalistic** as well- an instinctual killer who may have **killed for the enjoyment of it**.



Raymond Dart, 1893-1988



Robert Ardrey, 1908-1980

Interpretation of Evidence

- Dart made his conclusions keeping in mind a large number of hominid **remains** that had incurred significant **fracturing** and **puncturing**, which Dart understood as “evidence of widespread interpersonal violence among *africanus*.”
- The fossil evidence has now been reexamined by other scholars (Richard Leaky) who believe this damage is more likely due simply to the compression of bones and other debris over a lengthy period of time.

Lorenz on Aggression

- For Lorenz the concept of aggression refers only to intraspecific aggression - fighting between members of the same species. When two species fight (as when one species kills another for food), aggression is not involved.
- Perhaps the best **example of aggression** is seen when animals **defend their territory** against another of the same species.



Think of similar behavior with humans.

Konrad Lorenz, 1903-1989

- Ethologists see **aggression as an instinct (an innate drive)** that once helped to **ensure the survival of the individual and the species**.
- As such, it was passed down from generation to generation as part of our hereditary makeup.
- The problem is, of course, that the presence of such a drive **in the modern age** - with its weapons of mass destruction - **may be extremely counterproductive**.



The meaning of aggression in the animal world

- Aggression is believed to have several species-preserving functions:
 - 1. It keeps a balance in the territory between the needed resources on the one hand and the number of individuals to be supported on the other.
 - 2. It aids in defense of the young.
 - 3. It contributes to the survival of the fittest through the process of sexual selection.
 - 4. It contributes to the establishment of stable social relations through the creation of dominant-subordinant systems such as the well-known “pecking system.”

- Ethologists used to believe that the intraspecific aggression among animals generally not aimed at killing or extermination of the loser. On the other hand, Lorenz identifies man as the only species that routinely slaughters its own kind, besides rats, which also engage in “clan” wars and murder members of their own species.
- Further research has, however, proved Lorenz wrong about this. We now know that several species also occasionally kill their own kind.
- For instance, **Edward Wilson** discusses the notoriously aggressive behavior of **ant colonies** toward one another and of “colony warfare” both within and between species. Colonies of the common pavement ant **defend their territories** with pitched battles conducted by masses of workers.
- Murder and cannibalism among the vertebrates also seem to be more prevalent than previously believed. Lions sometimes kill other lions, and there are reports of the killing and **cannibalism** of cubs after one of their protector males had died and the territory was invaded by other prides.
- Indeed, man may not even be the most aggressive species. Who is it then?

- *The hyena is often granted this distinction now.*



Aggression Inhibiting Mechanisms

- Ethologists believe that while animals have inhibiting mechanisms in intraspecific aggression (appeasement gestures or releasing signals), humans do not. (Do you believe it?)
- The most frequently cited example of such inhibiting mechanisms is that of the wolf's baring his neck during combat, an act that would presumably leave him vulnerable to be killed, but instead acts as a kind of surrender signal to the opponent, who then ends the contest.
- (How about raising your bare hands into the air - surrender?)
- Ethologists, however, believe that man lacks such mechanism, because in the early stages of his evolution he had no need for them. Unlike the saber-toothed tiger and other predators, man was unable to kill his fellow-men quickly; without claws and fangs he simply did not have the tools for it. (Do you buy this argument?)
- (How about choking the opponent with your bare hands? Is that fast enough?)

- Ethologists believe that the **sheer difficulty of hand-to-hand killing** meant that most first men would give up the effort long before death resulted.
- If the physical difficulty was surmountable, presumably the **aggressor** would also be **dissuaded by the anguished pleading of his opponent**.
- (Where does the compassion come from? Instincts or Divine intervention? Is compassion inheritable as much as aggression?)
- However, assisted by the development of a greatly enlarged brain, humans later devised **tools and weapons** that could be used **to slay their enemies even at great distances** thereby reducing both the physical and emotional constraints on killing.
- By this time, however, it was too late for man to develop those inhibiting gestures that lower relations had possessed for millennia. (Does this latter statement make sense to you?)

- Instead of these “instinctual” mechanisms passed down through genetic imprinting, mankind has been forced to rely on other measures to inhibit killing:
 - **morality, religion, ethics, and cultural prohibitions.**
- It would be an understatement to say that these have proven to be ineffective. (Could they be civilized expressions of “appeasement gestures?”)
- The result is that while aggressive instincts were once species preserving, they no longer serve the function-just the opposite.
- Man’s aggressive instincts, combined with the lack of instinctual inhibitory mechanisms and the ability to develop weapons of long-range destruction, mean constant conflict and death.

- Hence, from the perspective of the ethologist, wars provide an outlet for the aggressive tendencies that are inherent in human beings.
 - *drive-discharge model-aggression* is seen as a drive that seeks release or discharge, thus impelling man toward aggressive activities.
 - *hydraulic model* - analogous to the pressure created by water that is held in check by a dam. In other words, a kind of energy accumulates in the instinct center of the animal, generating pressure for its discharge.
- Aggression is in this sense spontaneous. Its source is internal to the organism, not external.
- The question is how these aggressive actions are set off.



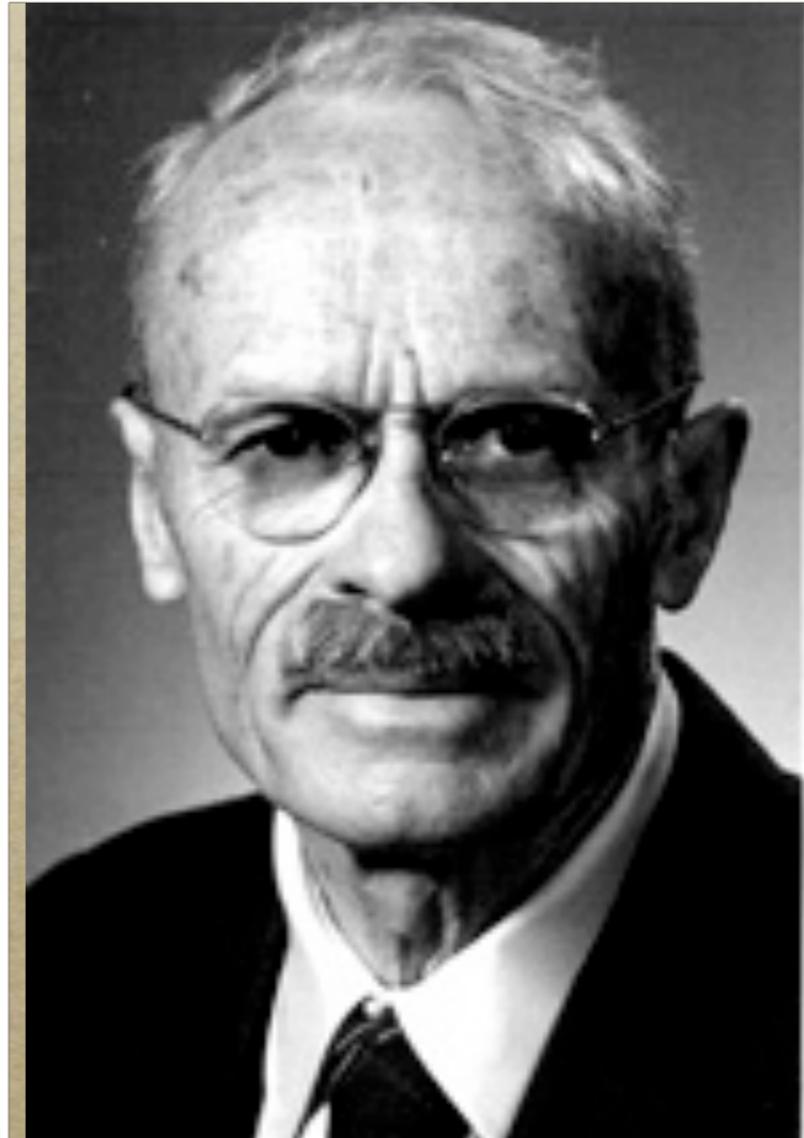
The question centers around the stimuli needed to elicit such a response.

English psychiatrist **Anthony Storr** (pictured) and **Lorenz** suggest that although the physical mechanism of aggression is inborn, it is still usually triggered from the external environment.

- But, they also argue that the fact that aggression needs an outside stimulus to set it off does not imply that man can escape the need to behave aggressively.
- Lorenz maintains that the longer the aggressive energy is dammed up, the lower the threshold value of the stimulus needed to elicit the aggressive response.
- Indeed, he speculates that following an extensive period of damming, aggression can be performed without the presence of an external stimulus.
- Storr agrees, suggesting that when no external stimulus exists that is capable of stimulating aggression, man will actually seek out such a stimulus.

Psychology vs. Ethology

- Psychologist **John Paul Scott**, while agreeing that aggression is rooted in a physiological process and that it needs to be activated by external stimuli, would argue that aggression will never be manifested if the outside trigger is missing.
- Scott also concluded that there is no evidence for a drive for aggression.
- If Scott's more optimistic view is correct, mankind is not doomed by its genetic inheritance; violence is avoidable.



J. P. Scott,
1909 - 2000

Ethologists' view of *territoriality*

- An idea dear to the heart of ethologists is *territoriality* and the relationship between *territory* and *aggression*.
- For instance, **Robert Ardrey** suggests that man's genetic inheritance has provided him with the same **territorial instincts** as his lower relations.
- **Ardrey** relies on the work of **F. F. Darling**, who suggested that the motivation for territorial behavior in animals was psychological, rather than physiological - arising from the dual "needs" for security and stimulation.
- To these two needs **Ardrey** adds a third need found in higher animals: **identity**.

Ethologists' view of *identity*

- **Ardrey** suggests that territory satisfies the three basic needs.
- Territory defines who one is; “we” are the ones, who live together in the territory; “they” are outsiders. Whether in human or animal communities, the distinction is important. **Identity** within the territory is also based on status ranking or “pecking orders,” which apply only to members of the territory.
- Territory also provides **security**. This is the function of the center of the territory, the place where the ability of the group to protect itself is strongest and also where the willingness of the intruder to challenge territorial rights is the weakest.
- Territory also provides the function of **stimulation**. This is the function of the periphery of the territory. Here members of the territorial group come into contact with other members of the same species in neighboring territories, creating a wealth of excitement.

What humans want? Tension reduction or stimuli?

- Assuming that human behavior parallels that of its ancestral cousins, all of this would, of course, go very much against **Freud's** notion that **human behavior is aimed at tension reduction**.
- Indeed, a variety of research performed with animals indicates just the opposite - organisms frequently go out of their way to obtain **stimulation from the external environment**. What is true for animals seems to be equally true for man.
- **Estelle Ramey**, a physiologist and biophysicist who has studied **boredom**, contends that every laboratory experiment on **the pathological effects of boredom**, not to mention the reports of men stationed in Antarctic outposts, prisoners of war, long-haul truck drivers, and airplane pilots, supports the notion that **stimulation is an important need**.
- As **F. H. Knight** once observed, “What people really want is trouble, and if they do not have enough of it, they will create it artificially, the institution of sport being proof.”

War & Three Basic Human Needs

- **Ardrey**, hence, maintains that war satisfies the three basic needs for **identification**, **security**, and **stimulation**.
 - First, **identification** is provided through military rank, through membership in platoons, squadrons, corps, battalions, divisions, and armies in association with other soldiers. Glory in war is also capable of providing a kind of personal identification for soldiers.
 - Second, war is widely presumed to be fought for the purpose of **security** either to create it where it does not exist, to enhance it, or to maintain it.
 - Third, war also provides more than enough **stimulation** for most men especially for those who actually combat.

Recent Ethological Studies

- While the works of Lorenz and other scholars of the first wave of ethological studies in the 1960s and early 1970s focused primarily on the behavior of fish and birds, a second wave of scholarship by ethologists has taught us much more about the behavior of man's closest biological relatives - **chimpanzees and gorillas**.
- Since chimpanzees are closer to humans physiologically and genetically than any other creature - in their DNA structures, the two species vary by just over one percent - evidence concerning the aggressive nature of chimps would seem to be crucial to the ethological argument.
- Watch this short documentary on aggression with chimpanzees featuring the research by by **Jane Goodall**.

In her thirty years at Gombe, **Jane Goodall** observed many behaviors that have shattered our preconceptions of man's evolutionary cousins. So, she saw:

- that **chimps** are not only **tool users**, but also **tool makers**;
- that violent conflict associated with the determination of dominance among male chimpanzees is quite ritualized and **struggles to the death do not occur**, contestants frequently receive severe physical punishment during dominance struggles;
- that chimps engage in **aggressive territorial conflicts**, though encounters between members of different territorial groups **typically** became **dangerous only for unprotected female intruders**;
- that **two chimpanzee communities engaged in a four-year “war”** after the chimp community she was observing divided into two separate territorial groups; that the members of the original community totally eliminated the members of the breakaway group one by one over a four-year period. (Each of the **“secessionists”** was **brutally beaten to death by former friends**. Instances of **cannibalism** sometimes accompanied this warfare.)

Critique of Ethology

- Lorenz and his followers have been **criticized both for their methods and for the validity of their results**. The substantive evidence seems to be extremely weak and based primarily on extrapolating disputed evidence from the behavior of **certain** animal species to human beings. A few specific criticisms are related to the following issues:
 - **1. *Is aggression really an instinct?*** Owing to this difficulty in distinguishing learning in very early ages from instinct, many scholars have begun to **abandon the term “*instinct*”** altogether.
 - **2. *Is not man different from other animals?*** Lorenz’s primary failing would seem to be that he fails to recognize that man is substantially different from other animals, because of the enlarged brain he has developed. Many scholars today believe that, generally speaking, **the more advanced the species, the less genetics determine behavior**.

- **3. *Monocausal explanation.*** Lorenz's theory fails to explain all aggressive behaviors, because it ignores other variables that may play a role in aggression - such as **the presence of frustration, the character of the sociopolitical environment, or the ability of man to reason and to learn.**
- **4. *Methodology.*** Lorenz and his followers are criticized for using observations of the behavior of one species to explain the behavior of other species and for using observations of individuals to explain the collective behavior of groups.
- **5. *The drive-discharge model.*** The physiological correlates of aggression are brought about by the individual's **response to perceptions of the external environment rather than from within.**

- **6. Crowding and territoriality.** Man's behavior under crowded conditions varies substantially depending on crowdings' interaction with several other variables. **Scott** cites as an example that **in the Eskimo societies**, except the Aleut, there was **nothing such as defense of territory**. Crowding per se, in the absence of variables such as **income level, malnutrition, noise, filth, and other variables**, seems to have no great impact on things such as crime, competitiveness, and aggressiveness **Territoriality may have a cultural basis instead of a biological one**. But, more about it later.
- In sum, **Samuel Kim** argues
 - that there is less aggression among more complex species,
 - that when aggression occurs, its causes are more complex, more numerous, less rigidly programmed by the genotype, and more influenced by **ecological and experiential factors**.
- Lorenz's characterization of **primates** as "*irascible*" is not accepted by many primatologists, who see them rather as **generally peaceful and cooperative**.
- **Jane Goodall** argues that extreme violence is a rarity among chimps.

The Nature-Nurture Debate

Nature: Sociobiology

- Although **Edward O. Wilson**, the father of sociobiology, claims that human behavior has been programmed to a substantial degree by natural selection, he doesn't claim that genetics are the sole cause of behavior. Instead **the sociobiological theory recognizes the interaction of genes with the cultural environment**. Nevertheless, Wilson's **emphasis is on the genetic determinants** of human behavior and human culture.
- How do we know that human behavior has a genetic base?
- First, according to sociobiologists, the social cultures of man and chimpanzees, man's closest relatives anatomically and physiologically, are similar.

- But, second, says Wilson, human behavior is also distinct from the behavior of our evolutionary relatives in ways that can only be accounted for by a unique set of human genes.
- Virtually every human culture known shows these distinct characteristics:
 - athletic sports, community organization, cooperative labor, division of labor, education, ethics, etiquette, funeral rites, gift giving, government, hospitality, inheritance rules, kinship nomenclature, language, law, marriage, penal sanctions, population policy, property rights, religious ritual, residence rules, sexual restrictions, status differentiation, and trade, among others.
- This could not have happened randomly; it must be genetic, Wilson believes. How else could so many human societies have developed the same patterns of behavior ?

Nature: Sociobiology

Adaptiveness and Genetic Fitness

- Behavioral traits of human nature were “*adaptive*” during the time that human behavior evolved, and genes consequently spread through the population that predisposed their carriers to develop these traits.
- *Adaptiveness* means that if an individual displays particular behavioral traits, he stands a better chance of having his genes represented in the next generation than if he did not. This advantage is called *genetic fitness*.
- **Wilson** contends that the greatest part of genetic evolution occurred over five million years ago, prior to civilization. There has been some evolution since then, but not enough to affect a large number of traits.

Nature: Sociobiology

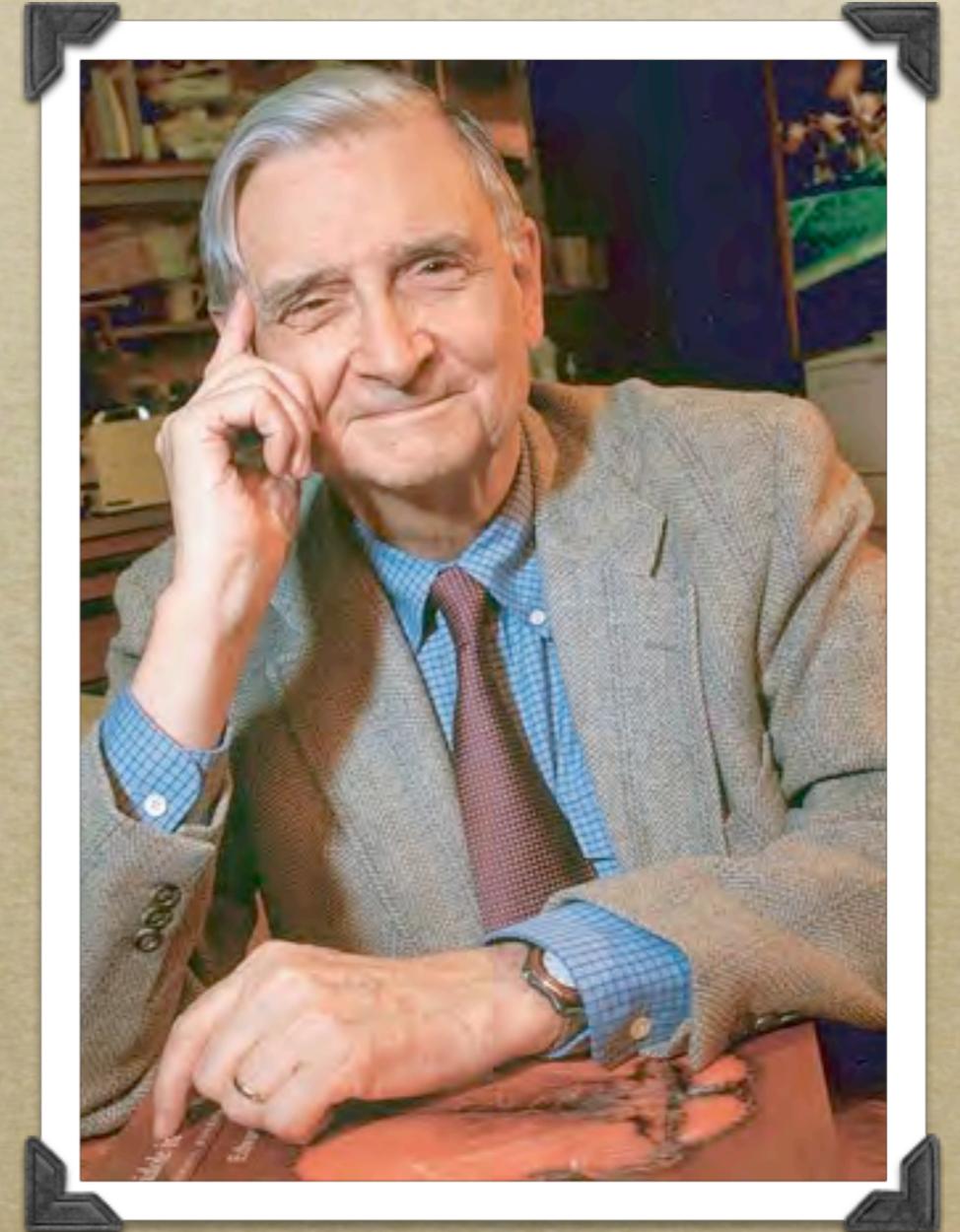
Cooperation & Altruism

- Sociobiologists believe that **cooperation** and **altruism** are *innate traits*, presumably because they add to genetic fitness. However, they also believe that **aggression** is equally an innate trait of humans.
- **Wilson** sees organized **warfare** as **endemic** to every form of society, from hunter-gatherers to the modern urban-industrial.
- Like Lorenz, **Wilson** argues that man's aggressiveness has added to his genetic fitness through preservation of the territorial balance, defense of the young, and mating and survival of the fittest.
- Because **aggressiveness** has added to genetic fitness, there is a fairly high probability that the trait will develop in a specific set of environments, but there is no certainty that the trait would develop in *all* environments. **One should not expect, therefore, that all societies will be aggressive.**

Edward O. Wilson

(1929-)

- Even though aggression is seen as genetic, **Wilson** is reluctant to define aggression as an *instinct*.
- Neither does he see it as an inborn drive that builds up pressure until it bursts the dam of inhibition.
- Wilson maintains that there is no general instinct for aggression, only particular patterns of aggressive behavior, i.e. that aggression is a “genetic contingency plan - a set of complex responses of the organism’s endocrine and nervous systems - programmed to be summoned up in time of stress.”



- Man inherits a wide variety of possible behaviors.
- Which behavior particular human beings display depends on **cultural differences**. Each culture gives a specific form to aggression.
- Consequently, according to Wilson, the cultural evolution of aggression would seem to be guided by
 - (a) the genetic predisposition toward learning some form of communal aggression,
 - (b) the necessities imposed by the environment, and
 - (c) the previous history of the group, which biases it toward the adoption of one cultural innovation as opposed to another.
- However, the bottom line for **Wilson** is that man is “predisposed to slide into deep, irrational hostility under certain definable conditions.”

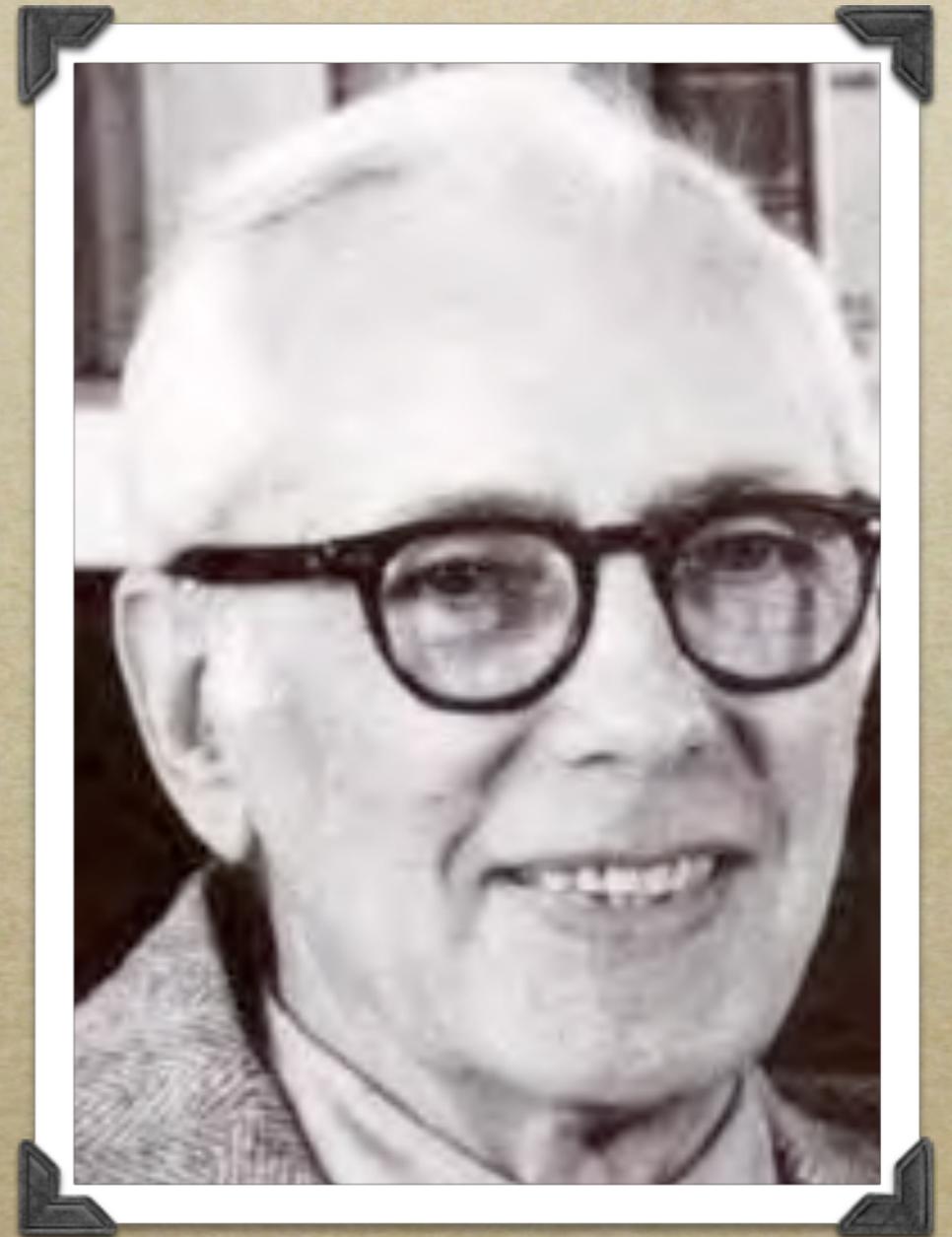
Critique of Sociobiology

- Much of critique of sociobiology comes from **anthropologists**. Most anthropologists agree that there is no doubt that **much of human behavior has a genetic basis**, but that this is different from saying, as **Wilson** does, that such behavior is **genetically determined**.
- Although **Wilson** recognizes in turn the importance of culture, environment, and learning in determining aggression, he generally **tends to give more weight to the genetic influences** than anthropologists believe they merit.
- For instance, Wilson argues that the reproductive efficiency of the group or its chances of survival are increased by the altruistic acts of its members.
- Natural selection thus selects favorably for altruism, but **does that mean that genes "determine" altruistic acts?**

Anthropologist, **Ashley Montagu**, doubts this. Mankind displays great variety in altruism. Montagu also cites the study by Harlow in which monkeys which are isolated or inadequately socialized are unable to act altruistically later in life. He argues the same is true of humans.

Altruism may have a genetic basis, but environmental factors play the decisive role in determining whether such behavior will be developed or not.

The same is true with aggression.



*Ashley Montagu,
1905-1999*

Is social behavior determined by heredity?

- Anthropologists believe that **Wilson** has failed to build a convincing case for his general proposition that “social behavior is determined by heredity, environmental stimuli, and past experiences, and that *free will* is an illusion.”
- His evidence for this is that man shares several similar modes of social behavior with his nearest animal relatives: the size of adult groupings is in the range of ten to one hundred, not smaller; there is a relatively long period of social training of the young; the institution of play, and so on. Likewise, all human groups share similar social behaviors (mentioned before), such as athletic sports, division of labor, education, funeral rites, gift giving, marriage, status differentiation, and so forth.
- The reaction of anthropologists to this is simply the common environmental influences in man are likely to produce common forms of social behavior. Faced with similar problems and similar tasks, various human groups throughout the world constructed similar institutions to resolve these problems and solve these tasks. They did not have to be genetically programmed to do so.

The War of Theories

Arguments and Counterarguments

- **Ethology:** War is derived from innate aggressiveness.
- **Anthropology:** If war is seen as being derived from innate aggressiveness that is a part of the nature of mankind, then warfare should be a relatively constant state of affairs. Yet we know that war and aggression are not constant in time or space.
- **Sociobiology:** They are not. But, that does not mean that men are not predisposed for aggression, but only that at times circumstances do not provoke the expression of aggressive behavior.
- **Anthropology:** If it all depends on circumstances, why some people/nation choose to go to war and some do not while being under the same circumstances? Why some peoples are traditionally pacifistic? Is not the answer in culture, education, training, propaganda, leadership?
- How would you continue this debate?

Nurture: Cultural Evolution Theory

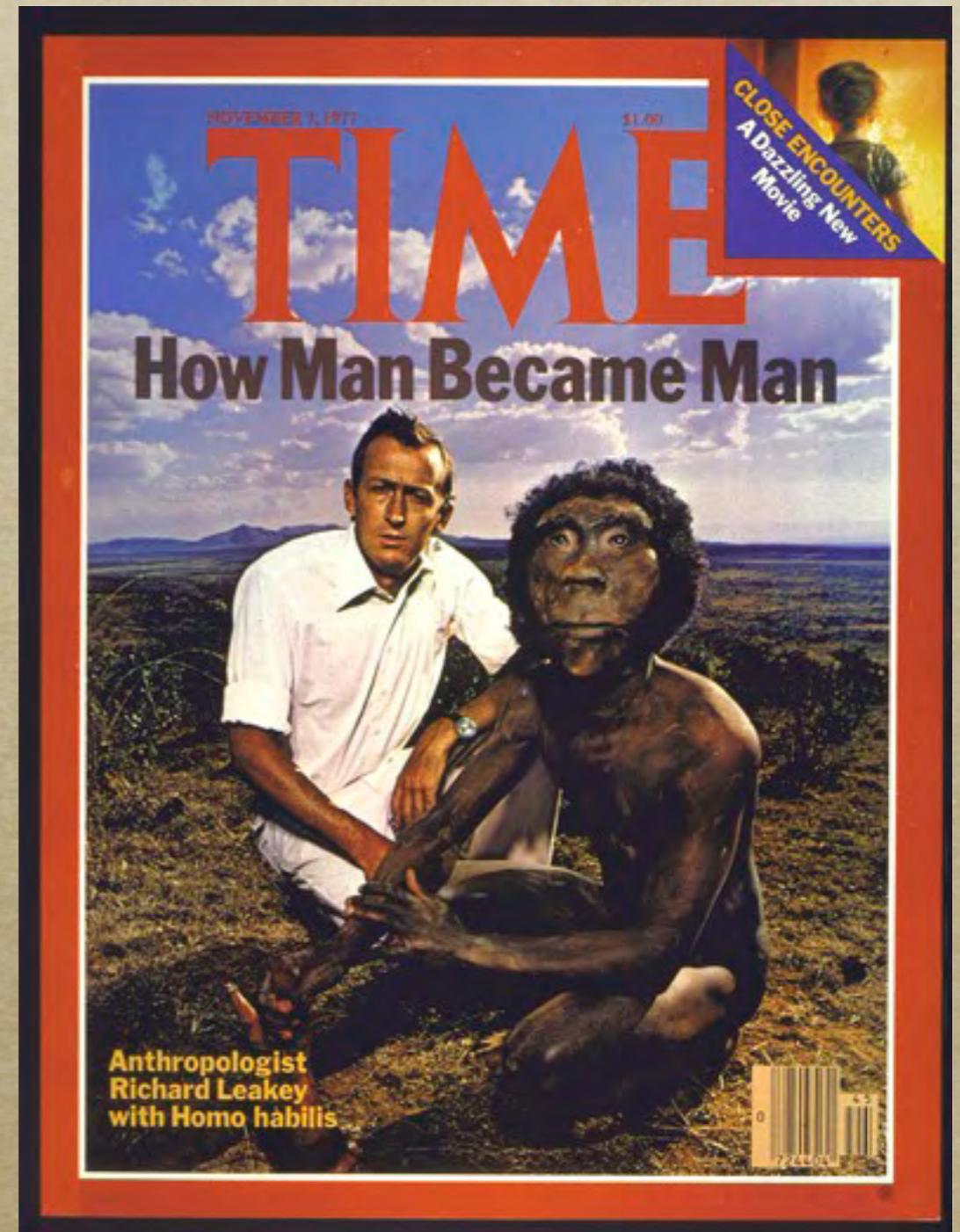
- Those on the nurture side of the dispute, primarily **behavioral psychologists** and **anthropologists**, make several arguments.
- (1) Since man varies greatly in his behavior of aggression, different cultures are a good place to look for an explanation of the differences in aggression.
- (2) Peaceful societies do in fact exist, dispelling the myth that all men are aggressive.
- (3) The experimental evidence is fairly clear that aggression is greatly influenced by learning. Aggression can be taught; it can also be modified, reduced, and even eliminated by learning.

Cultural Evolutionary Theory

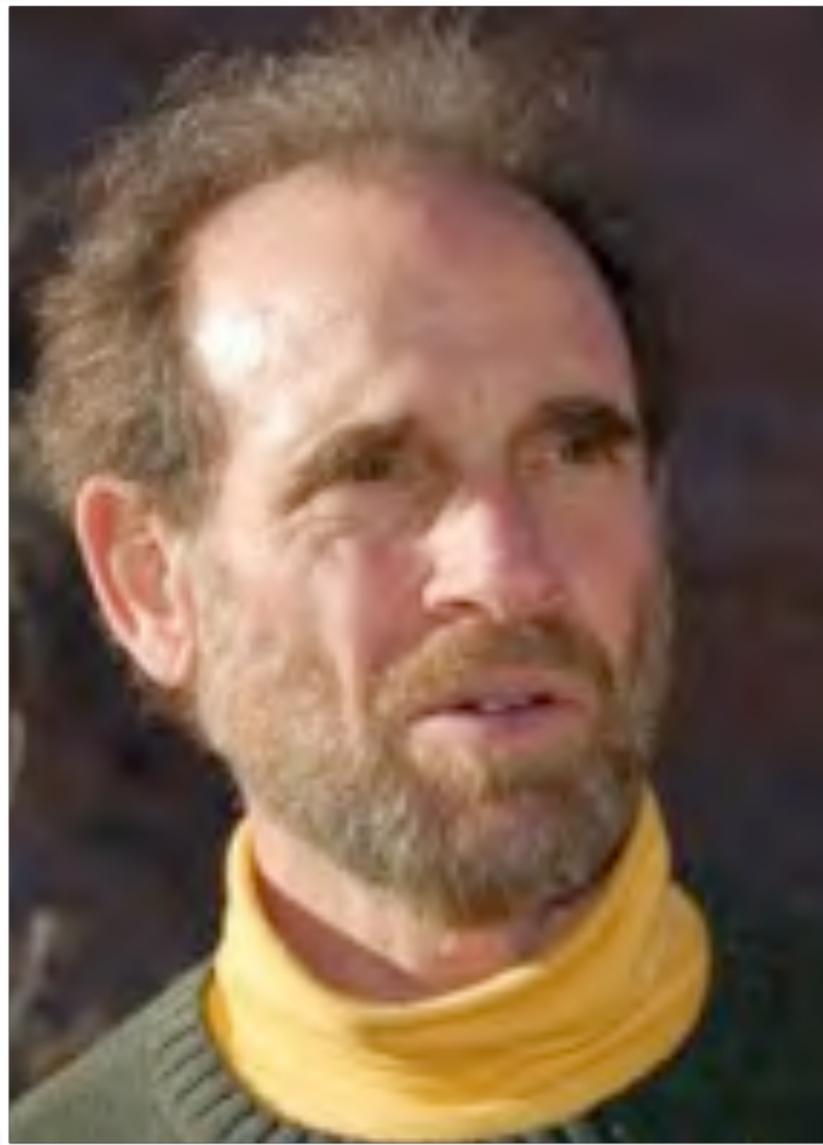
- **Anthropologists** frequently argue that **early man** was initially a **peaceful animal** with a nonaggressive "nature."
- According to **Ashley Montagu**, there is no evidence of either intragroup or intergroup hostilities in early man before the development of agricultural-pastoral communities. Such aggressive behavior would have endangered the whole population and would - in Edward Wilson's terms - not have promoted *adaptiveness*.
- For anthropologists, an important key to aggression is the fundamental change in the social and cultural environment that confronted mankind as we progressed from the nomadic hunter-gatherer stage of development to that of settled agricultural or pastoral existence.
- In agricultural or herding societies, land became a valuable possession, which was for the first time owned by individuals or groups and required protection from other individuals or groups.
- Q: Did early hunters have to fight for hunting grounds with other hunters?

Agricultural Revolution and Aggression

- Anthropologist, **Richard Leakey** (1944-), also suggests that the *Agricultural Revolution* constituted a major social, cultural, economic, and political change, which was followed by a substantial **increase in military encounters between neighboring groups**.
- **Leaky**, thus, sees **warfare as a response to the changing economic and social circumstances** in which early man found himself after the agricultural revolution.



Agricultural Revolution and Aggression



Bard Schmookler, (1946-)

- Yet another anthropologist, **Andrew Bard Schmookler** (1946-), agrees with Montagu and Leaky and states that agricultural societies eventually encountered limits to their growth posed by the existence of other communities.
- This typical Malthusian problem that agricultural communities faced could be resolved either by a more intensive use of the land or by expanding one's current farming and grazing areas at the expense of one's neighbors through **the use of force.**

- In order to survive, **agrarian societies**
 - started emulating their most aggressive rivals;
 - built large communities through consolidation and aggregation;
 - constructed large-scale political organizations in order to efficiently mobilize their populations;
 - initiated taxation systems to make the wealth of society available to these governments; and
 - created military institutions to protect and extend their power.
- In reality, certain avenues of *cultural evolution* were closed off. More highly organized societies drove out the less highly organized; the large drove out the small; the more warlike cultures drove out the more peaceful cultures.
- *Social evolution* proceeded in only one direction-toward the creation of ever more powerful and militant societies. A process of *cultural selection* seems to have been at work here.
- The result of this process was that powerful, militaristic political units spread throughout the world, and wars between these societies became endemic.

Nurture: Peaceful Societies

- Despite the general trend identified by **Schmookler**, peaceful societies have not only existed in the distant past, but many such societies have survived into more recent times.
- **David Fabbro's** study of peaceful societies focused on societies that were deemed to be peaceful due to
 - (a) the absence of wars on their territory,
 - (b) the absence of external war involvement by the group
 - (c) the absence of civil war or internal collective violence
 - (d) the lack of a standing military-political organization, and
 - (e) little or no interpersonal violence in the society.

- **Fabbro** investigated seven societies that met these criteria: the Semai of Malaysia, the Siriono of Bolivia, the Mbuti pygmies of Zaire, the Kung Bushmen of the Kalahari, the Copper Eskimoes of northern Canada, the Hurterires of North America, and the islanders of Tristan da Cunha in the South Pacific. (Other peaceful societies might include the Zuni of the American Southwest, the Arapesh and the Fore of New Guinea, the Walbiri aborigines of Australia, the Tasaday of the Philippines, the Tahitians, the Lepchas of Sikkim, and many more.)
- What are these peaceful societies like?
- The seven peaceful societies examined by **Fabbro** could all be classified as “**egalitarian band societies**,” which
 - generally lack patterns of ranking and stratification,
 - place no restrictions on the number of people capable of exercising power or occupying positions of prestige, and
 - have economies where exchange is based on generalized reciprocity.

- All these societies are small, face-to-face communities, a major factor contributing to their open and egalitarian decision-making process.
- Though the first five of the mentioned societies are hunting and gathering societies, the last two have some agricultural base.
- However, they all produce **little or no surplus**, and what is produced is distributed equally.
- **The lack of an economic surplus** (that is, the production of economic goods beyond what is needed for subsistence) **would seem to be important**.
- If there is no surplus, the **political authorities** can not confiscate or commandeer it and use the wealth derived from it as a basis for carrying on coercive activities, including the creation of a **military organization**.

Poverty and Violence & Culture of Non-Violence

- It is important to notice that the **scarcity of resources**, with which most of these societies are faced, **is not a factor that contributes to violence**; quite the contrary, it is a factor that encourages close cooperation.
- **Fabbro** concludes that peaceful societies are peaceful essentially because they lack some of the most important structural prerequisites for engaging in war: a coercive hierarchy and leadership and an economic surplus to support a nonproductive military organization.
- Many of these peaceful societies also develop **cultural norms that discourage violence**. The Kung disparage physical combat as a means of settling disputes. Instead, the most admired characters in the Kung folklore are those who deal with adversity through trickery and deception rather than through force.

Peaceful, but not totally nonviolent

- Of course, not all primitive societies have been totally nonviolent. The **variability in violence** among traditional societies is fairly large; violence and even warfare exist.
- However, the central point, according to **Gwynne Dyer**, is that **precivilized societies did not kill people *much***.
- **Dyer** notes that of **the hundreds of hunter-gatherer societies** which modern man has encountered, almost all have had the same attitude toward **war**:
 - it is an important ritual, an exciting and dangerous game, and perhaps even an opportunity for self-expression,
 - but it is not about power in any recognizable modern sense of the word,
 - it most certainly is not about slaughter,
 - neither is it about the conquest of territory.

- What is warfare then among hunter-gatherer tribes about?
- **Dyer** contends that there is scarcely one recorded example of such tribe's participating in a death struggle with its neighbors because of **population pressure** or **economic scarcity**.
- Although many were engaged in low-level warfare against their neighbors in their spare time, . . . nobody thought 'winning' was sufficiently important to put much thought into organizing warfare efficiently.
- This low-level tribal warfare was limited in nature and **highly ritualized**. **The American Plains Indians'** institution of “*counting coup*” - whereby the adversary was not killed, but simply touched with a stick or hand - is an excellent example.
- The **fighting** often **stopped** for the day after a single casualty was exacted, and there were deliberate steps taken to prevent the destructiveness of the warfare.
- Individuals got killed, though only a few at a time, and the societies survived intact.

Warfare as a rough sport for underemployed hunters

- **Dyer** concludes that precivilized **warfare** was mostly a “**rough male sport for underemployed hunters**, with the kinds of damage-limiting rules that all competitive sports have.”
- On the other hand, as these people have “progressed” toward agriculture and herding, the warriors have more free time and they begin to acquire material interests to defend; the outcome is that war becomes more destructive.
- **Quincy Wright**’s analysis of 633 primitive cultures confirms that the collectors, lower hunters, and low-level farmers were the least warlike of these primitive peoples while the most advanced herding and farming societies were the most warlike.
- The conclusion of anthropologists and historians is, therefore, that a tremendous increase in violence accompanied the transition of societies from the hunter-gatherer life to the more settled, agricultural existence and the concomitant rise of towns and cities.

Nonviolent people in violent societies

If aggression is a matter of cultural evolution, how is it possible then that there are so many nonviolent people in violent societies?

Indeed, there are many nonaggressive individuals within generally aggressive, modern communities. Most societies are filled with people who would find it very difficult to take another's life, even in anger. Even if aggression is part of the human genetic makeup, it would not seem to be enough to cause most people to be able to kill another human being.

Werner Levi notes that there never seem to be enough “aggressive” men flocking to the recruiting stations during war, so that everywhere men are drafted to perform such services. Once drafted into the military, they need a heavy dose of **indoctrination** to turn them into killers. It takes a great deal of conditioning to prepare them for face-to-face combat. Even so, in some armies more than half of the men who were supposed to fight did not pull the trigger. They were willing to die for their countries, but they were not willing to kill for them. Environmental factors would seem to have been at least somewhat successful in suppressing whatever genetic impulses man has toward aggression. Or is compassion innate, too?

Nurture: Social Learning Theory

Clearly, violent behavior varies greatly between individuals and groups. What might account for this?

Behavioral psychologists have shown that aggression can be modified through the learning of peaceful or cooperative responses, and experimental research in the laboratory has indicated the power of conditioning to change the behavior of animals.

For instance, Scott reports that male mice have been trained to be completely peaceful.

Animals can learn peaceful behavior not only on the intraspecific level, but also on the interspecific level.

Watch this movie about an unlikely friendship or this one.

Nonaggressive societies

- It is also apparent that many societies have "**learned**" to be nonaggressive.
- Aggression is almost totally absent in some cultures, even as a response to frustration. Even when aggression is present, vastly different patterns exist.
- Thus, in some societies, such as the Eskimos, there is some individual aggressiveness, but there is no group warfare, while in Pueblo Indian societies individuals are not pugnacious but there is group warfare.
- These circumstances tend to indicate that **both individual aggressiveness and group aggressiveness must be learned, and learned separately.**

Albert Bandura and Social Learning Theory



Albert Bandura, (1925-)

Albert Bandura, a proponent of *social learning theory*, maintains that aggression is learned in large part from the social environment. Aggression is very much influenced by the socialization process that almost all youngsters encounter - in the home, among family members, with peers, in school, and in religious groups - as a natural part of growing up and becoming familiar with societal norms. There is a sizable amount of information, for instance, that more aggressive individuals come from homes where corporal punishment is used, and that criminals have been abused as children.

- The **socialization process** is instrumental in determining the contexts in which aggression is permitted (*if any*) and the targets (*if any*) that are permissible for individuals occupying particular roles in society.
- Once a particular behavior (aggressive or nonaggressive) is adopted, it is maintained, modified, or eliminated by positive or negative ***reinforcement***.
- It might be interesting to spend a moment pondering **mass culture in the United States as reflected in films**. If films do indeed mirror the predominant cultural attitudes and norms of society, and if children and young adults do indeed learn attitudes and behavioral norms from such films, what does this portend for the United States? In particular, it might be interesting to reflect on the image of heroes in American film. **Who are our heroes and why?**
- **The hero** was not the man of peace who could settle disputes between his neighbors through logic and persuasion, but the man of action who settled disputes through violence and bloody retribution. In such a way do we learn violence from our culture.

- A complicating factor is that individuals are subject to several learning environments.
- Most cultures, especially the more complex modern cultures, have **subcultures** with a set of competing values and norms.
- If individual behavior is the product of cultural environment, then **the behavior of our rulers** is probably the product of several different environments, too.
- In summary, **social learning theory** reminds us of the importance of **culture as a source of violence**. It admonishes us that if we seek to understand the cause of violence and aggression, we need to understand that **individuals (including national leaders)** are quite frequently **the products of social and cultural environments** that condone and even reward aggression and belittle peaceful cooperation.
- Ultimately, however, the implications of social learning theory for controlling aggression and violence are optimistic. If aggression is learned, it can be unlearned. If violence is based on cultural and environmental factors, these can be changed, albeit slowly.

Conclusions & Questions

- First, if aggression has a genetic or instinctual basis, if it is indeed part of "*human nature*," then efforts to eliminate war are almost certainly doomed to failure.
- Second, if war is derived from an innate aggressiveness that is part of *the common nature of mankind*, then how do we explain peace?
- If people are aggressive by their very nature, how come then that all states are not behaving in the same way, i.e. how is the *variation of aggressiveness* possible? Or is aggressiveness more conditioned by our culture and environment?
- Some scholars, actually advocate that the variation in the aggressiveness of states is due to the variation in the personal psychological natures of their leaders.
- Now, let us see what **Howard Zinn** has to say about human nature and war!