



BEYOND WAR

THE HUMAN POTENTIAL FOR PEACE

DOUGLAS P. FRY

FOREWORD BY ROBERT SAPOLSKY

Beyond War

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The Human Potential for Peace

Douglas P. Fry

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS
2007

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford University Press, Inc., publishes works that further Oxford University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship, and education.

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Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi
New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

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Published by Oxford University Press, Inc.
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016
www.oup.com

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Fry, Douglas P., 1953–

Beyond war : the human potential for peace / By Douglas P. Fry.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-19-530948-5

1. War. 2. Warfare, Prehistoric. 3. Peace—Social aspects. 4. Ethnology. 5. Conflict management—Social aspects. I. Title.

U21.2.F79 2007

303.6'6—dc22

2006023638

Printing number: 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

To Hanna, Heather, Jeremy, Geoffrey, Caroline,
Tyler, Zachary, Kayla, and other members of
the next generations

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Foreword

People often get a bit nutty when considering ideas about the “inevitability” of human behavior. Such notions come in many forms. For example, there’s the idea that it is preordained that females will be inferior to males at math. Or that certain genes determine certain behaviors. Or that it is inevitable that a guy will take a hostile view toward his dad having a penis.

Some of the time, these conclusions arise from confusing correlation with causality, or problems with discerning statistical relationships, or failing to understand the idea of biological vulnerability and interaction with the environment. And some of the time, they are just plain weird, complete with fin-de-siècle Viennese froth.

I’ve fallen for this myself. I’ve studied baboons in East Africa for decades. In the process, I’ve gotten to know my nearest neighbors, nomadic pastoralist Masai tribespeople. Until I had kids of my own, the only ones on earth I’d been repeatedly exposed to were Masai kids, and my own peers, growing up in Brooklyn. And based on that data set, here is something that I firmly believe is an inevitable human behavior: Once a boy discovers that if you inflate a balloon and let the air out, it will make a noise, it becomes universal and inevitable that he will do this by the butt of one of his friends, claim that said friend has gas, and get the giggles.

So, as I said, people get a little nutty.

One of the truly well-entrenched realms of It-Is-Inevitable-That is that it is inevitable that humans will be violent and that human societies will wage warfare. Sometimes a view like this comes with a pretty foul agenda. Consider Konrad Lorenz, co-founder of ethology, expert on bird behavior, and Nobel laureate. In the 1960s, in his hugely influential book *On Aggression*, Lorenz proclaimed that human aggression is universal and inevitable. The stance he took makes considerable sense—Lorenz was a venomous racist, a man who used his academic pulpit in Germany to write Nazi propaganda poisonous enough to turn one's stomach, a man who went to his death insisting that he spent the thousand-year Reich communing with the little birdies that he studied. Don't blame people if they're violent—they're just following their inevitable biological orders.

But you don't have to be Lorenz to believe in the inevitability of human violence. Anyone noticing the blood-drenched world we live in would have to take that idea seriously. And academics of various stripes have as well.

Students of primatology and human evolution sure thought this. The 1960s saw the rise of the Robert Ardrey/man-the-territorial-hunter/big-cojones school of human evolution. Drawing upon the social system of the savanna baboon as a surrogate for our formative history in the savanna, the conclusion was that we are by nature a violent, stratified, male-dominated species. Jane Goodall's work with chimps seemed to confirm this further, demonstrating murder, cannibalism, organized group violence, and something resembling genocide among our closest relatives.

The game theorists were awash in the inevitability of violence and noncooperation as well. The heart of game theory, the Prisoner's Dilemma game, repeatedly showed that good guys

finish last, that the first individual who spontaneously starts cooperating in the game is competitively screwed for the rest of time, as the noncooperators snort derisively at the naiveté. Neuroendocrinologists weighed in also. Testosterone increases aggression, as it increases the excitability of parts of the brain relevant to aggression; girls inadvertently exposed to testosterone prenatally become more aggressive.

And, naturally, none of this is true.

Even those violent chimps and baboons can reconcile after fights, have cooperative, altruistic relationships, can even establish and transmit cultures of low aggression. Then there are the bonobo chimps, a separate species that is as genetically related to us as are chimps, a species that is female-dominated, has remarkably low rates of aggression, and solves every conceivable social problem with every conceivable type of sex. The game theorists, meanwhile, have spent recent years revealing the numerous circumstances that select for cooperation rather than competition even in competitive games drenched in realpolitik. And normal levels of testosterone turn out not to cause aggression as much as exaggerate preexisting social tendencies toward aggression, without the latter, testosterone doesn't remotely translate into inevitable aggression.

In this superb book, Douglas Fry gives lie to the inevitability of violence by surveying another set of disciplines, namely, cultural anthropology, archaeology, and human paleontology. He trashes the urban myth of inevitable aggression in numerous ways. These include documenting the varied human cultures with minimal or no intra- or intergroup violence, exploring the social systems and ecosystems that predispose toward cultures without warfare and their social mechanisms for sidestepping group violence, revealing the mistakes in classifications that have given rise to erroneous

labeling of certain societies as warlike. The book also reveals other mistakes that infest this literature: A virtuosic chapter analyzes the fatal flaws in a famed, canonical study that seemingly displays the reproductive, evolutionary benefits of murder in an indigenous society.

All this is done in a way that is encyclopedic and authoritative. And well-written, and often moving, and surprisingly often—given such an intrinsically dour subject—funny. It seems inevitable at this point in a foreword to list the sorts of people who should read this book—jurists, legislators, parents, butchers, bakers . . . Instead, I will avoid another supposed inevitability and simply say this book should be read. It is important.

Robert M. Sapolsky

Preface

When I first began studying anthropology, one aspect of the discipline that appealed to me was its breadth. Where do we come from? What is our nature? What does it mean to be human? Why do we behave the way we do? What are the prospects for our future? Anthropology addresses big questions. Literally the "study of humankind," anthropology lends itself to a *macroscopic perspective*. It focuses not just on the present, but also on the past. It seeks to understand specific cultures as well as recurring patterns that span societies. Anthropology simultaneously embraces the biosocial diversity and uniformity of humanity.

There is a natural tendency to think in terms of the here and now of everyday life. But as we enter the twenty-first century, many of the challenges facing humanity demand a broader context. The macroscopic perspective of anthropology, with its expansive time frame and culturally comparative orientation, can provide unique insights into the nature of war and the potential for peace. A cross-cultural perspective shows, for instance, that humans everywhere seek justice—although the paths to justice vary. Some entail violence but others do not. Much violence, in fact, stems from people defending their rights or attempting to correct injustices. Anthropological and historical cases show that it is possible to replace violent means of justice seeking with nonviolent approaches. Herein lies a broader lesson for creating and maintaining peace.

A macroscopic anthropological view suggests that it would be possible to replace the institution of war with more effective, less brutal ways of seeking security, defending rights, and providing justice for the people of this planet. In an era of nuclear missiles and other weapons of mass destruction, trying to achieve security through the threat or use of military force is like trying to perform heart surgery with a chain saw. For the good of us all, we must replace the war system with viable institutions for creating peace, delivering justice, and guaranteeing security.

In adopting a view that spans millennia and crosses cultural space, I draw on data from many anthropological fields: archaeology, hunter-gatherer research, ethnographic descriptions of particular societies, comparative cross-cultural studies, research on cultural belief systems, and applied anthropology (a field that focuses on real-world problem solving). The book also includes theory and data from fields beyond anthropology, for example, behavioral ecology, game theory, animal behavior, and evolutionary biology. The goal is to attain a view of the human capacities for violence and peace that is as complete and integrated as possible.

In my experience, some people, accustomed to the international war system, assume that it simply is not possible to find better ways to resolve differences and to assure security. However, the wealth of anthropological data considered in this book suggests otherwise. Humans have a tremendous capacity for resolving conflicts without violence. In today's world, we need to apply these skills in new ways and on a grander scale. We need to think in new, bolder ways about creating realistic alternatives to war. Too often, short-term, shallow security analyses prevail over more comprehensive planning for a secure future. Rather than focusing exclusively on narrow issues, such as how many fighter jets to order this year or what to do about

the local "hot spots" most likely to erupt into violence this month, we need to address a set of broader, critically important questions that are centrally relevant to providing genuine, long-term safety and security for the people of the planet. How can we improve the quality of life for all humanity, reduce the social and economic inequalities that foment hostility, hatred, and terrorism, and create new procedures and institutions for providing justice and resolving differences without war? In short, at the global level, how can we replace the law of force with the force of law?

A central goal of this book is to thoroughly explore how anthropology contributes to understanding war and peace. I hope to challenge existing ways of thinking about war, peace, security, and justice. These are topics that concern each and every one of us on this interdependent planet where we all breathe the same air and would perish together in the same nuclear winter. By questioning traditional thinking, I hope that the book will promote reflection, discussion, and action for a safer world.

Helsinki, Finland
June 8, 2006

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Acknowledgments

As I've worked on this book and its predecessor, *The Human Potential for Peace*, many friends and colleagues graciously have engaged in discussions on relevant topics, provided bibliographic information or other forms of help, supplied photographs, or read and commented on draft chapters. I warmly thank John Archer, Roger Archer, Ofer Bar-Yosef, Jan Beatty, Megan Biesele, Kaj Björkqvist, Chris Boehm, Bruce Bonta, James Côté, Mark Davis, Frans de Waal, Bob Dentan, Carol Ember, Mel Ember, Kirk Endicott, R. Brian Ferguson, Tim Finan, C. Brooks Fry, Kathy Fry, Sirpa Fry, Agustin Fuentes, Peter Gardner, Tom Gregor, Jonathan Haas, Marvin Harris, Robert Hinde, Bob Hitchcock, Paul L. Jamison, Allen Johnson, Terttu Kaivola, Talia Krohn, Ray Kelly, Sue Kent, Hanna Korpela, Mari Laaksonen, Catherine Lutz, Katie MacKinnon, Joyce Marcus, Peter Meylan, Carolyn Nordstrom, Carl O'Neill, Karin Österman, John Paddock, Fred Rawski, Carole Robarchek, Clay Robarchek, Nancy Ries, Maria Rodriguez, Heikki Sarmaja, Cliff Sather, Kenneth Smail, Peter K. Smith, Les Sponsel, Jukka-Pekka Takala, Cybele Tom, Bob Tonkinson, Jim Welch, and Camilla Westermark.

I very much appreciate the guidance of the editorial team at Oxford University Press. I thank Jan Beatty for recommending the proposal to her colleagues, Elda Rotor for helping to shape the project into its current form, and especially Cybele Tom for providing truly excellent suggestions. I gratefully acknowledge

Cybele's critical role in shaping the content and presentation, fine tuning the arguments, and enhancing the readability of the book. I also thank Lelia Mander for so capably overseeing production and Sue Warga for splendid copyediting.

Material in this book was collected during research projects supported by the United States Institute of Peace (grant number 023-99F), the National Science Foundation (grant numbers 81-17478, 97-10071, and 03-13670), the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research (grant number 4117), and an Indiana University Skomp Fellowship (number 26-235-77). I am very grateful to these institutions for supporting my research on human aggression and conflict resolution over the years. It should also be clear that the opinions expressed in this book do not necessarily reflect the views of these granting agencies.

I owe warm thanks to my wife, Sirpa Fry, and my father, Brooks Fry, for their unfaltering support during the entire writing project. Sirpa has heard—repeatedly, I'm afraid—about the trials and tribulations of working on a project of this nature. She always has offered sound, supportive advice and honest, helpful reactions to my prose, for which I remain most grateful.

Beyond War

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1

Charting a New Direction

Many ideas in science seemed crazy at one time but are now regarded as being settled, either having been laid to rest (as in the case of cold fusion) or firmly established (as in the case of plate tectonics, which grew out of an earlier "crazy" theory of continental drift). . . . But, even the weirdest theories of science must pass one rigorous test or be discarded: their predictions must be in agreement with phenomena observed in the physical world.

—ROBERT EHRLICH, *NINE CRAZY IDEAS IN SCIENCE*

This book takes the road less traveled. It examines how cultural beliefs about war bias scientific interpretations, affect perceptions of human nature, and may even close our minds to the possibility of developing alternatives to armed conflict. The book reexamines existing interpretations against the actual evidence in an attempt to untangle fact from fantasy. As we will discover, there is a lot of fantasy floating around out there. A thorough review of the evidence leads, first, to a critique of the status quo picture of war and human nature—here dubbed the “man the warrior” perspective—and, second, to the construction of a new interpretation of human aggression. The book argues that warfare is not inevitable

and that humans have a substantial capacity for dealing with conflicts nonviolently. There are ways to move beyond war.

A sleuthing analogy may help to clarify what this book is all about. Imagine that Holmes and Watson don't know the sex of a person who has just moved into their neighborhood, but they have heard that the new neighbor lives alone. Walking by the house on Saturday afternoon, they observe the following clues. The name on the mailbox is Tyler Geoffrey. The pickup truck parked in front of the house has a somewhat sexist bumper sticker that, in advertising Carol's Pizzeria, attempts to humorously equate women with pizza. Glancing in the side window of the truck, Holmes astutely observes that the driver's seat is adjusted far back from the steering wheel. Based on these facts, the obvious conclusion is that the new neighbor is a man. It seems crazy to argue that a tall, pickup-driving, sexist person named Tyler might be a woman.

According to the "man the warrior" view, humans (especially males) are warlike by nature. Advocates of this perspective forge a tight evolutionary link between chimpanzee and human violence, emphasize sex differences in aggression, and recite a litany of barbarity, atrocity, and brutality to support this portrait of humanity. The validity of this "man the warrior" view may seem rather obvious; after all, we all know that humans make war and that wars always seem to be raging somewhere. However, a different—but *not* polar opposite—perspective will be suggested in this book. According to this new view, clearly humans are capable of creating great mayhem, but they also have a remarkable capacity for working out conflicts without resorting to violence. Specifically, a careful reexamination of the actual evidence will lead us to the conclusion that humans are not warlike by nature.

If this sounds improbable to some readers, I must beg for indulgence and ask that we suspend judgment until we examine the evidence and arguments. Data from a vast array of archaeological and ethnographic research will give us a comprehensive picture that leads to new interpretations. This view is broader, by far, than merely looking at current political events or using data from a single academic field, culture, or time period.

To express the challenge in terms of our sleuthing analogy, how solid is the seemingly obvious conclusion that Holmes and Watson's new neighbor is a man? Bear in mind that our sleuths haven't actually seen the person. We can begin to question assumptions. What if Tyler Geoffrey was the previous resident's name? What if Tyler in this case actually is the name of a woman? What if the pickup truck belongs to someone else? Or, assuming that the truck in fact does belong to the new neighbor, aren't some women tall? And don't some women drive pickup trucks? It is even possible, although perhaps not probable, that a woman could own a truck displaying a bumper sticker that most women would shun. What if she borrowed the truck from a male friend for moving? The main point is that the initial "obvious" conclusion rests on a set of assumptions and may be absolutely wrong.

Similarly, I propose that the evidence supporting the "man the warrior" view of humanity is in fact very limited. And, as unlikely as it might sound at first, most of the assumptions of this neo-Hobbesian view are simply flawed. The way to evaluate this issue is to look carefully at the evidence and the arguments.

Holmes and Watson realize that if they really want to be sure that their new neighbor is a man, they should look for more clues. Watson proposes that they knock on the door to say, "Welcome to the neighborhood." Unfortunately, no one responds, but while

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