

4 The Natural History of Peace: The Positive View of Human Nature and Its Potential

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■ Leslie Sponsel argues that peace is alive, well, and frequently enough observed to justify a view of human nature that is optimistic and positive. If we have failed to see it, he suggests, it may have something to do with the myopia induced by living in a society having had more than its share of warfare and aggression. Certainly it is true that many social scientists believe that war and violence are depressingly common. As a result, to focus on peace may often require taking into view a larger context of conflict. In this volume the contributors look at mechanisms of reconciliation (de Waal), the process by which violence and peace generate one another (Tuzin, Crenshaw), and the preconditions for interludes of peace (Vasquez). Nonetheless, Sponsel makes a compelling case in this anthropological review of the evidence for peace. As he points out (supported by Knauff in chapter 3), human prehistory is relatively free of systematic evidence of organized violence, and modern hunters and foragers have low rates of nonfatal aggression. Sponsel's comprehensive review of the literature, which provides us with a useful bibliographic tool, is impressive. His documentation of peace as opposed to aggression provides a perspective on human nature that can have a profound effect on how we view and think of ourselves.

WHAT DO we know about peace?¹ One answer to this fundamental question will be developed in this chapter from a holistic anthropological perspective. From available evidence and interpretations it appears that many prehistoric and prestate societies, probably the majority, were *relatively* nonviolent and peaceful in the sense that only sporadically and temporarily did intragroup and / or intergroup aggression occur, ranging from diverse kinds of fighting, feuding, and raiding to, in some cases, warfare. Such considerations lead to the working principle underlying this chapter—the potential for the development of a more nonviolent and peaceful world is latent in human nature as

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revealed by the natural history of peace. Here the phrase "the natural history of peace" refers to the possibility of a holistic and diachronic description of peace as the norm in most societies, which in this and other respects means that peace is natural.

Without denying the reality of many forms and occurrences of violence including warfare, this chapter purposefully focuses on nonviolence and peace for two simple reasons: (1) One necessary condition for achieving greater progress toward the realization of a more nonviolent and peaceful world is to consider nonviolence and peace directly and systematically. (2) Yet there has been a general tendency to focus on violence and war, usually to the exclusion of nonviolence and peace. Accordingly, the first part of this chapter briefly explains the systemic bias in peace studies of the negative concept of peace and then develops a working definition of the positive concept of peace. The second part surveys the major lines of evidence and interpretation regarding the natural history of peace: biology, primatology, human ethology, palaeontology, archaeology, and ethnology. In the third part, or conclusions, generalizations are drawn from this survey and a theoretical framework is outlined to suggest one approach for the development of further knowledge and understanding of nonviolence and peace.

Peace studies have flourished in recent decades as a very loosely organized interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary field of research, education, and action, which is in principle concerned with all aspects and levels of violence, war, nonviolence, peace, and related phenomena (Boulding 1978, Galtung 1985, 1986, 1988, Gulsoy 1988, Stephenson 1990, Thomas and Klare 1989, Wallensteen 1988). In practice, however, most teaching, research, symposia, and publications in the field of peace studies focus on war and other forms of violence, often to the neglect or even exclusion of nonviolence and peace. For example, anthropologist O'Neil (1989: 117) observes:

Phenomena associated with violence have long been of interest to social and behavioural scientists, including anthropologists. As a result, several theories have developed around the question of why people behave violently. It has been only recently that investigators have seriously occupied themselves with the question of why people do not behave in violent ways in response to situations appearing to provoke violence in others. So, while scientific explanations for violence have by no means become closed issues, satisfactory explanations of non-violence have scarcely been articulated. And regrettably, the issue of peace has barely attracted serious attention.

This systemic bias is even found in major international journals devoted to the subject of peace. For example, in a review of the contents of the *Journal of Peace Research* from 1964-1980, Wiberg (1981: 113) observes, "For it turns out that out of the approximately 400 articles, research communications, etc., published over seventeen years, *a single one* has been devoted to the empirical study of peaceful societies with a view to find out what seemed to make them peaceful" (The article is by Fabbro and will be discussed later.) Wiberg (1981: 134) also notes that only about 5 percent of the material published in the journal directly concerns nonviolence.

This systemic bias is also found in anthropology. For example, in Ferguson's (1988) extensive bibliography *The Anthropology of War*, only 3.4 percent (64) of 1,888 citations directly address peace, and even then they are of varied relevance, quality, and currency. Even recent anthropological publications specifying the word *peace* in their title often have little if anything to say directly about peace (e.g., Heelas 1989, Wolf 1987).

Underlying this systemic bias is usually a *negative view* of both human nature and peace; that is, human nature is naturally aggressive, and peace is *reduced* to the absence of war (Bock 1980, Feibleman 1987, Kohn 1990, Midgley 1978, Montagu 1976). For example, in an article for a UNESCO journal, French anthropologist Balandier (1986: 499) writes:

In the beginning was violence, and all history can be seen as an unending effort to control it. Violence is always present in society and takes the form of war in relations between societies when competition can no longer be contained by trade and market.

Followers of the negative concept see a relative condition of nonviolence in society and peace between societies as achievable mainly through the reduction of violence and war after scientific research has accumulated sufficient knowledge about violence and war to control them (Konner 1982: xviii, 203, 414).

Allegiance to the negative concept of peace has far reaching and serious consequences. Most of those who follow this systemic bias effectively avoid any direct intellectual confrontation with the subjects of nonviolence and peace. Accordingly, relatively little progress has been made in advancing the knowledge and understanding of nonviolence and peace, this in sharp contrast to the large volume of studies on violence and war. This systemic bias effectively detracts attention from research, policy, and action on many of the underlying problems and issues of peace

(Barnaby 1988, Leakey and Lewin 1978: 281, Melko 1986, Smoker 1981: 149). *Yet it is as important to know and understand nonviolence and peace as to know and understand violence and war. Also it is as important to increase nonviolence and peace as it is to reduce violence and war.* In light of such considerations and for heuristic purposes the present chapter focuses as much as possible on peace, although not to the exclusion of some discussion of war.

Following the positive concept, peace may be defined ideally as the dynamic *processes* that lead to the relative *conditions* of the absence of direct and indirect violence, plus the *presence* of freedom, equality, economic and social justice, cooperation, and harmony (see Boulding 1978: 3, Webb 1986). Direct violence includes war, and indirect violence refers to structural violence such as the related phenomena of racism, poverty, and malnutrition. This positive concept of peace as an *ideal* differs from the negative concept, which reduces peace simply to the absence of war. As Boulding (1978: 8) observes, war and peace each has its attributes; neither is merely the absence or opposite of the other. Those who follow the positive concept of peace consider economic and social injustice to be the major causes of much of the violence in the modern world (Boulding 1978, Galtung 1968, 1985). From this perspective, peace is not limited to maintaining national security. (National security is usually considered to be the defense of three things: national territory from foreign invasion and occupation, strategic raw materials and economic markets, and the nation's social and political values (Barnaby 1988: 42, 210.) Rather, peace is a *relative* condition involving dynamic processes that are *life-enhancing*; that is, ideally it promotes the survival, welfare, development, and creativity of individuals within a society so that they may realize their physical, sociocultural, mental, and spiritual potential in constructive ways. Thus, peace involves at least three mutually dependent levels: individual (inner), social, and global. (For recent history, another level should be inserted between social and global, namely, national, which is the major concern of political science).

Biology

It is appropriate for an exploration of the natural history of peace to begin with nature. After all, human nature is often thought to reflect nature, given that humans are animals, whatever else they may be as well (Adler 1967). However, because of limited space it must suffice merely to raise the point that there are various natural phenomena that biologists take seriously and that clearly fall into the category of nonviolent and

peaceful behavior in the broadest sense of the terms, although most biologists may not label the behavior in this way.²

Since Darwin, many people in Western civilization have viewed nature as fundamentally competitive and violent, with characterizations such as "the struggle for existence," "the survival of the fittest," "red in tooth and claw," and "gladiatorial arena" (Montagu 1952: 9). This characterization mirrors the social, economic, and political context of British science in the nineteenth century—mechanization, industrialization, urbanization, overpopulation, poverty, mercantile and other economic competition, colonial exploitation, racism, ethnocentrism, and warfare (Montagu 1952: 19,27-31,47). The view of nature held by Darwin and his followers *stressed competition to the neglect of cooperation* (Montagu 1952: 18,34). Only in *The Descent of Man* (1871) did Darwin consider intragroup cooperation as complementary to intergroup competition (Montagu 1952: 73, 80-83).³ Darwin also viewed warfare as an agency of natural selection in human evolution (Montagu 1952: 85, 87; also see Huxley 1896, Montagu 1942, and Pollard 1974).

Only a few evolutionists and other scholars have taken issue with the Darwinian emphasis on violence and competition; most notable is Kropotkin in his collected essays called *Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution* (1914). While Kropotkin did not reject the importance of competition in biological and human evolution, he argued that competition was not necessarily always violent and that cooperation and mutual aid were also important factors (Montagu 1952: 41-42). He considered competition and cooperation to be two different components of the same process of the struggle for existence (Gould 1988: 18). Moreover, Kropotkin recognized the essential mutual dependence of individuals within a community—whether plants, animals, or humans (Montagu 1952: 58). Yet only in the 1970s has mutualism begun to be recognized as an important ecological process by biologists (Boucher, James, and Keeler 1982: 318; also see Axelrod 1984, Axelrod and Hamilton 1981, van der Dennen and Falger 1990, and Montagu 1976: 137-192).

Modern sociobiology, which has much to say about aggression (Chagnon 1988, Konner 1982, Shaw 1985a, b), has also developed several concepts related to Kropotkin's ideas about cooperation and mutual aid, but using a different theoretical framework and set of terms. Sociobiologists focus on social evolution by assessing the reproductive costs and benefits of behavior. An altruistic act benefits the recipient at a cost to the actor. The exchange of altruistic acts between two individuals is called reciprocal altruism. Finally, cooperative acts benefit both actor and recipient but often have selfish components (Trivers 1985: 64-65; also see Wil-

son 1978: 149-167). (Kohn [1990] includes a discussion of altruism in human society in his book *The Brighter Side of Human Nature*.)

Even Lorenz (1966) in his famous book *On Aggression* considered behavior that promotes nonviolence by preventing or reducing aggression such as ritualization, appeasement, displacement, bonding, and communication. Although Lorenz and others suggested many leads, systematic research on the biology of nonviolence and peace has been greatly neglected in contrast to the attention given to the biology of aggression (Archer 1988, Groebel and Hinde 1989, Kemp 1988). Nevertheless, Kemp (1988: 118) states that "evolution has led intraspecies aggression, in the overwhelming number of species, and in all mammals, to a non-lethal and nonviolent form of behavior."

Primate Ethology

As Stevenson (1987: 130) observes, to show that the human line evolved from primates does not prove that it is nothing but a primate or that it has not evolved further. Nevertheless, primates remain relevant to the human species because, whatever else we are, we are also primates.

In recent decades several points have emerged from primate ethology that are pertinent to the natural history of peace: (1) There is a tremendous range of variation in the type, frequency, and intensity of aggressive and related behavior (Givens 1975, Itani 1983). (2) When aggression does occur, it is usually limited to highly ritualized threat displays that result in the spatial displacement of individuals but seldom in physical injury and rarely in death. (3) Aggression is avoided, reduced, or resolved by appeasement and submissive behaviors as well as through well-developed mechanisms of conflict resolution (de Waal 1982, 1986, 1989). (4) There is no hint of even the rudiments of warfare in infrahuman primates, except for our sibling species, the common chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*).⁴

The nonviolent behavior of infrahuman primates impresses modern primatologists as much, or even more than, their violent behavior (Fossey 1983: 56, Goodall 1986: 313-386, Smuts 1985, 1987, Strum 1985, de Waal 1982, 1986). For instance, following extensive field observations on free-ranging baboon (*Papio anubis*) troops in their natural habitat, Strum (1985: 22) concludes:

Far from being ruled by aggression and powerful individuals, this society places a premium on reciprocity, and individuals act out of enlightened self-interest.

Baboons must be nice to one another because they need one another for survival and success. It is a finely tuned system. . . . There is a politics to what baboons do and it is this social maneuvering that places a premium on baboon intelligence and creates a social smartness sometimes unmatched in human society.

After more than a quarter of a century of intensive field observations on chimpanzees in Tanzania, Goodall (1986: 357) asserts:

Chimpanzees. . . are capable of very violent behavior. Aggression, particularly in its more extreme form, is vivid and attention catching, and it is easy to get the impression that chimpanzees are more aggressive than they really are. In actuality, peaceful interactions are far more frequent than aggressive ones; mild threatening gestures are more common than vigorous ones; threats per se occur much more often than fights; and serious, wounding fights are very rare compared to brief, relatively mild ones.

Following extensive observations on how captive primates of several species avoid, reduce, and resolve conflicts, de Waal (1989: 7) states in the prologue of his book *Peacemaking Among Primates*:

My main purpose here is to correct biology's bleak orientation on the human condition. In a decade in which peace has become the single most important public issue, it is essential to introduce the accumulated evidence that, for humans, making peace is just as natural as making war. (See also de Waal 1982, 1986.)

The observations by de Waal (1989: 171-227) on reconciliation and other pacific behaviors in captive bonobos, the "pygmy chimpanzee" (*Pan paniscus*), are confirmed through studies of free-ranging bonobos in their natural habitat. According to Kano (1990: 64), bonobos are more gregarious and pacific than the common chimpanzee, and unlike the latter they have never been observed to kill members of their own species. The bonobos use grooming, sex, and other behavior to relieve group tensions and maintain social cohesion. However, although hostility is extremely rare among females, it is more common among males (Kano 1990: 66). Kana (1990: 70) concludes:

The bonobo groups of the Wamba forest are not entirely friendly or entirely antagonistic. Encounters are characterized by cautious mutual tolerance. Members of different groups use a varied sexual repertoire to reconcile and appease, and remarkably, elements of dominance do not enter into sexual activity. Bonobos have evolved systems of maintaining, at least on the surface, a pacific society.

In sum, an increasing number of modern studies of infrahuman primate behavior, both in the wild and in captivity, reveal that *nonviolence is more frequent than violence*, and that apes and monkeys have intricate *mechanisms of conflict avoidance, reduction, and resolution*. They also maintain a relatively nonviolent and peaceful society through various behaviors including, among many others, play, mating, parenting, aunting, bonding, touching, grooming, sharing, cooperation, and coalition. There is also a wide range of vocalizations, facial expressions, gestures, and body postures and movements that are nonviolent and peaceful (Goodall 1986, de Waal 1989, Silverberg and Gray 1992).

Human Ethology

A student of Konrad Lorenz, Eibl-Eibesfeldt (1989), pioneered the direct approach to human ethology through the analysis of many kilo meters of film footage of naturalistic human behavior from an extremely large sample of cultures around the world. His publications also address questions of war and peace (1971, 1979, 1989: 361-422).

In his monumental compendium on human ethology that explores human nature, Eibl-Eibesfeldt (1989: 421) reaches the general conclusion that:

War, defined as strategically planned, destructive group aggression, is a product of cultural evolution. Therefore, it can be overcome culturally. It makes use of some universal innate human dispositions, such as man's aggressive emotionality and the preparedness for group defense, dominance striving, territoriality, disposition to react to agonial signals from strangers, etc. But all these traits do not lead to warfare. War requires systematic planning, leadership, destructive weapons, and overcoming sympathy through dehumanizing the enemy in advance of the actual conflict. Man easily falls prey to indoctrination to act in supposed group interest.

To take a particular case, in his field study of the !Ko and !Kung, sub-groups of the society commonly called the "Bushmen" of southern Africa, Eibl-Eibesfeldt (1975) found a diversity of types of aggressive behavior, using a very broad definition of aggression. However, he was more impressed with the ways this society *controls* aggression and with their counterbalancing friendly behavior. Eibl-Eibesfeldt describes the play and socialization of children as focused on the cultural ideal of peaceful coexistence. He also asserts that many of the patterns of bonding and the urge to bond are inborn in humans. (See also Kemp 1988.)

Human Palaeontology

The accumulated specimens of fossil hominids currently available in the collections of museums and universities throughout the world reveal that *nonviolence and peace were likely the norm throughout most of human prehistory and that intrahuman killing was probably rare.*

In search of instances of intrahuman killing in the palaeontological record, Roper (1969) systematically surveyed the published reports on the remains of one or more fossil hominid individuals recovered from over 110 Pleistocene sites. Roper (1969: 448) concludes:

My own evaluation is that some intrahominid (perhaps intraspecific) killing probably occurred in Lower and Middle Pleistocene and that sporadic intraspecific killing probably took place among *H. sapiens* in the Upper Paleolithic. The evidence to back up the latter statement is the four skulls with depressed fractures from the Upper Cave of Choukoutien in China, the drawings of human figures pierced with arrows in two French caves [Pech Merle and Cougnac caves from the Aurignacian-Perigordian period], and probably the cut on the skull of the woman from Cro-Magnon. If some of the human skeletal material from Afalou-bou-Rhummel, Algeria, had exhibited mortal wounds, the contention that warfare occurred in the Upper Palaeolithic might be documented. The only other instance of possible mass killing in the Upper Palaeolithic is that of the Upper Cave of Choukoutien, and since Pei does not affirm Weidenrich's assertion that these remains were victims of a massacre it seems unwise to ascribe the term "warfare" to this situation. . . . The author's determination is that, although there seems to be sound evidence for sporadic intrahuman killing, the known data is not sufficient to document warfare.

Roper's survey of the palaeontological record of human evolution suggests (but does not prove) that intrahuman killing was a rare occurrence. The evidence for intrahuman killing comes from only four out of more than 110 Pleistocene fossil hominid sites. Furthermore, the bulk of the available evidence for killing is limited to relatively late in prehistory—*Homo sapiens sapiens* in the Upper Palaeolithic, about 30,000 to 10,000 years ago, whereas human evolution extends back at least four million years.

However, it should be noted that the amount of violence may be underrepresented in the palaeontological record because injury to soft tissues may cause death without leaving any imprint on the skeleton. Also, even indisputable skeletal evidence of prehistoric intrahuman killing cannot adduce the motivation, which may be legal or ritual rather

than murder, feuding, revenge, or warfare.

Prehistoric Archaeology

As in the case of the palaeontological record, so with the archaeological record, lack of evidence is not proof of absence. Also the archaeological study of warfare suffers from many problems and limitations. It is not always possible to distinguish between hunting tools and war weapons, especially for the Palaeolithic, unlike the metal ages (Childe 1941: 127, 129, 133, Vencl1984: 120). Weapons and fortifications of organic material are unlikely to be preserved archaeologically, except under very special climatic, geological, or other circumstances (Vencl1984: 122). Also, even when some tools could clearly have been made for weapons, that does not necessarily mean that they were used as such in warfare (Gabriel 1990: 25-30). Some apparent fortifications may actually be retention walls (Roper 1975: 329). Some rock art depicting fighting may be ritualistic reflections of shamanistic visions rather than documenting ordinary reality (Campbell 1986: 256). Nonmaterial aspects of warfare such as political and diplomatic processes are not preserved in the archaeological record (Vencl 1984: 121-123). Such problems and limitations may bias the archaeological perspective on warfare suggesting that prehistoric societies were more pacific than they actually were (Vencl1984: 123). Nevertheless, available evidence and interpretations are suggestive. (See Gabriel 1990 for a general review of the archaeology of warfare.)

Palaeoanthropological evidence and interpretations indicate that the human line evolved at least by 4 million years ago, agriculture about 10,000 years ago, and the state around 5,000 years ago (Gowlett 1984). During the hunter-gatherer stage of cultural evolution, which dominated 99 percent of human existence on this planet (Lee and DeVore 1968: 3), lack of archaeological evidence for warfare suggests that it was *rare or absent for most of human prehistory*. For instance, while the famous cave art from the Upper Palaeolithic of France and Spain realistically depicts the prey animals of hunters, only very rarely is human fighting illustrated and it never begins to approach warfare (Ferrill 1985: 17, Pfeiffer 1982).

Leakey and Lewin (1977) observe:

Throughout the later stages of human evolution, from about three million years onwards, there was, however, one pattern of social behavior that became extremely important, and we can therefore expect the forces of natural selection would have ensured its becoming deeply embedded in the human brain: this is cooperation ... (p. 245).

Because the mixed economy of hunting and gathering brings with it a much more efficient exploitation of resources in the environment and also sharpens the edge of social interactions—both of which enhance adaptability of the human animal—evolutionary forces favored its development. It is probably the single most important factor in the emergence of mankind. And cooperation was an essential element of its success. More than any other piece of social behavior, the motivation to cooperate in group effort is a direct legacy of the nature of human evolution (p. 248).

The earliest evidence for anything that could properly be labeled warfare comes from the fortifications surrounding some Neolithic sites such as Jericho about 9,500 to 9,000 years ago (Eisler 1988: 48-58, Gabriel 1990: 23, Gowlett 1984: 160, Roper 1975: 329, Venc 1984: 120-121). Roper (1975: 330-331) argues that in the Near East during the Neolithic the control of strategic trading sites was the catalyst for warfare. Turning to Europe, Keeley and Cahen (1989) interpret fortifications around the villages of the first agricultural colonists in Belgium about 6,300 to 6,000 years ago as defenses against raids by indigenous Mesolithic hunter-gatherers. Yet the existence of weapons and/or fortifications does not indicate how widespread and frequent warfare might have been (Gabriel 1990: 30).

As culture evolves toward the state level of sociopolitical organization, war appears to become inevitable (Carneiro 1970, 1978, Cohen 1984, Gowlett 1984: 175, Lewellen 1983, Paynter 1989, Wright 1977). This inevitability is not simply a theoretical assumption; it is evident at some phase in the archaeological sequence of the evolution of every state (Gowlett 1984: 175, 178-179, 186-189, 194). Cohen (1984: 338) argues that: "War helps to make states, states make war, and therefore states are in part, and always must be, war machines." He observes that war is more frequent in the earlier stages of the state than in its later stages when the society is more organized politically and has a standing army (p. 354). Yet *even at the state level war is not ubiquitous*, because comparative historical studies document extended periods of relative peace sometimes lasting centuries or even millennia (Melko 1973, 1990, Melko and Hord 1984, Melko and Weigel 1981).

With the evolution of the state level of sociopolitical organization, more than ever before, and especially in contrast to egalitarian foraging societies, social stratification is highly developed, and becomes an important form of indirect (structural) violence (Berreman 1981, Paynter 1989, Webb 1986).

Eisler (1987) developed a new feminist interpretation of cultural evolution that she calls cultural transformation theory. According to this

theory, cultural diversity overlays two elemental models of society that have profound systemic consequences.

The *partnership model* is based on linking people in an egalitarian society that does not evaluate differences hierarchically. This model generates an affiliative, cooperative, and nurturing society with a technology of production, a religion of reproduction, and a relatively nonviolent and peaceful life.

The *dominator model* is based on ranking differences, beginning with those most fundamental in our species—male and female. These and other differences are interpreted in terms of superiority and inferiority, and the sociocultural system is structured around various hierarchies backed by authoritarian threat and force. Members of both sexes are conditioned to equate masculinity with fighting power and dominance. This model generates warfare and other forms of direct violence as well as indirect (structural) violence (pp. xvii-xix). This is correlated with the development of a technology and religion of confrontation and destruction.

Eisler concentrates on European prehistory and reviews archaeological and other evidence to argue that both foraging and farming stages of cultural evolution were based on the partnership model. Only after a period of chaos triggered by peripheral invaders, beginning around 7,000 years ago, did the transformation to the dominator model occur in Europe (pp. 43-45).

Regardless of the validity of Eisler's interpretations and models of European prehistory, the idea that there is a *positive correlation between gender equality and nonviolence/peace* is sustained by ethnographic cases like the Semai, Chewong, Buid, and Piaroa, among others (Howell and Willis 1989: 22,24-25,36,46,68,81-82,87,95; also see Adams 1983, Burbank 1987, Divale and Harris 1976, Lee 1982, Mitscherlich 1987, Rosenberger 1973, Turnbull 1982, and Whyte 1978).

In summary, interpretations of the accumulated evidence available from prehistoric archaeology suggest that *relative nonviolence and peace prevailed for most of human prehistory. Warfare in cultural evolution is a relatively recent development that emerged in some phase of the evolution of agriculture and subsequently flourished with the rise of the state* (cf. Keeley 1995).

Because the development of war in human prehistory is determined by cultural rather than biological evolution, this raises the possibility that societies can transcend previous cultural stages including warfare to evolve very different cultural systems (Mead 1964, 1968). Indeed, the transformation of warlike societies into peaceful ones has occurred repeatedly in human history, such as in Melanesia with pacification

under the pressures of European colonialism (Rodman and Cooper 1979).

Ethnology and Ethnography

Many analyses of the ethnographic record indicate that, in general, nonviolence and peace prevail in hunter-gatherer societies, although some cases of homicide and feuding have been reported (Palmer 1965, Knauff 1987, Wolf 1987).⁵ That warfare would be absent or negligible in most foraging societies is not only *plausible* but also *probable*, if one considers that they are largely occupied with subsistence, lack sufficient food surplus to sustain a military organization and its adventures, and do not have political leadership and organization to direct warfare (d. Wolf 1987). Also among foragers, the possession of group territory that might be defended through the development of warfare against other groups is quite variable, depending on resource distribution, abundance, and predictability (Dyson-Hudson and Smith 1978). The typical foraging lifestyle emphasizes mobility, kinship, egalitarianism, cooperation, generalized reciprocity, social harmony, and nonviolent mechanisms of conflict resolution such as fissioning, if for no other reason than that their survival and adaptation depend on such attributes (Leakey 1978, 1981, Lee 1979, 1982; Turnbull 1961, 1983).⁶ In addition, many societies have fairly well developed institutionalized mechanisms for conflict resolution and social justice, such as mediation (Greenhouse 1985, Marshall 1961).

Several cross-cultural studies support the characterization of foragers as, in general, relatively nonviolent and peaceful. For instance, in a quantitative analysis comparing 652 nonliterate societies, Broch and Galtung (1966: 33) found that 4 percent were pacific engaging only in defensive wars, 53 percent fought as a social ritual with relatively little bloodshed, 26 percent had economic war, and 7 percent had political war. (For 10 percent of the societies the pattern of war was unknown.) Broch and Galtung (1966: 40-41) conclude that belligerence increases with increasing civilization and also with greater contact and that territory and the state are closely related to this process. They confirm Wright's (1942) previous general conclusion that "primitive" societies are more peaceful than "civilized" ones. (See also Leavitt 1977.)

Fabbro's (1978) seminal analysis compared seven supposedly nonviolent and peaceful societies: Semai, Siriono, !Kung San, Mbuti, Copper Eskimo, Hutterites, and Islanders of Tristan da Cunha. The first five are mainly foragers while the last two are agrarian societies. Table 1 lists the attributes that were either absent or present in all seven of these societies.

These characteristics approximate those indicated in the ideal definition of positive peace discussed earlier.

TABLE 1. FABBRO'S NONVIOLENT SOCIETIES

<i>Attributes absent</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intergroup violence or feuding • internal (civil) or external war • threat from external enemy group or nation • social stratification and other forms of structural violence such as sorcery or witchcraft • full-time political leader or centralized authority • police and military organizations
<i>Attributes present</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • small and open communities with face-to-face interpersonal interactions • egalitarian social structure • generalized reciprocity • social control and decision making through group consensus • nonviolent values and enculturation

Most of these characteristics are also reflected to some degree in additional ethnographic cases of relatively nonviolent and peaceful societies as documented in four sources. *Societies At Peace*, edited by Howell and Willis (1989), focuses on indigenous theories of human nature, egalitarian gender relations, nonviolent values, and enculturation for the Buid, Chewong, Piaroa, Semai, and Zapotec, among others. *Learning Non-Aggression*, edited by Montagu (1978), concentrates on cases of enculturation for nonviolence among the Inuit, !Kung San, Mbuti, Semai, Tahitians, and others. Sponsel and Gregor (1994) include case studies of nonviolent and peaceful aspects of the Semai, Zapotec, Inuit, Kinga, Xingu, and Yanomami, while Bonta (1993) published an annotated bibliography of forty-seven peaceful societies.

The Semai of Malaysia are the best documented case of a pacific society. Dentan (1968) lived with the Semai in 1962-1963 and 1976, while Clayton and Carole Robarchek (1977a, b, 1981, 1989a, b) lived with them in 1973-1974 and 1979-1980. Although Dentan and the Robarchek's worked independently at different periods with the Semai, they are in basic agreement that the society is essentially nonviolent and peaceful. They describe in detail the nonviolent ethos and lifestyle of the Semai.

Part of the enculturation process of the Semai is for children to learn to be nonviolent through the kinds of games they play and other means (Dentan 1978). (For more on nonviolent enculturation and play see Montagu [1978] and Royce [1980].)

However, some others, who have not lived with the Semai, such as Paul (1978), have asserted that the Semai are really bloodthirsty killers, at least latently, and that this confirms the innate aggressiveness of human nature. Such arguments have been successfully refuted in a joint article by Robarchek and Dentan (1987).

It would be remiss not to mention the Tasaday of the Philippines, because they are famous as an "ultra primitive" case of an extremely pacific society and therefore of considerable interest to the history of anthropological aspects of peace studies and the theme of the natural history of peace (Sponsel 1992). However, to be objective, any support the Tasaday case might provide for the basic argument of this chapter must be suspended until the controversy over their authenticity is resolved one way or another (Headland 1992). Briefly, the Tasaday are supposed to have no weapons or enemies, as well as no words for anger, murder, war, or enemy. Nance (1975: 447) described the Tasaday as follows:

Although we could not or would not emulate them and may never extract new principles of behavior from them, we could treasure them as reminders of what was humanly possible, as inspiring emblems of social peace and harmony, of simply, love.

Similarly MacLeish (1972: 248) wrote:

[The Tasaday are] perhaps the simplest of living humans, and those closest to nature. . . gentle and affectionate. . . Our friends have given me a new measure of man. If our ancient ancestors were like the Tasaday, we come from far better stock than I had thought.

The apparently "ultra primitive" status of the Tasaday was interpreted as a reflection of the *elemental pacific qualities of human nature*. The Tasaday provided a precedent and model of a nonviolent and peaceful egalitarian community living by group consensus in freedom and in harmony with nature (Sponsel 1990b, 1992). Unfortunately, no more can be said of this intriguing case in the present context until the controversy is resolved, which may depend on further research, especially from archaeology, ethnohistory, genetics, and linguistics.

There are also cross-cultural studies that challenge the view of hunter-

gatherers as relatively nonviolent and peaceful. Ember (1978) compared fifty societies of hunter-gatherers throughout the world and found that 64 percent had warfare at least once every two years, 26 percent had warfare somewhat less often, and only 10 percent had no, or almost no, warfare. She asserts that this dispels the myth that hunter-gatherers are typically peaceful. However, the broad definition of warfare used by Ember is inadequate and inflates the frequency. (Also see the discussion of Ferguson's ideas, below in this chapter).

More recently, Knauff (1987) extracted and interpreted data from some of the literature on what he calls "simple" human societies to compare estimates of annual homicide rates per 100,000 people (cf. Palmer 1965). He finds that these societies have high rates of homicide, in some cases even several times higher than the average for the United States. However, homicide should not be confused with warfare. That is, a society can be violent in the sense of having a high rate of homicide yet still be peaceful, in the negative sense, by lacking warfare. These societies include the Central Eskimo, Hadza, !Kung Bushmen, Mbuti, and Semai, who have usually been described as relatively nonviolent and peaceful! But note the statements indicated with added emphasis in Knauff's (1987: 459) conclusion:

Especially in egalitarian societies, there may be a pattern of social life that is *generally peaceful and tranquil* but is punctuated by aggression which, when it does occur, is unrestrained and frequently homicidal. This may result in a high ratio of lethal violence to aggression despite a *low overall incidence of aggression*.⁷

One problem with the comparative studies by both Ember and Knauff is that they may not give sufficient attention to the specific details of motivations and context as well as external influences. For example, Broch and Galtung (1966: 42) early advocated analyzing the relationship between societies rather than studying a society as an isolate. Recently Ferguson (1990a) identified the neglected factor of Western contact as triggering or at least intensifying much of indigenous warfare through social stress and depopulation from epidemic disease, territorial displacement, competition for resources (especially Western trade goods), and so on. (Blick [1988] independently developed a parallel argument). If the argument is valid in general, then *much of what some ethnographers have taken for granted as traditional endemic violence and warfare may actually have often been precipitated, or at least intensified, by direct or indirect Western contact*. Moreover, the supposed chronic endemic warfare and other forms of violence in so-called primitive societies may have been substantially less

in precontact times than many anthropologists have believed. In the light of this new argument the ethnographic record of warlike societies needs to be reassessed, and this may be assisted by more ethnohistorical research on the contact situation. (It should also be noted that contact with Western societies has sometimes led to the pacification of societies in which warfare was formerly endemic (Rodman and Cooper 1979, Robarchek and Robarchek 1989, Scheffler 1964, Willis 1989).

In light of the above it is of interest that San rock paintings depicting fighting are common in southern Africa and may reflect millenia of conflict with other African societies and centuries of conflict with European colonial society (Campbell 1986). Also in the case of the Maasai pastoralists of eastern Africa, Jacobs (1979) debunks their reputation for bellicosity and argues that it was contrived by outsiders to exploit their land, first by African and Arab farmers and later by Europeans (cf. Evans-Pritchard 1940: 150-151; also see Bodley 1990).

This contact argument has even been applied to a reinterpretation of Yanomami aggression by Ferguson (1990b, 1991, 1992). The Yanomami are an Amazonian tribal society that for decades have been consistently characterized as "the fierce people" in numerous publications by Chagnon (1968: 1-2, 1988, 1990), and are therefore of special relevance to the natural history of peace as another extreme case and as a polar opposite of the Tasaday (Sponsel 1983, 1991). But in recent years several anthropologists, who have also conducted fieldwork for many years with Yanomami, have begun to question openly the reality of the ethnographic image created by Chagnon (Albert 1989, 1990, Albert and Ramos 1989, Colchester 1987: 8, Lizot 1985: xiv, Good 1991: 73-74, Ramos 1987, Smole 1976: 16). These anthropologists are reconsidering the violence in Yanomami society.

Here it must suffice to summarize briefly the pertinent aspects of the most recently published reports of fieldwork with the Yanomami, in this instance from the very extensive research by Good (1989, 1991). So far, Good has lived in Yanomami villages for a total of sixty-eight months over a period of fourteen years (1989: 4-5). In particular, he illuminates one of the factors helping to explain the fierce reputation of the Yanomami—the high visibility of violence in villages. The Yanomami village (*shabono*) is a large circular communal house with no walls other than the one around its perimeter. In this circular house, virtually all activity is visible or audible from any other location. Good was impressed that, in sharp contrast to family and community violence in his own country (United States), in a Yanomami village there is so little privacy that almost everything is public including violence (1991: 73).

Instead of concealing anger, the Yanomami openly vent it (pp. 70-72), for example, through public complaint speeches (p. 208) and public insult (p. 74).

Good was also impressed by how harmonious communal life actually was, considering that seventy-five or more people fairly regularly live day and night in one giant room (the *shabono*), and they have no institutionalized government, police, or military to maintain order and settle disputes (p. 69). Good observed that despite disease and occasional fights and infrequent raids, the Yanomami are basically happy people living in a harmonious society (pp. 82, 174-175). Kinship and friendship are important factors maintaining social cohesion (pp. 293, 317). Also daily life in the community is permeated by laughter, joking, and clowning, which relieves tension (p. 51). When aggression occurs it is usually highly ritualized (p. 69). Finally, Good mentions that the Yanomami he observed never engaged in anything even close to open warfare (p. 44). Of course Good's observations in one region do not refute the occurrence of warfare elsewhere in this society, but like other field-workers his observations indicate that warfare is not ubiquitous among the Yanomami, despite Chagnon's characterizations. In fact, Good hints that the term *warfare* may not be appropriate to describe Yanomami aggression.

The above points also bear on more general considerations. In one of the most widely read ethnographies, Chagnon (1983: 213) states, "Warfare among the Yanomamö—or *any sovereign tribal people*—is an *expectable* form of political behavior and no more requires special explanation than do religion or economy" (emphasis added). Furthermore, embedded in a sociobiological interpretation of his detailed quantitative data on the Yanomami in the prestigious journal *Science*, Chagnon (1988: 985) asserts, "Violence is a potent force in human society and may be *the principal* driving force behind the evolution of culture" (emphasis added). Although a reader might be impressed by the many years Chagnon has studied the Yanomami and by his use of extensive quantitative data on other matters, actually he does not adequately marshal arguments or evidence to sustain these two opinions. Moreover, their fallibility should be clear from the foregoing review of diverse lines of evidence on the natural history of peace (e.g., Eislser 1987, Gabriel 1990). It appears that in many prehistoric and "primitive" societies, probably even the majority, nonviolence and peace were prevalent in daily life, only sporadically and temporarily interrupted by intragroup or intergroup aggression, ranging from diverse kinds of fighting, feuding, and raiding to, in some cases, warfare. (See also Lizot 1994).

As part of the revisionism that has become fashionable in contempo-

rary cultural anthropology in recent years, *scholars are challenging previous ethnographic images of societies as either nonviolent/peaceful or violent/warlike*. Although in recent years the increased quantity and quality of anthropological contributions to peace studies is heartening, it may take considerable time, effort, and personnel before a consensus and/or synthesis emerges. In any case, the idea that war is *not* a cultural universal remains intact. But there is a need to identify more systematically and precisely and to explore in research, both on etic (scientific and generalizing) and emic (particular native views) grounds, the meaning of *nonviolence*, *peace*, *violence*, and *war*. Some scholars even assert that using such words as general labels for cultures is very problematic (Campbell 1989, Heelas 1989). Moreover, Albert (1990: 561) even goes so far as to assert that the characterization of any social interaction as "violent" is culture bound. Thus, "tribal violence" is an ethnocentric concept because in Western civilization the idea of violence is inseparable from its association with the transgression of a social norm (see also Howell and Willis 1989: 6-7). In this connection it is interesting that two distinct neighboring ethnic groups in the Philippines, the Buid and Tausug, use the same word (*maisug*) for aggression, but give it exactly the opposite moral evaluation (Gibson 1989: 67).

Finally, of special interest are formerly violent/warlike societies that for various reasons have been transformed into relatively nonviolent/peaceful ones in Melanesia (Rodman and Cooper 1979, Scheffler 1964), Africa (Willis 1989), and Amazonia (Robarchek and Robarchek 1989). The conditions and processes involved in such transitions merit much more research, especially as they bear on the possibilities of developing a more nonviolent and peaceful world.

Conclusions

What do we know about peace? This chapter reviewed the natural history of peace within the holistic framework of diverse lines of evidence: biology, primate ethology, human ethology, human palaeontology, prehistoric archaeology, ethnology, and ethnography. Two trends in particular stand out from this review of diverse lines of evidence. (1) In recent years the *revisionist* fashion has stimulated the reassessment of the ethnographic images of societies portrayed as either nonviolent/peaceful or violent/warlike. (2) It appears that the natural and social sciences may be on the verge of a *paradigm shift*—to include nonviolence and peace as well as violence and war as legitimate subjects for research, and eventually to balance the historic and current systemic bias of the disproportionate

amount of attention given to violence and war in contrast to nonviolence and peace. This paradigm shift will not be easy because it must surmount the obstacles in the history and culture of Western civilization, which may be most pronounced in American society and which in various ways tend to value violence and war over nonviolence and peace (Graham and Gurr 1969, Hofstadter and Wallace 1971, Iglitzin 1972, Palmer 1972, Toplin 1975). *Peace appears to be elusive not because relatively nonviolent and peaceful societies are so rare—they are not—but instead because so rarely have nonviolence and peace been the focus of research in anthropology and other disciplines, including even the field of peace studies. The deficiency lies in the research, including the ethnographic record, and not in human nature.* Overall the two trends of revisionism and the paradigm shift are healthy if the field of peace studies, like science in general, is to be a genuinely critical, analytical, and self-correcting process. Perhaps nonviolence and peace are finally becoming legitimate subjects for research and teaching, thereby opening a new frontier with all the excitement, challenges, and promises of exploration.

This chapter has focused on nonviolence and peace as a heuristic exercise simply because elsewhere it has been so neglected. Certainly it is extremely important to conduct research on violence and war with the hope of contributing to their understanding, reduction, and control. While this type of research is necessary, alone it is not sufficient to develop a more nonviolent and peaceful society and world. Progress in that direction will remain very limited until we seriously, systematically, and intensively directly consider nonviolence and peace. To put it simply and undeniably—you cannot understand or achieve something by ignoring it.

Although space allows for presentation of only some of the highlights of each line of evidence, this conclusion will emphasize five points that are often neglected.

- (1) Although *conflict is inevitable and ubiquitous, violence is not*. There are nonviolent and peaceful ways to reduce and resolve conflict, even in monkey and ape societies (e.g., Howell and Willis 1989: 3, 15, 19).
- (2) *Human nature has the psychobiological potential to be either nonviolent/peaceful or violent/warlike.*
- (3) *Nonviolence and peace appear to have prevailed in many prehistoric and prestate societies.*
- (4) *War is not a cultural universal*. In particular, war seems to be most frequent and intense in the state level of sociopolitical organization, a relatively recent and short phase of cultural evolution that may even-

tually be transcended through further evolution. Nevertheless, there are civilizations that have experienced centuries or even millennia of relative peace.

- (5) *The potential for the development of a more nonviolent and peaceful world is latent in human nature as revealed by the natural history of peace* (e.g., Kohn 1990). Humans have evolved both biological and cultural behavioral mechanisms to promote nonviolence and peace as well as to avoid, reduce, and resolve conflict and violence. Indeed ethnography does provide *heuristic precedents and models* of sociocultural systems that are relatively nonviolent and peaceful (Bonta 1993, Fabbro 1978, Howell and Willis 1989, Montagu 1978, Sponsel and Gregor 1994).

In this chapter, peace is considered to be a relative (rather than absolute) *condition* involving dynamic life-enhancing *processes* operating in relation to *ideals*. While it may be necessary first to experience war, or know about the existence of war, in order to conceptualize it explicitly and articulate a preference for peace instead, it is not necessary to have war first in order to value peace. A society, either peaceful or warlike, reflects cultural values, whether explicit or implicit. Interpretations of the palaeontological and archaeological records strongly suggest that peace occurred prior to war in human prehistory and cultural evolution. From ethnology and ethnography it is clear that relatively nonviolent and peaceful societies may value peace quite independently of any experience or knowledge of war. Thus, war is not necessarily prior to peace on either theoretical or experiential grounds. An analogy would be to assert the necessary prior occurrence of sickness for health, hate for love, or death for life. Considerations like these expose the reductionism and absurdity of such etic ideas as those that conflict resolution or ritualized warfare are peace, or peace is the residual category that includes whatever remains after war.

This exploration of the natural history of peace closes by urging the understanding that a *theory of human nature* is inevitably associated with theories of peace and war, regardless of whether it is explicit or implicit, and whether it has been developed in a systematic, informed, and critical manner. The importance of a theory of human nature in influencing beliefs and actions is stressed by Stevenson (1987: 3):

What is man? This is surely one of the most important questions of all. For so much else depends on our view of human nature. The meaning and purpose of human life, what we ought to do, and what we can hope to achieve—all these are

fundamentally affected by whatever we think is the "real" or "true" nature of man. (See also Berry 1989, Eisenberg 1972: 124, Nelson and Olin 1979, and Roosevelt 1990).

Notes

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1. Some of the points in this chapter are discussed in more detail in Sponsel (1989, 1990a, 1994).

2. A curious but feeble attempt has been made by Lackner (1984) to consider some of the peaceful aspects of nature.

3. This principle has been applied by Bigelow (1969: 47) in his account of the evolution of human nature and war where he considers social cooperation as necessary for defense and offense against other groups in the struggle for survival. (Also see Knauft 1994). Parallel ideas are applied in analyses by Murphy (1957) of the Mundurucu and Overing (1989) of the Piaroa, both societies in Amazonia. Also see the cross-cultural study of the relationship between internal and external conflict by Ross (1985).

4. Despite the above, Goodall (1986: chapters 12 and 17) also sees in chimpanzees the rudiments of warfare. Following vivid descriptions of adult males on patrol along the perimeter of their territory, where they cooperated in violently attacking and killing members of an adjacent group, apparently without provocation, and other observations, Goodall (1986: 534) concludes:

The chimpanzee, as a result of a unique combination of strong affiliative bonds between adult males on the one hand and an unusually hostile and violently aggressive attitude toward nongroup individuals on the other, has clearly reached a stage where he stands at the very threshold of human achievement in destruction, cruelty, and planned intergroup conflict. If ever he develops the power of language—and, as we have seen, he stands close to that threshold, too—might he not push open the door and wage war with the best of us?

5. Fabbro's analysis is one of a number of attempts to consider the pacific nature of "primitive" society, although some are now mainly of historical interest: Collins (1981), Ellis (1919), Howell and Willis (1989), Kang (1979), Kropotkin (1914: chapter 3), Melotti (1987), Montagu (1978), Nance (1975), Perry (1917), Smith (1929: chapters 5-6), Van Velzen and Wetering (1960), Wright (1942).

6. It should be noted that there are exceptional cases of foraging societies without agriculture that had warfare, such as the Kwakiutl of the Northwest Pacific Coast who engaged

in intense competition and even had slavery, but they involved quite special circumstances (Ferguson 1984).

7. There are many problems with Knauff's use of homicide rates, despite the magical appeal of statistics. (1) The average homicide rate for the United States as a whole is almost meaningless because of the enormous variation in homicide rates from urban to rural areas, among different "racial" and ethnic groups, and between regions in such a large and heterogeneous society. (2) If the killing of other humans by Americans during wars, such as in the dropping of the atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima during WWII, were included in Knauff's calculations, then the rates for the United States would certainly be elevated very substantially. If he is intent on an objective measure of violence, then the reason for excluding war statistics in the case of the United States is unclear. If the quantification of violence in the form of homicide rates among ethnographic groups like the Yanomami includes those in the context of warfare (internal and / or external), then there does not seem to be any justification for treating the U.S. any differently. (3) Also it is questionable to compare the homicide rates of a large, complex, multicultural society like the United States with those of small and fairly homogeneous societies. (4) Furthermore, some of Knauff's estimates of homicide rates may not be accurate. For example, Dentan (1988a: 626) asserts that the homicide rate of the Semai is somewhere around 0.56 per 1/100,000 in contrast to Knauff's (1987: 458) estimate of 30.3 per 100,000. (5) Albert (1990: 561) is also critical of Knauff's attempt to assess degree of violence through quantitative comparisons that completely ignore the specifics of the situation, cultural context, and meaning of any particular homicide. He asserts that there is no value-free and cross-culturally valid definition of violence.

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