

THE MYTHOLOGY OF WAR

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Foreword:

As much as I dislike the use of the word “mythology” to designate a story that is untrue, there is, to some extent, an element of that type of mythology in this title. Wars are universally abhorred by humanity, and even the most warlike nation of the modern world professes to detest war. If these protestations were true, there could hardly be any war present on the planet today. The eradication of war is the announced purpose of many international organizations, and nations continue to denounce “war” as the source of all evil. Again, considering the power of the nations stating their opposition to war and the power of the organizations dedicated to eliminating war, it would seem that war should soon disappear. There is obviously a certain distance between what the people and nations of the world profess to be their ideal, and what is actually the case.

Unfortunately, the only safe prediction about war is that no one is sure where the next one will occur. But occur it will. If war is the source of so many evils, as it obviously is, why does it continue to exist?

The question is not simply answered by saying that there are always people who see the immediate advantages of war and do not foresee the harms that may happen to themselves. While the statement may be true, it presumes that humans are extremely limited in their ability to understand the possible future from examining the past. The opening lines of the Iliad bemoan the tragedy of war and its effects on mankind and the youth of the world. But the epic relentlessly describes in detail the many exploits of Achilles, Hector, and all the other heroes. The ancient Greeks glorified war as the proving ground of heroes. The Greeks considered the age of the heroes as far higher than their own. Most of the literature of Greece and Rome, and even the records of the lives of the Pharaohs written on tomb walls, are devoted to declaiming the prowess in war of the subjects. In fact, it might be said that the ultimate hero-defining activity is war, and has been recognized as such since at least the beginning of history.

Considering the fact that humanity has flourished on the planet to the extent that it has crowded out thousands, perhaps millions of other species,¹ it would seem that it has not done much harm to its own progress by warring within itself. While, on the other hand, war, as detestable as it is professed to be, has been the touchstone of national pride and the source of the mythology by which a nation sustains itself. The most glorious episodes in the history of any nation are devoted to war, usually victorious wars. In other words, while particular wars may be good or bad for individual societies by turn, and probably no society is immune from some harm due to war, for humanity as a whole, they have apparently been an asset. There is, of course the aspect that history of war is written by the winners, and the picture transmitted down through the ages has always been one of glory and success which accrue to the winners.

This has also worked to emphasize the positive points of war and suppress the more dismal aspects.

The Definition of War

The dictionary definition of war is “a conflict carried on by force of arms, as between nations or parties within a nation.”² It would seem, however, that we could imagine that people may rely on their own strength to carry out a war, using only what tools that come to hand, but what we call “war” could not happen between individuals. Thus the idea that “nations or parties within a nation,” is much more vital, since wars occur between groups, and usually rather large groups. In other words, war is a social activity involving two large groups. What bond creates these groups is a problem we will examine further. To understand the meaning of the word “war” it would suit us well, however, to examine the first conflict we would call a “war.” This, of course, is probably impossible because, while conflicts leave their traces so that present day archeologists can discover them and tell when a certain city was destroyed and sometimes even by whom or what army and how, the problem is that wars have been so prevalent even throughout prehistory, that almost every known civilization ended with destruction wrought by an invading army. There are exceptions, of course. While Mohenjodaro in the Indus Valley was destroyed apparently by Aryan invaders, Harappa, only six hundred kilometers away. was apparently simply abandoned.³ If we go as far back as we find civilizations, however, we find destruction wrought by armies. There is, therefore, no way of knowing of the “first” war, unless we presume that the first “city” civilization was also the site of the first war.

Motives for War

If we review the wars of history of which we know the causes, there are two basic causes. One is desire for power over material and/or land outside the boundaries of the group; and the fierce animosity towards another group arising from fear or a perception of having been wronged by the other. The desire for power can probably be resolved into greed for what some other group or country has, but the drive for power seems to become detached from its connection to material needs or desires and becomes an end in itself. The first city states of Sumer were established within limited boundaries and lasted for some hundreds of years, but soon expansion of power became a viable option to the larger more prosperous states, which soon absorbed the city states into an “empire” under the Babylonians or the Assyrians or the Persians. And as each of these extended their power until turned back by another power, the Greeks or the Egyptians or the Hittites being successful at times, other times being absorbed by the conquering powers. In the Western world the empires follow one after another, and perhaps their driving force epitomized by the statement of Alexander the Great at the age of twenty-seven bemoaning the fact that he had “no more worlds to conquer.”

The closer we come to the modern age, the more excuses can be found for going to war. In what is today France, the former Vikings who had taken over Normandy and then invaded England were demanding their own hegemony in France during the Hundred Years War, and all sides considered legitimate history as that which had stopped at a period which made themselves the “true” owners of whatever property was involved. Today, of course, for those in possession, no matter what the history is, the *status quo* is the “true and correct” situation, while those who are not in possession insist that whatever area is under dispute is historically their own. Since almost any area on earth has been occupied by many different people historically, and even before history, the problem of deciding at what point in history to draw

the line of "rightful possession" is impossible. Not only are there former owners of a particular area who no longer exist and cannot, therefore, insist on their claim, there are people who claim to have as ancestors peoples who actually did occupy the land. Biologically speaking it is impossible that any of the present Jews who claim an ancestral (and Yahweh-given) right to Palestine could trace one hundred percent of their ancestry to the Jews who were forced out of Palestine by the Romans. On the other hand, statistically there are probably very few people on the planet who cannot trace some perhaps infinitesimal part of their ancestry to the Palestinian Jews of 2000 years ago.

On the other hand, there are those native inhabitants of vast areas who did not think in terms of "ownership" of land, such as the Ainu of northern Japan, who did not have a territorial government and were simply ignored by the Japanese who moved into Hokkaido and worried about protecting the island from the Russian Empire, not even considering that the Ainu living on the island would have any claim to it as a "country." The Native Americans had much the same attitude, many of them insisting that "ownership" of the land was a crime against nature. The earth was a gift from God to everyone⁴ who should treat it with respect. As idealistic as these ideas are and in tune with the current ecological ideas, they simply left the gates open to European settlers who appropriated the land indiscriminately to the point where the Native Americans finally woke up to the fact that their land had been taken from them.

In America, wars against the native Americans, or against the Spanish proprietors of Mexico, etc. are all considered only just today, since not only do the winners write the history, they also make the moral judgments upon it.

In a more recent period, Hitler made many thinly-veiled excuses to cover his greed for land and power, but he did reflect the modern need to find justification for making war, as opposed to the days when war was justification for itself. True, in the Iliad, the war of the Greeks against the Trojans was to right a wrong and to bring Helen back to Sparta, but this was indeed an epic aimed at displaying the Greek idea of justice, along with the bravery of its heroes and the strength of its people. Even in the Iliad, the myth of the horrors of war and its adverse effects on mankind are narrated as the basic statement of the epic.⁵ But while protesting the tragic outcome of war, it displays war as the ultimate trying ground for heroes. While in the Iliad, Achilles is shown as completely self-centered, conceited and greedy, prepared to sacrifice the whole of the Greek army to his own pride and need of recognition, making him almost an anti-hero in today's terms, in the Odyssey he is found among the shades in Hades' realm, and in later epics we find him enjoying the afterlife in the Elysian fields, deserving happiness as the epitome of a hero.

Few of those who consider the Trojan War as actually having happened think that the war occurred in order to bring an abducted queen back to her husband, however. Most think of it as an attempt to subdue a city which occupied a strategic point at the entrance to the Dardenelles, leading to the Black Sea and Asia, and few recognize it as a glorification of war, albeit with the tragic overtones which the Greeks seemed to have enjoyed so much.

The Japanese invaded Korea, Taiwan, Manchuria, China, Southeast Asia, the Philippines, out of a desire for land and resources, and attacked the U.S. at Pearl Harbor because America was trying to stand in the way of the search for resources. The Japanese were, to a great extent, simply copying Great Britain in its own imperial expansion, and in imitation named its expanded area the Greater East Asian Prosperity Sphere. It found, however, that such

expansion was not considered moral by the West if the expanding country was Asian.

Great Britain itself justified its expansion into the world which it considered "backward" as its "Manifest Destiny," meaning that somehow the Almighty had awarded the British the duty of teaching the rest of the world correct manners.

With the empires of Britain and Japan now gone, along with those of the other colonial powers of Europe, and the USSR as well, the various justifications can easily be reduced to simple national greed and desire for power.

There is, however, one other aspect of a national will to war which is not quite so crass as greed. It may be given the name of "patriotism" or "national pride," or it may simply be designated as the "war effort" of the citizens, but it is certainly present in all warring communities and it pervades those communities with a spirit of cooperation and camaraderie, a sense of righteousness, a unified detestation of the enemy, and complete trust in the actions of the leaders. It may be a reactionary spirit which arises from the feeling of being attacked and/or wronged; or it may arise in a more active sense of righting the wrong to another or punishing the wrong-minded. In any case, there is no difference in the warring factions on either side, both think of themselves as not only correct and unjustly receiving the attacks of another, but that the "other," that is, "the enemy," is basically evil and unjust. This view of the enemy extends to the people as a whole, not just those actually fighting. It is, in other words, a cultural view, which sees the other culture on the whole as "evil" and "untrustworthy."

The "Crusades," in spite of the devastation they wrought,⁶ are looked upon in Western Europe as wars fought for ideals which unified the whole of Christendom. Even today, the word "Crusader" connotes one who fights for justice. The *Jihad*, or "struggle," of Islam is also a justification, and sometime even a mandate for war.

While the motive for starting a war might not so openly contain the idea of unifying the nation or culture, politically, opposition to an ethnic or racial group within a country may serve as a rallying point. The recent events in Bosnia-Herzegovina, or Rwanda with the genocidal activities of the Tutsi and Hutu tribes are prime examples of attempts to achieve power by unifying opinion against an ethnic group.

In other words, the power of hate towards another culture or ethnic group to oppose and fight against another is recognized universally as an efficient means of unifying the people. It is thus that the internally unifying bond of a society will be strengthened for coordinated effort against a rival culture or cultures. There is no more widely recognized motivation for unity than the feeling within a group of being somehow persecuted, attacked, or even looked down upon by another. This has been consistently and cynically used throughout history by demagogues and even local politicians for political advantage. It might even be a rule that arousing the emotions of a group demands there be an enemy. The Nazi's had the Jews, as did many other groups in Europe from the early Middle Ages down to the present; the Tutsis have the Hutus, and vice versa, as do the Serbs and the Muslims in Bosnia and the Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland.

No matter the outcome of a particular conflict, unless a culture is totally destroyed, the unifying bond remains and strengthens the internal cooperation within the culture which, in turn, is a natural basis for the continuance, and even the extension of the culture in question.

The Evolutionary Basis

Frans de Waal compares the ethical systems of primates, monkeys and humans in a book he entitled *Good Natured*.⁷ There seem to be many similarities for comparison, war being among them, primates in the wild invading neighboring groups areas and subduing them quite brutally. Wars among chimpanzees in captivity are rare according to de Waal, but this is simply because there are no zoos or enclosures for them that are large enough to house more than one group. In the wild, however, raids on the neighboring groups are quite regular and carried out with vicious purpose, although the chimpanzee does not have the weapons available to humans.

There seems to be an egalitarian trend among monkeys and primates as the level of intelligence rises. Chimpanzees fight among each other quite regularly and, to a great extent, the reason behind the constant quarreling is the strict system of social status which is under constant pressure from the biological urges of lower-class males to mate, the right to mating being reserved to the boss in most situations, the lower class male having to be sly in any affairs undertaken. The females are also ranked and the rights and privileges of status jealously guarded. Rank among chimpanzees, however, carries with it the duty of mediating the disputes between lower-ranked individuals, among other things, and it is apparently a necessary attribute of the leader. That is to say that, if the chimpanzee group does not agree with the way disputes are mediated, they may reject the leader for another who is better and fairer in doing the job.⁸

Social status, however, is not involved in the attacks of one chimpanzee group upon another group's territory and it would seem that we would have to look here to find the ultimate source of the human "will to war."

Legitimizing War

As long as war is an activity which represents the ultimate danger, and thus the opportunity for the human, especially the male human, to confront the danger and prove his manhood, so to speak; and as long as social unity created by war is so advantageous to the human community, it cannot actually reject war no matter how much it conflicts with its morality. Instead, the community attempts to legitimize war, professing to allow it only in certain circumstances. The Roman Catholic Church, although from its history it could hardly be called a "pacific" organization, has declared that under certain circumstances war is "legitimate" and consonant with the law of God.⁹ Besides self-defense, the circumstances in the past have extended to "driving the infidels from the land of Christ's birth," and other rather self-serving aims.

The excuses for war mentioned above, however, always designate "the enemy" as the cause of the war. Sometimes mental acrobatics are necessary to legitimize war, but there is no nation on earth which would confess to be in the midst of waging an "unjust" war. Individual citizens within a country may object to a particular war, or to war in general, but the number is so insignificant that most nations are willing to treat conscientious objectors as simple eccentrics. Pacifism has been the theme of several Hollywood movies in the past, but in the end there is usually some compromise with the ideals of pacifism so that the main character acts "normally" in protecting his family or such. *Friendly Persuasion* is representative of this type of thought, as is *High Noon* in which the Quaker wife played by Grace Kelly shoots down the

man trying to kill her husband, played by Gary Cooper. There is no way in which the movie-going public would enjoy a movie in which no effort was made by the hero to fight against the villain, pacifism not being a viable ideal in this case.

The United States professes, of course, to abhor war, just as every other nation in the world. It maintains, however, the largest standing army in the world, much of it in areas far distant from its own shores, the largest arsenal of weapons, produces and sells the greatest amount of arms of any nation and has engaged in more conflicts over a wider area than any other country. To maintain the support of the people of the United States, there is always a "moral" basis provided for any military activity. In Korea and Vietnam this was simply the necessity of opposing the "Evil Empire" which was trying to achieve world domination, the communist countries. In the Caribbean it was Grenada, and Central America had Panama where incursions by the U.S. armed forces were legitimized by the need to get rid of certain undesirable leaders ("undesirable," of course, to the U.S. Government). In Iraq the professed purpose was to drive President Saddam Hussein's forces from Kuwait. It has since become a war to aid the Kurdish population in the north or the Shiites in the south.

It seems, therefore, that it is a rather simple process to legitimize war, and one that is continually carried out in many countries, especially those which have the most capability of waging war. (Nations who have little or no war capabilities seldom go to war, but wars "on a shoestring," so to speak, are often carried on by guerrillas.)

Purposes of War

In today's world, the desire for the material assets of another country may indeed be the object of a war, but it is never presented as such. Today the reason for wars is to right a perceived wrong. The wrong may be some specific wrong such as the attack on the American Pearl Harbor, or it may be an overall suspicion that the other is out to harm you in some way or other. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was because the U.S. was not allowing the Japanese to obtain the natural resources from southeast Asia which they felt were rightfully theirs. The whole purpose of war is to right those perceived wrongs or eliminate the threat to the group, as well as to claim land or other valuable material. An example of this was the demand of Hitler at the Munich Peace Conference that the Sudetenland be ceded to Germany, since the primarily German population who lived there was being discriminated against by Poland. This demand was acceded to by the other European powers intent on dissuading Germany from going to war, an event which followed almost immediately, in any case. The European nations which agreed to the demand were probably aware that it was a grab by Hitler for more land, but gave credence to the arguments anyway. More significant, however, whether the other nations agreed with the demand or not, the people of Germany were sufficiently convinced of the justice of it to follow Hitler into war, if need be.

The meaning of this is clear in that it is necessary that the people who are about to wage war be in agreement among themselves that the war is just. Though it may not be necessary to have a level of animosity in which the people themselves demand a punitive war, the population as a whole must feel a level of outrage toward another people sufficient to let them at least agree to the war as it may be waged by the group's leaders.

This was not true of the war the U.S. waged in Vietnam, and, in fact, the Vietnamese conflict was the cause of a divisiveness among the American people which had never been known

up to that time. Even more, the effects of the Vietnam War on the American people is proof that war itself is not necessarily a unifying element, rather war is an expression of the outrage of one group towards another. In the case of Vietnam, of course, the American population felt little outrage against the Vietnamese as a people or nation. There had been little previous acquaintanceship with Vietnam, and it was very difficult to arouse an emotional reaction among the general population even though the soldiers actually fighting the war did in their minds reduce their enemies to sub-human levels. This resulted in atrocities such as the My Lai massacre, which were in turn punished by the American military chiefly because the animosity of the American population as a whole was nowhere near as vociferous as that of the soldiers actually fighting. At first, the idea that America should protect the South Vietnamese from the "Evil Empire" of communism was enough to support the war effort, but as the war escalated and more American lives began to be lost in the conflict, serious defects in the will to war became apparent. Probably more than any other aspect, it became obvious that the "game was not worth the candle," so to speak; the possible gains not measuring up to the losses involved.

Evolutionary Advantages for the Individual.

Males are typically rated by females according to their bravery. That bravery ultimately involves the risk of loss of life. On the other hand, the resulting attraction to the female results in multiple opportunities for mating for the male.

The high evaluation of the attribute of acting in the face of great risk may be due to the presumed ability of such a one to overcome enemies to the family after mating, a strong protector being more able to guard the interests of children and mother from predators, etc. when they are in a condition of not being able to protect themselves. I would also suggest that it is not only because males are stronger and larger than females that war is traditionally the province of the male, but also because war is, among other things, the proving ground for the male as a desirable mate. And it may in fact be true that natural selection has resulted in having males stronger and larger because of the advantages size and strength afford in fighting rather than the need to be stronger in order to hunt, as is traditionally held.

Without some kind of advantage for the individual, bravery in the face of danger would hardly be considered an asset, and, in fact, would very quickly disappear as an aspect of natural defense, not to mention that the fact that the risk of loss of life is only proven when a certain number of those facing it actually do lose their lives. It is certainly not advantageous for the individual who loses his life, and would seem to be evolutionally disadvantageous as well, only sustainable by a species if statistically the overall loss of life of the members of the species is less than the percentage necessary for survival, being offset by the resulting increase in successful breeding opportunities. There is less biological harm done by losing human males, however, since one male may provide multiple breeding opportunities, as opposed to the woman who is restricted by the time of gestation to a limited number of offspring.

Hunters and Warriors

Humans, as meat-eaters and hunters, tend to identify with the predators, of course. Symbols associated with human societies, especially nations, are mostly of predators; eagles, lions, hawks, dragons and tigers frequent, the Japanese crane being a rather amiable exception.

While we might imagine wars between primitive tribes concerning food sources, and wars between tribes which form a background for a culture, it is difficult to conceive of active wars of conquest under these conditions. Fighting for a particular food-gathering-hunting area, or to protect the same, is very similar to wild animals fighting over a kill, and escalation beyond obtaining an immediate object would be rare, if it happened at all.

A misinterpretation of Lorenz' *On Aggression*¹⁰ sees the meat-eating animal as an aggressor when attacking its prey, while Lorenz defined aggression as the action of attacking one's own species for purposes other than simply obtaining the means of subsistence. Simply because humans or proto-humans ate meat would not make them aggressors as was originally thought by R.A. Dart and those that accepted his idea that the human race developed from a "killer ape."¹¹

In terms of biology, the proto-human had to find a slot in the total ecological environment which was not taken by any other animal which would be competitive. Perhaps hominids did not go to war to move into another animal's territory, but were able to develop because they had found a slot in the ecology not occupied by another animal within which they could sustain themselves without competing with any other major biological unit. In the case of hominids, the slot was found partly because of the ability to obtain energy from a great variety of foodstuffs, both vegetable and animal; and partly because other hunters were nocturnal, (or it might be said that hominids became daytime hunters because there was little competition there). The competition between proto-human hunters and other animals was then decided forever in favor of humanity when the humans learned to use spears and other tools that made it possible to make a kill without having to close in and endanger themselves in the process. But the advantage that the ability to use spears, etc. gave the humans was not one which destroyed competitors in the food chain directly, but one by which competitors were less able to compete, and thus losing the access to their food resources, perished. This is to say that humans did not war on lions, for example, in order to achieve superiority in a particular segment of the food chain. They might have killed a lion or other predator in the process of accidentally meeting one at the site of a kill where the human may have been the scavenger, but there was almost certainly no positive attack on another species for any reason other than to eat it.

It was thus that the proto-humans (a term I use to designate the ancestors of *homo sapiens*, which would include *homo erectus* dating from a little over a million years ago, and their ancestors up to the first hominids over four million years ago), were able to develop over many millennia among the other inhabitants of the area of Africa where humanity originated.

It was suggested especially during the 1960s that the species that became *homo sapiens*, being meat-eating and therefore enured to killing, was a vicious race which eliminated indiscriminately any others who would seem to be competitive. This particular theory, developed by the Australian anatomist Raymond Dart, was in vogue for a short while. But the conclusions which led to the image of a particularly vicious nature for humanity was mainly a misreading of a rather skimpy selection of clues.¹² There is also the fact that hominids did not live entirely on meat which comprised only 20 to 50 percent of their diet. The first hominids to eat meat probably found it scavenging from the kills of other predators, and were latecomers to the world of meat-eating animals.

In any case, the desire to kill fellow humans for food has not been found to be a human

trait. If cannibalism were a normal trait among humans, the drive to kill other humans would have some kind of cultural background. Cannibalism is, however, universally abhorred except in a special way in some primitive societies for whom eating such parts of a human as the heart or liver provide courage or whatever virtue the dead may have had. Even there, killing another human is an exceptional deed with particular social significance. Most species avoid killing members of their own species, except in conflicts aimed at dominance over a group, as a natural evolutionary rule. Killing other humans is likewise universally abhorred, with the few exceptions in which human sacrifice was practiced as a way of appeasing the gods, and other ritualistic practices.¹³ The desire to kill fellow humans can hardly be considered a source of the human tendency to go to war.

There are many species of animals which use escape as the main system of coping with danger. There are animals who are good at running away, or good at hiding, deceiving the eye of the hunter, etc. who have developed these "cowardly" traits as means of survival. The identification with the predator may not necessarily indicate that humans are "bloodthirsty," but it does indicate that "attacking" rather than "escaping" is highly valued by most, if not all humans, even those who profess otherwise. Even the tool of the pacifists call "civil disobedience" as advocated by Mahatma Gandhi, an attitude rejecting the idea of attacking, is still a means of confrontation rather than a means of seeking safety by avoidance of danger. In actual practice, the pacifism of Gandhi would require much more bravery in the face of danger than other types of active resistance.

Communal Advantages of War

As we mentioned in the beginning, war is community conflict. Fighting individuals do not make a war. In fact, the usual concept of war concerns groups larger than families, though the actual extent of groups engaging in war is hard to define. There must, however, be some way in which members of a warring group are linked, if not by kinship such as groups of families or tribes, then by culture, which, of course, can be very closely connected to citizenship in a particular nation or residence in a particular district. The kinship or cultural ties serve to create a strong feeling of "WE" against "THEM." That is, there is a necessity of the members of a group have a sense of identity with the other members which in turns works to create a common understanding in the group. It is the group consciousness which forms the background upon which war can be waged against another group, and it is the group consciousness which coalesces to energize the group to make the effort to make war, seeing as honorable those who make the most effort, and dishonorable or even traitorous those who do not join the war effort or seem to be sabotaging it. There is no greater term of opprobrium than "traitor" in any group, though the label must, by its very nature, be relative only to the group. Thus the very same individuals may be a traitor to one group while being a hero to another, the traitor-hero often being executed with great vengeance. In American history there is the example of Nathan Hale hung for being a traitor to the British, and Benedict Arnold, the epitome of a traitor to the Americans.

If we presume, however, that wars must occur between large groups by definition, then the first wars would have had to occur only after people began to live in groups larger than a family, or what is thought of as the basic unit for hunter-gatherers. Examining other primates such as chimpanzees, however, the communities they form are so similar in many ways to those

of humanity, that it would seem that social grouping of hominoids was coincidental with evolving into a primate, that is to say that it is part of the definition of humanity. There has been a line of thought in which the human was first an independent individual, only evolving into a social animal later.¹⁴ This is perhaps a bit of wishful thinking on the part of the Western individualistic ideals. The social tendencies of animals seems to be the result of natural selection of systems of protection, the group being a basic way of protection from predators. It has been shown that chimpanzees inhabiting an area which abounds in predators tend to form larger groups than those in areas where there are fewer predators.¹⁵ Colin Tudge states in *The Time before History* that the forerunners of homo sapiens probably lived in groups of around twenty-five, though he admits that there may also have been a kind of loose federation of these family-based units similar to a tribe which may include twenty or so of these groups, likening it to the present tribal system maintained by the !Kung bushmen of the Kalahari Plain in southern Africa.¹⁶ At what point would conflicts between family groups be called "wars" is a moot point and depends on a relative standard. While people today think in terms of large nations and huge armies, having been enured by the recent conflicts of this century, other eras and places might perceive of wars as involving his family and other local groups, those being the only groups he knows. On the tribal level the idea of a war is a definite possibility. The possibility, then, that there may have been "wars" among humans, or proto-humans, as long as a million years ago or more when homo erectus began to emigrate out of Africa, is certainly possible. War would, in fact, supply a certain impetus to the emigration of the human species as we could imagine areas in which overpopulation would lead to conflict over food supply, forcing the losers in any conflict to move to less competitive areas.

There may be some dispute, again, over the size of a conflict which would be called a war. Rick Fields in *The Way of the Warrior*¹⁷ insists that wars began as humans discovered the intrinsic worth of "land" after the beginning of agriculture when city states developed and large populations were found grouped together in them. Gordon Childe, in *What happened in History*, sees only civilization, that is society based in cities, as having progressed to the point of waging war.¹⁸ If we accept these points of view, then the first wars were indeed rather recent, beginning with the first city-states in Sumer, and spreading as the civilization of cities spread to Egypt, etc.

It should be obvious, however, that conflicts between groups did not begin with the cities, even though it is only with the concentration of people into large groups that the conflicts may be thought of as "wars." While perceived intrinsic worth of land or of its products can conceivably be thought of as the major reason for one group to attack another, it is hardly the only possible cause, and a look at the primitive peoples remaining in the world today would show that wars, perhaps miniature wars, if the comparison is made with the conflicts that have gone on in the world in recent centuries, have always been with us.

Inter-tribal wars are recorded in many areas of the primitive world, and it might even be said that in some areas, any tribe is in an eternally continuing state of war with any other tribe. In New Guinea tribal warfare is a regular custom with regular ritual battles held. The Papuans especially have a very strong sense of land ownership which is one of the main sources of conflicts among them, the claims to land being handed down *in perpetuum*, but nonetheless repeatedly questioned by other members of the same tribe or between tribes. The resulting wars are quite ritualized with much posturing by either side and the number of those killed in any one

battle may be *nil*, or nearly so, but the custom remains, nonetheless, and is central to their culture. In the same area, headhunting used to be an integral part of the cultural and demanded a constant background of tribal war to sustain the custom.

If we see the ritual wars of the Papuans as central to their cultural activities, we must also ask what biological or evolutionary advantage is found in them. Ritual wars make very little change in the status quo of the warring tribes, and thus the motive for war would seem to be a trivial advantage over the rival, being, for example, the retention or recapture of some article stolen from the other tribe. The battles usually conclude when someone on either side is rather sorely wounded, though not necessarily fatally, the greater part of the warring activity is the posturing of both sides in threatening confrontation, (Japanese television crews have even filmed these "battles," though the threatening and posturing is so ritualized that the result is hardly "gripping war film"). The fact that there is little at stake in these battles, and the way they are concluded indicate that the purpose of the war ritual itself is somewhere other than gain or righting of a wrong. That is to say, there is a cultural imperative to the activity which in some way works to make it necessary for the well-being of the community. Relieved of all the other mythological encumbrances of the act of war, the need to right a wrong or to settle a grudge or to defy a tyrant or to defend oneself against another villainous group out to annihilate you, etc. etc., what we are left with is the moral unity of the community to act as a singular whole. The community sees itself as a single unit in opposition to another group, thus reinforcing the cultural values of the community, *all* the cultural values, not simply those concerned with war, through the medium of making the individual members of the group aware of the necessity of the group to their well being, and of their own role in acting as part of the group. They are thus brought to see that the group consensus is the normal and correct path, and that through their own necessity of being part of the group, since the group is also their own support, the group must indeed present the only correct evaluation of any situation. This personal involvement ensures the absence of any extra-cultural viewpoint from which to make any objective judgment concerning any matter.

The result of this absorption into a cultural set of values means that there will never be objectivity on the part of the contestants in any conflict. Those who identify with the Serbs in the former Yugoslavia will join with the rest of the Serbs in denying any wrongdoing and reviling the Croats and the Moslems for their atrocities committed against the Serbs, and this position is never hypocritical since all objectivity has been replaced by loyalty to the group. By loyalty here I do not mean a "my-country-right-or-wrong" idea of being ready to surrender integrity for loyalty, rather a simple confidence that the country or group is right, and there being no doubt about this "fact" to put the aspect of "loyalty" in jeopardy. The surrender to the values of the society to which the person belongs has taken place at the point of identification with the group, wherein the identification of values also takes place.

In the social procedures leading to war, therefore, there is always a factor motivating the members of the community to unite against an outside antagonist, and it is this unity by which the community tries to achieve the level of strength to wage war. And it is this unity through which the community achieves sufficient unity of thought among the members to perform its functions to preserve and increase the overall welfare of the society. Therefore, though war may indeed be disadvantageous to a particular society materially, the communal identity achieved in focusing the fear or hate or demand for redress on a group outside the community,

is advantageous to the welfare of the community. It is thus enabled to sustain hardship and face danger without rebelling, and bring about a closer cooperation by which the individuals relinquish a certain amount of personal freedom for the common good, resulting in more effective activities by the group for vital ends such as obtaining and distributing essential goods such as food, fuel, land, etc.

From the point of view of natural selection, it would seem that genes which would help a human cooperate with the group would be successful as opposed to such genes that would encourage withdrawal or opposition to the group. By the same token, it would also seem that the genes which encourage an empathy within a group through which opposition to another group coalesces, would be successful. But this would simply be another way of saying that humankind's tendency toward conflict with other groups, and war, is based in his genes.

To what extent is the tendency to belong to and empathize with groups is present in the human psyche is demonstrated by the phenomenon of "sports fanship" in which an individual becomes what is called an "adherent" to a certain team for reasons which are often quite obscure; it may be simple proximity or the amount of knowledge about a particular team, etc. The "games" of the sport, be it baseball, American football, soccer, or any number of others, become miniature wars in which the fans see vital interests involved in the outcome of the contests. The identity factor is indeed of more importance than even the advantage or disadvantage resulting from the outcome of the contest. The violence between soccer fans is well known and a large problem at World Cup matches, and has even resulted in a real shooting war in South America between Uruguay and Peru,

That is not to say there is a gene somewhere in the human makeup which makes him wage war, but it does mean that the foundations of war, the tendency toward group identity leading to inter-group conflict is gene-based.

Summary

It seems that wars among human groups have been with mankind since prehistory, and have increased in number and size as the number of humans grew. In this century we have experienced two conflicts called "world" wars since they extended to a large part of the globe. Each of the opposing groups is certain of its own righteousness, and usually has remained so after the conflict has come to an end, leaving the seeds of further conflict intact.

With the increase in war efficiency, mankind has reached the point of being able to totally destroy a group, with of course the obvious danger of being destroyed itself. This has created the urgency to find a means of limiting or doing away with war.

Every society and culture has, however, learned through eons of evolution that safety and welfare lies in group unity and opposition toward outsiders, especially other groups. The mistrust and suspicion of those outside one's own culture literally derives from man's genes, and is therefore so much a part of humanity that to change those tendencies, developed over the millennia, in order to avoid war in the short time of the one or two centuries in which war has become too dangerous to sustain, is plainly impossible.

Is the conclusion, then, that wars will always be with us? Unfortunately, the evidence points to that conclusion. The level of vociferous opposition of one or another group could even unleash the unthinkable atomic conflagration which would end life as we know it on our planet. In fact, it would seem that the possibility is larger rather than smaller as technology

progresses and nuclear capability extends to a larger number of societies. It is probably only a matter of time before some society elects to use their nuclear arms in desperate opposition to some group or another.

If there were a danger to the planet as a whole, alien invaders from outer space, the human tendency to unite against an outsider would certainly come into effect, resulting in the salvation of the planet. Unfortunately, there is much less likelihood of this occurring than the writers of science fiction would have us believe.

On the other hand, having achieved the level where his species is called *homo sapiens sapiens*, meaning he should be really doubly smart, man may indeed bring his mind into play in analyzing and coping with the situation to which his genes have led him.

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Notes

- 1 It is suggested that there are about 30 million species of living creature extant and for every one existing today there have been thousands in the past, the resulting figure is mind-boggling. Tudge, Colin: *The Time Before History, 5 million years of human impact*. Scribner, New York, 1996: p.112ff.
- 2 The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, Random House New York, 1981, p.1608.
- 3 Wonders of the Ancient World, National Geographic Atlas of Archeology: National Geographic Society: Washington D.C. 1994 : p.156.
- 4 Campbell, Joseph: *Myths to Live By*: Viking Press; New York, 1972: p.185.
- 5 The opening lines of the Iliad: "Sing, goddess of the anger of Achilleus, son of Peleus, the accursed anger which brought uncounted anguish on the Achaians and hurled down to Hades

- many mighty souls of heroes," etc. Homer: *The Iliad*: Trans. Martin Hammond: Penguin Books; Middlesex, Eng. 1987.
- 6 The First Crusade, when it conquered Jerusalem, was particularly bloody, the killing never being equaled before or since. Armstrong, Karen: *Jerusalem, One City Three Faiths*: Alfred A. Knopf New York, 1996. p.273ff.
- 7 De Waal, Franz. 1996. *The Origins of right and wrong in humans and other animals, Good Natured*; Harvard University Press; Cambridge, Massachusetts. 1996.
- 8 De Waal; p.132.
- 9 Roman Catholic Church Catechism
- 10 Lorenz, K.Z.: *On Aggression*, Methuen; London: 1966.
- 11 Dart, R.A. : *Adventures with the Missing Link*: Harper; New York, 1959.
- 12 Leaky, R.E.: *The Origin of Humankind*, Basic Books; N.Y.; 1994, p.10.
- 13 Even what is known as the "Fifth Commandment" in the Jewish Bible, "Thou Shalt not kill." seems to omit the words "other Jews" since elsewhere the same Yahweh commands the Jews to utterly destroy Canaan and kill all the Canaanites. Deuteronomy, Chapt. 5, v. 16ff., Chapt. 7, v.2ff. and elsewhere.
- 14 de Waal: *Good Natured*
- 15 de Waal: p.178
- 16 Tudge: p.267 and elsewhere.
- 17 Fields, Rick: *The Code of the Warrior*: Harper Perennial; N.Y.; 1991, p.38.
- 18 Childe, Gordon: *What Happened in History*: Penguin Books; Middlesex, England; 1942.