

ROTARY DISTRICT 5440 PEACEBUILDER NEWSLETTER
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HUMAN AGGRESSION AND VIOLENCE: INNATE, LEARNED OR BOTH?

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In these newsletters of the Rotary District Peacebuilders, we want to invite readers for contributions and ideas, suggestions and possibilities for our efforts to promote the foundational skills for promoting peace, i.e., nonviolent conflict resolution, improved communication and cooperation, successful negotiation and mediation as well as the critical and creative thinking that can help communities move through obstacles and difficulties. See the end of this newsletter for more details about this project and the authors.

ARE WAR AND CONFLICT INEVITABLE DUE TO OUR DNA?

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Why does man fight? There are two primary theories.¹

- 1.) Prussian officer Carl von Clausewitz proposed war is a *“continuation of policy . . . by other means.”* War is another way that nations advance their own interests, a gainful enterprise, a rational action, or socially sanctioned group behavior.
- 2.) Sigmund Freud concluded there is a flaw in human psyche, a desire to destroy, an aggressive instinct, an irrational behavior that leads to war.

Some believe that Freud’s conclusion can be explained by our basic genome. Ever since the development of the theory of evolution proposed by Charles Darwin (1859), which suggested that humans were a natural consequence of the laws of nature, people have debated how “animal like” are humans. Initially, evolutionary scholars argued that a sudden increase in cranial capacity allowed man to step beyond animal instincts to kill for food to a human capable of spirituality and morals.² This theory was supported by the discovery of the large sized Piltdown skull. But when this was shown to be a fraud in 1953, many researchers returned to the idea that man’s nature was basically driven by its ape ancestors who routinely killed to eat; thus, man, the killer ape.

Raymond Dart in 1953 posited that the cruelty of man can only be explained by “man’s carnivorous and cannibalistic origin.” Robert Ardrey (1961 to 1976) even argued that it was competition, violence and war that keeps man evolving, and without these activities mankind is doomed to dwindle to near extinction like the gorilla or entirely disappear like the dodo (*Raphus cucullatus*) last sighted in 1662.

¹ Ehrenreich, Barbara (1997) *Blood Rites: Origins and History of the Passions of War*, Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 292 pp.

² Charles Darwin visualized a spiritual and intellectual gap between humans and their closest ape cousins. He noted that man was capable of love for all living creatures a trait seemingly absent in all other animals.

The killer ape hypothesis is only one of at least twelve theories of how mankind evolved, and most do not stress a violent animal nature.³ Different scientists have proposed that humankind was uniquely determined because: we make tools, 1944; we're killers, 1953; we share food, 1960s-70s; we swim in the nude, 2013; we throw stuff, 2013; we hunt, 1968; we trade food for sex, 1981; we eat (cooked) meat, 1992; we eat (cooked) carbs, 2015; we walk on two feet, 1809-1899; we adapt to climate change, 1996; and we unite and conquer as an invasive species, 2015. Many of these ideas may have merit, but they share a bias that each proposer believed that it was one well-defined trait that changed ape into man. Critics argue there is nothing in any proposal that causes inevitable change to a man from a toolmaking, stone throwing, meat and potato eating, highly cooperative, adaptable and big brained pre-man.⁴

There is also the view of Social Darwinism and Sociobiology adherents that human morality should be based on the evolutionary process of the survival of the fittest. Individuals, ethnic groups, races, or societies that are most fit survive, and the weak are eliminated....and that is good! Thus, competition and winning are the basis of human morality and ethics. Ethical principles are only good if they allow the human race to survive, otherwise they are irrelevant. These arguments seem to be equally popular among laissez-faire capitalists, Nazi fascists, imperialists, eugenics supporters, nationalists and racists. These ideas have led to so many inconsistent and incompatible ideas that today it is criticized as an inconsistent philosophy, which does not lead to any clear conclusions.⁵ Critics also suggest that although genes might play a role, aggressiveness could as easily be explained by social environment, i.e., is it nature or nurture?

That man has an inherently aggressive nature is also frequently stressed by theologians who find it compatible with the idea of the originally sinful nature of mankind. Do you remember the old comic line "*The Devil made me do it!*" made famous by the comedian, Flip Wilson's Geraldine Jones character?⁶ Some might find it comforting that this suggest our "inherent" violence and war propensities aren't our fault...the devil makes us do it!

Robert Sussman argues that even if there is some truth in aggressive human instincts, it is still possible for humans to deliberately choose NOT to be violent. We need not deny our demons, but we can be masters of our own future. We have the capacity to learn from our past, we need not be governed by it.⁴ Barbara Ehrenreich concludes her book on the origins of war by noting that one new and unique result of the many centuries of war is the arise of the world-wide peace movement and resistance to the institution of war itself. These movements are still very small and feeble relative to their opponents, and often reactive and tardy. But the author feels they are the primary hope against future war.¹

³ Strauss, Mark (2015) *12 Theories of How We Became Human and Why They're All Wrong*, National Geographic, <https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/09/150911-how-we-became-human-theories-evolution-science/>

⁴ Sussman, Robert W. (1999) *The Myth of Man the Hunter, Man the Killer and the Evolution of Human Morality*, *Zygon: Journal of Religion & Science*, Vol. 34, Issue 3, pp. 453-471. Also republished in 2013 as *Why the Legend of the Killer Ape Never Dies*, Chapter 6 in *War, Peace, and Human Nature: The Convergence of evolutionary and Cultural Views* (ed. Douglas P. Fry), Oxford Scholarship on Line.

⁵ Social Darwinism, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Darwinism#Criticism_and_controversy

⁶ The devil made me do it! https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flip_Wilson or <https://news.dailytoast.com/lists/classic-comedian-flip-wilson-s-10-greatest-bits/slide1>

A song for peace from Bob Meroney: “Here is an unusual song/poem by Burl Ives that speaks to the personal loss associated with war. One of my favorites, although it brings tears to my eyes.”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVrQIPY1WAg>



AGGRESSION, VIOLENCE AND CIVILITY AMONG ANIMALS AND HUMANS

Del Benson, Ph.D. is Professor and Extension Wildlife Specialist in the Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology at Colorado State University since 1975 working to connect persons with nature and with other humans.

Can nature study and human history inform thinking about social groups, cooperation, posturing, territorial displays, aggression, violence, civility, and even peace amongst populations of wildlife or humans? These topics are so broad and deep that I suggest reading ecology books and Google searches about animal references. Scholarly accounts of the past from history books or religious books will suggest that humans have been quite violent towards each other over all time. Violent topics are common in **The Story of Civilization**, an 11-volume series by Will and Ariel Durant, the **Bible**, and the **Quran**.

Animals generally have social hierarchies within geographical territories that are defend against others of their species either overtly or subtly. Birds sing and elk bugle to show their locations and to attract mates. Browsing mule deer might ward off another deer, even their own young, that wants to feed in the exact same place without clear signs that the space is being secured. Nests of birds and fish are often protected by at least one parent. Cliff nesting birds tolerate very close proximity to other nests while eagles defend larger spaces.

Male grizzly bears and African lions kill the young of females to initiate estrus allowing breeding and genetic exchange with the new male. Baboons and some monkeys (especially the open grassland species) are quite territorial with violent interchanges under conditions of threat. Other primates (often the tree dwellers) such as chimpanzees and great apes show less physical violence but use posturing for social status and aggressive displays to ward off intruders of the same species.

Most animal species display with songs, feather shows, antler thrashing of the ground, urinating on bellies and bushes, brow lifts, or by driving Mercedes cars to show social standing. Social

order and submission to authority can be maintained by picking bugs and grooming other primates, bearing necks and lowering the tails of submissive canines, cowering behind an aggressive partner, or by not speaking up at board meetings. Do these behaviors promote peace and civility for animals...or human animals? Peace no, civility yes!

It is better to avoid fighting than to fight and lose, so displays are generally adaptive for upward mobility in the social structure. Many species will flee when danger is too near and that is why humans are taught to make noise when in dangerous situations of nature. Some animals give warning sounds such as the chatter of squirrels and trumpeting of elephants. Chimpanzees might pick up sticks to warn intruders or use them in battle if the threat is upon them.

Mock charges of display are frequently a first attempt to bluff the intruder before fleeing or fighting as seen with the neighbor's dog, a bear in the forest, or with candidates at Presidential elections. Even generally gentle animals will fight off predators and other perceived threats. Hikers are told not to get too close to babies in the woods. Human presence could result in the mother disappearing or she might attack aggressively.

Fighting off unwanted suitors is a biologically adaptive strategy to make sure that breeding is taking place with those of similar fur and feather. Animals in situations where fleeing is not an option will likely play dead or fight. Never back a skunk into a corner with no escape route. These imperatives relate to humans also. Cooperation is useful and adaptive...until that strategy does not work! Humans can try to live together, because our big brain affords us intelligent reasoning.

Humans have family and social structures. We create tribes, cities, states, nations, organizations, and levels of authority and responsibility. Disputes can be handled civilly while skirmishes are avoidable...unless there is a greater threat. Humans pick leaders based upon displays of status that could include traits which are physical, psychological, social, economic, designated, assumed, or acquired by aggressive force.

Human civilizations have many attributes, but one major reason for being is the acquisition and distribution of energy. We use energy in the form of reproduction, food, labor, product making, distribution, transportation, securing the supply, and communications about the availability of resources to the rest of community. Ultimately, energy is used to acquire and to protect territories and to locate and secure resources that are needed and wanted for the times.

When resources are scarce, humans can think and solve those problems. Solutions can cause invasions of human territories leading to conflict. Stories of history, whether academic or spiritual, are replete with examples of how humans have maintained and expanded their territories and fought for energy resources, labor, distribution, wealth, and status.

Is peace attainable? No! The hungry will try to eat. The oppressed will grow weary and fight back. Can civility be learned and practiced? I hope so! Humans have the ability to try. Consequences for not trying are grave. Human abilities for destruction are greater today than at any time in history. We have nuclear warheads, remote distribution systems to deliver them, and the appetite for dominance and display. We consume resources at alarming rates and defile the atmosphere, lands, and waters with activities and pollutants that harm nature and ourselves.

We know that we can exert force, but should we use it? Now is the time to focus our big brains on civility and diplomacy. We cannot flee because there is no place to go. We should not fight because that merely leads to more fighting and we learned from the animal world that fighting is only valuable when you win.

Can humans afford to battle nature or each other; or should we use the paradigm of diplomacy and civil actions?

RETHINK THE WAR AND DOMINANCE PARADIGM

William M. Timpson, Ph.D. *has been on the faculty at Colorado State University in its School of Education for many years. What follows is adapted from Timpson's 2009 book, 147 Tips for Teaching Peace and Reconciliation, co-authored with an international group of peace scholars that included Ed Brantmeier, Nat Kees, Tom Cavanagh, Claire McGlynn and Elavie Ndura (Madison, WI: Atwood).*

The telling of history from limited, violence-based perspectives constructs social memory in ways that help to perpetuate violence as inherent, natural, and a human absolute—in short, ‘just the way things are.’ The telling of violent histories saturates collective memory with violent images and struggles of the past; these violent narratives can serve to impact the power of present transformative action toward actualizing nonviolent futures. In *Cultures of Peace: The Hidden Side of History*, Elise Boulding (2000) writes of the war-steeped telling of history as related to western civilization, that history is often written as stories about the rise and fall of empires, a description of the rulers, their armies, navies and air power, their wars and battles, i.e., the history of power—who controls whom.

In this provocative book, Boulding critiques the telling of history from violent, power-dominated, and patriarchal viewpoints. She furthers her argument by providing historical examples of groups and societies who lived relatively peaceful and harmonious lives, solving conflict in nonviolent ways. Examine how you and participants are/were “told” stories in history books and various media. What explicit and implicit messages are reinforced through these narratives? Brainstorm a list of examples of nonviolent historic responses to conflict situations. Who were the key players, leaders, and ‘behind the scenes’ people and groups involved in these conflicts? What methods, besides violence, were used to actualize change? Reflect on how peaceful, nonviolent, and cooperative paradigms might alternatively transform present community, societal, national, and global conflicts into mutually beneficial outcomes for humanity and our fellow planetary inhabitants.

In the photo below, a large mural in Londonderry pictures the violence of “Bloody Sunday” when British troops fired on civil rights marchers, an event that triggered the Irish Republican Army to declare war on the occupying British forces. A very violent two plus decades followed until the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 made for a peace that still holds. The challenge for educators and the community in general is how to tell the story of this history in a way that honors the experiences of all sides to this conflict but also emphasizes the forces of peace that eventually took hold.



ROOTS OF AGGRESSION AND VIOLENCE

Lloyd Thomas, Ph.D. is a longstanding member of the Fort Collins Rotary Club, a licensed psychologist and a life coach with a long history of writing regular columns.

"Aggression" is not the same as "violence." "Violence" is the label we give to extreme forms of aggression. Not all aggressive actions are violent in nature. Not all people with "aggressive personalities" engage in violent acts. Like Brandt F. Steele, M.D. stated in his 1970 essay, *Violence In Our Society*,** most behavioral scientists believe that human beings have "an instinctive drive toward aggression." Dr. Steele writes, "...the fact [is] that human beings are natively capable of being quite aggressive, and that the problem is very much one of the manner in which such impulses are channeled or directed."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has estimated that in the United States alone over "2 million emergency room visits each year are due to violent assaults, and about 16,000 people will be murdered each year. Young men between the ages of 18 and 24 are more likely to be victims or perpetrators of violence. Over a third of American women and over a quarter of American men have experienced stalking or physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner, and nearly half of all American women have experienced psychological aggression from an intimate partner."

In his book, *The New Brain*, R. Douglas Fields, Ph.D. writes, "Violence at political rallies, terrorism, and horrifying workplace shootings bewilder us, but they shouldn't. Traditional approaches to understanding violence seem played out. What we need is an understanding of violence at the level of brain circuitry. Violence, like all human behavior, is controlled by the brain. From the everyday road rage, to domestic violence, to a suicide bombing, the biology of anger and aggression is the root cause of most violent behavior."

Viewing violence narrowly from the perspective of psychological dysfunction shirks the larger truth that the biological roots of rage exist in all of us. The leading risk of death throughout the prime of life is not disease. It is violence. If you survive into old age you will most likely die from disease, but according to CDC statistics for deaths in the United States for the year 2014, "life

ends at the hand of another human so frequently, that from early childhood through middle-age, homicide is the third to fifth most common cause of death in all age brackets between 1-44 years."

In the July 2019 issue of the magazine, *The Rotarian*, Alex Kotiowitz writes, "In Chicago, [between] the years 1990 and 2010, 14,033 [people] were killed, [and] another roughly 60,000 wounded by gunfire. That is more than all those U.S. soldiers killed and wounded in the combined wars in Iraq and Afghanistan." Those wars are ongoing today...2019. He goes on to write, "...here's the thing: Chicago is by no means the most dangerous city, not even close. Its homicide rate doesn't even put it in the top 10."

Kotiowitz makes it clear: "Often considered a physical expression of aggression, violence may be predatory, impulsive, reactive, [vengeful] or defensive in nature. *Violence can develop from situational or environmental and may result from a mental condition or from personal or cultural beliefs.*" (Italics mine).

In today's modern world, most people rarely think that violence or war is good. But they often believe it to be necessary for: defending or gaining territory; economic gain; spreading religious beliefs; strengthening "nationalism"; taking revenge; dismantling an "unjust" government; resolving disputes/conflicts; freeing oneself from fear (creating "security"). They believe that these goals can be attained only by using weapons in violent aggression.

Human aggression seems to be "channeled or directed" by a single dynamic belief: "If I believe that you believe something different than I believe, that gives me the right to act violently against you." History is replete with examples where violence is used to justify one's belief system. John Wilkes Booth killed Lincoln because he held a deep belief in the rightness of the Southern cause, in the Southern ideals and in the Confederacy. Booth actually wrote in his diary, "Our country owed all her troubles to him, and God simply made me the instrument of punishment."

The Christian Crusaders while carrying the banner of God and the Church, killed thousands of infidels. Believing their actions to be righteous and rewarding, jihads kill non-Muslims by the thousands. Parents violently abuse their children thinking they are "teaching them life lessons," or "encouraging better behavior." Our "justice system" uses violent actions (killing) believing that "justice" will be served.

Violence invites retaliatory violence. Killing the enemy creates more enemies. Fearful domination creates passive resistance or active rebellion. In like manner, being heard invites understanding. Cooperation invites teamwork. Addressing physical and psychological needs invites mutual, peaceful activity. Look what happened with the Japanese and western Germany *after* world war two. Peacekeepers need to attempt these risky behaviors *prior to engaging in violence or going to war.*

Steele writes, "It seems obvious that individuals as well as various cultural and social groups tend to use aggression and violence that they consider good or right to enforce their good and right standards." However, someone once said, "You can only fight ideas [beliefs] with other ideas." The threat of violence or violence itself has never been very effective in changing one's mind (beliefs). Multiple studies have shown that previous experience with violent punishment has not prevented the occurrence or recurrence of anti-social behavior.

Dr. Steele concludes: "I refer to the concept that our moral convictions, our superegos, not only give us permission to be violent, but give us great approval for violence expressed in certain directions. These same patterns of violence we then transmit to our children in their earliest, most formative years. We should pay much more attention to the ideals and categorical imperatives that we teach our infants and children. ...we must recognize that the most potent controls and directions of aggression and of violence are those that we learned at our parents' knees.

If we are really to understand the mechanisms of violence and how to control it in our culture, we must pay attention much more than we have in the past to those more forces within us that tell us to direct violence in certain ways, and that enable us all to do evil under the guise of doing good. ...I am almost ready to join with Henry David Thoreau, who said, 'If I knew for a certainty that a man was coming to my house with a conscious design of doing me good, I would run for my life.'"

**The above quotations of Dr. Brandt F. Steele are found in: *THE PHAROS OF ALPHA OMEGA ALPHA*, printed in April, 1970, Vol. 33. No. 2, Pages 42-48 and were used with permission of the Alpha Omega Alpha Honor Medical Society.

PEACE LITERACY PLANNED FOR FORT COLLINS

Paul K. Chappell is an international peace educator and serves as the Peace Literacy Director of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation. He graduated from West Point, was deployed to Iraq, and left active duty as a Captain. He is the author of the seven-book Road to Peace series about ending war, waging peace, the art of living, and our shared humanity. Chappell grew up in Alabama, the son of a half-black and half-white father who fought in the Korean and Vietnam wars, and a Korean mother. Having grown up in a violent household, Chappell has forged a new understanding of war and peace, rage and trauma, and vision, purpose, and hope. He returned to Fort Collins from June 11-13 to lead a series of workshops for school counselors, teachers, parents and community. Emerging from a century of almost continuous warfare combined with the Rotary Foundation's commitment to promoting peace and this current year's focus on literacy, this topic of peace literacy is especially compelling for U.S. citizens, in particular. His website is www.peacefulrevolution.com.

QUESTION: How can we build on the notion of Peace Literacy at every level of education and in every subject area?

PRIORITIES OF THE ROTARY FOUNDATION

In these newsletters of the Rotary District Peacebuilders, we want to invite readers for contributions and ideas, suggestions and possibilities for our efforts to promote the foundational skills for promoting peace, i.e., nonviolent conflict resolution, improved communication and cooperation, successful negotiation and mediation as well as the critical and creative thinking that can help communities move through obstacles and difficulties. The Rotary Foundation has six priority areas: (1) Promoting peace; (2) Fighting disease; (3) Providing clean water; (4) Saving mothers and children; (5) Supporting education; and (6) Growing local economies. It has been argued by staff at Rotary International (RI) that long with promoting peace, "sustainability" is another cross-cutting priority that connects with all the others. RI has

directed efforts in these six areas to enhance local and global impact and staff indicate that their most successful and sustainable projects and activities tend to fall within these areas: See the RI website: <https://my.rotary.org/en/learning-reference/about-rotary/our-priorities>

If you would you like to respond to one of the pieces in this newsletter, check out our blog www.rotarypeacebuilder.com and join the conversation! If you would like to contribute to a future newsletter, visit www.rotarypeacebuilder.com/submit/. The topic for next month's newsletter is on "Unarmed Peacemakers." Future issues are looking at the following: September—Empathy an Ingredient for Peace, Empathetic Civilizations and Utopias; October—Lost Alternatives in Lives, Families, Wealth and the Environment due to War Conflicts; November—Educating for Peace at Every Level: Cooperation, Communication, Critical and Creative Thinking.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

William M. Timpson, Ph.D. *has been on the faculty at Colorado State University in its School of Education for many years and a member of the Fort Collins Rotary Club where his focus on sustainable peacebuilding in Burundi, East Africa, has been supported by two Global Grants. Over the past four decades his work has focused on complex and difficult topics, in particular, issues that include peace and reconciliation, sustainability and diversity. His work includes instructional improvement, curriculum innovation, professional development, educational leadership, and organizational change. In Spring 2014 he served as a Fulbright Teaching Scholar at Kyung Hee's Graduate Institute of Peace Studies in South Korea. In February 2018 he served as an evaluator for the Rotary Peace Center at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia. Study tours to areas of conflict include Israel-Palestine in 2017 and Ukraine-Russia in 2019. If you have questions or ideas, email Bill: william.timpson@colostate.edu*

Robert N. Meroney, Ph.D. *has been an active member of the Fort Collins Rotary Club and regularly researches a range of topics on modern life, issues and politics that serve to spark deeper conversations among friends and colleagues. If you have questions or ideas, you can contact Bob: Robert.Meroney@ColoState.EDU.*

Del Benson, Ph.D. *is Professor and Extension Wildlife Specialist in the Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology at Colorado State University since 1975 working to connect persons with nature and with other humans. Education, research and outreach about nature, outdoor activities, and wildlife conservation on private lands are part of his offerings. He worked for the provincial wildlife agency in Ontario Canada (1973-1975), studied socio-economic wildlife values on private lands in South Africa where he has consulted and led tours, and reviewed hunting and nature conservation on private lands in Africa, Australia, South America, and Europe. His approach to education is to encourage stewardship of nature by multiplying his efforts through community action, workshops, courses, presentations, publications, conservation organization development, and via the Internet: <http://www.LandHelp.info>. Six graduate courses are taught at Colorado State University about leadership and communications, wildlife and natural resources policy, sustainability, wildlife management on private lands, and writings of Aldo Leopold. He is President-Elect of Fort Collins Rotary and previously served as advisor for Fort Collins Rotaract for 8 years. To contact Del, email: Delwin.Benson@ColoState.EDU.*

Lloyd Thomas, Ph.D. is a longstanding member of the Fort Collins Rotary Club, a licensed psychologist and a life coach. In the essay that follows, he extends the example of “Tom” from Northern Ireland and the issues of “blame, accountability and responsibility.” Contact him if you would like to receive his newsletters. He can be reached through email:
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Lindsey Pointer has been working on the use of restorative principles in the criminal justice system. She is a restorative practices facilitator, trainer and researcher and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Restorative Justice at Victoria University in New Zealand with support from a Rotary Global Grant Scholarship and the Fulbright Program from the U.S. State Department. If you have questions or ideas, contact Lindsey: lindseycpointer@gmail.com