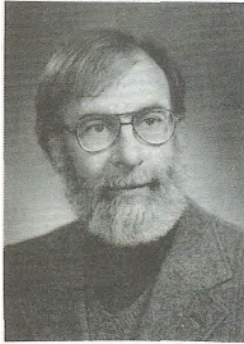


## THE SEVILLE STATEMENT ON VIOLENCE AND WHY IT IS IMPORTANT



DAVID ADAMS is a peace activist and professor of psychology at Wesleyan University in Connecticut. His Ph.D. (1967) in physiological psychology was obtained at Yale with a dissertation on single neurons that fire only during fighting in cats. Since then he has made many contributions to the literature on brain mechanisms of aggressive behavior and is a council member of the International Society for Research on Aggression. Finding his research misused to justify social violence, he has worked on the development of a science of peace. In addition to work on the Seville Statement on Violence, he has authored two books: *The American Peace Movements: History, Root Causes, and Future* (1986) and *Psychology for Peace Activists: A New Psychology for the Generation Who Can Abolish War* (1987).

### Summary

The Seville Statement on Violence, reproduced here, specifically rejects the various myths that war is part of human nature and concludes that "the same species who invented war is capable of inventing peace." It is gaining endorsements by scientists and scientific organizations, mass media, and in school texts and curricula around the world. Its importance is underscored by evidence that many young people erroneously believe the myth that war is intrinsic to human nature and that these young people are less likely to take part in action for peace.

The Seville Statement on Violence, drafted by 20 scientists from around the world on May 16, 1986, rejects the various myths that war is part of human nature and concludes that "the same species who invented war is capable of inventing peace." The statement, reproduced here in full, specifically rejects five myths: (1) that we have inherited a tendency to make war from our animal ancestors; (2) that war is genetically programmed into our human nature; (3) that in the course of human evolution there has been a special selection for aggressive behavior; (4) that humans have a "violent

*Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, Vol. 29 No. 3, Summer 1989 328-337

© 1989 Sage Publications, Inc.

brain"; and (5) that war is caused by instinct or any single motivation.

The Seville Statement is gaining increasing recognition by scientists and scientific organizations. Originally sponsored by Spanish UNESCO and written by a group composed largely of members of the International Society for Research on Aggression, it has since been endorsed by such organizations as the American Anthropological Association, the American Psychological Association, and Psychologists for Social Responsibility. In addition to these and other U.S. endorsements, it has been endorsed by the Czechoslovak UNESCO Commission, the Danish Psychological Association, the International Council of Psychologists, the Medical Association for Prevention of War (London), the Mexican Association for Biological Anthropology, the New Zealand Psychological Society, the Norwegian Psychologists for Peace, and the Polish Academy of Sciences.

The message of the statement has been increasingly carried by the mass media and is finding its way into textbooks and school curricula. The most recent mass media presentation was in the special issue devoted to war and peace of *Psychology Today* (June 1988), which originated from the endorsement of the Seville Statement by the American Psychological Association. Detailed news of endorsement, mass media and school presentations, and similar information is available in the Seville Statement Newsletter, available from the author of this article.

To some extent the importance of the Seville Statement is obvious. In the last few decades there have been many articles and programs in the mass media devoted to the theme that warfare is inevitable or, at least, difficult to eradicate, because it is somehow ingrained in human nature. Related to this are findings that from 25% to 60% of all young people believe that war is intrinsic to human nature. For example, we found that 33% of young people responded "very much" or "somewhat" when asked, "Do you agree with the following statement: 'Wars are inevitable because human beings are naturally aggressive creatures?'" (Bosch & Adams, 1987). An older study by Granberg (1975) found that 63% of college students agreed with the proposition that "human nature being what it is, there will always be war," and 42% agreed with the proposition that "the roots of war are in man's basic nature."

There are also quantitative data that indicate the importance of the Seville Statement and its message. Scientific studies in Finland and in the United States have found that young people who believe that war is intrinsic to human nature are less likely to believe that they can do anything for peace, and they are less likely to take action for peace. The initial results came from Riitta Wahlstrom, an educational psychologist in Finland. She reported a negative correlation between belief that war is intrinsic to human nature and belief that "you personally can do anything about nuclear war." The data from her study are reproduced in the top panel of Table 1 (Wahlstrom, 1984).

The Finnish data were replicated twice in the United States. As shown in Table 1, students at Wesleyan University gave similar results in 1985 and again in 1986. Those who believe that war is intrinsic to human nature are less likely to believe that they can do anything personally about nuclear war (Bosch & Adams, 1987).

Finally, we carried the research one step further and showed that students who reject the myth that war is intrinsic to human nature are most likely to engage in action for peace. Results were obtained from two questionnaires. The first questionnaire obtained attitudinal measures. The second questionnaire, administered one month later, obtained a quantitative measure of peace activities during the preceding month, that is, the month following the attitudinal questionnaire. Results are shown in the bottom panel of Table 1 (Bosch & Adams, 1987).

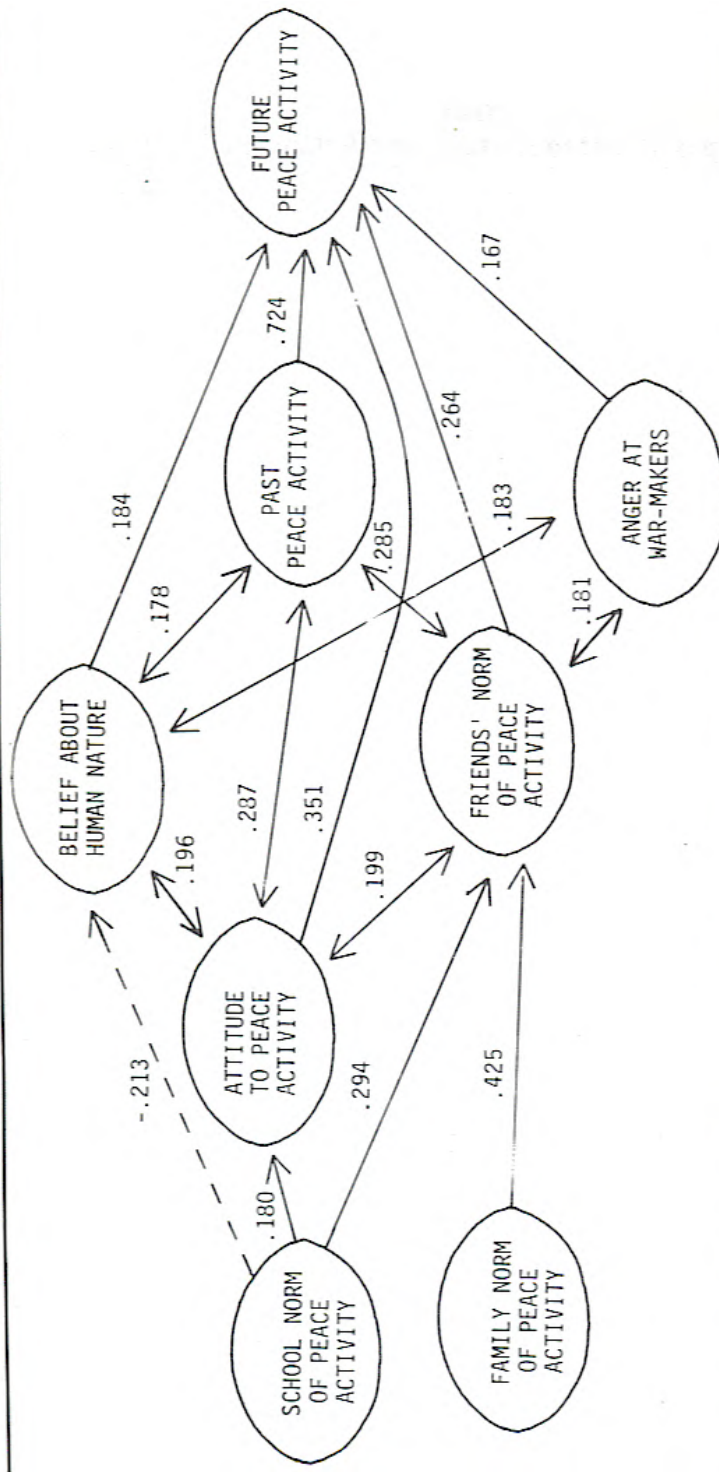
To put the attitudes about human nature and war into their proper context in the determination of peace activism, the questions about these attitudes were embedded in a questionnaire that probed other factors as well. These other factors included the attitudes of one's friends, family, and school, and the question "Do you feel angry when you think about those who are responsible for the nuclear arms race?" The results were analyzed by partial correlation techniques and are presented in Figure 1.

The various factors in peace activism are positively inter-correlated for the most part. The attitudes of family, friends, and school directly or indirectly support the subject's anger and/or attitude about the efficacy of peace activity, which, in turn, affect the subject's belief about human nature and level of peace activity. Even after these correlations are partialled by appropriate computer techniques they remain statistically significant.

**TABLE 1**  
**Relationship of Belief to Attitude and Activity in Three Studies**

		Do you believe war is intrinsic to human nature?	Do you think that you personally can do anything about nuclear war?		Are you engaged in activity for peace	
Finland			Yes	No or Don't know		
1984	No	35	60	95	(29%)	
(Wahlström)	Don't know	13	50	63	(19%)	
	Yes	48	121	169	(52%)	
		96	231	327		
		29%	71%			
		$\chi^2 = 4.2, p = .02$ one-tailed				
USA (Wesleyan)		Yes	No or Don't know	Yes	No	
1985	No	12	9	21	12	21 (35%)
(Bosch and Adams)	Don't know	2	9	11	9	12 (20%)
	Yes	5	20	25	24	27 (45%)
		19	38	57	15	45
		33%	67%	25%	75%	
		$\chi^2 = 6.3 p < .02$ one-tailed			$\chi^2 = 4.8 p < .02$ one-tailed	
USA (Wesleyan)	Agreement:	Very much or Somewhat	Very little or Not at all	Activity Score		
1986				8 or more	7 or less	
(Bosch and Adams)	No or Very little	30	24	54	24	54 (56%)
	Somewhat	9	20	29	16	29 (30%)
	Very much	6	7	13	12	13 (14%)
		45	51	96	44	52
		47%	53%	46%	54%	
		$\chi^2 = 3.6 p < .05$ one-tailed			$\chi^2 = 9.3 p < .001$ one-tailed	

One correlation is negative, however, and it supports the need for changes in the way we teach social science. There is a negative correlation between school norm on peace activity and belief about human nature. This negative correlation resulted from the fact that we drew the sample for our larger study from both Wesleyan University (a rather elite school) and from students at a nursing program and from a community college. Students at the elite school tended to believe more in the myth that war is intrinsic to human nature, while they reported more support from their school for peace activism, a paradoxical combination.



**Figure 1: Structure of Peace Activity**

SOURCE: The arrows represent all correlations that were significant after partialling for other factors. All correlations are positive except for the negative correlation of school norm on peace activity with belief about human nature. School and family norms are treated as antecedent factors because family is not chosen by the subject and school was chosen well before the time of the study. Future peace activity is treated as a subsequent factor because it was measured one month later than the other variables and concerned only activities taking place during that month. Other arrows are bidirectional because there was no way to determine the direction of causal effects. Data are from 126 students from three schools, 114 of whom completed the follow-up action questionnaire as well as the initial attitudinal questionnaire.

Students at the community colleges tended to reject the myth that war is intrinsic to human nature but reported little support for peace activism from their school. How should we explain this paradox? The most likely explanation seems to be that social science courses at the elite university emphasize human nature explanations such as the use of sociobiological arguments in sociology courses and the use of genetic explanations of intelligence, personality, and other such traits in psychology courses. Community college students, on the other hand, seem to be less influenced by such trends in social science teaching. If this explanation is correct, it gives all the more reason why dissemination of the Seville Statement and incorporation of its message into social science curricula could play an important role in the historical task of abolishing war.

#### REFERENCES

Bosch, S. & Adams, D. (1987). The myth that war is intrinsic to human nature discourages action for peace by young people. In J. M. Ramirez, R. A. Hinde, & J. Groebel (Eds.), *Essays in Violence*. Seville, Spain: University of Seville.

Granberg, D. (1975). War expectancy: Some further studies. *International Journal of Group Tensions*, 5, 8-25.

Wahlstrom, R. (1985). On the psychological premises for peace education. Paper presented at Third European Conference of International Society for Research on Aggression, Parma, Italy.

Reprint requests: David Adams, Professor of Psychology, Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT 06457.

#### STATEMENT ON VIOLENCE

Believing that it is our responsibility to address from our particular disciplines the most dangerous and destructive activities of our species, violence and war; recognizing that science is a human cultural product that cannot be definitive or all-encompassing; and gratefully acknowledging the support of the authorities of Seville and representatives of the Spanish UNESCO; we, the undersigned scholars from around the world and from relevant sciences, have met and arrived

at the following Statement on Violence. In it, we challenge a number of alleged biological findings that have been used, even by some in our disciplines, to justify violence and war. Because the alleged findings have contributed to an atmosphere of pessimism in our time, we submit that the open, considered rejection of these mis-statements can contribute significantly to the International Year of Peace.

Misuse of scientific theories and data to justify violence and war is not new but has been made since the advent of modern science. For example, the theory of evolution has been used to justify not only war, but also genocide, colonialism, and suppression of the weak.

We state our position in the form of five propositions. We are aware that there are many other issues about violence and war that could be fruitfully addressed from the standpoint of our disciplines, but we restrict ourselves here to what we consider a most important first step.

**IT IS SCIENTIFICALLY INCORRECT** to say that we have inherited a tendency to make war from our animal ancestors. Although fighting occurs widely throughout animal species, only a few cases of destructive intraspecies fighting between organized groups have ever been reported among naturally living species and none of these involve the use of tools designed to be weapons. Normal predatory feeding upon other species cannot be equated with intraspecies violence. Warfare is a peculiarly human phenomenon and does not occur in other animals.

The fact that warfare has changed so radically over time indicates that it is a product of culture. Its biological connection is primarily through language, which make possible the coordination of groups, the transmission of technology, and the use of tools. War is biologically possible, but it is not inevitable, as evidenced by its variation in occurrence and nature over time and space. There are cultures that have not engaged in war for centuries, and there are cultures that have engaged in war frequently at some times and not at others.

**IT IS SCIENTIFICALLY INCORRECT** to say that war or any other violent behaviour is genetically programmed into our human nature. While genes are involved at all levels of nervous system function, they provide a developmental potential that can be actualized only in

conjunction with the ecological and social environment. While individuals vary in their predispositions to be affected by their experience, it is the interaction between their genetic endowment and conditions of nurturance that determines their personalities. Except for rare pathologies, the genes do not produce individuals necessarily predisposed to violence. Neither do they determine the opposite. While genes are co-involved in establishing our behavioural capacities, they do not by themselves specify the outcome.

IT IS SCIENTIFICALLY INCORRECT to say that in the course of human evolution there has been a selection for aggressive behaviour more than for other kinds of behaviour. In all well-studied species, status within the group is achieved by the ability to cooperate and to fulfill social functions relevant to the structure of that group. Dominance involves social bondings and affiliations; it is not simply a matter of the possession and use of superior physical power, although it does involve aggressive behaviours. Where genetic selection for aggressive behaviour has been artificially instituted in animals, it has rapidly succeeded in producing hyperaggressive individuals; this indicates that aggression was not maximally selected under natural conditions. When such experimentally created hyperaggressive animals are present in a social group, they either disrupt its social structure or are driven out. Violence is neither in our evolutionary legacy nor in our genes.

IT IS SCIENTIFICALLY INCORRECT to say that humans have a "violent brain." While we do have neural apparatus to act violently, it is not automatically activated by internal or external stimuli. Like higher primates and unlike other animals, our higher neural processes filter such stimuli before they can be acted upon. How we act is shaped by how we been conditioned and socialized. There is nothing in our neurophysiology that compels us to react violently.

IT IS SCIENTIFICALLY INCORRECT to say that war is caused by instinct or any single motivation. The emergence of modern warfare has been a journey from the primacy of emotional and motivational factors, sometimes called "instincts," to the primacy of cognitive factors. Modern war involves institutional use of personal characteristics such as obedience, suggestibility, and idealism, social skills such as language, and rational considerations such as cost-calculation, planning,



and information processing. The technology of modern war has exaggerated traits associated with violence both in the training of actual combatants and in the preparation of support for war in the general population. As a result of this exaggeration, such traits are often mistaken to be the causes rather than the consequences of the process.

We conclude that biology does not condemn humanity to war, and that humanity can be freed from the bondage of biological pessimism and empowered with confidence to undertake the transformative tasks needed in this International Year of Peace and in the years to come. Although these tasks are mainly institutional and collective, they also rest upon the consciousness of individual participants for whom pessimism and optimism are crucial factors. Just as "wars begin in the minds of men," peace also begins in our minds. The same species who invented war is capable of inventing peace. The responsibility lies with each of us.

Seville, May 16, 1986

David Adams, Psychology, Wesleyan University, Middletown (CT)  
USA

S. A. Barnett, Ethology, The Australian National University, Canberra,  
Australia

N. P. Bechtereva, Neurophysiology, Institute for Experimental Medicine  
of Academy of Medical Sciences of USSR, Leningrad, USSR

Bonnie Frank Carter, Psychology, Albert Einstein Medical Center,  
Philadelphia (PA) USA

Jose M. Rodriguez Delgado, Neurophysiology, Centre de Estudios  
Neurobiologicos, Madrid, Spain

Jose Luis Diaz, Ethology, Institute Mexicano de Psiquiatria, Mexico D.  
F., Mexico

Andrzej Eliaz, Individual Differences Psychology, Polish Academy of  
Mexico Sciences, Warsaw, Poland

Santiago Genoves, Biological Anthropology, Institute de Estudios  
Antropologicos, D. F., Mexico

Benson E. Ginsburg, Behavior Genetics, University of Connecticut,  
Storrs (CT) USA

Jo Groebel, Social Psychology, Erziehungswissenschaftliche  
Hochschule, Landau, Federal Republic of Germany

Samir-Kumar Ghosh, Sociology, Indian Institute of Human Sciences,  
Calcutta, India

Robert Hinde, Animal Behavior, Cambridge University, UK

Richard F. Leakey, Physical Anthropology, National Museums of  
Kenya, Nairobi, Kenya

Taha H. Malasi, Psychiatry, Kuwait University, Kuwait

J. Martin Ramirez, Psychobiology, Universidad de Sevilla, Spain

Federico Mayor Zaragoza, Biochemistry, Universidad Autonoma,  
Madrid, Spain

Diana L. Mendoza, Ethology, Universidad de Sevilla, Spain

Ashis Nandy, Political Psychology, Center for the Study of Developing  
Societies, Delhi, India

John Paul Scott, Animal Behavior, Bowling Green State University,  
Bowling Green (OH) USA

Riitta Wahlstrom, Psychology, University of Jyvaskyla, Finland

Reprint requests: David Adams, Ph.D., Department of Psychology,  
Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT 06547.