An Encyclopedia of War and Ethics

Edited by
DONALD A. WELLS

GREENWOOD PRESS
West port, Connecticut • London

HUMAN NATURE AND WAR. Since the beginning of civilization, it is likely that people have wondered if war and social violence are inevitable results of human nature, or whether they are social inventions that could be replaced by the invention of peace and nonviolence. After all, war seems to he as old as civilization itself. The earliest known cities were surrounded by walls that evidently were erected to defend against armed attack.

In modem times, the theory that war is determined by human nature has been popularized by writers such as Thomas Hobbes* (1588-1679) in the 16th century, by Social Darwinists such as Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) in the 19th century, and more recently by Konrad Lorenz (1966) and Edmund O. Wilson (1975). The Social Darwinists made use of the evolutionary theory of Charles Darwin (1809-1882), while Lorenz and Wilson used information from recent scientific studies of animal behavior.

A great deal of publicity has been given to these recent claims that war is inherent in human nature. The most prestigious publishing houses, journals, and hook reviews have given wide coverage to each new supporter of this point of view. Although the question is not new, it would seem to have taken on a new urgency in the past few years.

Why at this moment of history has the question become so important? We may speculate that in the past, when there seemed no chance to abolish the institution of war, the question was confined to philosophical speculation. Now, however, the abolition of war is on the agenda of history. The advent of nuclear weapons has transformed international war to the point that even the winner could he totally destroyed. With the end of the Cold War*, the United Nations* has begun to realize the potential for which it was created, "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war."

Given its new relevancy, the question of the nature of war needs to be addressed in realistic fashion, using the sharpest analytic methods of the natural and social sciences. It was for this reason that twenty eminent scientists were convened in Seville, Spain, for the UN International Year of Peace in 1986. They came together, in conjunction with a meeting of the International Society for Research on Aggression, to answer the question: "Do modern biology and social sciences know of any biological factors that are an insurmountable or serious obstacle to the goal ol world peace?" They brought to Seville the results of studies about animal behavior, psychology, brain research, genetics, and other related issues.

Among the studies brought to Seville, two played an especially important role in their formulation of the question: "The Behaviors and the Genetics of Aggression," by the celebrated behavioral geneticist, Benson Ginsburg, and "The Biological Basis of Warfare," by the founder of animal behavior studies in the United States, John Paul Scott.

The twenty scientists concluded that "biology does not condemn humanity to war" and that "the same species who invented war is capable of inventing peace." They based their conclusions on live propositions, abbreviated in the following presentation:

1. It is scientifically incorrect to say that we have inherited a tendency to make war from our animal ancestors. Although lighting 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 ol tools designed to be weapons. The fact that war has changed so radically over lime indicates that it is a product of culture.

2. It is scientifically incorrect to say that war or any other violent behavior 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 he 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.

3. It is scientifically incorrect to say that in the course of human evolution there has been a selection for aggressive behavior more than for other kinds of behavior. 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.

4. It is scientifically incorrect to say that humans have a "violent brain." While we do have the neural apparatus to act violently, it is not automatically activated by internal or external stimuli. How we act is shaped by how we have been conditioned and socialized.

5. It is scientifically incorrect to say that war is caused by "instinct" or any single motivation. The emergence of modem warfare has been a journey from the primacy of emotional and motivational factors, sometimes called "instincts," to the primacy ol 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 text of the Seville Statement has been reprinted over a hundred times in more than thirty languages, some of which are listed below in the bibliography. UNESCO, which adopted the Seville Statement in 1989, has produced a brochure that includes the text, commentary, and :i bibliography that includes supporting scientific documentation.

The Seville Statement on Violence has been endorsed by numerous scientific organizations, including the American Anthropological Association, American Psychological Association, and American Sociological Association.
Of course, other issues have arisen that were not dealt with in the Seville Statement on Violence. For example, in another publication it has been pointed out that "biology does not make men more aggressive than women." Also, a controversy has arisen recently about whether there is a biological

factor that makes people tend to distrust or be aggressive toward others who are of different racial or ethnic groups. The latter is expected to be addressed soon by a group of experts similar to those who gathered in Seville.

Some criticism of the Seville Statement exists, as pointed out in the pages of the .*Seville Statement Newsletter*, which has been published three times a year since 1986 and is distributed now by the International Peace Research Association. Most prominent have been complaints from specialists who feel that the statement implies that they should discontinue their search for biological factors in war. Therefore, one should point out, when using the statement, that research should be continued because conclusions in science are never linal and must he constantly revised in the light of new data. In the words of the statement itself, one must recognize "that science is » human cultural product which cannot be definitive or all encompassing."

The Seville Statement notes that the tasks of constructing peace are not only institutional and collective, but "also rest upon the consciousness of individual participants lor whom pessimism and optimism are crucial factors. Just as 'wars begin in the minds of men,' peace also begins in our minds." This has been studied scientifically. It was found that those young people who believed that war is intrinsic to human nature were less likely, when asked in a subsequent questionnaire, to have taken part in any activity for peace. Apparently, they believed that since war was inevitable, such activity was of no use.

Belief that war is intrinsic to human nature is widespread. It was found in a cross-cultural study of 5,000 university students from eighteen nations published in 1972 that about half of them believed that "war is a result of the inherent nature of men." Other studies have confirmed these results.
Given the widespread belief in the biological inevitability of warfare and the effect of this attitude on people's behavior, it is clear that the debate on this question needs to be expanded to include as many people as possible. The Seville Statement on Violence can play a useful role in this debate, although new materials, including those based on new research, need to be developed as well.

See BANALITY OF EVIL; FEMINISM AND WAR; MILITARY TRAINING, BASIC; PSYCHIC NUMBING; WOMEN IN THE MILITARY.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adams, David, "Biology Docs Not Make Men More Aggressive Than Women," in *Of Mice and Women*, K. Bjorkqvist and P. Niemela, eds. (London: Academic Press, 1992). 17-25.

———— . *The Seville Statement on Violence: Preparing the Ground for the Constructing of Peace* (Paris: UNESCO, 1991).

Adams, David, and Sarah Bosch, "The Myth That War Is Intrinsic to Human Nature Discourages Action lor Peace by Young People," in *Essays in Violence,* Martin Ramirez.. Robert Hinde, and Jo Groebel, eds. (Seville: University of Seville, 1987), 121-37.

Barnett. S. A.. "Models and Morals: Biological Images of Man." in *Multidisciplinary Approaches to Aggression Research,* Paul P. Brain and David Benton. eds. (Elsevier: North Holland Biomedical Press, I981). 515-29.

Eckhardt, William. "Crosscultural Theories of War and Aggression." *International Journal of Group Tension* 2, no. 3 (1972), 36-51.

Ginsburg, Benson E., and Bonnie F. Carter, "The Behaviors and the Genetics of Aggression," in Essays in Violence, Martin Ramirez, Robert Hinde, and Jo Groebel, eds. (Seville: University of Seville Press, 1987), 121-37.

Leeds, Anthony, and Valentine Dusek, "Sociobiology: A Paradigm's Unnatural Selection Through Science, Philosophy, and Ideology," *Philosphical Forum* 13 (1981), 1-35.

Lorenz, Konrad, On Aggression (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966).

Scott, John Paul, "The Biological Basis of Warfare," in *Essays in Violence*, Martin Ramirez, Robert Hinde, and Jo Groebel, eds. (Seville: University of Seville Press, 1987), 121-37.

"The Seville Statement on Violence," Unesco Courier 46 (February 1993), 40 (published in 32 languages).

Wilson, Edmund O., Sociobiology: The New Synthesis (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975).