

THE DAWN WARRIORS - Man's Evolution toward Peace.
An Atlantic Monthly Press Book, Little, Brown & Co.
Boston, Toronto, 1969

Robert Bigelow

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This theory assumes that warfare began more than a million years ago. Many modern authorities reject this assumption. But is it reasonable to assume that birds never migrated before 3000 B.C., merely because we have no eyewitness records? Five thousand years of savage warfare during historical times do not suggest a million years of prehistoric peace. Men have been hanged for murder without having been caught in the act.

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The essence of this thesis is that the ability to learn cooperation was actually favored by the selective force of warfare. The "highest" human qualities were demanded by the "lowest" human qualities, with such force and constancy that the size of the brain trebled very rapidly. Cooperation requires communication. Communication is achieved through signs and symbols, and symbolic thought is required for higher mathematics. There was a powerful biological reason for loving neighbors: this was the most effective defense against the hatred of foreigners. The Golden Rule appears quite naturally under these conditions. As neighbors become more numerous, and the scale of social cooperation expands, the Golden Rule tends to embrace the entire



earth. Warfare may thus contain the seeds of its own destruction.

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The editors of Life, in their Epic of Man, have informed the general public that warfare began in the cities of Sumer only a few thousand years ago. With very few exceptions, this is the assumption of our modern authorities. It is a very sweeping assumption indeed, and it contradicts an enormous body of historical evidence. We might expect, therefore, that it is based on an even more enormous, and more convincing, volume of actual evidence of prehistoric peace. But prehistoric peace is very rarely supported with evidence. It is merely taken for granted. Gordon Childe and ~~Charles~~ Charleton Coon both say that prehistoric men probably engaged one another in mortal combat, but most modern authorities convey an impression of almost idyllic prehistoric peace.

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In a book called Four Thousand Years Ago, Geoffrey Bibby follows the sun around the earth, describing the birth of the second millennium B.C. As the mists of the third millennium dissolve in the growing light, a gentle panorama of childish peace unfolds before our eyes. The sleepy Egyptian who steps from his doorway has heard of war (his legends tell of Falcon Kings and Conquest) but he knows little of this, and cares less; he has even heard of raids into the delta during the past year or two, but this too is far away and in the background of his mind. In Mesopotamia a small band of workmen have heard of Sargon the Great, who died nearly three hundred years ago, and they are sufficiently aware of the threatening Elamites and Amorites east and west of them to keep their bronze-tipped spears ready to hand. There is a ~~hint~~ hint



of latent violence in this semicivilized dawn, but a capitalist revolution is under way, replacing the older, communist form of administration, and the future holds great promise. In the Indus valley "Mongols", negroid Dravidians*, and beak-nosed Armenoids mingle amicably in the broad streets, trading cloth and oil and flour. These are the semicivilized regions, where war has begun to appear on the human scene, but even here men are mercifully unaware of the savage furies the second millennium holds in store.

* Bibby describes these Dravidians as "dark, almost negroid," but Carleton Coon says that insofar as they were not caucasoid, Dravidians were australoid, not negroid.

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In the mists of Bibby's peaceful dawn it is not easy to find the prototypes of the warriors who are to rend and tear each other's flesh throughout the second millennium B.C. This terrible storm will break without warning. Bibby's dawn provides scant grounds for predicting that Joshua will be commanded by his Yahweh to kill all who breathe in the cities that worship other gods in the Promised Land. If we accept the vision of primitive peace that our scholars unfold before us, we must be forgiven if we fail to understand the apparent depravity of civilized man.

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In 1964 Bertram S. Kraus made this remarkable statement: ((quote title of book))

The acquisition of the upright posture rendered this Primate hors de combat. He was short of the weapons, agility, speed, acuity of senses, and bodily protection which had hitherto allowed him to compete successfully with other members of the Animal Kingdom and to adapt to his total environment. No longer could he withstand the direct forces of the natural environment. The equipment so carefully developed over hundreds of millions of years of evolutionary selection was "suddenly" stripped from him.

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With such strong leanings toward speculation, it is strange that there has been so little on the possibility of prehistoric warfare. There is no dearth of evidence upon which it could be based. For example, Georges Roux reports that Kathleen Kenyon unearthed a remarkable settlement at Jericho, surrounded by a strong city wall of undressed stone which has been radiocarbon-dated at 6800 B.C. The wall was built almost nine thousand years ago. Would the descendants of men who had survived for millions of years without stone wall defenses have built it for protection from lions? Did they build it for exercise? Or did they build it for protection from the one distinctively warlike animal species? Page 189

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According to the prehistoric peace doctrine, Australian aborigines should have been living in peace before the Europeans arrived. Carleton Coon says they represent the survival, with very little change, of a cultural level found elsewhere between 70,000 and 100,000 years ago, and that they were not, and are not, peaceful. Russel Ward, however, describes them - under the heading "Mild Aborigines" - as the most primitive and peaceable peoples known in history. This judgment, of course, is relative. In the eyes of men who think in terms of total retaliation, the aborigines are peaceful in comparison.

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These examples do not support the doctrine of prehistoric peace, and very few authorities have defended it with evidence. Back in the 1930's, however, Elliot Smith made a commendable effort to do this in a series of detailed descriptions of the behavior of more than twenty groups of living peoples who were at, or only just beyond, the food-gathering stage. His survey led him to this conclusion: "So long as he is free from the disturbing influence of civilization the nomad is by nature a happy and well-behaved child, full of generous impulses and free from vice."

Although they would not state it in these exact words, most modern authorities seem to agree

with Smith's general view that primitive men were by nature peaceful. His evidence seems to have been almost unanimously accepted. To my knowledge, this view has not been supported by any more convincing evidence, yet attempts to refute it are very rare in the modern literature.

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He cites many examples of the "innocence" of primitive men. The Salish Indians of British Columbia, for example, are described in these words. "What is most pleasing to the stranger is to see their simplicity, united with sweetness and innocence, keep step with the most perfect dignity and modesty of deportment."

The Paiute of Nevada are another tribe cited by Smith as proof of primitive peacefulness. He said they were peaceful "as a rule", and though they were "not so bright in intellect" as the prairie tribes, they displayed more "solidity of character" in resisting the "vices of civilization."

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The Punan of Borneo evoke idylls of morality and peacefulness. Smith referred to an account of them by Professor M'Dougall [sic] as "one of the most charming pictures ever drawn of the uncivilized peoples of the world." They lived in Central Borneo, surrounded by notorious headhunters who dominated the more favorable sites on the river banks. The Punan wandered peacefully through the forests without crops or domestic animals. Smith quotes a description of the behavior of the Punan in the presence of more warlike men:

When gathered in friendly talk with strangers, even those whom they have every reason to trust, they prefer to remain squatting on their heels, rather than to sit down on a mat; and the tension of their muscles,

combined with the still, alert watchfulness of their faces, conveys the impression that they are ready to leap up and flee away or to struggle for their lives at any moment. It is doubtless this alertness of facial expression and bodily attitude that gives the Punan something of the air of an untameable wild animal.

Such behavior is not surprising in people who are trying to live peacefully in the hunting grounds of headhunters, without losing their heads. Most civilized men would take small pride in descent from ancestors like the Punan, and such people will probably make a very modest contribution to the future gene pool of Homo sapiens.



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If the preagricultural way of life is conducive to peaceful behavior, we should expect such behavior in all these tribes. The prehistoric-peace hypothesis assumes that peace prevailed for at least a million years between all humans everywhere; violent intergroup competition is excluded wholesale as a possible factor in human evolution. Such a sweeping hypothesis cannot be proved by selecting apparently peaceful groups out of a great mass of contrary evidence. Smith ignored the rest of the Indians who were living near the Salish tribe, and at the same cultural level. When we consider the behavior of these other tribes it is easy to understand why the Salish Indians dipped their arrows in rattlesnake venom.

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Smith cites also the northern Ojibways (Chippewas) as an example of the peacefulness of primitive man. Leechman says there was no "Organized" warfare among these people, but that friction between them was so constant that they might easily decide it was safer to kill strangers than to risk being killed themselves. This may be called self-defense rather than warfare, but it has evolutionary effects nevertheless.

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The Punan of Borneo, like the Paiute of Nevada, seem to have been peaceful through sheer force of circumstances rather than "by nature". Smith concedes ~~that~~ that they would fight back if attacked, when there was "no choice of flight." If a relative was murdered, they would seek an opportunity of planting a poisoned dart in the body of the murderer. But, like the Paiute, they could not compete with the military organizations of the surrounding tribes. Their peacefulness, then, was like that of modern prisoners of war - or that of the Australian aborigines who stood with only boomerangs and spears in their hands before the Europeans.

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Several of Smith's allegedly peaceful peoples, such as the Punan, were not really living under preagricultural conditions. They were in close contact with agricultural peoples, and were therefore unsuitable as examples of human reactions to an early Stone Age environment. The Veddas of Ceylon, Two Malayan tribes, a Sumatra tribe, New Guinea and Philippines tribes, were all cited by Smith as examples of the mildness of primitive man. All these peoples were surrounded by warlike agricultural peoples, and their "peacefulness" was imposed on them by force. If they are excluded as a likely source of evidence bearing on human social reactions in a prehistoric environment, Smith's roster of "primitive" peoples is left with the

Lapps, Samoyeds, and Ostiaks, which he lumped as "Siberians." "Siberians" lived near the homeland of Huns, Mongols, Russians, and other mobile warriors, and it is clear from Russian history that they did not always greet invaders with open arms or bowed heads. A similar physical environment, in northern Canada, has also failed to ensure purely peaceful social interactions. The behavior of people under such conditions today cannot be regarded as representative of human behavior everywhere during the Pleistocene, but it still shows clearly that warfare takes place between pre-agricultural groups, even where population densities are very low.

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Elliott Smith contends that primitive "children" do not fight "by nature". They do so only when threatened by other men. This is not a peculiarity of primitive men - it is what we all do. Highly civilized men can live in huge, congested cities without constantly seeking each other's heads as trophies, and without continually threatening to spear one another. If threatened, or if they imagine themselves threatened, civilized men can fight with very destructive weapons, but they do not do this for mere sport, or to release an "innate" and uncontrollable urge. Many an English soldier has envied gentlemen in England then abed, on the eve of the battle in which he was killed.



Smith could have found more convincing evidence of "peacefulness unless disturbed by the influence of civilization" in Sweden. Sweden has refrained from warfare despite civilized influences that must have been very disturbing indeed. Surely this is more commendable than peacefulness due merely to lack of provocation.

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Smith's contented state of happy peace might be desirable to many people, but he does not explain how to achieve it. His revulsion from the trend towards centralization and megalopolises is shared by Aldous Huxley and Lewis Mumford, who advocate a return to autonomy within decentralized groups. However, our historical records and the anthropological studies of today's primitive people suggest that this cure for the ills of civilization might be worse than the disease.

Ashley Montagu believes in the peacefulness of primitive men with a missionary zeal as fervid as Elliott Smith's. He warns that we are in great danger today because we are beset by myths, one of the most insidious of which is the belief that our susceptibility toward warfare is "innate."
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Ashley Montagu has recently mustered a platoon of "innate peace" authors in an attack on the implications of Lorenz and Ardrey that we are innately aggressive. The book edited by Montagu, Man and Aggression, was reviewed by S.L. Washburn* - who said that Montagu's interpretation of primate behavior is as inaccurate and biased as Ardrey's. According to Washburn, the gentle, cooperative nonhuman primate is as much a product of the imagination as the killer ape. Montagu's contingent asserts repeatedly in this book that nonhuman primates do not kill other members of their own species, but Washburn exposes these statements as false. Macaque monkeys kill macaques, and langur monkeys kill langurs.

* New York Times, October 5, 1968

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Ritchie Calder* says it is now generally recognized that healthy wild primate societies do not fight seriously either within or between bands, and that the innate relationships among primates are more civilized than the Geneva Convention. The italicized words can be used to mold evidence into almost any desired interpretation.

* Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London, Series B, 251 (1966), pp.451-455

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F. Clark Howell refers to this great evolutionary event as follows:

In addition to stopping abruptly, the classic Neanderthaler is replaced with equal abruptness by people like ourselves. There is no blending, no gradual shading from one type to the other. It is as if modern men came storming in and dispossessed the Neanderthalers - perhaps even killed them.*

((quote))

*Carleton Coon suspects that there may have been more blending between the two types of men than this statement implies.

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William Howells deals with the problem in these words:

And the conservative position is to view the Upper Paleolithic people as Whites, coming in and displacing Neanderthals. Of course, this eviction did not happen overnight. Nor do we know how it happened, and whether we may imagine the two kinds of men doing battle to the death. But almost certainly they did not. The newcomers might, in fact, have extinguished the Mousterians simply by more successful hunting, getting the game first. But the two might have met, even peaceably, and with some slight interbreeding; however,

in Europe at least, the probabilities are against more than this. For they would have been naturally hostile competitors, having different ideas and speaking different languages, like the Navahos and the Pueblos, or the Iroquois and Algonquin - and we should not suppose that such tribes were any more openminded about foreign competition than we are. Furthermore, there were probably important spots, avenues of game, or critical passes, such as the meeting of the valleys at Les Eyzies. There must have been real rivalry for command of these, just as bands of Australian aborigines view infringement of their rights to water holes as fighting matter. *[my italics.]*

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