



# BEYOND WAR

THE HUMAN POTENTIAL FOR PEACE

**DOUGLAS P. FRY**

FOREWORD BY ROBERT SAPOLSKY

# Beyond War

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*The Human Potential for Peace*

Douglas P. Fry

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To Hanna, Heather, Jeremy, Geoffrey, Caroline,  
Tyler, Zachary, Kayla, and other members of  
the next generations

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## Foreword

People often get a bit nutty when considering ideas about the “inevitability” of human behavior. Such notions come in many forms. For example, there’s the idea that it is preordained that females will be inferior to males at math. Or that certain genes determine certain behaviors. Or that it is inevitable that a guy will take a hostile view toward his dad having a penis.

Some of the time, these conclusions arise from confusing correlation with causality, or problems with discerning statistical relationships, or failing to understand the idea of biological vulnerability and interaction with the environment. And some of the time, they are just plain weird, complete with *fin-de-siècle* Viennese froth.

I’ve fallen for this myself. I’ve studied baboons in East Africa for decades. In the process, I’ve gotten to know my nearest neighbors, nomadic pastoralist Masai tribespeople. Until I had kids of my own, the only ones on earth I’d been repeatedly exposed to were Masai kids, and my own peers, growing up in Brooklyn. And based on that data set, here is something that I firmly believe is an inevitable human behavior: Once a boy discovers that if you inflate a balloon and let the air out, it will make a noise, it becomes universal and inevitable that he will do this by the butt of one of his friends, claim that said friend has gas, and get the giggles.

So, as I said, people get a little nutty.

One of the truly well-entrenched realms of It-Is-Inevitable-That is that it is inevitable that humans will be violent and that human societies will wage warfare. Sometimes a view like this comes with a pretty foul agenda. Consider Konrad Lorenz, co-founder of ethology, expert on bird behavior, and Nobel laureate. In the 1960s, in his hugely influential book *On Aggression*, Lorenz proclaimed that human aggression is universal and inevitable. The stance he took makes considerable sense—Lorenz was a venomous racist, a man who used his academic pulpit in Germany to write Nazi propaganda poisonous enough to turn one's stomach, a man who went to his death insisting that he spent the thousand-year Reich communing with the little birdies that he studied. Don't blame people if they're violent—they're just following their inevitable biological orders.

But you don't have to be Lorenz to believe in the inevitability of human violence. Anyone noticing the blood-drenched world we live in would have to take that idea seriously. And academics of various stripes have as well.

Students of primatology and human evolution sure thought this. The 1960s saw the rise of the Robert Ardrey/man-the-territorial-hunter/big-cojones school of human evolution. Drawing upon the social system of the savanna baboon as a surrogate for our formative history in the savanna, the conclusion was that we are by nature a violent, stratified, male-dominated species. Jane Goodall's work with chimps seemed to confirm this further, demonstrating murder, cannibalism, organized group violence, and something resembling genocide among our closest relatives.

The game theorists were awash in the inevitability of violence and noncooperation as well. The heart of game theory, the Prisoner's Dilemma game, repeatedly showed that good guys

finish last, that the first individual who spontaneously starts cooperating in the game is competitively screwed for the rest of time, as the noncooperators snort derisively at the naiveté. Neuroendocrinologists weighed in also. Testosterone increases aggression, as it increases the excitability of parts of the brain relevant to aggression; girls inadvertently exposed to testosterone prenatally become more aggressive.

And, naturally, none of this is true.

Even those violent chimps and baboons can reconcile after fights, have cooperative, altruistic relationships, can even establish and transmit cultures of low aggression. Then there are the bonobo chimps, a separate species that is as genetically related to us as are chimps, a species that is female-dominated, has remarkably low rates of aggression, and solves every conceivable social problem with every conceivable type of sex. The game theorists, meanwhile, have spent recent years revealing the numerous circumstances that select for cooperation rather than competition even in competitive games drenched in realpolitik. And normal levels of testosterone turn out not to cause aggression as much as exaggerate preexisting social tendencies toward aggression; without the latter, testosterone doesn't remotely translate into inevitable aggression.

In this superb book, Douglas Fry gives lie to the inevitability of violence by surveying another set of disciplines, namely, cultural anthropology, archaeology, and human paleontology. He trashes the urban myth of inevitable aggression in numerous ways. These include documenting the varied human cultures with minimal or no intra- or intergroup violence, exploring the social systems and ecosystems that predispose toward cultures without warfare and their social mechanisms for sidestepping group violence, revealing the mistakes in classifications that have given rise to erroneous

labeling of certain societies as warlike. The book also reveals other mistakes that infest this literature: A virtuosic chapter analyzes the fatal flaws in a famed, canonical study that seemingly displays the reproductive, evolutionary benefits of murder in an indigenous society.

All this is done in a way that is encyclopedic and authoritative. And well-written, and often moving, and surprisingly often—given such an intrinsically dour subject—funny. It seems inevitable at this point in a foreword to list the sorts of people who should read this book—jurists, legislators, parents, butchers, bakers . . . Instead, I will avoid another supposed inevitability and simply say this book should be read. It is important.

Robert M. Sapolsky

## Preface

When I first began studying anthropology, one aspect of the discipline that appealed to me was its breadth. Where do we come from? What is our nature? What does it mean to be human? Why do we behave the way we do? What are the prospects for our future? Anthropology addresses big questions. Literally the "study of humankind," anthropology lends itself to a *macroscopic perspective*. It focuses not just on the present, but also on the past. It seeks to understand specific cultures as well as recurring patterns that span societies. Anthropology simultaneously embraces the biosocial diversity and uniformity of humanity.

There is a natural tendency to think in terms of the here and now of everyday life. But as we enter the twenty-first century, many of the challenges facing humanity demand a broader context. The macroscopic perspective of anthropology, with its expansive time frame and culturally comparative orientation, can provide unique insights into the nature of war and the potential for peace. A cross-cultural perspective shows, for instance, that humans everywhere seek justice—although the paths to justice vary. Some entail violence but others do not. Much violence, in fact, stems from people defending their rights or attempting to correct injustices. Anthropological and historical cases show that it is possible to replace violent means of justice seeking with nonviolent approaches. Herein lies a broader lesson for creating and maintaining peace.

A macroscopic anthropological view suggests that it would be possible to replace the institution of war with more effective, less brutal ways of seeking security, defending rights, and providing justice for the people of this planet. In an era of nuclear missiles and other weapons of mass destruction, trying to achieve security through the threat or use of military force is like trying to perform heart surgery with a chain saw. For the good of us all, we must replace the war system with viable institutions for creating peace, delivering justice, and guaranteeing security.

In adopting a view that spans millennia and crosses cultural space, I draw on data from many anthropological fields: archaeology, hunter-gatherer research, ethnographic descriptions of particular societies, comparative cross-cultural studies, research on cultural belief systems, and applied anthropology (a field that focuses on real-world problem solving). The book also includes theory and data from fields beyond anthropology, for example, behavioral ecology, game theory, animal behavior, and evolutionary biology. The goal is to attain a view of the human capacities for violence and peace that is as complete and integrated as possible.

In my experience, some people, accustomed to the international war system, assume that it simply is not possible to find better ways to resolve differences and to assure security. However, the wealth of anthropological data considered in this book suggests otherwise. Humans have a tremendous capacity for resolving conflicts without violence. In today's world, we need to apply these skills in new ways and on a grander scale. We need to think in new, bolder ways about creating realistic alternatives to war. Too often, short-term, shallow security analyses prevail over more comprehensive planning for a secure future. Rather than focusing exclusively on narrow issues, such as how many fighter jets to order this year or what to do about

the local "hot spots" most likely to erupt into violence this month, we need to address a set of broader, critically important questions that are centrally relevant to providing genuine, long-term safety and security for the people of the planet. How can we improve the quality of life for all humanity, reduce the social and economic inequalities that foment hostility, hatred, and terrorism, and create new procedures and institutions for providing justice and resolving differences without war? In short, at the global level, how can we replace the law of force with the force of law?

A central goal of this book is to thoroughly explore how anthropology contributes to understanding war and peace. I hope to challenge existing ways of thinking about war, peace, security, and justice. These are topics that concern each and every one of us on this interdependent planet where we all breathe the same air and would perish together in the same nuclear winter. By questioning traditional thinking, I hope that the book will promote reflection, discussion, and action for a safer world.

Helsinki, Finland  
June 8, 2006



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# Beyond War

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# 1

## Charting a New Direction

*Many ideas in science seemed crazy at one time but are now regarded as being settled, either having been laid to rest (as in the case of cold fusion) or firmly established (as in the case of plate tectonics, which grew out of an earlier "crazy" theory of continental drift). . . . But, even the weirdest theories of science must pass one rigorous test or be discarded: their predictions must be in agreement with phenomena observed in the physical world.*

—ROBERT EHRLICH, *NINE CRAZY IDEAS IN SCIENCE*

This book takes the road less traveled. It examines how cultural beliefs about war bias scientific interpretations, affect perceptions of human nature, and may even close our minds to the possibility of developing alternatives to armed conflict. The book reexamines existing interpretations against the actual evidence in an attempt to untangle fact from fantasy. As we will discover, there is a lot of fantasy floating around out there. A thorough review of the evidence leads, first, to a critique of the status quo picture of war and human nature—here dubbed the "man the warrior" perspective—and, second, to the construction of a new interpretation of human aggression. The book argues that warfare is not inevitable

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and that humans have a substantial capacity for dealing with conflicts nonviolently. There are ways to move beyond war.

A sleuthing analogy may help to clarify what this book is all about. Imagine that Holmes and Watson don't know the sex of a person who has just moved into their neighborhood, but they have heard that the new neighbor lives alone. Walking by the house on Saturday afternoon, they observe the following clues. The name on the mailbox is Tyler Geoffrey. The pickup truck parked in front of the house has a somewhat sexist bumper sticker that, in advertising Carol's Pizzeria, attempts to humorously equate women with pizza. Glancing in the side window of the truck, Holmes astutely observes that the driver's seat is adjusted far back from the steering wheel. Based on these facts, the obvious conclusion is that the new neighbor is a man. It seems crazy to argue that a tall, pickup-driving, sexist person named Tyler might be a woman.

According to the "man the warrior" view, humans (especially males) are warlike by nature. Advocates of this perspective forge a tight evolutionary link between chimpanzee and human violence, emphasize sex differences in aggression, and recite a litany of barbarity, atrocity, and brutality to support this portrait of humanity. The validity of this "man the warrior" view may seem rather obvious; after all, we all know that humans make war and that wars always seem to be raging somewhere. However, a different—but *not* polar opposite—perspective will be suggested in this book. According to this new view, clearly humans are capable of creating great mayhem, but they also have a remarkable capacity for working out conflicts without resorting to violence. Specifically, a careful reexamination of the actual evidence will lead us to the conclusion that humans are not warlike by nature.

If this sounds improbable to some readers, I must beg for indulgence and ask that we suspend judgment until we examine the evidence and arguments. Data from a vast array of archaeological and ethnographic research will give us a comprehensive picture that leads to new interpretations. This view is broader, by far, than merely looking at current political events or using data from a single academic field, culture, or time period.

To express the challenge in terms of our sleuthing analogy, how solid is the seemingly obvious conclusion that Holmes and Watson's new neighbor is a man? Bear in mind that our sleuths haven't actually seen the person. We can begin to question assumptions. What if Tyler Geoffrey was the previous resident's name? What if Tyler in this case actually is the name of a woman? What if the pickup truck belongs to someone else? Or, assuming that the truck in fact does belong to the new neighbor, aren't some women tall? And don't some women drive pickup trucks? It is even possible, although perhaps not probable, that a woman could own a truck displaying a bumper sticker that most women would shun. What if she borrowed the truck from a male friend for moving? The main point is that the initial "obvious" conclusion rests on a set of assumptions and may be absolutely wrong.

Similarly, I propose that the evidence supporting the "man the warrior" view of humanity is in fact very limited. And, as unlikely as it might sound at first, most of the assumptions of this neo-Hobbesian view are simply flawed. The way to evaluate this issue is to look carefully at the evidence and the arguments.

Holmes and Watson realize that if they really want to be sure that their new neighbor is a man, they should look for more clues. Watson proposes that they knock on the door to say, "Welcome to the neighborhood." Unfortunately, no one responds, but while



they are waiting, Holmes surveys the interior of the house through an adjacent front window. Watson knocks a second time and looks displeased, noticing that Holmes is not so subtly peering through the window.

Holmes has noticed a small table near the front door and partly under the front window. Holmes also can see across the living room to a bar-height kitchen counter. On the table near the front door Holmes notes a hairbrush with long dark hairs, a makeup kit, and a key ring containing five keys and a small plastic figure of Snoopy. Scattered on the living room sofa, which faces the window, Holmes spies a violet sweater, the unread daily newspaper, a cookbook, and two magazines—*Better Homes and Gardens* and an issue of *Glamour* with model Heather Graham on the cover. The room has various cardboard moving boxes, some open, some sealed. A signed photograph of actor Jeremy Irons protrudes from one of them. Looking across the living room, Holmes scans a miscellaneous assortment of small items on the kitchen counter. One item in particular catches Holmes' attention, a plastic bottle brightly labeled "Multivitamins plus Iron."

In light of this more extensive investigation, Holmes and Watson are ready to modify their initial conclusion. They still have not been able to gather all of the information they hoped for—meeting the new neighbor face-to-face—but they have been able to collect many new clues by looking in the window. Moreover, they have weighed the importance of different types of information in their minds to arrive at a comprehensive judgment. Watson remarks to Holmes as they continue their walk, "I've seen more women driving pickup trucks than single men's homes with stuff like that." Holmes replies, "Precisely, Watson. And also consider what paraphernalia were *not* there."

A careful reevaluation of the evidence will lead our thinking in a new direction. It will reveal how the human potential for conflict resolution tends to be underappreciated, whereas warfare and other forms of violence tend to be emphasized, exaggerated, and naturalized. Exposing this bias has real-world significance. Naturalizing war creates an unfortunate self-fulfilling prophecy: If war is natural, then there is little point in trying to prevent, reduce, or abolish it. After all, if we can't help being warlike, why should we even bother resisting such tendencies? The danger of assuming that humans are fundamentally warlike is that this presumption may help justify "doing what comes naturally." It also may contribute to an exaggerated fear that naturally warlike "others" are eager to attack us. Harboring such assumptions also can stifle the search for viable alternatives to war: Why attempt the "impossible"?

This book presents a novel slant. It brings some largely neglected yet highly relevant anthropological findings to center stage. It offers a new perspective. A wealth of cross-cultural information exists on conflict management from around the world. This book draws on this bounty of anthropological material, for instance, to illustrate how conflict resolution occurs in cultures everywhere, to document that numerous nonwarring societies exist, to unearth archaeological evidence on the very recent beginning of war, and to explore the nature of peace and aggression among nomadic hunter-gatherers. A consideration of nomadic hunter-gatherer bands will form the centerpiece of a new evolutionary perspective on aggression. We will travel to the Arctic, Australia, Africa, and beyond to examine the nomadic hunter-gatherer adaptation close up. The resulting fresh perspective will rest soundly on anthropological data, much of which previously has been ignored or dismissed.

A macroscopic view suggests that humans have the *capacity* to replace the institution of war with international conflict resolution procedures to ensure justice, human rights, and security for the people of the world—social features that are sorely underdeveloped in the current international war system. This conclusion, as we will see, stems from a comprehensive review of the anthropological data on war, social organization, conflict management, and human evolution. Such a macroscopic anthropological perspective, spanning evolutionary time and cross-cultural space, is considerably broader than most current-day political perspectives. It can provide novel insights about the possibilities of achieving and maintaining peace.

The “man the warrior” perspective is well entrenched in Western thinking. This is not surprising because the belief that war is part and parcel of human nature has a long history. Thomas Hobbes philosophized in *Leviathan*, published in 1651, on the natural state of war; renowned psychologist William James saw humans as naturally bellicose; Sigmund Freud devised a death instinct to account for some forms of human destructiveness.<sup>1</sup> But it is an often ignored fact that scientists and scholars, as human beings, are members of a culture too. Like everyone else, they are exposed to cultural traditions and worldviews that influence their thinking and perceptions. When the learned and shared beliefs of a culture hold that humans are innately pugnacious, inevitably violent, instinctively warlike, and so on, the people socialized in such settings, whether scientists or nonscientists, tend to accept such views without much question.

One example of how cultural beliefs about the naturalness of war are reflected in scholarship involves the landmark treatise *A Study of War*, by judicial scholar Quincy Wright.<sup>2</sup> Wright observed that

some societies in his large cross-cultural sample were nonwarring but, nonetheless, he classified the whole sample within four categories of war. Consequently, the nonwarring societies were labeled as engaging in war because there simply were no alternatives such as "peaceful" or "nonwarring" in the classificatory scheme. This creates a false impression that all societies make war. Wright's war classification is merely one example of research that reflects a belief bias in Western culture that war is natural.

Another example that we will consider in this book involves the inordinate amount of attention given to one anthropological article on the South American Yanomamö. At the same time, published critiques of the article are swept under the rug.<sup>3</sup> The article purports to show that men who have participated in killing someone have more children than men who have not killed anyone. This particular finding has achieved celebrity status, being reiterated over and over again. The implication is that this finding tells us something extremely important about evolution and human nature: Evolution may well have favored killers and warriors over their less violent peers. If so, then "man the warrior" tendencies have evolved as part of human nature.

Similarly, another finding that has been played up as having the utmost relevance for understanding the origin of human warfare is that chimpanzees at Gombe Reserve in Tanzania killed off members of a neighboring group one by one. Similar behavior may have occurred among other chimpanzees also. In any case, why should this type of behavior among *chimpanzees* be repeatedly touted as so important for understanding *humans*? And why do writers taking this approach simultaneously brush over unaggressive bonobos—a species that is just as closely related to humans as are chimpanzees—and instead link humans to so-called killer chimps?

Again we see a "man the warrior" bias in models that continue to favor chimpanzees over bonobos for drawing inferences about human nature. Primatologist Frans de Waal points out that "reconstructions of human evolution [if based on bonobos instead of chimps] might have emphasized sexual relations, equality between males and females, and the origin of the family, instead of war, hunting, tool technology, and other masculine fortes."<sup>4</sup>

In researching this book, I have encountered example after example of how primatological, archaeological, and cultural findings are interpreted so as to bring them into line with prevailing cultural beliefs about the warlike nature of humanity. Quite frankly, I did not anticipate encountering such a pervasive bias.

Proposing an alternative to the well-established "man the warrior" view will undoubtedly generate controversy and resistance. Controversies tend to become polarized. Shades of gray are forcefully relabeled as either black or white. The middle ground evaporates and recondenses at the poles, representing the most extreme views. But as physicist Robert Ehrlich points out, "The nice thing about ideas in the sciences is that they can be supported or refuted by data."<sup>5</sup> I propose that a fresh, comprehensive consideration of the facts will reveal that a new perspective on war and peace makes a lot of sense *because it corresponds closely with the actual evidence.*

A common pitfall involves conceptually muddling war and other types of aggression. We will see several examples of the confusion that this creates. So let me make it very clear that when I express the conclusion that warfare was a rare anomaly through most of prehistory, I am *not* denying the existence of other forms of violence—fights, murders, executions—over evolutionary time. Similarly, when I argue that warfare is not an evolutionary

adaptation, I am in fact talking about warfare, not all forms of human aggression. When I suggest that humanity could abolish the institution of warfare, my conclusion is based on a study of the anthropological material, not a blind faith that humans are angels. On the world stage, there will always be a need for police and jails, laws and courts, and arbitrators and mediators. Abolishing war will not mean an end to conflict. It will mean that conflicts are handled in less destructive ways.

Toward the end of the book, we will consider practical applications of a macroscopic anthropological perspective for understanding, preventing, and diminishing war. By drawing comprehensively on anthropological material, I will argue that potentially war could be replaced by international conflict management procedures and institutions to effectively handle disputes in the twenty-first century and beyond. Rather than jumping immediately into the exploration of real-world applications such as these, we must build a necessary foundation and consider the anthropological findings on war and peace from diverse cultural settings and across millennia. To start out, let's turn our attention to the powerful sway that cultural beliefs hold over each and every one of us and how this affects our views of human nature.

## 2

### Do Nonwarring Societies Actually Exist?

*During the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war, and such a war, as is of every man, against every man. . . . No arts, no letters, no society, and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death, and life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.*

—THOMAS HOBBES, *LEVIATHAN*

A batch of recent books from archaeology, primatology, and psychology echo a Hobbesian theme: Humans are warlike by nature. *The Dark Side of Man* melodramatically asserts: "We live in a world in which cheaters, robbers, rapists, murderers, and warmongers lurk in every human landscape." An evolutionary psychology textbook explains that "human recorded history, including hundreds of ethnographies of tribal cultures around the globe, reveals male coalitional warfare to be pervasive across cultures worldwide." *Demonic Males* argues that human warfare has ancient evolutionary roots: "Chimpanzee-like violence preceded and paved the way for human war, making modern humans the dazed survivors of a continuous, 5-million-year habit of lethal aggression."<sup>1</sup>

With some variation from author to author, this portrayal of humanity claims that warfare is ubiquitous or nearly so. Humanity

is warlike. Nonwarring societies are dismissed as virtually or totally nonexistent. Some authors propose that even the simplest and oldest type of society, the nomadic hunting-and-gathering (foraging) band, is warlike. Lawrence Keeley writes, for example, "There is nothing inherently peaceful about hunting-gathering or band society." Other researchers assert that "no truly peaceful foraging people has ever been found or described in detail." As a theme spanning such arguments, not only is warfare viewed as pervasive across cultures, but it also is assumed to be an extremely ancient practice. Additionally, some authors propose that warring, assaulting, raping, and murdering have an instinctual basis—that evolutionary processes have favored warfare and other forms of violence.<sup>2</sup>

Some years ago, biologist Edward O. Wilson posed and then answered this question: "Are human beings innately aggressive? . . . The answer to it is yes. Throughout history, warfare, representing only the most organized technique of aggression, has been endemic to every form of society, from hunter-gatherer bands to industrial states." Many people concur. College students from Connecticut and Florida filled out attitude surveys designed to assess beliefs about war and human nature. Respondents were asked if they agreed that "war is an intrinsic part of human nature" and that "human beings have an instinct for war." Approximately half the students linked war to human nature and instincts. It is not difficult to find expression of such views. *Time* magazine published a letter from a reader that stated: "Modern psychology tells us it is the genetically determined, typical male aggression, the 'dark side of man,' that helps men climb the corporate ladder." I once chatted with a man who had lived through World War II as well as the Korean, Vietnam, and Gulf Wars. He stated with absolute certainty: "There always has been war and there always will be war."<sup>3</sup>



One possibility is that this view of humanity represents an accurate reflection of reality. On the other hand, such interpretations may merely reflect a commonly shared cultural belief in Western society that war is natural and inevitable. Cultural belief systems contain "notions of the nature and attributes of humanity. They decide whether we are good, evil, or neutral." As learned and shared phenomena, "belief systems tend for the most part to reside at the level of assumptions and presuppositions."<sup>4</sup> They usually are at work on a subconscious level. Certain beliefs may diverge sharply from hard observation and evidence, but nonetheless people tend not to question the validity of such beliefs. Indeed, it may not occur to them to question their beliefs because they have already adopted them as part of their cultural heritage. The statement that "there always has been war and there always will be war" may well be a reflection of a shared belief whose veracity is assumed and widely accepted without systematic testing. For many people, the supposed truth of the statement is patently obvious, and having lived through several wars only entrenches that sentiment.

Beliefs about human nature and war also are implicitly reflected in many Western writings about war, including those by scientists and scholars as notable as Thomas Hobbes, Jonathan Swift, Thomas Huxley, William James, Sigmund Freud, and Francis Crick, who like other people tend to accept their culture's belief system without question.<sup>5</sup> People in Semai society tend not to question the existence of supernatural spirits called *mara'*; they simply know that they exist. Zapotecs tend not to question that a sudden fright can cause a disease called *susto*. So it is with cultural beliefs. They are simply accepted by cultural insiders most of the time.<sup>6</sup>

Do all societies really engage in war? Is there evidence of war going far back over the course of human evolution? If the answer to these questions is yes, then the view that war is ancient, natural,

and inevitable gains support. If the answer is no, this view is undermined. We don't have to vote on the question, for, to repeat physicist Robert Ehrlich's comment, "the nice thing about ideas in the sciences is that they can be supported or refuted by data."<sup>7</sup> In the remainder of this chapter, we will examine whether warfare occurs in all cultures or not. In future chapters, we will consider data on the antiquity of war.

## Warfare and Feuding from a Cross-Cultural Perspective

In a cross-cultural study of warfare, Carol and Melvin Ember presented their findings on the frequency of war in 186 societies from around the world in two ways: first, for all the societies in the sample, and second, for only the societies not pacified by a colonial or national government. For the whole sample, which is called the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample (SCCS), warfare was reported as "absent or rare" in 28 percent of the societies ("absent" meant absent and "rare" meant less than once in ten years). For nonpacified societies only, the Embers found warfare to be "absent or rare" in 9 percent of the sample.<sup>8</sup>

Drawing conclusions about warfare frequency from this research turns out to have a wrinkle or two. The Embers defined war so broadly as to encompass feuding and revenge killings when undertaken by more than one person: "a warfare event could involve the ambush of a single person of an 'enemy' group."<sup>9</sup> The inclusion of feuding and revenge killings in the Embers' tally of war is an absolutely crucial point to consider if one wants a meaningful assessment of the ubiquity of war.

Including under "warfare events" feuding and revenge homicides if conducted by two or more persons both increases the number

of societies that are reported to practice war and raises estimates as to how often warfare presumably occurs within these societies. For example, this practice leads the Embers to report, not surprisingly, that the Andaman Islanders warred "every year." By contrast, Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, who conducted fieldwork among the Andamanese, writes that "fighting on a large scale seems to have been unknown amongst the Andamanese." Other experts conclude that the Andaman Islanders had feuds but that "war between whole tribes does not seem to have occurred" and that "true warfare did not exist, and there was not even much fighting or feuding."<sup>10</sup>

Try this thought experiment: When you read that a given culture makes war every year, what mental image do you form about what is going on? I'll wager my paycheck that the words "makes war" immediately bring to mind substantially more carnage than the ambushing of a single person.

The overall conclusion based on the Ember and Ember study can be stated as follows: Even when *war* is defined so broadly as to include individual instances of blood revenge and feuding, it is still "absent or rare" in 9 percent to 28 percent of the societies in a large cross-cultural representative sample of societies, depending on whether one includes only unpacified societies or all the societies in the sample.

Keith Otterbein has been studying war, feuding, and other forms of violence since the 1960s.<sup>11</sup> He defines *feuding* as blood revenge that follows a homicide and distinguishes it from *warfare*, defined as "armed combat between political communities."<sup>12</sup> Based on ethnographic data for fifty cultures from around the world, Otterbein found that four societies (8 percent of the sample) never engaged in war.<sup>13</sup> Clearly, the vast majority of Otterbein's sample practiced warfare, but not all. Taking a comprehensive overview of

North American cultures, Harold Driver concluded that whereas feuding sometimes existed, "most of the peoples of the Arctic, Great Basin, Northeast Mexico, and probably Baja California lacked true warfare before European contact."<sup>14</sup>

Turning for a moment to feuding, cross-cultural studies show that rates of feuding vary from one society to the next, and that feuding, like warfare, is not present in all societies. Keith and Charlotte Otterbein found blood feuding to be absent in 56 percent of a sample of fifty societies from around the world and infrequent in another 28 percent of the sample. Psychologists Karen Ericksen and Heather Horton investigated blood feuding using the 186 SCCS societies, the same cross-cultural sample used by the Embers in their study of warfare. They found that the classic blood feud—when both the malefactor and his relatives are considered to be appropriate targets of vengeance—exists in 34.5 percent of the societies. Overall, some form of kin group vengeance was considered legitimate in 54 percent of the cross-cultural sample and not legitimate in the remaining 46 percent of the societies. Even in societies where kin group vengeance was socially permitted, by no means was it always carried out.<sup>15</sup>

Viewing these two cross-cultural studies of feuding in tandem shows that approximately half of the societies in the samples allow blood feuding and half do not, and even when it is socially permitted, other approaches for dealing with grievances are often adopted in place of seeking vengeance. As we will explore in Chapter 7, feuding can be seen as a judicial mechanism—a way that aggrieved parties seek their own justice.

It is important to define terms such as *war* and *feud* clearly to avoid confusion. A biologist commented that "war—lethal conflict—is older than humanity itself."<sup>16</sup> By such a general conception of war as lethal conflict, the killing of even one individual by another, even