



# Human Cruelty - A Built-in Default

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## COMMENTARY

The history of mankind is overloaded with violence between individuals (e.g., Cain and Abel), tribes (e.g., Hutu and Tutsi in Africa) and nations (e.g., Japan-China war; Korea war; World Wars I and II; Vietnam war). Frequently, the violence arose in fights over resources and territory (e.g., colonialism), religious control (e.g., early Christianity, Muslim Jihad), and racism (e.g., white and black people), but also from envy and hatred with seemingly no comprehensible benefits (e.g., the mass extermination of the Jypsys, Jews and Armenians). This seems an elementary difference between humans and all other members of the animal kingdom. While the developed brain of homo sapiens enabled world-wide population, high-tech living, improved health and longer life span, it also facilitated inventions of terrible killing devices that sadly have been used even in the modern era. The main reason that prevents from use of mass-destructive nuclear warfare, in light of the Hiroshima-Nagasaki experience, is the fear from total extermination of mankind. Instead, we witness nowadays cyber and biological strikes that lead to devastating results. The deadly Covid-19 virus that instigated a worldwide pandemic is an example of a ruthless retaliating act by a regime that ignored its own cost (the large number of casualties is probably meaningless in a population of 1.3 billion), while seeking destruction of the competing Western economy [1].

Not only that the outrageous threats and dangerous acts by radical leaders (e.g., North Korea, Iran and quite surprisingly China and Russia) jeopardize the entire world and may eventually lead to nuclear confrontation, a horrifying inference is that humanity is captured in the hands of fanatics who disregard the most precious value of our civilization - human life, as well as the increasing environmental risks to planet Earth. The violence often involves incredible cruelty and ruthless actions against helpless opponents, including women and children, which questions the basic moral rules and educational values established through thousands of

years of our development. Although perception of cruelty may differ in various societies, it is basically a behavioural offensive that renders discomfort, pain or even death of other humans or animals often with no rational reasoning. Not necessarily would a cruel act satisfy the offensive side as it may just be part of his/her personality and may even be unnoticed. Amazingly, despite the self-perception of mankind as top of either creation (religious) or evolutionary pyramid (scientific), our species seems to be far ahead among all animals in cruelty and violence. Whereas animal 'cruelty' is usually associated with predation, herd leadership, and breeding (increase in testosterone among males), the cruelty among humans (individuals, groups and entire populations) is frequently irrational and may deteriorate into unimaginable terrible actions (often termed by mistake 'animal behaviour'). Attribution of cruelty to only environmental stimuli has proven incorrect in a variety of studies showing astoundingly that it may appear very early in life prior to any noticeable external influence [2,3].

Since a genetic trait for cruelty, namely a combination of expression products of numerous genes that collectively impose a cruel behaviour is hard to contain especially in new-born infants, the puzzling question is why it has been maintained in humans. Without a coherent explanation, a change in perception and the nomenclature used may provide some logic as to the origin and preservation of cruelty in humans. By assuming that cruelty in animals is a built-in urge that developed to support survival (frightening and deterring putative opponents; seizing prey; competing on breeding) it may also exist in humans, a branch in the animal kingdom. Thousands of years of human development toward civilized life might have buried the cruelty urge under educational TABUs, social rules, and emotional restrictions. However, when such an urge outbreaks due to an environmental stimulus or a psychological crush, we obviously fail to understand its basis and the terrible acts associated. Yet, if we consider the cruelty urge a hidden built-in default, we may change the question

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of where it came from into what were the reasons that triggered the outbreak and how could it be prevented. While this rationalization may perhaps explain cruelty outbreaks of individuals or small groups, how to rationalize cruelty outbreaks of large populations (e.g., the 'Final solution' of the Nazi regime; The massacre of the Armenians by Turkey). In such outbreaks there must have been some logical reasoning to follow quite blindly the murderous decisions of the leaders. This could possibly be the outcome of a continuous brainwash, where blaming minorities as the cause for national difficulties enables a corrupted regime to twist the mind of the masses and convince them to cooperate in 'mad' or cruel acts. Of note is the fact that not too far in human history the end results of a war between nations was often total extermination of the defeated side. Although such a cruel action can hardly be understood in the modern era, it seems that despite the developed humanism with consensual TABUs and educational and emotional restrictions, some cruel outbreaks have shown no limits (e.g., 'The Final Solution' by the Nazis). As large-scale (national) assaults followed by unprecedented aggression and cruel actions usually

involved men in uniform (army or police with legal backup and power over others), who readily 'obeyed their orders', we should dig deeper into our conscience and try define our limits, in other words, are there 'built-in' moral restrictions that cannot be ignored under any circumstances (e.g., cruelty outbreaks or illegal orders to kill) including fears from punishment? Unfortunately, a negative answer would mean that our entire developed humanism and civilized manners are illusive.

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