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-Chapter review: Is human aggression taught or instinctual?

While we often think of aggression as maladaptive, it is obvious that under certain conditions aggression is an asset to an animal when it prolongs its life and opportunities for passing its genes to the next generation. Animals are up against thigns from member of their own species as well as from different species, e.g., predators. Man is hardly an exception, and it should occasion no surprise that he is biologically capable of perceiving threat to his existence and reacting to such threats aggressively.

-pp. 36

Selection operated not only on his aggressive potentialities, but on the rest of his social behavior as well. Man is capable of great degrees of cooperation, empathy, sympathy, sacrifice, the deferment of gratification, exceedingly strong bonds to others closely related to him, and extraordinary ties with numerous symbolic constructs involving religious, ideological, and material maters.

-pp. 36

Man is the only animal with language and an adaptation based on the sharing and use of arbitrary symbol systems. He is the only animal with plural role responsibilities and the animal who lives under differential power allocations that can be decided arbitrarily, i.e., without reference to biological attributes.

-pp.37

It does not seem unlikely that we retain, as Darwin suggested, some of these non-verbal communication devices to allay violent actions and reactions, but it also seems certain that there is a heavy cultural or learning component in the genesis of such gestures, and it remains a problem to decide which are universal or specific for different cultures. The fact that they exist in all cultures suggests that conflict is a structural property of human societies. In the human case, the range of stimuli that can evoke aggression is exceedingly varied and complex, and aggressional tendencies can last long beyond the emotional state of anger, and can continue to occur in the absence of the attitude of hostility.

-pp. 38

In general, as the brain grows and so does the child’s reality picture of the world, his expectations of his parents’ and peers’ behavior, and his control of rage. In early stages, rage is sudden, explosive yet quick to subside and be forgotten. With maturation the thresholds for such expression rise, but once exceeded, the rage and anger are longer in duration, and subsequent brooding or hostile periods are prolonged.

-pp. 40

-idea of sustaining hate or rage against people for actions that they have done in the past

The same symbolism that enhances sentimental bonds between kinsmen, and symbolically defined groups outside of biological relationships (clan, tribe, state, nation, ideology), bring in their wake its antithesis: extra- group aggressional tendencies. Role differentiation and intra-group commitments generate frustration, pain and conflict.

-pp. 47