

Nonkilling Societies

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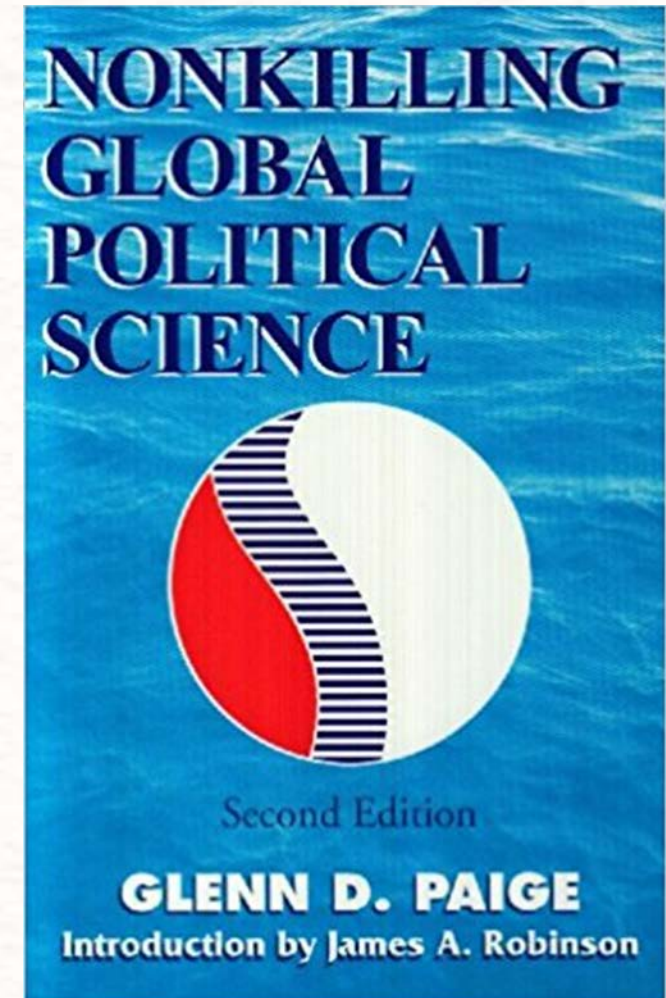
The following chapter summaries and conclusions are from Leslie E. Sponsel, Department of Anthropology, University of Hawai`i, Honolulu, HI, who teaches a course on the anthropology of war and peace. Also, see his course syllabus on this website.

Foreword

Joam Evans Pim

Definition: Nonkilling Society

- A human community,
- smallest to largest, local to global,
- characterized by no killing of humans and
- no threats to kill;
- no weapons designed to kill humans and
- no justifications for using them; and
- no conditions of society dependent upon threat or use of killing force for maintenance or change (NKSocieties, p. 9)



- **Nonkilling societies exist, not a utopian dream, even if largely ignored – systemic bias privileging killing**
- **You cannot understand or achieve something by ignoring it**

- **Amish**

Introduction

Reflections on the Possibilities of
a Nonkilling Society and
a Nonkilling Anthropology

L.E. Sponsel

Rationale for Existence of NK Societies

- Humans and chimpanzees are sibling species, and bonobos are nonkilling
- Nonkilling societies exist, like Semai
- Some societies have transformed from killing to nonkilling, like Waorani
- Even in societies with some killing, most individuals are nonkilling, like Yanomami
- Through contact some “warfare” may have been transformed and intensified, if not originated
- Human nature is resistant to killing, warriors have to be conditioned to kill, and those who kill often have emotional problems
- The overwhelming majority of humans have never killed
- The “simple” hunter-gatherer lifestyle depends on harmony, cooperation, and sharing to survive, and reflects 99% of human existence with war absent to rare
- If humans were genetically programmed to be instinctive killer apes, then the species would likely have become extinct

Nonkilling Anthropology Curriculum

- **Unity and Diversity of Humankind**
- **Professional Values and Ethics in Anthropology**
- **History of Anthropology from War to Peace**
- **History of Colonial and Development Anthropology**
- **Anthropology of Colonialism and Neocolonialism**
- **Cultural Evolution, Change, and Revolution**
- **Anthropology of Violence and War**
- **Anthropology of Nonviolence and Peace**
- **Science, Technology, and Economics as if People Mattered**
- **Quality of Life: Environment, Water, Food, and Health**
- **Anthropology of Environmentalism, Environment, and Gaia**
- **Comparative Religion: Worldviews, Values, and Spiritual Ecology**
- **Alternative Political and Legal Systems**
- **Culture in Conflict Management and Resolution**
- **Problems and Solutions in Applied Anthropology**
- **Human Rights and Advocacy Anthropology**
- **Collaborative Ethnographic Methods**

1. Gentle Savage or Bloodthirsty Brute?

Robert W. Sussman and Donna Hart

- Two polar extreme postures – apes as demonic killers versus gentle beings, no middle, with killer view dominating because reflects early Greek and Christian views
- Medieval myths dominate modern scientific views of human nature, behavior, and morality, as data are interpreted to fit preconceived notions rather than data generating theory
- Predominant view: “Man the Hunter” evolved not only to kill other species as prey, but to eventually hunt their own kind, this as descendants of killer apes
- Territoriality, aggressive dominance hierarchies, and male dominance over females are ideas from Robert Ardrey (1960s), Edward O. Wilson (1970s-), and Richard Wrangham (1990s-), but according to Robert Sussman and Donna Hart these are not universals in primates (including humans)
- According to Wrangham, “coalitional killing” – adult males collaborate to kill or brutally wound other adults – both in chimps and humans – is part of the dominance drive which increases genetic fitness, and that reflects the ancient origin of war inherited from the common ancestry of chimpanzees and humans
- However, the other half – females – “Woman the Gatherer,” not only “Man the Hunter,” the later male bias, and also there is female choice of sexual partners, according to Adrienne Zihlman

2. Not Killing Other People

Piero P. Giorgi

- **Mythologies, popular beliefs, and disinformation heavily influence ideas about the origins of violence and war, such as their supposed prevalence in prehistory and congenital violence.**
- **However, scientific evidence is accumulating to demonstrate the contrary, including the extraordinary plasticity of the human brain from infancy to adulthood, and the importance of cultural conditioning [nurture over nature].**
- **During the Paleolithic (100,000 – 12,000 YA), hunter-gatherer societies emphasized harmony, cooperation, and sharing to survive, one indicator being the prevalence of rock art focused on animal prey instead of interpersonal and intergroup human violence. This is a product of natural selection.**
- **During the subsequent Neolithic (around 10,000 YA), with the domestication of plants and animals facilitating more sedentary and larger communities, more violence and eventually warfare developed. This is a product of cultural selection.**
- **With the evolution of the state (around 5,000 YA), structural violence increased which also fuels warfare.**
- **In modern culture, subconscious habituation to violence is another important factor, such as in the news media, movies, sports, etc.**
- **Nevertheless, a major historical cultural turning point is emerging with the questioning of violence and war (e.g., peace studies), unsuccessful wars (e.g., Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq), and successful popular nonviolent movements toward Neotopia (e.g., Gandhi, civil rights) (see p. 95).**

3. Nonkilling as an Evolutionary Adaptation

**Douglas P. Fry, Gary Schober, and
Kaj Bjorkqvist**

- While competitive aggressive behavior occurs, killing within a species is not normal, nonkilling prevails. Rituals and tournaments minimize risk.
- A comparison of physical aggression across species, including humans, suggests that selection pressures rarely favor killing members of the same species.
- Human societies can be culturally constructed that are virtually free of lethal violence.
- Since human killers tend to be targeted for revenge through execution by family members of their victim, humans may have been selected for the avoidance of killing [cf., Chagnon *Science* 1988].
- In short, nonkilling is an evolutionary adaptation as revealed by evidence from biology, anthropology, and psychology.
- “It behooves us to keep in mind all the murders that never occur in response to all the disputes and grievances that really do occur in human societies everyday” (p. 101).

4. Nonkilling Social Arrangements

Robert Knox Dentan

- In “modern” societies, personal and social disasters favor the formation of small, acephalous, egalitarian, mutual-aid, primary groups--- a primordial form of face-to-face social interaction that tends to inhibit homicide.
- Dentan asserts that usually societies do not become peaceful by choice, but because of circumstances.
- He asserts that the Amish, Hutterites, and Mennonites became pacifists because historically they were defeated and enclaved by the larger state system.
- The exceptions are the intentional alternative communities like the Rainbow Gathering (see Chapter 10).
- Dentan concludes by suggesting that ecocatastrophe may cause the collapse of the state system because capitalism is unsustainable, and some survivors may revert to nonkilling primary groups, others to killing fraternal interest groups.
- Presumably a similar scenario of survival groups might arise after a nuclear war or global climate change disaster.

5. How Can a Society Eliminate Killing?

Peter M. Gardner

- Paliyan hunter-gatherers of southeastern India avoid intentional killing of other humans by self-control, refusing to talk back, and walking away from a conflict to avoid escalation.
- Their society is strictly egalitarian by gender and age, no one holds authority over others, even a parent, husband, or elder.
- They place a premium on warmth and respect in personal relations, and avoid exhibiting any disrespect for another person, a key value.
- They use word play, clowning, or soothing speech to distract and calm a conflict situation.
- Conflict avoidance is an unambiguous strength in maintaining nonviolence and peace within the society.

6. Into the Heart of Darkness

L.E. Sponsel

- Since the 1960s, Napoleon A. Chagnon has persistently described the Yanomami as essentially Hobbesian savages with chronic endemic warfare and other forms of aggression, even though almost all other anthropologists who have worked with them reject his view.
- Following Glenn Paige's suggestion to rethink classic works from the perspective of nonkilling, this essay answers the question of whether the Yanomami are a killing or nonkilling society, or something in between? The answer is the latter.
- It does so based on Chagnon's own ethnography in which there is embedded ample evidence of nonkilling behavior, although this does not deny killing and other violence which he also describes but exaggerates.
- American readers of Chagnon's ethnography, culturally conditioned to be attracted to violence (subconscious habituation), tend to focus on violence instead of nonviolence, and this misses or underestimates the latter.
- Accordingly, this chapter, like a 1998 article in the journal *Aggressive Behavior*, critically challenges and rejects Chagnon's Hobbesian image of the Yanomami.
- Thereby this critical analysis also undermines the views of apologists for war like Stephen Pinker, Edward O. Wilson, and Richard Wrangham who accept Chagnon's account without any reservations depicting the Yanomami as the epitome of tribal warfare and human evolutionary heritage.

7. Menraq and the Violence of Modernity

Alberto Gomes

- Throughout the 20th century and beyond, the Menraq (Semang) forest foragers of Malaysia have been consistently described as irrefutably nonviolent and peaceful.
- Nevertheless, in April 1993, there was an incident of three killings in response to an attempted land grab by outside Malaysians including their attack on the headman.
- This explosion of atypical violence reflected the accumulation of growing external pressures of “modernity” including economic, ecological, and structural violence against the Menraq.
- Author Albert Gomes concludes: “It was an act by a group of people in desperation and experiencing social upheaval who has cast aside their deep sense of nonkilling for just a moment of aberration, an act that will now haunt them for the rest of their lives” (p. 265).
- This is a case study of the transition from nonkilling to killing, although a single aberration from the norm.

8. James Bay Cree Respect Relations within the Great Community of Persons

Richard Preston

- **The Cree foragers of James Bay in Northern Quebec and Ontario in Canada are another case of a nonviolent and peaceful society.**
- **Their spiritual hunting ethic emphasizes the maintenance of respectful relations with all persons in the greater community which includes not only humans but also animals and spirit beings.**
- **Killing animal prey is done with deep respect because it sacrifices its life so that the hunter may live. The hunt and eating prey is a holy act.**
- **Killing other humans is very rare because the Cree avoid violence as much as possible, including confrontation, retaliation, or revenge for offenses.**
- **This case challenges the image of “Man the Hunter” as the aggressive and warlike evolutionary heritage of killer apes.**

9. Ending Violence, Changing Lives

Identity, Domestic Violence and
Cultural Change in Southern Belize

Laura J. McClusky

- Author McClusky argues that domestic abuse in the form of husbands beating wives is not the same everywhere and even in the same place.
- She examines specific instances among the Maya of southern Belize, and since the mid-1990s the purposeful women's movement to reduce this type of formerly normalized violence.
- This movement includes gossip and delaying marriage. Government programs for women's craft cooperatives to gain more economic independence were also initiated. More access to education has elevated women's economic independence.
- McClusky describes the meaning of violence in this case and how violence has been used to build community.
- The Maya of southern Belize view violence as acceptable means to enforce social roles, punishment to correct an individual's actions and attitudes, and resolve conflicts, although unfortunate and not preferable.
- Two reasons for wife beating are infidelity and laziness.
- However, the violence in the communities studied does not include murder.
- This is a case study of indigenous attempts to transform a society from violence to nonviolence.

10. You Can't Be Nonviolent Without Violence

Michael I. Niman

- Since 1972 the Rainbow Gathering is an annual meeting in a national forest of up to 30,000 people pursuing a utopian vision of a nonviolent subculture, a temporary, intentional, spontaneous, alternative community.
- It is an experimental model imitating an all-inclusive, egalitarian (non-hierarchical), nomadic, hunter-gatherer band, an acephalous, anarchic community with policy decisions based on consensus councils.
- Gatherings are non-commercial with sharing of all necessities and no charge or fee for participation.
- Originating in the US, this contagious phenomenon has spread elsewhere to become a global movement, including in Latin America, Europe, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and Asia.
- It has survived peacefully for more than four decades, but faced regular violent opposition from agents of the state system, such as officials of the National Forest Service, because it is considered a threat to the legitimacy of a system dependent on violence.
- Rainbows maintain order and security without the tradition of a police, military, or security force.
- Participants have responded consistently with nonviolence in the face of the violence, thereby demonstrating the superior efficacy of nonviolence, a kind of laboratory to field-test such a strategy and tactic.
- The cycle of nonviolence versus violence is likely to continue to repeat itself at each annual gathering until eventually the state collapses as states have always done with the Rainbow model likely surviving as more enduring.
- The Rainbow Gathering is a revitalization movement to develop a more genuine culture, demonstrating the successful pursuit of nonviolence and peace, a remarkable nonkilling ethos.

11. Peaceful Islands

Joam Evans Pim

- Many small, remote, insular communities survive by pursuing a taboo on violence through preventive and avoidance mechanisms, a matter of nonviolent worldview and values.
- Three traditional cases are examined: Tristan da Cunha (South Atlantic), Ifaluk (Micronesia), and Tahiti (Polynesia).
- Also, four modern cases are examined: Aland Islands in Finland, Hawaiian Islands, Jeju Island in Korea, and Canary Island of Lanzarote in Spain.
- These are small-scale communities, and the situation changes to more violence with much larger communities, as described through archaeology (Patrick Kirch) and computer simulations (Stephen Younger).
- Nevertheless, these peaceful islands demonstrate that nonkilling is possible and offer heuristic models for thinking about and designing nonkilling societies.
- The historical and contemporary existence of peaceful islands is not a romantic fiction or utopian dream, but an actuality.

12. Nonkilling and the Body

John Clammer

- “Underlying all of this is a deeply and largely unquestioned sociological assumption: that social order is fragile and somehow needs to be constantly maintained, if necessary by violence” (p. 369).
- “The other paradox ... in the very society that invests huge amounts of its resources in body maintenance... killing is still widely condoned in warfare, in penal contexts and the worlds of the imagination as reflected and reinforced by movies, computer and video games, comics, popular literature, sports such as hunting, extensive meat-eating and in crime suppression” (p. 370).
- “Killing terminates the physical, social, emotional, and spiritual potentialities of the individual/body which is the vehicle of the life-force” (p. 370).
- “... technologizing of killing ... easily leads to the “normalization” and routinization of warfare (p. 375).
- “... the world’s biggest arms traders are the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (p. 375).
- John Paul Lederach in *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* asserts that to transcend violence it is necessary to pursue in an integrated manner four things: moral imagination including imagining our enemies within our web of relationships; embracing complexity without dualistic polarity; pursuing the creative act; and stepping into the mystery of the unknown that lies beyond the landscape of violence (p. 381).

13. Toward a Nonkilling Society

Matthew T. Lee

- **Social science is agnostic, but recognizes that beliefs and perceptions can have real consequences (p. 395)**
- **Moral of the New Testament story by Jesus about the Good Samaritan--- love everyone, enemy as well as neighbor --- treat others the way you would like to be treated by them (Golden Rule)**
- **Institutional change - Pentecostal Assembly of God (now 3 million) shifted from pacifism in WWI to pro-war in WWII through accommodation with mainstream culture of America, etc. (pp. 403-405)**
- **Individual change – theologian and minister Paul Alexander shifted from killing socialization to nonkilling following Jesus (“Christocentric hermeneutic”), *killing irreconcilable with Christianity*, trying to change the institution back to pacifism (pp. 396-402)**
- **Religious institutions influential, but individuals do not necessarily blindly follow**
- **Social affinity refers to perceived similarity to others, including identification and empathy with other individuals and groups, and it can lead to nonviolence and peace [cf., p. 394]**
- **This contrasts with social distancing (geographical, temporal, and/or social) with dehumanization of the other (us versus them, “tribal egoism” versus “universal altruism”) [see pp. 391-392]**
- **Hope for Christian Americans to be transformed from killing to nonkilling society?**

My General Conclusions from *Nonkilling Societies*

- The real question is not whether or not human nature is violent or nonviolent, it has the capacity to manifest either violence or nonviolence.
- The question is what are the particulars of specific situations in which one or the other capacity is manifest?
- Also, following Glenn Paige, what are the particulars when there is a transformation from one to the other in either direction?
- Anyone who is concerned with advancing nonkilling instead of the opposite, needs to seriously and systematically consider nonkilling, not ignore it and attend exclusively to killing phenomena.
- However, nonkilling societies are small-scale non-state societies.
- There are extremely powerful obstacles to large-scale state societies becoming nonkilling, including the magnitude and momentum of the military-industrial-media-academic complex; rapidly increasing population and consumption with increasing pressure on diminishing natural resources and the capacity of planetary systems to absorb and process waste and pollution; physical and spiritual alienation from others and nature, etc.
- But perhaps most of all is deficient moral imagination, creativity, and commitment.

Some sources that inspire hope that Glenn Paige's visionary ideas of nonkilling may continue to attract increasing attention, consideration, and engagement to make a significance difference in the world:

- **Malcolm Gladwell, 2000, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, Boston, MA: Little, Brown & Company.**
- **Jonah Berger, 2013, *Contagious: Why Things Catch On*, New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.**
- **Paul Hawken, 2008, *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Movement in History is Restoring Grace, Justice, and Beauty*, New York, NY: Penguin Books.**
- **Leslie E. Sponsel, 2012, *Spiritual Ecology: A Quiet Revolution*, Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.**