

and other types of social behavior, such as the oxytocin and vasopressin systems, are affected by parental nurturing received during infancy. It is hypothesized that the neural bonding system may be important for the development of loyalty in individuals towards a social group and its culture. Neglect and abuse during early life may cause the bonding system to develop abnormally and compromise the capacity for rewarding interpersonal relationships and commitment to societal and cultural values later in life. Other means of stimulating reward pathways, such as drugs, sex, aggression, and intimidating others, as well as the involvement in sects or gang activities, could become relatively more attractive as a way of life (Pedersen 2004). We have to recognize that aggression, violence, and cruelty reflect abnormalities in the emotion regulatory circuitry of the brain.

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Compassion as an antidote to cruelty

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Abstract: The impulse toward violence and cruelty is endemic to the human species. But so, likewise, is the impulse toward compassionate behavior. Victor Nell acknowledges this, but he does not explore the matter any further. I supplement his account by discussing how compassion, specifically in the moral education of children, can help remedy the problem of violence and cruelty in society.

Aggressive impulses are innate in the human species. And perhaps all humans are prone to exhibiting and enjoying cruelty under certain conditions (even if these conditions are never met in their particular life circumstances). The commonly told story of human evolution centers upon positing such impulses as the drivers of our destiny (humans as aggressive, self-seeking, greedy, "man the hunter," and so on). Other accounts, however, recognize the obvious (but often neglected) truths that: (1) humans are also cooperative, caring, nurturing beings; and (2) if it were not for these latter traits, our species' history – although undeniably bloody – would arguably have been far less characterized by peaceful periods and everyday cooperation, far less filled with constructive, creative accomplishment, and much shorter (Kropotkin 1908; Mead, G. H. 1934, Pt. 4; Mead, M. 1937; Skyrms 1996, Ch. 3). However gloomy today's human scenario may appear, then, it is important to keep a sense of balance and hope.

I have no doubt whatsoever that Victor Nell would agree. His research project is in no way intended to contest the foregoing perspective, but rather, to take on the challenge of understanding and, to the extent possible, help counteract and neutralize the violent and cruel tendencies that are so evident and widespread, cross-culturally, in our contemporary world. These are laudable objectives, for two reasons. First, Nell's approach forces us to look at violent and cruel acts as having positive reinforcement for the perpetrators. Only if we unravel how this process works can we improve our chances of control and rehabilitation in this arena. Second, his project has the underlying significance that ordinary people should not have to live in fear for their safety, and victims of violence should not have to bear the onus of readjusting to a hostile social environment taken as the norm.¹ Yet I wonder whether, in addition to Nell's approach, we might still need to give careful consideration to the compassionate side of our nature² as an antidote to "the rewards of cruelty."

Nell presents strong evidence for regarding the perpetration and enjoyment of cruelty as having deep evolutionary, neurological, and biochemical underpinnings, and we probably must accept this. However, within the context of his thoughts on mitigating the problem of violence and cruelty in human life, very little is said about the role of compassion in defining who and what we are, and in describing the human potential. In section 6.2, Nell acknowledges that the human motivational repertoire comprises both cruelty and compassion. But the impulse toward compassion is not addressed further. Granted, Nell has another research agenda. I respect that and wish to make it clear here that my purpose is not to try to pick holes in his argument, but rather to supplement it, in the positive spirit of collaborative scholarly exploration.

Compassion is defined as "deep awareness of the suffering of another coupled with the wish to relieve it" (*American Heritage Dictionary* 2000). This formulation illustrates that compassion is a deeper feeling than either sympathy or empathy (with which it is often compared), inasmuch as compassion entails not just resonant fellow-feeling, but also the desire to ameliorate another's negative situation. While the above definition is an etymologically faithful rendering (com/passion as "suffering with"), I believe compassion has come to have an even richer meaning than is suggested here, namely, one that embraces what the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer calls "loving-kindness" (Schopenhauer 1841/1965, sect. 17), or everyday caring concern for the other and his or her interests, and the desire to see the other flourish. I have given careful thought to the idea that compassion might be, as Schopenhauer claims, the sole motivational foundation of ethics (Schopenhauer 1841/1965, sect. 19:4), the primary moral emotion. Two principles of right conduct, above all others, might generally be considered as absolutely basic: "Do no harm" (nonmaleficence) and "Do good whenever possible" (beneficence or benevolence). Both can be construed as following naturally from the compassionate side of our nature (Schopenhauer 1841/1965, sect. 16). This is not the place to debate whether compassion is the whole of morality. But it may be of interest to reflect upon just how central it is to a better world.

What is special about compassion is that it appears to be an innate tendency. Children show caring concern toward their peers, those younger than themselves, and animals. They are naturally inclined toward acceptance of others and toward being nonjudgmental (what later may blossom as tolerance, celebration of diversity, etc.). Lack of compassion and intolerance are, in the broadest sense of the term, learned responses that stem from certain kinds of conditioning, life experiences, and circumstantial events, such as cultural images of violence, examples set by role models, neglect, emotional impoverishment, and abuse and bullying. These influences lead to desensitization and may allow other natural impulses – toward violence and aggression – to predominate in thought and action. But if lack of compassion, intolerance, and cruelty, for example, can be learned, they can also be unlearned – or better still, prevented by different learning.

To teach and instill a cultural ethos of compassion and respect for others, as well as animals and the environment, is the goal of the humane education movement (Selby 1995; World Animal Net, n.d.). The simple precept here is that if we want desirable personality qualities and dispositions to flourish, we need to nurture and reinforce these. Imaginary exercises, thought experiments, and role-playing can help create and strengthen the capacity to put oneself in another's shoes, and to prevent the development of a closed mind characterized by compartmentalization, distancing, and the objectification, marginalizing, and inferiorizing of the other.

The aim of making children more compassionate by enhancing their natural tendencies in this direction can positively contribute to creating a society in which people are less prone to violence and cruelty. It would, however, be naïve to

assume that such an endeavor could succeed without other large-scale measures being put in place to remove or at least restrict the conditions that motivate and encourage violent and cruel behavior. In this respect, Nell is completely correct to stress that we must do what we can to make such behavior less rewarding—a gargantuan task, but one on which the human future depends. Yet I would maintain that peaceful social reconstruction hinges equally on the careful, systemic cultivation of compassion.

NOTES

1. I owe this victims-of-violence point to Fiona Utley.
2. As I trust will become evident, compassion is to be distinguished from, and is much more profound than, the altruism that some theorists explain in terms of evolutionary reproductive strategies, simple reciprocity, prisoner's dilemma gamesmanship, and so forth.

Cruelty: A dispositional or a situational behavior in man?

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Abstract: Presentation of evidence from multiple disciplines is the most impressive feature of Nell's article. I have observations and objections, however, about the following issues: (1) violence as a by-product of cruelty; (2) the equation of animal and human cruelty; (3) social psychological evidence contrary to the biological model; (4) whether prevention of cruelty best arises from predispositional or situational factors.

By presenting admirable, extensive evidence from paleontology, predator ethology, primatology, anthropology, and cognitive and experimental psychology related to motivation and learning, as well as social psychology and cultural evolution, Nell traces the evolutionary origins of cruelty and violence to present-day human beings. Hypothesizing continuity between the behavior of predation in animals and contemporary cruelty in humans, he links a wide range of behaviors into a "pain-blood-death complex," a very important and useful thesis. However, several observations and objections should be stated.

Nell notes that violence is the by-product of cruelty and maintains that if effective prevention is to be applied, such origins must be revealed. But cruelty may also be the by-product of violence; in war, a general climate of violence may lead to cruelty and torture by military personnel on their victims without any previous preparation for it (see, e.g., the Abu Ghraib torturers; Haritos-Fatouros & Zimbardo 2005). Archetypal emotional-motivational processes common to all mammals may well influence human behavior, as Jung has proposed many years ago. But human behavior is also greatly influenced by cognitive processes, and by the resulting situations produced. The Freudian biological model which proposes a destructive, biologically determined, death-seeking force, a human "instinct" that produces aggressive behavior and violence has long been with us and has been repeatedly challenged and largely refuted by experiments as well as field studies.

In particular, torturers do not have to have a certain kind of personality, only exposure to certain kinds of psychological, social, and political conditions. (Haritos-Fatouros 2003). Similarly, gender differences, with greater male violence, and sex-related aggression, and abuse, cannot be attributed mainly to high testosterone and low serotonin in males. Albert Bandura (1973; 1990) and followers of social learning models have shown evidence that aggression is a behavior pattern largely learned through positive or negative reinforcement. Disengagement mechanisms are also used in situations of cruelty, and their importance is indeed acknowledged by Nell in the target article.

Finally, prevention of human cruelty and violence clearly requires more than detecting high and low scorers on any type of questionnaire – Nell proposes a Cruelty Readiness Questionnaire (target article, sect. 6.4) to predict high readiness and pleasurable arousal in situations of potential cruelty. Neither would MRIs' demonstrating individual differences in cerebral pathway involvement to differentiating stimuli predict cruelty, or go far to prevent cruelty from occurring. I certainly agree with the author that cruelty will not be contained through obscurantism and that effective prevention requires that its reinforcers are revealed. However, it is also important not to lose sight of classic works emphasizing cultural and situational factors, for example, Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1975/1979/1986), Milgram's work on obedience to authority (Milgram 1969/1974), and Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment (Zimbardo 1970).

On the other hand, the target article offers an abundance of possible hypotheses for research. Why certain kinds of behavior confer direct fitness benefits is of interest; Nell informs us that among the Ache, better hunters are more often chosen by the Ache women and have much higher fertility. The basic question remains, however: How far are aggression, violence, and cruelty in humans today the result of predisposition factors, or biological or archetypal processes, and how far are they the result of cognitive/emotional processes evoked by situational factors? To paraphrase Voltaire: I do not agree with you, but I shall do everything within my power to help you express your point of view.

Human–animal connections: Recent findings on the anthrozoology of cruelty

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Abstract: Recent findings in anthrozoology – the study of human–animal interactions – shed light on psychological and social aspects of cruelty. Here we briefly discuss four areas that connect animal cruelty and cruelty directed toward humans: (1) voices of perpetrators and their audiences, (2) gender differences in cruelty, (3) cruelty as play, and (4) the putative relationship between animal abuse and interpersonal violence.

To support his contention that the roots of cruelty lie in predation, Nell invokes findings from psychology, ethology, neurobiology, history, and paleoanthropology. Curiously, given the central importance of inter-specific interactions to his theory, Nell neglects anthrozoology – the study of human–animal relationships. Of special relevance are current findings on animal abuse. Here we briefly raise several findings from this literature that are relevant to understanding cruelty generally.

1. Voices of perpetrators and their audiences. Nell correctly calls for greater understanding of the perspectives of those involved with cruelty, although his idea for doing so seems narrowly psychological. Anthrozoological studies of animal cruelty have examined the mistreatment of animals as it is defined in the course of social interaction in groups. People arrive at shared agreements about what things mean in given situations, and cruelty is no exception, whether this includes conventional groups, such as adolescent males, or unconventional groups of purported abusers, such as "kill-shelter" workers who are considered to be cruel by their "no-kill" peers (Arluke 2006). Second, when studying their voices, the gratifications of perpetrators and their audiences must not be limited to psychological ones such as "escalating arousal." For example, members of