

PEACE – WHAT PREVENTS IT? UNDERSTANDING THE CONDITIONED MIND

Are We Born Hardwired for War?

Is Warfare a Genetically Driven Instinctive Survival Reaction?

Is Combat in our DNA and Demands to be Exercised? Has Traditional Peace Education Paradoxically Created and Sustained Conflict?

“Most honest combat vets will tell you, perhaps not eloquently but in their own way, the same thing: essentially that combat is in our human DNA and demands to be exercised...The question is, Can we humans evolve peacefully, or will we succumb to instincts we can't transcend?”

– Quote from former Marine Corp helicopter pilot in Vietnam

“Instinct Theory states that motivation is the result of biological, genetic programming. Thus, all beings within a species are programmed for the same motivations. At the heart of this perspective is the motivation to survive I we are biologically programmed to survive. And, all of our behaviors and motivations stem from biological programming. Thus, our actions are instincts. Through the process of natural selection, individuals who were even slightly predisposed to engage in adaptive social behaviors were the "fittest" and tended to survive longer and to be more successful in passing their genes along to future generations. Even though these tendencies may not enhance our fitness in today's world, eons spent in harsher environments have left us genetically predisposed to perform certain social behaviors when situational cues call forth ancient instincts.”

Is it possible that a genetically generated, misplaced biological drive for survival incites people to conflict?

Is it possible that survival is a faulty instinctual compulsion?

Are we being controlled by this genetically generated, misplaced biological drive for survival, to the extent that no amount of knowledge can free us from it? In fact, is knowledge the cause of the conflict rather than the cure? If so, what are the factors that create and sustain this conflict? Are they based on this misdirected biological and instinctual necessity for survival that is paradoxically preventing it?

If we are basing each action on instincts that created the original conflict, in trying thereby to bring about peace, do we only continue to escalate conflict? Have we created opposing ethnocentric ideologies based on the conditioned notion that we have to psychologically identify with a group in order to have peace and security? Although at one time in our evolutionally history this worked, is it now preventing physical security due to the extensive divisiveness of these tribal ideologies? Does this mean that we can't have culture — the arts, music, and literature of a civilization that can demonstrate the

wonderful diversity of the human race — which we so appreciate for its differences? Or is it only when it becomes what we call “ethnocentric” that we have trouble?

If so, how does human relationship become ethnocentric and what can be done about it? Where does this deep-seated need to identify come from? What’s holding it in place? Can we come upon this fundamental source of human conflict by creating a questioning environment — an active dialogue that brings a nonjudgmental awareness of this deep-seated conditioning to our attention as it happens in the moment?

Is there another deeper and more profound factor — one that allows us to create a potential for the brain to let go of its “drive to survive”? Understanding that at the core of instinctual survival, we have a need to identify, can we put this demand into a temporary state of abeyance? Can our primary pattern for survival feel safe in this holding place, free of the usual provocations that keep the former, ethnocentric, conditioned patterns from repeating themselves?

A Threat: Is It Real or Simply Perceived as Real?

The old brain’s need for security is based on the freeze, fight or flight mechanism to protect itself from a perceived threat. If someone points a gun at us, then the threat is real and needs immediate attention. If however, someone is only holding up an image of a threat, or happens to look like someone of another ideological group that triggers a threatening feeling, then the threat is false and needs to be recognized and acknowledged as only an image. The image cannot hurt us as a gun can. Under certain image-threatening situations, the old brain cannot tell the difference between real or supposed threats. It reacts to both fact and fantasy in the same way: fight or flee.

Hopefully, one is rational enough to be aware of this difference and will not react to a supposed threat without examining the reality of it. Unfortunately, many people have been conditioned for so long that they cannot be “rational,” cannot differentiate between the imagined versus the actual threat. Their conditioning is a reflexive response something akin to a doctor tapping our knee to see how quickly it jerks. The conditioned image of “the enemy” is usually equally firmly in place due to the constant reinforcement it has received over time.

How can an environment of self-understanding potentially change that deep-seated conditioning programmed into our brains? We need first to see that this conditioning is not just behavioral and psychological, but also biological and physical — that it is genetic, ingrained in the physiology of the human brain for millennia.

What we are proposing is that this genetic structure for conflict, our being “hardwired* for war,” can be transformed by creating the right educational environment or intelligence to develop.

In order to free ourselves from our divisive conditioned state of mind, we need to realize one very important piece of the puzzle: at the primary level, knowledge has no place. Conditioned thinking has fragmented and hence separated the human race into opposing ideologies, but this is not a problem to be solved. Over and over, we have been trying ineffectively to solve the “problem” of conflict by finding a “solution.” In science and technology this problem-solving process has a place. This is where knowledge has meaning for our physical survival. But in understanding what prevents peace, we are talking about what place it has in the psychological realm in changing behavior, in this case from one of violent actions and reactions to one of peaceful conduct. Knowledge has a place at the secondary level in learning “conflict resolution skills,” and at the tertiary level in managing conflict when it has escalated beyond prevention or resolution. At the primary prevention level, however, knowledge has no place.

Ethnocentrism

At the moment when the image of “the other” comes up in the brain, knowledge cannot solve it. As a matter of fact, it can only postpone properly addressing it, for when it is approached as a “problem,” then this means that sometime in the future it will be solved — through time. But psychologically there is no future. Chronologically yes — psychologically no. In other words, the conditioned image is always within one’s frame of reference, ready to react to any stimulus that evokes it, such as the image of one’s “enemy.” Any method or system of knowledge only postpones bringing the immediate sustained awareness that is necessary to “deactivate” this genetic database, this hardwired biologically programmed pattern that is at the root of human conflict.

Think of this biologically hardwired “primary program” as a hard drive in the primitive brain. One could also use the analogy of a car without a driver. It has the capacity to go forward, but without a driver, it can’t move at all. Now the software, the disk, is the driver. It represents the cultural ethnocentric conditioning. When “inserted” or “instilled” into the brain, it activates the hard drive or car and off it goes along the same road that it has traveled for eons. By continuing to depend on identifying with the particular group or community that our old software has been “written” or conditioned into, it is basing our psychological survival needs on a really outdated program. In other words, the disk or software is corrupt. It’s maladapted, for it has not adapted to the present and correct situation, one that will really insure survival.

At one time in our evolution, this old program could guarantee our physical survival, but now it is obsolete and threatening our physical security. Originally, it was limited by the circumstances it needed to ensure survival. With fewer people, it did not present a significant problem as it adapted and was confined by those particular sociological times. But as the human race grew, it became a problem trying to ensure the survival of all the groups that were now confronting each other, competing for the limited resources available. Each group was driven to have its own group survive over others. This can lead to what is called “ethnocentrism.” The Oxford English Dictionary defines

ethnocentrism as "regarding one's own race or ethnic group as of supreme importance" and "belief in the superiority of one's own ethnic group."

**While trying to "bring about peace,"
we continue to recreate conflict,
simply because we are unaware of the deep-seated program
that keeps fight and flight in place.**

How have we conventionally tried to "solve the problems" of human conflict? Most of the attention and resources to this end are at the tertiary level in managing conflict. Very little is given to the secondary level of resolving the conflicts we have. Therefore the violence continues to happen. This is because we have not paid attention to the primary prevention level in this genetically and hence biologically based primary program and the ethnocentric software that continues to reactivate it in this maladaptive way. We have to some extent looked at the behavioral or psychological aspects, but rarely if ever have given attention to the foundation of it in the physiological makeup of the brain. So we go on trying to "solve the problem" of conflict through knowledge.

**We continue to dwell in this mindset —
that if we just had more knowledge about why we fight —
we could stop fighting.
But behavior can only be changed now,
in the present moment.**

This proposal affirms that conventional academic approaches to peace only confuse and intimidate us and therefore postpone real insight into the causes as they are happening in the moment. For it is only in the moment that we can free ourselves of this conditioned ethnocentric mindset. In other words, we will never be able to end war and find perpetual peace at some time in the future, for psychologically there is no future. We need to understand what prevents peace now — and not "how" to bring it about. The "how to bring about peace" is based on illogic that got us into the conflict in the first place.

Traditional and Historical Education for Peace

If we try to bring about peace, whose peace are we advocating as the one that will do it? Are we saying that "all paths lead to the same truth" and therefore we need to embrace all "paths"? Aren't these "paths," these widely varying ideological survival expectations, the very thing that fragments the human race, dividing us into opposing parties and therefore creating conflict? If this is so, perhaps we need to take the "negative approach," and through a process of elimination of what prevents peace, come upon peace.

Can we look at how we approach “solving the problem” of conflict conventionally so we can see if this is possibly the very thing that prevents it? Can we look at the multilevel academic approach to peace education that is supposed to lead us through this problem-solving process to the resolution of conflict? Can we look at what prevents peace through the eyes of academia, through its myriad academic interpretations – through anthropology, sociology, history, philosophy, political science, psychology, and so on and on, to find at some point “The Answer” to the “Problem” of conflict?

The various academic departments in universities involved in teaching peace education are trained to look through their limited specialized academic areas of expertise and only seeing that particular restricted viewpoint they fragment peace education into differing scholastic subdivisions. This intellectually divisive approach to peace education just postpones the first hand observation needed to see and hence understand the fact of conflict at the primary prevention level as it exists in each of us every moment. Academia then requires students to digest this scholarly fragmentation, each professor touting his or her own specialty as if it were the only one needed, or they combine their pedagogical efforts in a hodge-podge fashion and though this pooled effort confuse students even further.

Below are some examples of these basic tenets of conventional peace education college programs:

- **The Founding Premise of Peace and Conflict Studies:** War and other forms of violence, despite their omnipresence, can be mitigated and transformed through the application of knowledge.
- **The Nature of Violence and Its Causes:** As these are complex and multifaceted, students are expected to approach their studies from a number of interdisciplinary perspectives.
- **The Causes of War and the Causes of Peace:** An exploration of the entire conflict process associated with war from a variety of theoretical and methodological angles, including rationalist and behavioral models that examine the concept of war and why wars begin.

Can we question this deeply held belief that “the application of knowledge” or “studies from a number of interdisciplinary perspectives” or “a variety of theoretical and methodological angles, including rationalist and behavioral models” can bring an end to human conflict? We are proposing that they cannot, because their basic premise is incorrect. The “knowledge” or prejudice I have about you and that you have about me — and the divisive image this creates of “the other” — creates human conflict. This “knowledge” includes the images and attitudes that we have been indoctrinated into. As it is genetically based, it resides in the memory of all human beings.

How thus can “knowledge” put an end to the knowledge that is creating conflict? Do we need more evidence to counter the information that is dividing us and creating conflict?

**Conditioned thinking is not a problem to be solved
but a reality to be seen.**

**The key is to be aware of our conditioned thinking as it arises —
and not act on it.**

**As is has been said,
“Inaction is the highest form of action.”**

This seeming contradiction underlines the fact that if we act on our prejudicial conditioned thinking (a.k.a. “knowledge”), we only reinforce it. Thus, not acting on it is the only intelligent thing to do.

Using another academic perspective to see if peace can be brought about by knowledge, let’s look again at this deeply held belief that knowledge is the solution to the problem of conflict.

Please remember we are addressing the primary prevention level of conflict, understanding what *prevents* peace. At the secondary or tertiary level of conflict resolution or management, certain academic disciplines can bring clarity, but they do not, nor have they ever, stopped conflict that is knowledge–based at the primary prevention level. Since knowledge is comparative by nature, and comparisons create conflict through judgment and ideals, this approach has no place in the prevention of conflict.

Examples of Frequently Asked Questions in University Peace Education Courses

The questions below are commonly asked in university peace education programs on “Social Justice.”

- 1) What is social justice? What are human rights? What is peace? What are the origins of these concepts and how have they been interpreted across time and place?
- 2) What causes social injustice, violations of human rights, conflicts and wars? What are the consequences of these for individuals and communities?

- 3) How can social injustice, violations of human rights and conflicts be prevented? What are the conditions that create justice, peace, and respect for human rights?
- 4) What are the origins, strategies and aims of social movements seeking justice, peace and respect for human rights?
- 5) What are the philosophical, cultural, religious and political underpinnings of traditions of nonviolence and ethical behavior?

As prospective students look at this typical page from a university's peace or social justice program, they soon discover that they'll be required to answer the above questions. The university's required 36 units explores answers from a broad sampling of courses of various intellectual disciplines including anthropology, sociology, philosophy, political science, history, psychology, economics, and many more.

We can recognize an admirable search for effective peace and justice, but with such enormous questions, each having endless potential answers, how is it possible to succeed in selecting and mutually agreeing from such a myriad of choices? What would it take to investigate these questions in the totality of what they mean? If it were even possible, how long would it take to find the answers to these incredibly complex questions? Wouldn't it take immense research in only one of these areas, such as "What are the religious underpinnings of traditions of nonviolence and ethical behavior?" to find the answers to these particular questions? There are thousands of religious traditions of nonviolence, every one of them saying that its belief system is dedicated to peace. How about cultural, philosophical or political traditions of nonviolence and ethical behavior? Many, many thousands of such traditions go back perhaps to the beginning of recorded history.

In the first group of questions above, asking for concept definitions and their origins, how can we discover and agree upon effective answers to all these highly complex questions? Many lifetimes of extensive research by hundreds of "experts" in these fields could provide some "theories" for possible solutions to these questions — which is what we have done — but to no avail. Finding useful answers is literally impossible. In the meantime, wars continue to rage as we continue to try — and continue to fail — to come up with effective answers to any one of these questions.

In checking the reference pages of each book on the theories of peace education, we can find literally hundreds of other titles. Each of those references in authors' books most often contains hundreds more references. Exponentially, that can quickly climb to millions, considering that some of the references go back many years, some even centuries.

Thus we are caught in an endless labyrinth of thought, never finding any conclusive answers that address these questions in a way that actually bring about peace.

**All these questions seem to do
is postpone any immediate action to end conflict,
when, in fact, conflict can be ended only in the moment.
The moment is all there is.**

This leads us to realize that we have for millennia been looking in the wrong direction — to thought as a means to resolve the conflict that unknowingly thought has itself created. In other words thought is not aware of what it is doing. It still thinks that the “problem” — and its “solution” — is “out there.”

In examining the view that thought is the answer to the problem of conflict, we now have a case for demonstrating that thought used in this way will only lead to more thought, that will lead to more thought, that will lead to more thought — ad infinitum — incessantly and in a frenzied and disordered, fragmentary manner. Whenever we approach peace in this way, our search grows more and more frenetic and anxious until it simply grows out of control.

**This is especially true now that we have access
to endless knowledge on the Internet,
because we begin to see that this “problem solving” maze of thinking
just isn’t working. Instead, it is a form of violence in itself.**

Blindly we go on thinking that maybe we just haven’t dug deep enough. So we keep researching endless theories of endless authorities, hoping that one day we will have enough “evidence” to “prove” our theories. But which evidence, which proof and for which theories? That’s what got us into conflict in the first place — my theory versus your theory, my belief versus your belief — each trying to dominate the others to be recognized as “The Answer.”

We have to see the ludicrous illogicality of this. As we observe, we begin to see how the pursuit of peace is preventing the very peace we so strongly desire. Those trying valiantly to understand find themselves caught in definitions, explanations, hypotheses and beliefs (which, ironically, means “to act without sufficient evidence.”) As they attempt to navigate this maze of speculations to try to prove their theories, they have to conclude it still hasn’t worked. In a form of madness, incessantly trying the same or slightly different “cures,” they continuously repeat the same results — because they have never really addressed what prevents peace.

All this seems reminiscent of the preposterous and nonsensical Red Queen's race in Lewis Carroll's book *Through the Looking Glass*. This sequel to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, involves the Red Queen and Alice constantly running — but remaining in the same spot:

"Well, in our country," says Alice, still panting a little, "you'd generally get to somewhere else — if you run very fast for a long time, as we've been doing."

"A slow sort of country!" says the Queen. "Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place!"

If knowledge applied at the primary prevention level ironically prevents peace, how can we clearly state what place knowledge has — and what place it doesn't — in peace education? What ability do we possess that can prevent conflict from happening?

The Three E's

An Atrium Society curriculum helps teachers explain to young people the place of thinking or knowledge in understanding conflict by using a method called the 3E's:

Explanation: This is what I am doing right now. I am using thought to describe the learning process. If we both speak the same language and have similar backgrounds, then our explanations will probably make sense. Our intent is to create a common definition — one that causes us to look ahead. We can call this stage “foresight.”

Example: This is the next step in learning — when we remember something from our past that corresponds to the Explanation. In this way we “personalize” the Explanation by realizing, “Oh, now I know what he is describing — I remember when this happened to me.” For example, if I was explaining that the cause of bullying is conditioned thinking, we might see the truth by recalling a time when we were bullied. This stage, which causes us to look back, or remember, can be called “hindsight.”

Experiencing: This is the stage that does *not* come from thought. Thought is used to explain it, as I am doing here, but it is not thought that is Experiencing. In the above example of conditioned thinking, the actual awareness of the fact of conditioning as it is happening in the moment is Experiencing. This stage — because it causes us to look within — can be called “insight” that comes from Empirical** or experiential first-hand observation.

This Experiencing stage can also be called “metamorphosis” — or “change without time.” It is not a “supernatural state” or anything similar, but simply being aware of the activity of thought as it's happening. Please remember that the word is not the act of Experiencing. If we get caught up in the words, or “Explanations,” we will not be able to observe or be aware of the actual conditioned state of mind happening when it does. We will only have the *description* of “what is” and not the *actuality* of “what is.” This is what most intellectuals have — a body of descriptions and explanations — removed from the actuality they are pointing at.

Here is a personal example of this Experiencing stage: Last spring I was walking around the lake near our home when I came across a Hispanic man, whom I assumed was Mexican, working in the garden of one of my wealthier neighbors. As I passed by him I said in English, "Good morning." He kept his face down in his work and didn't respond to me at all. It seemed to me that he had an image of me as the "big white Patrón" or boss, and an image that he was merely a peon, a lowly Mexican worker, perhaps from just over the border, as there is a lot of prejudice concerning Mexicans where we lived. Detesting this feeling of separation, I thought to myself that when I came back around the lake, I would try something different. So on my return, I spoke in Spanish, "Buenos Días, Señor, Como está?" As I said this, he lifted his head and looked straight into my eyes with confidence and said, "Bién, bien gracias. Y usted?"

At that moment we were two men greeting each other without any prejudicial thinking. There was a moment of complete freedom from conditioning. In that moment I was he — and he was I. We were not separated by any preconceived prejudices, by any ethnocentric knowledge that we had been indoctrinated into. We were therefore unhindered by what before had been a barrier of "knowledge" — pre-judgments — that separated two human beings. Although words are inadequate to express feelings, I felt total accord between us and I understood in that moment that I could never hurt or take advantage of this man who was essentially me.

The following is a clearer and more outstanding example of what I mean by first hand or Empirical observation. Years ago in the 1970s, I was living in northern California. Because of constant "Air Raid Drills" we had in school, at a time when the U.S. was involved in a "cold war" with Russia, I had been conditioned in my early years to fear Russian people. When I heard that some Russians were going to come to our town, Sebastopol, I remember the heightened state of anxiety this caused me.

I expected them to dress differently, perhaps in KGB type hats and long Russian coats even though this was summertime. As it turned out, they looked like us, dressed in western business suits and conventional dresses. At first the air seemed highly charged and I felt very tense. I knew I had to make a gesture of friendship but I felt afraid to do so. After awhile people started mingling and who was who became less obvious.

I was standing around trying to look confident and sociable when a woman arrived at my side and we started to talk. I was glad to talk with anyone, even if it was someone I didn't recognize from my hometown, to relieve my tension. In the course of the conversation about the weather and other mundane things, I asked where she was from and she replied, "I am from Georgia."

I thought it funny that she didn't have a southern accent. But then she said something that completely stunned me! She said, "We from Russia are glad to be here." I said "What?" "I am from Georgia, in Russia," she said.

She repeated her statement and I panicked. At least I did inside my brain. I went into a “fight or flight” reaction. The “fight or flight reaction” triggered my body's primitive, automatic, inborn response to prepare it to “fight” or “flee” from a perceived attack, harm or threat to my survival. There were people from an area still apart of Russia called Georgia, and she was one of THEM!

My heart started pumping fast and my breathing increased! I could feel my pupils dilate! My awareness intensified! My sight sharpened! My impulses quickened! My perception of pain diminished! My immune system mobilized with increased activation! I was becoming prepared — physically and psychologically — to fight or run away, because I was looking at “THE ENEMY!” Yet outwardly, much to my surprise, I was maintaining my cool. I was observing this first hand, empirically.

There was no need to reference any authority to see what was happening in that moment. The actual first hand experience I was happening at that moment was “evidence” that I was hardwired for war, due to my conditioning as a child that now triggered the biological primitive brain to protect myself.

I realized at that moment that my body was preparing to fight her even though she was not a real threat. She was an *imagined* threat — that image of her as my enemy was one I had been conditioned to believe. If she had been pointing a gun at my head, I would have been justified in fighting or fleeing. But she was doing nothing of the kind. She was a very nice, very attractive woman who was just trying to be friendly and yet in my primitive conditioned brain she was a “hostile opponent”, a “real” threat to my survival in the moment. At that moment I was aware that what is called Empirical observation alone was the understanding and the freedom from that conditioned reaction. No thought was necessary to analyze it, no need to look into my storehouse of knowledge to be free of it. Instead in that instant there was awareness that the image, the thought of her as my “enemy,” was what was triggering my primitive animalistic brain to protect myself.

It is this automatic built in genetically hardwired instinct for survival that comes into play when our existence, real or supposed, is threatened. And likewise she had an image of me so we had in essence a meeting of images. And then there is the image we have of ourselves, the sense of self, of one's identity, ones conditioned view we have gained over time through the cultural and societal inculcation that occurs as we are being fit to belong to whatever tribe, clan, ethnic group we were born into. And this image of self again is the source of conflict when coming up against those whom are not of that same self-image. It seems that we are living in a house of mirrors of contradicting and opposing self-images that fragment and divide the human race into opposing ideologies hence creating conflict.

All animals have a hardwired survival instinct genetically built into the DNA, including humans. But the difference between humans and other animals is that humans can think, we can create images of the “enemy,” the adversary, leading to the destruction of millions and millions of us by us in our mistaken drive to survive.

But the tragic irony is that these images are illusions, they are not real, they are only images, and they are therefore only figments of our imagination. They have been made up at some point. Any nationality, religion, culture was created by thought driven by the biological brain in its drive to survive, its need to find security in a particular group, tribe, clan. But there is no real security in thought, in images. We are deceived by them, misled into believing that they are real and that they will protect us. All they do is fragment the human race into opposing ethnocentric

arrogances, each competing for dominance, power and control. These images are extremely dangerous for they are the basis of war when it comes to defending them.

I remember when I was teaching a college student about this and I asked her what religion she believed in. She said emphatically that she was ("blank"). I said to her, "No you aren't." Whereas she replied, "Oh, yes I am!" to which I again said, "No, you aren't. You just think you are." I also remember a young friend of ours years ago who escaped from Bosnia just as the war started. The night before the war broke out she was having a party with her friends who were all different ethnic representations of the groups there at the time. The next day when the war broke out, she being perceived as the "enemy" being of that minority, was attacked by the very friends the night before she was partying with. She barely escaped with her life. These images caused this separation, this division and violence.

If we were not conditioned into these images of who we think we are and who we think others are can we create an enemy and hence create war?

These realizations made me ask the question, *"Does this happen to everyone? Is this what drives people to kill those they think are a threat to their lives?"* I realized then that the primitive biological brain was the source of the supposed conflict, instantaneously preceded in a domino effect by the image triggering fear then triggering the fight or flight system. I realized that there was no need for thought to enter here to remedy this situation, to find a solution, an answer to this "problem." Thought was necessary, as I am doing here, to convey this reaction through words but it is not the process that corrects the conditioned state of mind reacting in that moment. The words come from the experiencing, from the actual fact of the immediate awareness of the conditioned reaction. But the words are not the thing, the description is not the described, the explanation or examples are only words, abstractions that too often creating a lofty reality that can appeal to our intellect, to our need to have another answer or solution to solve the problem of human conflict.

I also understood in that moment that this freedom from conditioned thinking was what we are all looking for. Ironically, we hadn't been able to "find it" because we were too busy stepping outside the moment, looking for it elsewhere: seeking solutions to the problems of conflict in knowledge, in methods, in ways, in definitions, in explanations.

Knowledge, and its continual pursuit,

**Only postpones this immediate insight in the moment
that is capable of dispelling the divisiveness
of prejudicial conditioned thinking**

This is really quite simple when we think of children. They are free of most social conditioning that creates these psychological barriers. But they do have a potential for this conditioning in what can be called a “primary program,” that has been established genetically in the brain for the assurance of having one’s physical survival needs met. It has been called “social stratification,” in that a child is biologically conditioned to identify with one group over another to be assured of having their physical needs safely met. Over tens of thousands of years, this identity program has been built up in us through the reinforcement of our need to survive, thus creating a genetic or inherited basis for it. To ensure this primary program’s survival, it is attached to the primitive instinct of the fight or flight mechanism in the limbic system of the brain. Because it is based on instinct, this primitive program holds a strong natural impulse, an automatic and involuntary reflex when aroused or challenged.

In contemporary studies of the influence of genetics and hereditary on behavior, psychologists include Instinct Theory, which asserts that all our behavior and motivation stem from biological, genetic programming. As each species is hardwired with the same motivations — the strongest program being survival — our actions all stem from our ancient instincts. Via natural selection, individuals with even a slight tendency to adapt their social behaviors were the “fittest,” usually surviving longer and being more successful in passing their genes along to future generations.

“Even though these tendencies may not enhance our fitness in today's world, eons spent in harsher environments have left us genetically predisposed to perform certain social behaviors when situational cues call forth ancient instincts.”

What are these “social behaviors” that call forth ancient instincts? Aren’t they a process of “natural selection” that ensures our survival? And how is our survival ensured? Is it a “primary” biological or genetic program that says it will provide safety in the group, provide physical security if we identify and conform to certain tribal ideologies?

Now the essential question arises. Is it pure instinct that motivates us to survive in this way — meaning it’s no one’s fault when conflict results from this biological program? If so, it’s therefore not a moral concern, for in this biological, genetic view, there is no good or bad behavior — just conditioned behavior that is instinctually programmed into us for our survival.

If this is true, are we condemned to be controlled by this obsolete program and hence be at war with each other endlessly? Some call this “social Darwinism,” meaning that we are biologically caught in an evolutionary time warp that will take millions of years to bring to an end. Or can this dilemma be ended instantaneously?

Freeing Ourselves via Proprioception

To summarize this paradox: conditioned, ethnocentric, divisive thinking is genetically in place to ensure our physical survival — yet ironically, it seems now to be the very thing that is threatening our survival. So is our current task to address this underlying, old-brain, genetic disposition to survive that is now threatening the survival of the human race? Must we — and can we — get to that “primary program” and free ourselves from its effect?

Firstly, what is sustaining that primary program? Let's use again the analogy that this primary program is a hard drive, like a car, but without a driver to tell it what to do. The driver, or the disk or software that drives the car, tells it where to go and what to do. It reinforces the “ethnocentric attitudes” that have for thousands of years mistakenly tried to “ensure” our survival. Is it possible to be free of this programmed behavior?

What's being suggested is that it can end in a nanosecond, without time, if we approach this condition with the correct perspective — sustained awareness of how thought has created and sustained this conflict. We have rarely questioned our ongoing notion that thought created this and that through knowledge we can free ourselves from its destructive effects. We have for millennia approached ending conflict through knowledge, hence through time psychologically. Unwittingly yet obligingly, time has marched on, through war after war, conflict after conflict.

Now we are challenging this notion that knowledge — at the primary prevention level — can alleviate the suffering caused by human conflict. We are asking for thought to be “proprioceptive,” which means that thought needs to be aware of itself, since it's not aware of its own background or participation. And that's the dilemma. Generally thought makes understanding conflict a “problem” and then thought says the answer to it is “out there.” In this manner, thought thus projects away from us the responsibility for understanding conflict created by conditioned thinking. As it is instinctual, we are truly unaware of this process.

How inappropriate that in the process of using thought to try to solve our social problems, we actually cause continual conflict due to the paradox of our maladjusted, biologically based program trying to ensure our survival. It doesn't want to see what it is doing because that would upset eons of conditioning. Since this primary program has been in operation for so long and seemingly has guaranteed our survival, then it would naturally ask, “Why should that be changed?” So it defends us against seeing what it's doing, creating an apparent “comfort zone” from the assumed security emanating from the conformity to the community. Any challenge to this is seen as a threat to security. We have great resistance, for example, to questioning our community's knowledge. It also feels uncomfortable with looking at itself, since thought — and the seeming

security it creates — has established an endorphin comfort zone, protecting us from feeling insecure. We certainly don't want to feel uncomfortable.

What this maladjusted genetic instinct drives us to do is to acquire what it thinks is necessary for our own independent need to survive being the unrelenting acquisition and expansion of worldwide territories and profitable possessions from others who themselves are also ironically tenaciously seeking what they deem is necessary for their own survival. What has been created in this distorted drive to survive is an extremely abnormal craving for anything valued that would allow for the continuous expansion of the individual ethnic group over all else, to compete obsessively to gain these necessities to sustain the continued existence of one's group over others. Thus we see nations invading each other in this reactionary and primitive determination, the strongest martial force of any nation state dominating others to get what it deems necessary for its continued existence. This enviably creates a financially feasible war in the name of "economic prosperity". This obsessively driven primitive survival for the individual group over all others is destroying us all, paradoxically in the name of survival.

To use an analogy, we humans are much like ants, fighting for gain, promoting the colony's (our tribe, our nation's) survival. Ants are hardwired to battle, to monopolize food resources, to protect their nest, to gain or protect territory or to stop other insects from stealing their food. How much are ants and humans alike?

So what do we do? Surprisingly, it is not "doing" as we know it — it is an "undoing." Undoing means understanding what *prevents* peace, and by a process of elimination, freeing ourselves from the confines of this unnecessary conditioned thinking and all the ideological belief systems that keep us bound to it. It's as though we had each been stuffed into a glass jar with the lid screwed on tight, so that as we grew, we suffocated. As we approached adulthood, our lids were screwed on even tighter, preventing our own lives from flourishing. When this happened, we died because there was no air, no nourishment, and like dying plants, we had nothing to help us grow and thrive. So where do we start?

We start with young people, because children are fresh and have not yet been encapsulated in the prisons of their thinking. Not just thinking, but also feeling dies inside those jars whose lids are screwed tight. Hence life cannot flower. For most adults it's too late because we intellectualize all this, creating elaborate and complicated explanations. We cannot see through the miasma of this confinement of our thinking about thinking incessantly. Like a Chinese Finger Puzzle, adults are caught in this no-win dilemma.

How do we present the importance of understanding conditioned thinking? In what context can it be openly explored? And in what setting can it be observed? The keys to these questions are the context of bullying — from the playground to the battlefield.

Bullying is a behavior everyone can relate to. Discussing it can be a practical, relevant, hands-on way to explore conditioned thinking that is at the root of human conflict. Some people may think that bullying is just a process of growing up, like the notions when we were young that “boys will be boys,” and that you should just learn how to fight the bully. But exploring bullying provides a more profound means to explore the entire underlying structure of conflict — the nature and structure of conditioned thinking. The entire curriculum of the Atrium Society — Youth Peace Literacy — was produced to address this critical situation.

Helping Liberian Children of War

To demonstrate how successfully this has worked with children of war and bullying on the battlefield, Dr. Marvin Garbeh Davis, a Liberian Peace Educator, has been helping children understand and resolve conflict peacefully. These children have survived the Liberian holocaust and have now gone on to discover the causes of what could be called a “genetic genocide.”

What was discovered, that could provide a completely new paradigm for peace education, is that even though the Liberian 15-year civil war seemed on the surface to be caused by decades of antagonistic political ethnocentric tribalism was instead at the root caused by a far deeper compulsion. After carrying out a test case of twenty former child combatants’ post-war behavior in Buchanan just after the war’s end, Dr. Davis’s findings demonstrated that psychological conditioning was at the root of this conflict as was expressed in his book *Brave New Child – Liberating the Children of Liberia and the World*. <http://www.atrimum.org/adult-brave-new-child-liberia.php>

But now after nine years of working with over 5000 Liberian children of war further evidence has come forth to indicate that the underlying cause that created psychological conditioning that lead up to the war was due more to a neurological instinctual malfunction in the brains of these young warriors, that there was a far deeper biological primitive impulse already built into their brains, as it is with all participants driven to war. This drive has been rooted for eons in the primeval human brain being hardwired for war as a genetically programmed survival instinct — but it was maladaptive and was therefore paradoxically preventing survival — and that was the cause of the conflict.

Dr. Davis taught the Liberian children about this misperception. He showed them how to pause and observe themselves in their own highly personal and reactive moments of judgment. He asked them to notice whether they were actually being physically attacked — or whether they were seeing merely an image programmed into their brains, inappropriately triggering the primitive old brain’s “fight or flight.” He asked different children of different tribes, gathered together in the same classroom, to notice whether an old survival system was inappropriately being stirred within their instinctual brain to defend against those old “arch enemies” sitting near them — and then to notice the reality: a misguided survival effort. Did they really need to fight for their survival against a real enemy — or was their vision actually just a dangerously outdated

caricature? Could they see how this continued to misguide them into conflict — and hence prevent peace?

**There's no reason for revenge.
It is only a disturbing dysfunctional error
in how we keep struggling towards,
and yet preventing, our own survival.**

This evidence continues to demonstrate, according to Dr. Davis and our programs, which he has been using, that the cause of the Liberian war is analogous to a mechanical defect in our computer-programmed brains — in essence, a systemic defect, which keeps on creating conflict without being aware that it's doing it. We have been ignorant of this biological malfunction.

Even though we are victims of this biological malfunction, we are responsible for understanding its implications and educating our children of its consequences, both individually and socially. We need to respect our children's innate ability to be intelligent, support them to observe the differences between an image and reality, let them truly be aware when an outmoded survival program has mistakenly been conditioned into their brains. We need to encourage them to have an inquiring mind that invites dialogue without judgment.

Our work with the Liberian children of war that brought about such wonderfully positive results was due to Empirical observation. As was said before Empirical observation is derived from direct observation. Or in other words it is first-hand, from the original source directly. It is not theoretical. It is not based on debate or intellectual speculation or guesswork.

With these children of war in Liberia we worked with we became aware of their actions, through careful and directed attention in the moment through our curriculum it brought this immediate observation for them to see in the moment, for it is only in the moment that one can see and end conflict created by this inborn genetic inheritance. It is what the Centre of Infant Cognition at the University of British Columbia realized when it came up with the Empirical results that children are “born bullies” or are a product of “social stratification” as they call it. It is this first hand, Empirical or proprioceptive learning that is the key factor in ending conflict as it happens in the moment. <http://cic.psych.ubc.ca/Welcome.html>

To make this clear Quantum Physicist Dr. David Bohm*** states, *“We could say that practically all the problems of the human race are due to the fact that thought is not proprioceptive. Thought is constantly creating problems that way and then trying to solve them. But as it tries to solve them it makes it worse because it doesn't notice that it's creating them, and the more it thinks, the more problems it creates – because it's not proprioceptive of what it's doing.”*

“One gives close attention to all that is happening in conjunction with the actual activity of thought, which is the underlying source of the general disorder. One does this without choice, without criticism, without acceptance or rejection of what is going on. And all of this takes place along with reflections on the meaning of what one is learning about the activity of thought.”

But as we discovered with the Liberian children of war there was a deeper biological cause of conflict in the primitive brain. Dr. Bohm’s article below on the three brains sheds light on this reality.

The Three Brains – With Dr. David Bohm

Let's see if I can propose something. First of all there has been the theory of the three brains: the reptilian, the mammalian and the new brain –the neocortex. Now the cortex appeared rather suddenly. The reptilian and mammalian brains came into equilibrium with their surroundings and were more or less suited to them. Then suddenly the cortex appeared. The mammalian brain with its emotional response responded to the environment and it worked, statistically. But now it's surrounded by the new brain. It's a different environment and it doesn't work because of simple reasons. The new brain can produce images, which are very convincing to the old brain. The old brain does not actually see these objects but the whole body still responds in a way, which corresponds to the object. The old brain knows how to get correspondingly stirred up in response to a lion and it says, "run". Or something nice appears and it says, "Go there". The new brain, however, can produce images, which means not just pictures but stirring up the whole system as if there were that thing present. The old brain doesn't look out to see whether it's there or not. It can't. It just gets stirred up. So therefore it can say those images are irresistible. Either it says I want them or they frighten me or they make me enraged or whatever. However, the new brain is functioning in the environment of the old brain. Namely, all the neurochemicals and so on come from there. All the desire and all the energy to do something come from there.

The new brain has no reason to do anything by itself. Therefore, when it gets all stirred up, it's confused and it doesn't work right. It's not integrated. When these neurochemicals are too strong, they confuse the new brain. Let's take an elementary case. Suppose a certain thing disturbs or frightens you. Your mother comes along and says don't worry about it; she lulls you into a sense of security. What happens is that that thought liberates just as simply as a nice situation would; it liberates what are called endorphins which coat the nerves that produce pain or fear, which then produce an effect rather like morphine I they're named after morphine. Then when the situation suddenly changes or you think differently, the endorphins are removed. Eventually you're hooked on them. Why? Because the old brain demands that you think again in such a way as to reproduce those endorphins; it demands this of the new brain. Therefore it demands false thoughts that will lull you into a nice sense of security (like being identified with a group).

Now who is providing you with the false thoughts? The new brain. It is simply a machine that provides whatever thoughts will satisfy what's going on in the old brain. The old brain makes a demand. Let's say it needs food; food comes in, it stops. It needs a nice thought that says everything will be all right. When it comes in it says, "O.K. It doesn't bother me anymore." The new brain gets hooked; it gets habituated into providing the old brain with the thoughts that will lull it into a good feeling.

The new brain has to do what the old brain wants, and then that's the way the system presently works. The desire, the energy, the intention fundamentally come from the spinal column. The new brain cannot see any reason to do anything. It's sort of an analytical function.

The new brain cannot control the old brain. Functionally that's an illusion or delusion. But society and culture said, "Let the new brain control the old brain. Being virtuous consists of doing that."

The old brain is dealing with survival, but then it also sent signals that the new brain picked up as suggesting that it could help with survival. Therefore, the new brain found out that it could help the old brain in the struggle for survival by all sorts of methods improving tools and whatnot.

The challenge to humanity is this: How is humanity going to get these two brains to work together? Some new movement is needed which cannot start in either brain. It must start in another way. More creatively (Empirical, proprioceptive or observational" learning)

**Synonyms for Hardwired: built in, constitutional, essential, inherent, inborn, inbred, indigenous, ingrain, ingrained, innate, integral, intrinsic, native, natural.*

***Empirical observation – being derived from or relating to direct first hand observation rather than theory, speculation, dogma or ideals i.e. looking at what is factual, actually without any interpretation or reference to any authority.*

****Quantum Physicist David Bohm was a former colleague of Albert Einstein at Princeton University. Dr. Bohm was an American quantum physicist who contributed to theoretical physics, philosophy of mind, and neuropsychology. Bohm is widely considered one of the best quantum physicists of all time. He was greatly interested in how conditioned thinking created and sustained conflict.*