



WAR: SOME CONCLUSIONS FROM ANTHROPOLOGY (ABRIDGED VERSION)

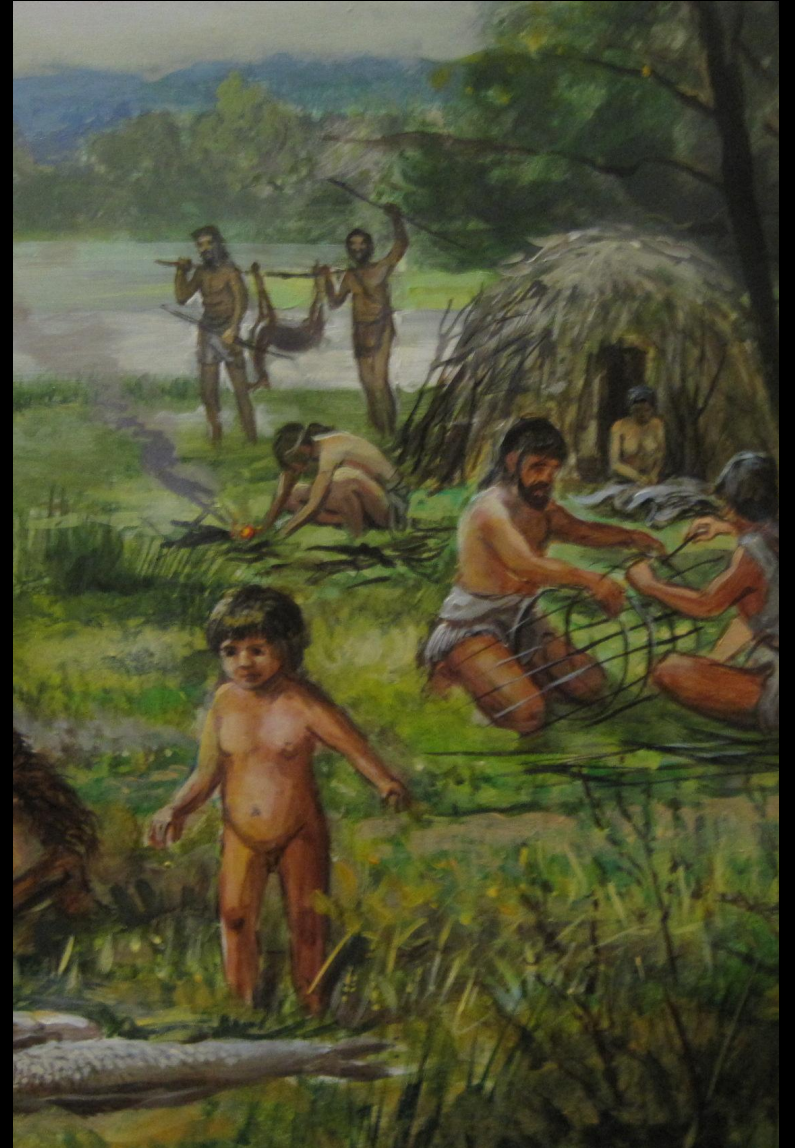
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TRADITIONAL BELIEFS

War is part of human nature.

War is very old. “War forever backwards”
(Brian Ferguson).

A Dire Implication: There is not much we
can do about war.



EVIDENCE-BASED VIEW

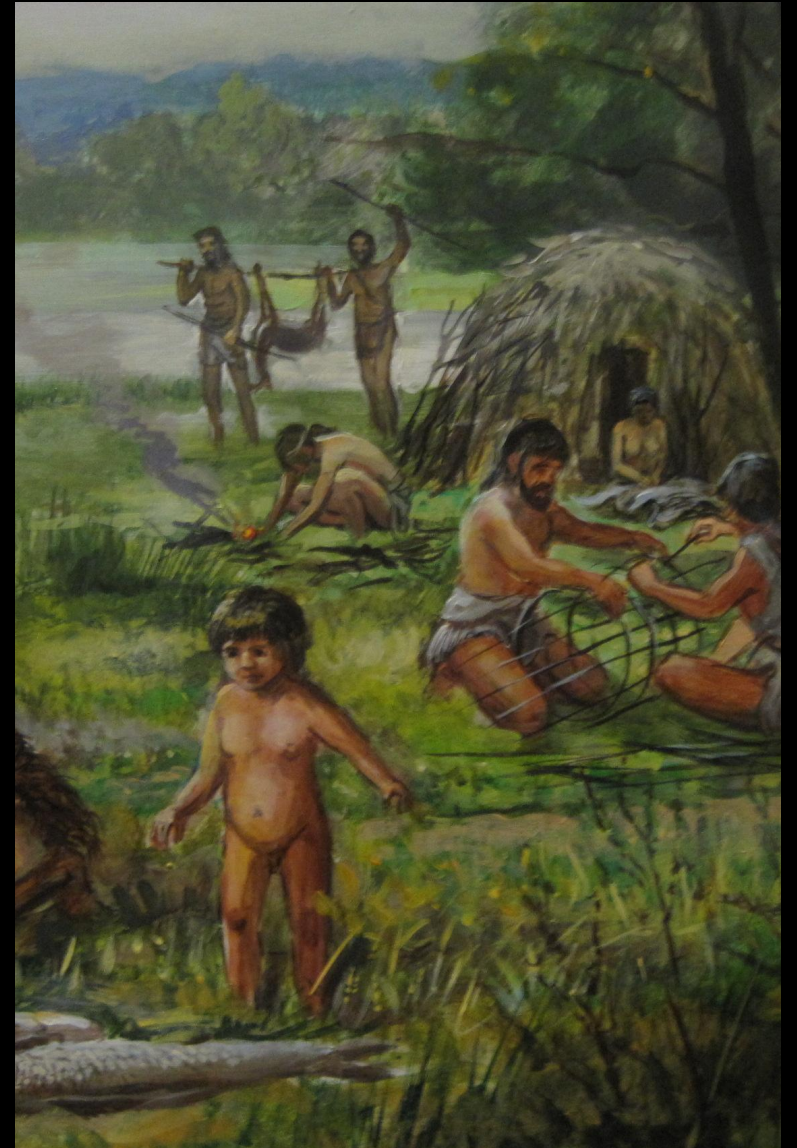
The traditional beliefs are wrong.

War is rather recent.

Origins of war lie in social complexity (via two main paths).

War is not everywhere.

We can devise non-warring systems.



DEFINING AND IDENTIFYING WAR

- War and other types of violence are often intermingled and muddled.
- “Lethal conflict” (Low 1993: 13) --- too broad a definition.
- Bowles (2009) doesn't require any loss of life in his definition of war.
- Prosterman (1972: 140) – clear, detailed definition and it matches common conceptions:
 - 1) a **group** activity,
 - 2) between **communities**,
 - 3) purpose is to **kill or seriously injure** multiple people,
 - 4) **unspecified** targets.
- Fry (2006: 91) short version: “relatively impersonal lethal aggression between communities”

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA: HOW OLD IS WAR?

It is **not** just a matter of lack of evidence in the older prehistoric record.

1. Origins of war are visible.
2. Origins accompany other changes--complexity.
3. Data recovery can be consistent over time and can show war beginning from no-war.



ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA

*Origins of war with **Complexity** both with **AND** without farming!
There are recurrent patterns.*

- > **Near East** (e.g., Ferguson 2013; Roper 1975)
- > **Oaxaca Valley, Mexico** (Flannery & Marcus 2003)
- > **Kodiak Island and North Pacific Rim** (e.g., Fitzhugh 2003)
- > **Northwest Coast of North America** (e.g., Maschner 1997)
- > **Isla Cedros, Baja California** (e.g., Des Laurier 2014; pers. com.)
- > **Japan** (Nakoa et al. 2016)
- > **Northwestern Alaska** (Darwent & Darwent 2014)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA

Various regional sequences show transitions from conditions of warlessness into conditions of warfare.

Thus, archaeological evidence contradicts assertions that war is very ancient in two ways:

- 1) the earliest dates are not early, and
- 2) chronologies shows the *origins* of war along with other changes toward social complexity

COMPLEXITY AND LETHAL VIOLENCE: CAN FORAGER STUDIES SHED LIGHT ON WAR?

- Aside from what the archaeological data show, we also have theoretical views that are coherent. On the one hand, we would **not** predict war among mobile foragers. On the other hand, evidence suggests that war is associated with the development of social complexity. With the development of social complexity, much changes. More on this shortly.
- Fry and Söderberg (2013a, 2013b) compile nine features of nomadic social organization hypothesized to operate against warfare.

MANY FACTORS MILITATE AGAINST WAR AT THE MOBILE FORAGER LEVEL OF SOCIETY

- A lack of leaders with authority to command or give orders.
- Band membership is flexible and in flux with shifting composition over time.
- Numerous links of kinship among different bands.
- Low population density.
- Small group size.
- Egocentric social networks that cross-cut groups.
- Value systems that favor egalitarianism over hierarchy, individual autonomy over taking or giving orders, and cooperation and sharing over militarism, hoarding, or dominating.
- Lack of stored portable goods to plunder.
- Rarity of social segments such as lineages.



- Anthropologic findings do **not** lend support to the belief that war is millions of years old (e.g., Allen & Jones 2014).
- Mobile Forager Band Societies, as a social type, possess many features that **make warfare unlikely**, and in fact the details of these lethal events show war **is** uncommon.
- Furthermore, most lethal disputes are dyadic and interpersonal.

WAR AND COMPLEXITY

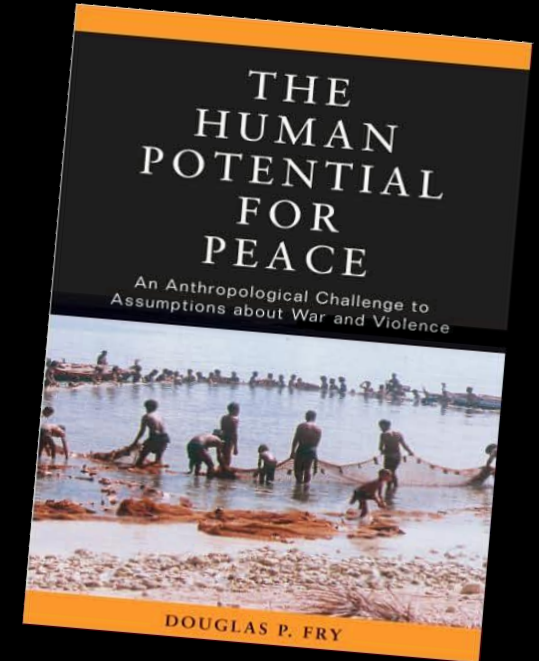
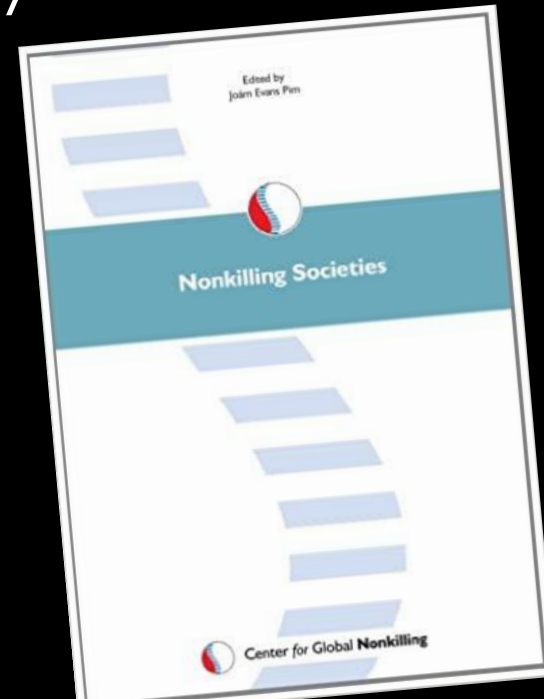
Certain preconditions would seem to make the development of warfare more likely writes Ferguson: “geographic concentration of critical resources, sedentism, high population density, food storage and/or livestock, social divisions creating separate collective identities, social and political hierarchy or ranking, monopolizable long-distance trade in valuable prestige goods, and major ecological reversals affecting food production” (Ferguson 2013: 192).

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

- The origins of war **are** associated with social complexity.
- This can occur before or after farming.
- The archaeological and nomadic forager data are in correspondence with the rise of warfare along with social complexity during the Holocene.
- Archaeology shows 1) only recent evidence of war, 2) a paucity of war among nomadic foragers, and 3) many examples of the origins of war in association with the sequential development over time of social complexity.
- Correspondingly, data on foragers shows a paucity of war among Mobile Forager Band Societies and an association of war with social complexity.

IS WAR EVERYWHERE? NO, THERE ARE NON-WARRING SOCIETIES

- 74 non-warring societies are documented (see Fry 2006, 2007).
- Over 80 internally peaceful societies are listed (see Fry 2006, 2007)
- Additional ethnographic cases certainly exist as well.



AND THERE ALSO ARE NON-WARRING PEACE SYSTEMS

- Some neighboring societies exist as *Peace Systems*, meaning that they do not make war on each other—and sometimes not with outsiders either.
- More on *Peace Systems* and the implications for preventing and eliminating war:
- Film, “A Path Away from War” (8.5 mins).
- Article, “Societies within peace systems avoid war and build positive intergroup relationships” (Fry et al. 2021).