

CHANDOS' THEORY

The natural world of which humanity is an essential part is relatively benign and our modern, artificially generated fear and hostility is creating its own 'predators'.

Those of us raised within the bosom of Western Civilisation, struggle to appreciate how it has molded us to its liking. There are many concepts we take for granted without stopping to consider their implication. A classic example is surely the notion that great men have changed history and that we need these individuals to guide us to a glorious and ever-greater future.

But ask the indigenous peoples of Australia, where I happen to be writing this, just how glorious or progressive has been the combative, striving culture that reached their shores so very recently. Do we stop to consider for how long our cultures have been dominated by men? Historians generally agree, that only in the last 3,000 years - a period coinciding with the rise of patriarchal monotheism - has the male, female power balance been lost.

And yet, we must ask ourselves if this striving insistence on using violence on a global scale is so inevitably natural to mankind. We use the blunt tool of our aggression to combat perceived enemies or just to seek new pastures and dig up deeper minerals. Only the truly deluded now deny the environmental devastation left in our path. Nor for that matter, the psychological impact on our own spirit, now so weary and confused by the obsession with 'progress'.

We've a responsibility to realise that our history has been written by the victors of this violence. But Tolstoy was convinced of the realistic limits to the power of Napoleon and Gore Vidal quoted John F. Kennedy as telling him that once in power, how powerless he felt. What we call civilisation is predominantly vanity, built on the suffering and exploitation of millions. And yet, within our culture is also the seed of something special; an understanding of genuinely civil behaviour. Despite the excesses of imperial hegemony, it has grown slowly, through the will of the people. While individuals have often inspired when their rhetoric caught the prevailing spirit, it is brave groups forging a powerful consensus that have made the difference, through determined struggle and often at great personal cost.

This gradual progression towards ever-greater understanding, cooperation and peace is often overlooked as a profoundly natural process. It was Prof. Stephen Pinker who clarified that relative to an increasing global population, levels of human violence are steadily decreasing. It would appear that despite our best efforts, humanity is destined to live ever more harmoniously upon our precious planet. This might be hard to believe from the constant reporting of global conflict by the media. But we must understand how brief has been our destructive reign compared to the ancient history of humanity, as well as the forces at work now obstructing a clearer understanding.

For one, bad news appears to be good business. So we shouldn't take as gospel truth the notion that everything is falling apart around us. Then there is the realisation that powerful corporate forces have now taken international control of much mass-media. There are coercive agendas at work, where elite forces are aligned to multi-national industries such as oil, steel and that most infamous misnomer 'defense'. Their prevailing narrative is one of conflict and confrontation within a hostile and frightening world that makes little sense. Such

phrases as 'the war on terror' well illustrate the poverty of this perspective, which attempts to portray a selfishly motivated world in frightening chaos. Discovering the original source for the financing of these terrorists helps an appreciation of how we are being manipulated.

Any notion of the natural civility of humanity or of our having a basic ethic common to all is drowned in an attempt to re-write Charles Darwin's '*The Origin of Species*' as a horrific natural battleground. This was never Darwin's intent and even Prof. Richard Dawkins wished he had not used such a loaded title for his highly influential book '*The Selfish Gene*'. It is surely time to take another look at the natural world and be inspired by its order, constant cooperation and economy of action.

There is so much modern fear of nature that many children today dare not get close, lest it react violently towards them. Our culture appears to have gone out of its way to prove the hostility and unpredictability of a frightening natural world. And yet, is it not strange for instance, that despite the lethal armament of horns, teeth and claws on so many males competing for space and females, that very rarely is any serious damage done. It does not appear to be the aim of nature to waste energy on spite, retribution or revenge or anything else other than for the purposes of survival.

Then consider the relationship between humanity and those creatures most commonly attributed with violent intent towards us. In reality, we have no natural predators to fear, though we mistakenly give that title to many innocent creatures. Sharks do not like or seek out human flesh. Though admittedly of little consolation in the event, if bitten by one, it is likely because it was not impressed with your swimming style and considered you a dying seal. Shark attacks may be on the rise in a world in which both their existence and food stocks are at risk but there is no evidence that their desperate measures are vindictive or calculated. In our sentimentality, we mustn't confuse violence with the natural necessities of survival.

In fact, supposedly dangerous wildlife does all it can to avoid contact with humanity, perhaps sensing that such association will not end well. Snakes, lions and bears are only dangerous when surprised by humans without any perception of their environments, or the wit for true respect. Anyone who has taken a walking tour through an African wildlife reserve will know that the intent of a good guide is to be aware of the wildlife and often to give it notice of benign intent. Then, Hippos, lions, leopards, rhinos, hyenas, buffaloes and all other supposedly aggressive animals can be seen to be more concerned to keep well away.

Our popular culture is littered with examples of where our over-active imaginations have victimised creatures. The bat, the toad and the snake have been particularly maligned in this destructive process. But a favourite of mine is the common fly, which evoke for me less thoughts of a dangerous health hazard than the numinous sounds of inner nature. Surely to anyone of religious inclination the 'Lord of the Flies' is not a terrifying apparition but a creator of great wonder.

Even the harmless house spider becomes a feared enemy. According to Professor Yuval Noah Harari, it is very rare for spiders to kill humans while vehicles kill around a million people per year, so shouldn't we fear these more? The reality is that if children are taught to respect and cherish all nature, then the fear born of ignorance will melt away. We seem to need to separate ourselves from each other, from nature and from truth itself. But every time we create a distinction to make a limited sense of the world, we get further from the whole of which we are a precious part, a whole that includes the smallest creature and even matter itself. As my father, the poet Rodney Russell rightfully put it; '*Sacred is the Dust*'.

So if despite the spikes created by the warped narrative of dangerous elites, humanity is finding greater understanding and cooperation, how can we define this civil behaviour? Then, how can we write a new narrative that can actually give us hope?

Forget the notion of merely voting every 4 or 5 years, the ancient spirit of our democracy is of rule by the people; as many involved as possible and of greater significance than our elected 'representatives'. In the words of Ivo Mosley; *"In truly democratic communities, political participation is not a profession but a right—and perhaps also a duty . . "* Surprisingly enough, it is also the antithesis of capitalism because rather than a commodity, democracy is built on the very natural reality of endless bounty. The sun shines on all alike without prejudice or limit. Nature is not judgmental, respecting all life. In its true sense, rule by the people must include all of us without judgment of status or wealth.

This understanding has slowly grown despite the worst excesses of our imperial past; from the equality of the enlightenment to the struggle for universal suffrage and the rights of minorities. This is not so much rule by the mob or even the majority but by us all, active and participating to make our systems constantly accountable and adaptable. That makes democracy more of a spirit that any particular place or culture and therefore a constant process or if you like, a gradual *civil-isation*.

One could give as an example of this 'spirit' the situation in modern Hong Kong. It is true that Britain never actually gave the vote to the people there but there was something even more precious that had become part of the culture, the very fabric of the Island. It was a belief in the dignity of the individual, in the rule of law and respect for all people. It might be hard to quantify but that doesn't make it less valid or crucial to the evolution of a truly civil society.

This process relies on the belief in the dignity of humanity but also of all life and ultimately our precious planet itself. That is why we assume to give a vote to everyone - and where democracy is better realised - involve as many as possible in the act of rule, through education and socio-political process. A sure sign of the degradation of this spirit or process is where for example 'defense' is championed in preference to education or environment concerns. The latter process not only reduces the ability of a population to participate but ultimately enslaves them in the triple damnations of war, debt and bondage. As I write, many in the US will be very aware of the risk of this change of spirit.

A society that revolves around the purchase and sale of commodities, will never fully appreciate the limitless bounty of nature. The most profound realisation is that nature gives us unconditional love, the ultimate non-commodity. Love might be democracy in its purest sense but more realistic is the lesser prerequisite for respect. If you like, it starts with toleration and then matures to fundamental respect, with the ultimate vision of love for all life. It is the concept described in all the great religions before oppressive statecraft highjacks a group momentum for the purposes of domination. But it is just as much the sentiment of non-believers with the wisdom to perceive it.

Without that vision of the true meaning of love, there really is no hope. But with it, an ever-growing consensus can build the culture of democracy freed from the limitations of any one individual, a culture which is also that of peace and as we have seen, the natural order.