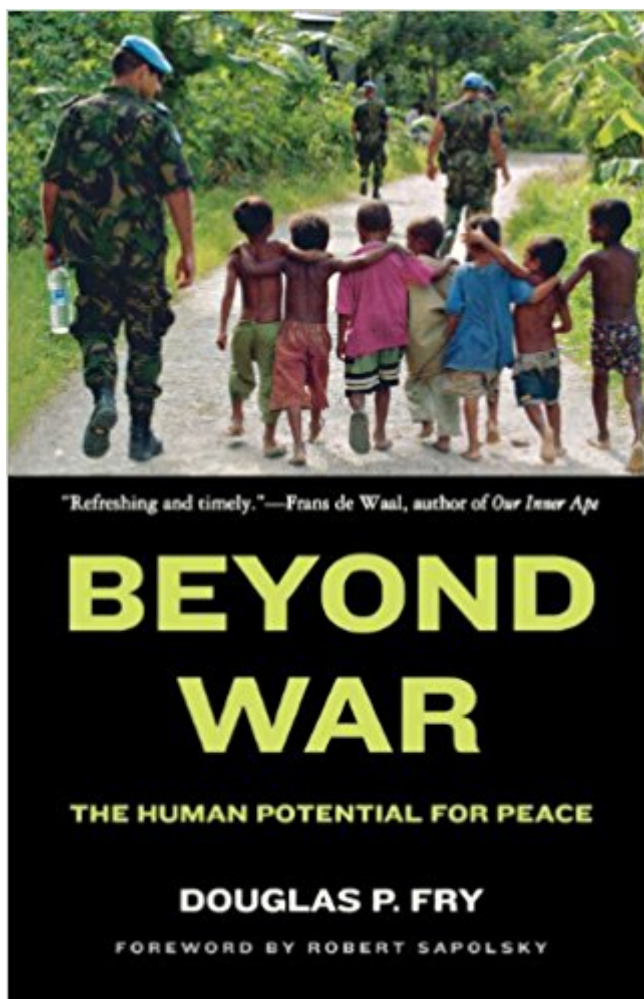


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# Beyond War: The Human Potential For Peace



## Synopsis

A profoundly heartening view of human nature, *Beyond War* offers a hopeful prognosis for a future without war. Douglas P. Fry convincingly argues that our ancient ancestors were not innately warlike--and neither are we. He points out that, for perhaps ninety-nine percent of our history, for well over a million years, humans lived in nomadic hunter-and-gatherer groups, egalitarian bands where warfare was a rarity. Drawing on archaeology and fascinating recent fieldwork on hunter-gatherer bands from around the world, Fry debunks the idea that war is ancient and inevitable. For instance, among Aboriginal Australians, warfare was an extreme anomaly. Fry also points out that even today, when war seems ever present, the vast majority of us live peaceful, nonviolent lives. We are not as warlike as we think, and if we can learn from our ancestors, we may be able to move beyond war to provide real justice and security for the world.

## Book Information

Paperback: 352 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 1 edition (April 10, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 019538461X

ISBN-13: 978-0195384611

Product Dimensions: 7.9 x 1.1 x 5.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 10 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #101,366 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #59 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Specific Topics > War & Peace](#) #63 in [Books > Textbooks > Social Sciences > Archaeology](#) #140 in [Books > History > Historical Study & Educational Resources > Archaeology](#)

## Customer Reviews

"This is a passionate book containing a tidy account of systems of war and peace."--New Scientist

"This book offers a refreshing and timely look at the evidence that we have warfare in our genes. Clearly, the assumptions of those who argue this position exceed the facts. Using anthropological data, Fry argues forcefully that our species has not only a strong desire for peace, but also plenty of ways to achieve it."--Frans de Waal, author of *Our Inner Ape* "If you believe humanity is doomed to war, read this book. If you want to convince others that it is not, read this book. Fry does two very important things in *Beyond War*. He shows that humans are not innately warlike and are fully

capable of living in peace. And he shows how past scholarship has been biased by an assumption of a 'beast within.' His magisterial tour of the evidence is clear, sensible, and entertaining."--Brian Ferguson, author of *Yanomami Warfare: A Political History* "Few questions are as controversial and consequential as whether war is 'natural.' In this important book, Fry does a fine job of demystifying the argument, while making a strong case for optimism. Human nature is a slippery thing, a concept often misused, yet crucial to understanding our past, present, and future. *Beyond War* will help scholar and lay-person alike to grasp hold."--David P. Barash, author of *Madame Bovary's Ovaries: A Dawinian Look at Literature* "An important and timely volume, [*Beyond War*]...is a valuable addition to the perennial debates on warfare."--*American Anthropologist*

Douglas P. Fry teaches in the Faculty of Social and Caring Sciences at Åbo Akademi University in Finland and is an adjunct research scientist in the Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology at the University of Arizona. A renowned anthropologist and a leading authority on aggression and conflict resolution, he has worked in this field for over twenty-five years and has published many articles and books on this subject.

There are plenty of self-proclaimed "realists" advancing the argument that war comes naturally to human beings, but few scholars with the knowledge to effectively question that view and the writing ability to make their challenge a pleasure to read. Fry is one of them. I won't get into the debate itself, better to buy the book and let Fry lay it out for you. I would, however, disagree with the previous reviewer about the importance of defining "war" before concluding that it is pervasive in human life. As Fry shows quite convincingly, you can only make the case for the universality of "war" if you define it as just about any lethal violence between three or more people. So a jealous man and his brother killing a third man (even within the same community) is considered to be "war" in these studies. Very misleading, dishonest science. The example from New Guinea is equally misleading. The reviewer is correct about the aggressive relations between groups there, but does he really think a tightly-packed island is a relevant model for the conditions in which human beings evolved? The world was a big, empty place from the perspective of early humans. Walking away from conflict was always an option. By the time studies were conducted in New Guinea, population density had reached a point where there was no place left to go in order to avoid conflict. This is more relevant to present conditions than to prehistory. But the reviewer's point about whether or not there is a universal human propensity to behave aggressively toward those not in our group (language, culture) is a good one. My reading of Fry's argument is that he acknowledges that

humans have the "capacity" for violence, but not necessarily the "tendency." Obviously, we are capable of horrible brutality, but the notion that it comes naturally to us is belied by the severity and ubiquity of post-traumatic stress in those who have acted in violence -- other than psychopaths. Wolves and sharks don't suffer after having killed. Humans, by and large, do. In any case, I highly recommend *Beyond War* to anyone who wants to hear the other side of the story, and who wants to enjoy themselves as they learn. Christopher Ryan, author of *Sex at Dawn: The Prehistoric Origins of Modern Sexuality*

Though technical, Fry thoroughly shows that there are errors in previous research that make the assumption that humans are by nature warlike. It brought a gleamer of hope to alter our way of looking at humanity.

Like many people, I'd come to believe that human nature is essentially war-like. After reading this book, I now understand that the vast majority of humans prefer peace, harmony, and positive problem-solving. The one problem we can't seem to solve (which is not addressed in this book) is how to choose leaders who prefer negotiated problem solving rather than violence.

I am reading this for a course on Peaceful Societies and it has a very interesting perspective, is clearly written and will be an important part of my final paper. Recommended for anyone interested in helping create a more peaceful world based on realistic principles.

Douglas Fry is professor of anthropology at the Abo Akedemi in Finland and an adjunct research scientist at the University of Arizona. His long-term interest is in understanding conflict and conflict resolution. His goal in this book is to counter what he calls the "neo-Hobbesian" view that prehistoric human communities, overwhelmingly hunter-gatherer in organization, were overwhelmingly fierce and war-like. He does this mostly by reviewing what we know about existing simple societies of the hunter-gatherer type. Fry's is a marvelous way to gain insight into human possibilities. We lived most of our evolutionary history in hunter-gatherer societies, so human nature is without doubt the product of the social relations of hunter-gatherer life. Fry shows, through analyzing a welcome variety of small-scale societies that virtually every such society has complex and sophisticated rules for avoiding and resolving conflict, and there are many such societies that simply do not engage in warfare. Fry therefore uses anthropological evidence to persuade the reader that warfare in human society is not inevitable, and that human nature includes many tools for the peaceful resolution of

conflict. A second claim Fry puts forward in this book is that warfare is in fact uncommon in modern-day hunter-gatherer societies, and probably was uncommon in our Pleistocene hunter-gatherer past. To show this, he provides much argument but little evidence. Moreover, my colleague Samuel Bowles has recently completed a careful study of the extent of war among both prehistoric and historic hunter-gatherers and comes to the opposite conclusion (Samuel Bowles, "Did Warfare Among Ancestral Hunter-Gatherers Affect the Evolution of Human Social Behaviors?" *Science* 324:1293--1298). He included the eight ethnographic sources and the fifteen archeological sources containing the relevant data on the fraction of adult males that perished in war, as opposed to natural causes and intra-group violence. He found that the ethnographic and archeological sources indicated a mean between 12% and 16% war mortality. Moreover, Bowles found that this level of warfare was sufficient to explain a high level of intra-group altruistic predispositions in humans. If Bowles is correct, and if there are no other factors promoting human altruism, we are in the curious position of being the most prosocial and cooperative species outside the eusocial insects precisely because we are among the most warlike of social species. I suspect there is a lot more to be said on this topic, and I suspect that there are sources of human solidarity and altruism beside war. However, there is every reason to believe that Fry is correct in stressing the possibility of conciliation and peace in the future of our species, and his book is a welcome addition to the literature on the topic.

Hard to read--so sad

This is the best book on "primitive" warfare out there for the basic reader currently (until Brian Ferguson releases later work). He shreds all the current anthropological arguments for humans being innately geared towards warfare whether biologically or through bogus surveys of primatology, ethnography or archaeology. Fry correctly makes the distinction between nomadic hunter-gatherers being completely different from tribal horticulturalists and sedentary foragers when it comes to using them as exemplary models of lacking warfare. He covers their mechanisms of nullifying disputes and their kinship structure that prevents organized warfare. The last chapter is pretty weak, but if you need a readable starting point for the anthropological dialog of warfare - this is the KEY place to start. If you don't have that above distinction in mind with nomadic foragers, your whole perspective is useless.

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