

revolve around punishments donated to those who are religiously incorrect and morally frail. Perhaps the ultimate formal cruelty is the currently very popular jihadist announcement that all those uncommitted to Islamic fundamentalism of a particular flavor should be killed in an eager form of broad service to godly rectitude. The idea is, of course, quite amazing, yet the dancing in some streets that followed the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon is no small datum about the value of Nell's central and profound assertion. Armageddon as an idea of appropriate punishment for bad people remains an attractive feature of various systems of belief. Who dreams up such notions but members of a species apparently equipped with the full toolkit Nell describes? And yet, given Nell's analysis of vicious primate hunting, we may be permitted to wonder what would be the result if chimps employed assertive theologians to justify their behavior.

Cruelty, age, and thanatourism

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Abstract: Two areas of research for testing Nell's theory are suggested. One is cruelty's seemingly negative correlation with age, which would confirm its linkage with testosterone, sex, and dominance. The other is the special field of leisure activity called *thanatourism*, that is, the transformation of loci of human horror into tourist attractions.

Nell makes at least two major contributions in the target article. First, he convincingly destroys the frequent, categorical, but empirically unsupported dissociation between predation and aggression. To be sure, the two are not necessarily associated, but their coevolution in predatory vertebrate species is highly plausible. Second, Nell notes the quantum jump in cruel behavior associated with the rise of states. In this, he shows how any complete account of human behavior always involves the interplay of biology and culture.

My one quibble with Nell concerns the third part of his central argument, where he restricts cruelty to hominids, starting with *Homo erectus*. If cruelty, by definition, is the intentional infliction of pain, it must involve self-consciousness, a trait clearly present in apes and quite probably in other highly intelligent mammals, such as elephants and cetaceans. Therefore, I would hesitate to deny a priori the capacity for cruelty in intelligent predator species such as orcas. Almost every claim for human behavioral uniqueness has bitten ethological dust. Prudence dictates avoidance of making a new one, although we are very probably best at being cruel.

Let me suggest two programmatic addenda to test Nell's cruelty model for humans. The first concerns a hypothesized negative correlation between cruelty and age. If cruelty activates the same hormonally based reward circuits as sex, dominance, and aggression, one would expect it to decline past puberty. This proposition could be tested, for example, on the behavior of sport fishermen and hunters (even though both groups would deny that cruelty motivates them). The frequency with which they kill their quarry could easily be correlated with age. For instance, the incidence of voluntary "catch-release" among fishermen would be a good index. The point of satiation in the shooting of multiple small game (such as ducks and partridges) would be another.

The second suggestion relates to the incipient research area of *thanatourism*, a neologism referring to the study of what attracts millions of visitors to the loci of atrocities such as Nazi concentration camps (Auschwitz rivals the Eiffel Tower as one of Europe's top attractions), ports of embarkation for the Transatlantic Slave Trade in Senegal and Ghana, and the killing fields

of Cambodia. In a sense, these attractions are more authentic substitutes for the waxworks of Madame Tussaud, and thus nothing new. Tourism is driven in part by the quest for authenticity.

Of course, most visitors to thanatouristic sites would strenuously deny that they have come for cheap thrills. Their presence is sublimated as memorialization or learning from history to avoid repetition. Why do visitors come in millions, however, even from families and ethnic groups who have not been affected by the atrocities? Unlike many memorials that are sanitized, thanatouristic sites often include displays of gruesome photographs, mountains of abandoned shoes and suitcases, and even stacks of skulls. Thus, their attractiveness is far from self-evident. Indeed, many visitors exhibit or report acute stress on these sites. Could it be that, in societies that have banned many displays of cruelty, such as public executions, the "demand for cruelty" gets sublimated and ennobled in "never again" thanatourism? Clearly, the behavior and motivation of visitors to such sites begs investigation.

Explaining human cruelty

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Abstract: I ask four questions: (1) Why should we think that our hominid ancestor's predation is not just a causal influence but the main causal factor responsible for human cruelty? (2) Why not think of human cruelty as a necessary part of a syndrome in which other phenomena are necessarily involved? (3) What definitions of cruelty does Nell propose that we operate with? And (4) what about the meaning of cruelty for human beings?

Nell argues that human cruelty has its origin in "predatory adaptation from the Middle Cambrian to the Pleistocene" (sect. 1). He says that this explains the widespread and ingrained nature of human cruelty. There is probably some truth in this speculation. However, I have worries about whether the evidence he cites supports the speculation, and I have worries about the content of the speculation. I put four questions.

1. Nell describes the multifarious and widespread phenomena of animal and human cruelty. And he makes it plausible that the nature, frequency, and distribution of cruelty should be given an evolutionary explanation. However, I cannot see that Nell has shown that his particular evolutionary speculation is better supported by the data than other possible rival evolutionary hypotheses. It is true that predation involves many of the features of human cruelty and it is thus plausibly seen as a historical source of human cruelty. But why should it be seen as the *unique* source? Our ancestors of the Cambrian to Pleistocene era did much else besides predation. They also fought, fled, and fornicated. In particular, human beings and many other species spend an awful lot of time and effort fighting and even killing members of their *own* species. Predation, by contrast, is typically directed at *other* species. Quite a lot of fighting within a species has to do with hierarchies, which are central in mating strategies. Some fighting within species may have to do with competition between groups for resources. Wrangham and Peterson (1996, Ch. 1) describe groups of chimpanzees killing chimpanzees from other groups. But much fighting within species, particularly between males, only aims at establishing hierarchies and does not involve death. It does nevertheless often involve pain and blood. So, such fighting is also a possible alternative source of current human cruelty. Moreover, there may be other possible contenders, perhaps in addition to the rival one that I have just mentioned. So, the first question I'd like to ask Nell is this: Although I am persuaded that there is causal *influence* from our hominid ancestor's predation to

human cruelty, why should we think that this causal influence is the *main causal factor*? Why is it not just one factor among others?

2. I am unhappy with Nell's *atomism* about the phenomena of cruelty. The worry applies equally to human and animal cruelty, but we can make the point most vividly for human cruelty. The point is one that Nietzsche makes (Nietzsche 1886/1973, sect. 259 and elsewhere). Nietzsche would ask: To what extent is human cruelty a necessary part of a syndrome in which other apparently different phenomena are necessarily involved? Nietzsche thought that a world without human cruelty would also be a world without many things that we do or should value. In particular, he thought that the barbarism of human cruelty is holistically intertwined with many of the highest achievements of "Western high culture." To simplify, Nietzsche would have said: No cruelty, no creative genius. For Nietzsche, the urge to human cruelty is irretrievably locked together with many admirable things in human life; creative and destructive urges are necessarily linked so that one cannot have one without the other. (Freud's later view was different because he separated creative and destructive urges, and he thought that one or the other was usually dominant [Freud 1930/1994]; for Nietzsche, by contrast, the two urges are necessarily tied together.) So my second question to Nell is: Why the atomism?

3. Although the phenomenon (or phenomena) of human cruelty may have animal origins, it is overlaid and transformed by cultural and ideological meaning; so it is not clear how far we are entitled to think of animal and human cruelty as instances of the same phenomena. This worry is partly, but not wholly, a pedantic one about what we are to mean by the word "cruelty." Let us start there, however. Cruelty is surely not merely "the deliberate infliction of physical or psychological pain on a living creature" (sect. 1). A doctor might deliberately inflict physical pain on a patient in the course of an operation, and a therapist might inflict psychological pain in the course of therapy that is intended to help a patient. Doctors or therapists might even take delight in causing pain if they think that it means that the cure is working. However, the doctor or therapist does not pursue or take pleasure in pain for its own sake; rather, the pain is thought to be a by-product or necessary means to what they do want for its own sake. Nell seems to recognize this, but only when we are already quite a long way into the target article; and he simply puts such cases to one side (sect. 2). But it is unsatisfactory simply to exclude these kinds of cases by fiat without modifying the definition deployed elsewhere. One cannot carry on working with the unsatisfactory definition, which does not fit the human phenomena that we call *cruel*. This matters because Nell needs a notion of cruelty that applies to both human beings and animals and which will allow him to draw conclusions about human cruelty from evidence about animals. I am not saying that this cannot be done, only that caution is in order – great caution. A proper conceptualization of human cruelty is essential to drawing any such conclusion. So, my third question for Nell is: What definitions of cruelty does he propose that we operate with?

4. I am not denying that it is possible, and perhaps plausible, that our animal natures are part of the explanation of human cruelty. But there is an enormous danger that the social or religious significance of human cruelty, in the *minds* of those who perpetrate it and suffer it, will be overlooked or underestimated. It is not clear how much we can learn from evolutionary theory alone when we consider the great human significance of blood, and therefore of the spilling of it. Consider bullfighting and fox-hunting. In both, the pain-blood-death scenario of the animal is invested with a complex array of meanings by the (human) participants. (See Hemingway 1932/1996 on the meaning of bullfighting; and see Scruton 1998 on the meaning of foxhunting.) And consider Christianity, in which one person's pain-blood-death scenario is invested with huge metaphysical, moral, and social significance. Indeed, the fate of the entire

cosmos is sometimes supposed to rest on the pain-blood-death scenario of one man: Jesus. And believing in that significance is supposed to have the power to deliver profound spiritual and metaphysical "salvation." Perhaps the meaning of Jesus's pain-blood-death in Christianity has more to do with suffering than cruelty. Nevertheless, it illustrates the transfiguration of pain-blood-death by complex meanings. There is a general issue lurking here about the relation between the human and social sciences, on the one hand, and disciplines such as biology and neurophysiology, on the other. Consider eating or sex: It is true that both animals and humans do it. But human beings invest these activities with social, moral, and religious significance, and they surround the activities with complex rituals. Human beings transfigure animal phenomena by investing them with meaning. It is not clear how much of the original animal phenomena will be recognizable in the sophisticated human phenomena. So, my fourth and last question for Nell is: Given the layers of meaning that, for perpetrators and sufferers are part of what human cruelty involves, is there enough in common between human and animal "cruelty" to forge a strong explanatory link between them?

Author's Response

Cruelty and the psychology of history

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Abstract: This response deals with seven of the major challenges the commentators have raised to the target article. First, I show that the historical-anecdotal method I have followed has its roots in sociology, and that there is a strong case for the development of a "psychology of history." Next, the observational data suggesting that intentional cruelty cannot be restricted to humans is rebutted on the grounds that cruelty requires not only an intention to inflict pain, but to do so *because* that pain would cause the victim to suffer – which requires a theory of mind. Third, in the light of the commentaries, I recognise that not only predation but also intraspecific aggression contributes to the development of cruelty. Fourth, I contrast nativists and environmentalists, the former regarding cruelty as a universal human capacity and the latter holding the view that cruelty is acquired through social learning, and argue that there is an otherworldly quality to the environmentalist view. I then show (the fifth challenge) that the target article does generate testable hypotheses. Sixth is a consideration of the implications of the target article for the re-admission of the concept of evil to the psychological lexicon; and seventh, a consideration of the commentaries which note that the cultivation of compassion is a tool for the prevention of cruelty. The last section of the response replies to questions of detail and rebuts some misrepresentations of my argument.

Publishing in *BBS* is not for the faint-hearted. It has forced justification of what had seemed to me to be self-evident (as with my historical-anecdotal method), reconsideration of what had appeared to be strong lines of argument (as with recognising the centrality of intraspecific aggression for the development of cruelty); allowed me to follow the encouragement given by commentators in elaborating half-articulated issues (as with the pull of evil); and