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States and the State of Nature: Understanding State Failure through Evolutionary Theory

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**Part I:**

**State Failure and Current Theories in Political Science**

State failure has been identified as one of the most destructive phenomenon in our world today. It poses many threats, both to the population of the failing state itself and to international peace and security. Fukuyama, the famous American political scientist, even made the claim that “weak and failing states have become the single most important problem for international order” (Cojanu and Popescu 116). State failure can have a severe domestic impact by leading to intense and bitter conflict within a state, and it can affect the region as well because many displaced persons and refugees pour into neighboring states as a result of the conflict, not to mention the fact that the conflict itself often spills over the state’s borders into other states. Globally, too, failed states can cause security threats because the “ungoverned space” can be a breeding ground for human trafficking, drug production, and global terrorism (119-20) For this reason, powerful states such as the U.K., Canada, and Australia have backed programs meant to develop and strengthen failing or weak states on the basis that they pose a threat to global security, and U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, in this same vein, argued that because of our globalized world, “a threat to one is a threat to all...Our defenses are only as strong as their weakest link” (116). The threat of state failure clearly moves as a powerful force in our world today, but what is it precisely?

Though many scholars and political scientists have written about the subject, there is no single, unified definition of a “failed state”. The term first appeared in an article published in *Foreign Policy* magazine in the early 1990s and was then taken up by key political figures such as Madeline Albright (114). I.W. Zartman in *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, offers the most all-inclusive and accepted definition thus far, arguing that state failure is when “the basic functions of the state are no longer performed” (115). Of course, this then requires the deconstruction of what a state is responsible for in regards

to its population. The standards for rating a state's "strength" or "weakness" are often based on its strength of physical security, legitimate political institutions, social welfare, and sound economic management (115). Many organizations have taken on the task of evaluating states in these categories with perhaps the most well known public source today being the Failed States Index or FSI. FSI breaks down its standards for evaluating states into three categories: Social Indicators, Economic Indicators, and Political and Military Indicators. In evaluating states *socially*, FSI looks at demographic pressures such as the pressures disease or natural disasters can put on a population, the level of refugees and internally displaced persons, group grievances such as ethnic violence or discrimination, and human flight or brain drain, the emigration of educated persons. They also take into account *Economic* markers of development such as levels of uneven economic development and the increase of poverty or economic decline. However, *Political and Military* Indicators seems to make up the highest standard with six separate subcategories of evaluation: the level of state legitimacy, the provision of public services, human rights and the rule of law, strength of the security apparatus, the degree to which elites are factionalized, and the level of external intervention or interference affecting the state (Foreign Policy). The FSI is published annually with data of the previous year providing new rankings of states, though it is worth noting that it is not the only attempt to classify and identify failed or failing states. The U.S. has developed the Commission on Weak States and U.S. Security, and the U.K. has its own departments specifically for international development that categorizes states. However, besides the FSI, the other two most widely accepted sets of rankings and evaluation are the Transformation Index of the Berelmann Foundation and the Governance Index of the World Bank. However, all of these varied organizations have their own set of standards for evaluating state strength or weakness, and, curiously, they all cannot even agree on

the number of failed states in the world. Some, like the World Bank, base their evaluation more on economic indicators while others are based more in physical security factors. For the purpose of this thesis, however, I will be using the FSI's detailed classification of what makes a strong or weak state in evaluating case studies in Part III.

Though I will be discussing the concept of the "failed state" and using the FSI's evaluation of states for the sake of better understanding what leads to this phenomenon, it is important to first acknowledge the heated, ongoing debate surrounding the term by many political scientists and scholars. In "Failed States are a Western Myth", Eliot Ross bitterly refers to *Foreign Policy's* FSI as "a yearly exercise in faux-empirical cultural bigotry" (1). He argues that the concept of the "failed state" becomes just another tool for Western countries to intervene for the purpose of their national interests and that it is both malicious and arrogantly prideful to believe that developing states need the "ever benign 'guardianship' of the western world" (2). He then adds acrimoniously, "We Westerners would keep hold of our sovereignty, of course; they [developing states] would make do with something called 'survivability' instead, and be grateful for it". The concept of the failed state also played an essential role in the development of the R2P norm, which Eliot argues is used as legal rationale for powerful states to act on their own self-interest. In summation, the concept of the "failed state" is simply an excuse for powerful states to take advantage of weaker, developing states.

Some scholars take this argument even a step further. In "Failed States, or the State as Failure," Rosa Brooks asserts, "most commentators define failed states in opposition to the successful states that are presumed to be the norm" (1160). However, states are a relatively new form of political organization when the history of city-states, empires, feudal kingdoms, sects, tribes, etc is taken into account. The state was not truly formed until 1648 with the Peace of

Westphalia that ended the Thirty Years War (1648). Stable states, “normal” states haven’t even been around that long, and are not, historically, the clear norm for political organization. In fact, the development of even the modern, stable states of today was a fairly bloody process that took place over centuries, so holding supposed failed states to this recent norm seems slightly manipulative. Brooks goes on to further point out that many of the states that are currently labeled failed states, many of them African states, are products of colonialism and throughout all of their history, would never truly have been considered stand-alone, stable states. During the Cold War, many of these “states” were being propped up by either the U.S. or the Soviet Union in their global conflict. It was only when the Cold War ended and these states were no longer of a special interest to the world powers that the concept of the “failed state” came into play. As Brooks contends,

Most so-called failed states were never really states in the first place, at least not in anything more than a technical sense. Afghanistan was never a functioning modern state; neither was Congo, nor Sierra Leone, nor Somalia, nor most of the dozens of states that have been characterized in the past decade as failed or failing. (1168).

With the colonial past serving as reminder that many of the problems facing failed states are a direct result of imperial interference in the first place and the fact that these same Western and European states are once again usurping their sovereignty through a rather duplicitous and shifty definition of “state” and “state failure”, is it any wonder that so many, like Eliot and Brooks, are questioning the legitimacy of the failed state as a concept?

It is certainly important to acknowledge that the “failed state” can be problematic at some levels. However, there are also very real dangers and problems that are known to be associated



with state failure that are worth addressing. Even with the definitional problems, there are still many lives being lost in disease, hunger, and conflict, and that shouldn't be easily dismissed. In "Why Do Some States Fail While Others Do Not?" Bryan Yannantuono explains, "theoretical models aside, state failure embodies a very tangible peril for those who reside within the failed state, as well as the states that border it...state failure is causally linked to increased and widespread humanitarian suffering, regional instability, and transnational threats of international organized crime" (3). As Yannantuono also points out in the article, failing or failed states are often contiguous with state collapse, which brings many of these incredibly destructive effects to the fore. In acknowledging the toll state stability can take on its population and the surrounding population, the secret of state stability becomes a puzzle that many political scientists and scholars are trying to resolve in the name of preserving human life and dignity. The task then becomes dissecting, analyzing what aspects of a state's make-up contribute to either its weakness and instability or its resiliency. What does a state require to thrive and remain stable? What factors or characteristics make a strong state? Political science has long been debating the issue, and scholars have come up with many different answers.

As early as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, the question of what makes a state durable and resilient has been a matter of debate. Hobbes believed that only a strong, authoritarian "sovereign" was capable of controlling a state, while Locke contended that liberal democracy was considerably more efficient and enduring for the simple fact that any government that was too overpowering would be overthrown. Both theorists' root their models in what they perceive to be the nature of man and the state of ungoverned nature itself. Thomas Hobbes in *The Leviathan* argues that people are held captive in the state of nature. Born out of his experience of civil war, the state of nature is an ugly place where people are entirely free to carry out their own

wills, but they remain in a state of “continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man [is] solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short” (89). Every man seems an island entire of himself, and every other person poses a threat. People must live by their instincts and the instinct of aggression is the strongest force at play. Each man acts to preserve “his life against his enemyes” and possesses “a Right to every thing; even to one anothers body” (91). Hobbes’s state of nature is violent and destructive anarchy, and the only way out is through a social contract, surrendering rights for security. However, because human nature is violent, power must be centered on a strong sovereign because *only* a strong authoritarian figure that could put the fear of death in citizens for breaking the social contract would be able to keep the country from devolving back into its natural state.

Locke had a very different perception of human nature and the state of nature. He believed men had the ability to reason and that they could comprehend that it was to the mutual benefit of any individual to cooperate with others, reciprocate any kindnesses, and develop a good reputation for the sake of reciprocation. He argued that people were self-interested, but it was in people’s self-interest to maintain a good reputation in order to receive help from others when they needed it. For these reasons, he also contended that people have a right to property. Essentially, Locke, very unlike Hobbes, argued that people have a right to their own body and “the labour of his body, and the work of his hands”, which is the means for attaining property (2). Locke stipulates, “he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property” (2). Men have a right to property because property essentially becomes an extension of them. These basic rights, because they are present even in a state of nature, create a very peaceful state of nature. Government is only needed for the sake of overcoming collective action problems. Therefore, Locke’s social contract is less about escaping

from the state of nature and more about an almost distant governance that, for the most part, leaves the people alone. In line with liberal thought, a government should be aligned with and representative of people's interests, basically democratic. No government should take people's rights, specifically property rights, away, and when a government becomes so overpowering that it is overstepping its narrow bounds, in Locke's world that is reason enough to replace it. Today, we would understand Locke and Hobbes's arguments as arguments about regime type, and certainly it has long been disproven that simply because a state is democratic or authoritarian does not translate to 'it is strong' or 'it is weak'. Democracies make up some of the strongest states today, but it is also a well-known fact that some of the most unstable states are new democracies or states that are transitioning to democracy. Democracy is pretty much all over the spectrum as far as weak and strong. There are fewer, very powerful authoritarian regimes today, but countries with an authoritarian regime are not necessarily on the edge of stability. Even though Hobbes's and Locke's arguments about the importance of regime type in determining the stability of the state, or in Hobbes's case simply its ability to keep the state of nature at bay, have been amended, it helps point to the fact that even in the early formation of the state and possibly even just political organization in general, the question of what creates stability has been a question political scientists, philosophers, and theorists have been grappling with for hundreds of years.

Of course, it is a question they are still grappling with, and while many believe that regime type has a role to play, there are many other, perhaps more accurate, indicators of what creates stability in states or even, inversely, what creates instability. One firmly held belief in the era of Ronald Regan and Margaret Thatcher was the idea that countries and the world as a whole would benefit from a kind of globalized economic reform. When countries' economies are

growing, they reasoned, those countries can further develop, and it was believed that strong economic growth would help the populations of many states in the long run. This reform had many names in the 1980s such as Reaganomics and Thatcherism, but globally it was known as neoliberalism. It meant “emphasizing a greater role for the market in the allocation of resources, a much reduced role for the state, and increasing integration in the world economy...proponents have held out the prospect of rapid, efficient growth, and an escape from the stop and go patterns of stagnation engendered by previous models” (Baer and Maloney 311). In other words, economic development would benefit everyone over the long run, and the process involved globally scaling back on state interference with the economy, allowing the markets to move as they would and to become globalized. However, the effects of this process didn’t quite pan out in many regions the way some believed it would. In Latin America, specifically, the effects of neoliberalism were condemned as socially regressive because economic growth took precedence over the distribution of wealth in many countries and as a result inequality was greater. Wages and workers’ rights were not protected, which created unrest in the populations. Economic reform had not been quite the panacea some thought it would be during that era. It was, in fact, charged with leaving many states worse off than when they began. Economic reform that grows the economy rapidly can, in many ways, actually lead to considerable instability in states if it creates a greater disparity between the rich and the poor or the social classes.

Yet, many believe there is still something important about economic growth and reform in developing states. As Tella and Macculloch point out in “Why Doesn’t Capitalism Flow to Poor Countries?” intrusive economic “regulation and left-wing rhetoric are more common in poor countries than in rich ones” (316). Indeed, they find that capitalism is “relatively more popular in rich countries than it is in poor countries,” and the poor countries are much more

likely to be less developed and more fragile (286). Many scholars and politicians are trying to figure out how to enact reform that will bring about economic growth in these countries, but in a way that also offers stability. From past experience, many have found that simply building a strong economy is not always enough to also build up the overall strength and stability of the state. However, overall development and stability is also usually more difficult to attain in poorer countries, so it becomes a puzzle of how to grow economies in a smart way. Timothy Shaw in “Africa’s Quest for Developmental States: ‘Renaissance for Whom?’” articulates this very dilemma and the need to organize the multiple factors of state development in regard to economic growth when he cites,

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) abandoned inherited market liberalisation—‘the observed inability of previous development approaches to assist African countries in diversifying and transforming their economies’—in favor of a ‘developmental state approach’ in which burgeoning growth would be advanced through sustained infrastructural, institutional, and social development (838)

Stable states have stable economies that grow, but simply growing the economy will not make an unstable state stable. In this way, the problem almost seems a paradox because weak states need a strong economy for development, but they need strong development before they can really grow and benefit from a stable economy. Clearly, the free market and capitalism are not going to do much good as far as strengthening states unless other factors are also taken into account.

Rather than economic factors, some scholars like Ronald Inglehart of the University of Michigan argues that the emphasis of development should be put on more social factors and the development of civic culture. As Inglehart explains, “since the late 1960s, rational choice models

based on economic variables have become the dominant mode of analysis; while cultural factors have been deemphasized to an unrealistic degree” (81). Stability within a country rests upon such factors as “personal life satisfaction, political satisfaction, interpersonal trust, and support for the existing social order”. Civic culture or civil society stands as a kind of political and social force that acts in relation to the government and the state, but in many ways is independent of it. Inglehart goes so far as to say that civic culture can explain many phenomena in states that economic analysis simply can’t. For instance, this particular perspective places emphasis on “sense of life satisfaction” for an individual within a given society rather than the country’s overall GDP or economic development. It then asks the question, “Is it true that economic security tends to enhance the prevailing sense of life satisfaction in a society, gradually giving rise to a relatively high cultural norm?” (1207). Generally, yes. However, there is a gaping distinction between these two perspectives, which are approaching the same problem. Asking the inverse of the same question helps to get at this difference: Is it true that a lack of economic security is likely to negatively impact the sense of life satisfaction in a society? Probably. Does a country that has a high GDP and a lot of industry necessarily also have economic security for the majority or most of the individuals within a society? Not necessarily. Inglehart also stresses the fact that these variables can impact each other. For instance, a society that has more economic security over a longer span of time may begin to develop higher levels of interpersonal trust. He also ties civic political culture to the permanence of a democratic regime:

Life satisfaction, happiness, interpersonal trust, and whether one supports radical social change or defends one’s existing society, all tend to go together in a cultural cluster that is closely related to whether or not democratic institutions have persisted for a long time in a given society. (1217)

This also helps to shed light on why transitional democracies can be so unstable because the populations of these states probably haven't had the chance or the time to develop a healthy civic culture. However, this model analyzes states and stability at the level of the society within a state rather than the state as its own entity or the individuals of that state, and so there are some holes in explaining other kinds of phenomenon.

Other scholars have suggested that failed states are sometimes the result of individuals in power and the agency of those governing. In "Bad Guys Matter" Paul Collier contends, "leaders matter, for better or, more likely for worse" (2). He cites examples of leaders, mostly African leaders, who govern to suit their own interests at the cost of their people, arguing "these people not only neglect to build the economy, they actively avoid doing so. The best-known instance is President Mobutu Sese Seko's order to 'build no roads' in the vast country then known as Zaire. Why? Because without roads, it was harder for opponents to organize a rebellion against him" (2). With some of the more developed democracies, there are mechanisms in place, checks and balances, that keep leaders from twisting the government or regime around too much for the purpose of their own interests, but in many democracies, especially new or weaker ones, the structure of the government itself is flexible enough to move as the leader wants it to. Once such a leader is elected, they will not give up power easily: "Politically ambitious crooks do not just fritter away the money they make from corruption; they invest it in future power," and they have the power to "bring whole countries to their knees" (3).

Other sources look at individuals as well, but rather than key individuals in power, they find data on average individuals within a population, trying to find indicators of healthy or weak states. Many feminist scholars take this approach. In "What Sex Means for World Peace," Valerie Hudson found some surprising evidence:

Using the largest extant database on the status of women in the world today...we found that there is a strong and highly significant link between state security and women's security. In fact, the very best predictor of a state's peacefulness is not its level of wealth, its level of democracy, or its ethno-religious identity; the best predictor of a state's peacefulness is how well its women are treated (1).

This can seem a rather puzzling finding in light of the other theories, which further points to the idea that there are more pressures acting on individuals than can be analyzed purely from the state level, but those pressures *do matter* in analyzing the state. This leaves some to conjecture what the link between the individual and state security might be as the data and evidence used to make these claims seems to correlate. States have begun to act on such facts and figures, however. When the U.S. went into Afghanistan and Iraq for regime change, they strongly urged that the countries press for at least a 25% female participation rate in their federal, elected bodies; ironically, the U.S. only has a female participation rate of about 17% in its Congress, but the fact that this appeared in their foreign policy objectives at all is acknowledgement of the fact that these theories regarding state stability matter and have an impact (2).

Many scholars and feminists have also looked to destabilizing forces such as the youth bulge phenomenon and its affect at the individual level to better understand the link between individuals and the security of the state. For instance, many have wondered what the effect on China will be of their one-child policy. The law has been the cause of many female-selective abortions and infanticide, and China now has a resulting deficit of about 50 million young adult women (2). There are many single, young men who, as a result, cannot settle down with a family. Many cannot find a wife, and, like a domino effect, rape and violence against women has escalated in the region. Many believe it is causing and could be the cause of great instability in



the regions that are most impacted and where women are the scarcest. It is difficult to make an exact prediction, but certainly it can be expected to be destabilizing. The question is merely to what degree.

However, it must be noted that there are still other scholars who believe that state stability and strength is something that cannot merely be artificially constructed. In fact, political scientist Charles Tilly goes so far as to suggest that war and state-making exist on a continuum, that all of these atrocious side effects that others attribute to state-failure may actually be a necessary part of the state-making process. Even the modern state was born out of a violent and bloody history. Tilly contends,

What distinguished the violence produced by states from the violence delivered by anyone else? In the long run, enough to make the division between “legitimate” and “illegitimate” force credible. Eventually, the personnel of states purveyed violence on a larger scale, more effectively, more efficiently, with wider assent from their subject populations, and with readier collaboration from neighboring authorities.

(172-73)

The process of the state coming to have the monopoly on the use of force, however, took a considerable amount of time and happened as the result of a long, drawn-out process. When European and Western states tried to reconstruct this finished model in the colonized “states”, which not having gone through the process themselves were ill-equipped to handle certain aspects of the apparatus, the result is many of the effects often attributed to the “failed state”. State stability, then, must come as a kind of “natural” end result and is not something that can be made or created. If this is the case, it puts policy-makers in a difficult position in how to proceed:

Are they exacerbating the problem in trying to help? Are they supposed to ignore the problem and let it work itself out “naturally” despite the bloodshed?

I would argue that despite Tilly’s argument, something should and can be done. Morally and ethically, it would be an incredibly difficult thing to simply accept that, because we can’t fix the problem in its entirety, we should allow the egregious effects that cost so many people their lives and security to flow unmitigated. However, especially because many powerful states have actually done a lot to make the problems in these countries worse through colonization and interference, there is an even higher obligation to stem the flow of blood and life that conflict, disease, and poverty are costing these populations. The many theories currently circulating among political scientists and politicians, which seek to better understand the nature of state stability and the effects of instability on the population, each have something worthy to offer in solving this puzzle. However, the theories that focus more on linking the individuals of a society to the security of the state seem to be more accurate indicators of state stability and are worth closer analysis. Looking at all of these forces and the kind of environment they create for individuals living within the country may open up the mystery behind why some of these odd correlations are so relevant to overall peacefulness within a state. In understanding the evolutionary psychology of individuals, which can have great predictive power in explaining responses to stimuli and environment, it may be possible to better understand what truly is at the root of state failure and instability.

**Part II:**

**Aggression and Cooperation: Predicting Evolutionary Strategies  
through Triggers in a Social Environment**

In Richard Dawkins's first chapter of his famous work *The Selfish Gene*, he muses in his usual, pithy style that "If superior creatures from space ever visit earth, the first question they will ask, in order to assess the level of our civilization, is: 'Have they discovered evolution yet?'" (Dawkins). Though the claim itself is overly grandiose, Dawkins is touching on something vital. Evolutionary theory is one of the most groundbreaking discoveries ever achieved by the human race. It unlocks so many mysteries and questions while simultaneously bringing to light numerous more puzzles. The logic of it is simple yet profound: with variety in the population, organisms ill-suited to their environment are less likely to pass on their genes; organisms that can thrive in their environment are more likely to live and reproduce, thus passing on the traits that help them to survive and/or thrive. The cumulative nature of this process over time is evolution. As Christopher Boehm of *Moral Origins* acknowledges,

After the passage of a century and a half, it's remarkable for any major theory not to be superseded, or at least vastly modified. However, in its basics...this theory of natural selection is still going strong in the world of science....When we consider the complexities of life processes, the simplicity and explanatory power of the theory are awesome. (3)

Evolutionary theory helps us in this day and age to fill in so many gaps in our understanding, not just about animals and the world around us but also about ourselves. However, there is often great resistance when it comes to applying evolutionary theories to human action and the human mind. After all, people have the ability to reason, the ability to be rational and think, and their actions are dictated by so many things that seem above supposed 'animalistic urges'. For instance, many people ask: how can evolutionary theory explain the allure of something as complex as religion or philosophy? How can it justify the mental,

physical, and emotional reaction to the exquisite, swelling crescendo of a string orchestra? Is the artist, who lives to put human thought and feeling into visual expression, somehow an evolutionary outcast, an anomaly? Or the poet? The writer? Perhaps even more perplexing is the question of altruism. Sacrificing one's life for another, a beloved friend or an unknown stranger, seems the greatest counter example to the assertion that people, like animals, have been shaped under the influence of evolution and natural selection. After all, many of these things seem, at best, superfluous to survival, or, at worst, absolutely counterproductive to it—i.e. altruism. However, to consider all of these examples as “flukes” in the evolutionary process or evidence against its influence is to misunderstand the complexity that arises from, what seems at surface-level, a very simple mechanism.

It is important to trace these common impulses and desires back to their source and try to answer the more basic question: how does this action actually help to protect and pass on one's genetic material? The connection is often easier to make than it first appears, and I will do my best to bring it to light throughout this section. The alternative is to accept that humans are somehow an exception to the rule, above the influence of a process that has shaped every other organism on the planet, both physically and mentally. Though it would certainly be pretty to think that the human race is above it all because of their superiority and complexity, it would seem highly unlikely that we are immune to such a powerful, enveloping force. In accepting the theory of evolution, it is illogical in many ways to not also accept that it has helped to shape the human psyche. And if the human mind is a product of evolution, it becomes possible to unlock many of the paradoxes and seeming dysfunctions of the natures of man and woman with all their intricacies. It becomes possible to explain how a person can have both the capacity for aggression and cooperation simultaneously and how each might be excited in different

environments with different social and psychological triggers. In essence, it becomes possible to understand the true nature of mankind.

I should add, before going any further, that none of this is truly a conscious process in the sense that a person knows why they are feeling or reacting to a certain stimuli the way they do. Natural selection may simply reward a given response or feeling over time; it's not like a logical thought process. The best way to explain this subtlety is through an example. In an interview between Richard Dawkins and David Buss, a renowned evolutionary psychologist, Dawkins postulates that “a naïve interpretation of Darwinian theory would say men ought to be cuing up to donate sperm; on the contrary, they have to be paid, which to a naïve Darwinian would sound ridiculous” (Dawkins and Buss). The mistake, of course, is to suggest that men *consciously* want to pass on their genetic information and produce offspring. Every organism “wants” this theoretically; that's part of how natural and sexual selection works. However, this desire is hardwired into a man's instincts, not something he is rationally trying to achieve. Dawkins quips that rather “the rule of thumb, which in nature works, is ‘enjoy sex’ because that's what tends to lead to reproduction” (Dawkins and Buss). Over the great expanse of time—before artificial insemination, before birth control, before the brief blip on the radar of history that is modernity—a strong desire for sex and the pleasure it gives leads, for obvious reasons, to greater levels of reproduction. “Want” in this sense, simply means that one's actions are likely conducive toward that end rather than that a person is actively trying to achieve a particular evolutionary goal. It is in this frame of mind that we turn from the theoretical ‘nature of man’ to trying to understand the actual nature of man in the context of evolutionary theory and what stimuli can trigger various strategies, specifically in regard to aggressive and cooperative responses.

The proclivity toward aggression is multifaceted and worth examination. It's incredibly prevalent in our close ancestral relatives, chimpanzees, and its strong roots can also be seen as early as adolescence through the issue of bullying. There are noticeable, potential benefits of aggression in the right scenarios and the right environment; specifically it can lead to gaining resources and attracting mates. Aggressive actions also tend to be context sensitive, suggesting that it is only a useful strategy given particular stimuli or circumstances and that men are sensitive to those cues. In this sense, context can sometimes correlate well with behavior or even be predictive on a large scale. In analyzing the nature of the failed state at the level of the individual, it is important to decipher what cues might trigger aggressive strategies in males.

Thomas Hobbes certainly based his theoretical state of nature on the inclination toward violence. A little over three hundred and fifty years ago, he famously wrote in *The Leviathan*,  
 the condition of Man is a condition of War of everyone against everyone;  
 ...everyone is governed by his own Passion and Reason, and there is nothing he  
 can make use of that would not be a help to him in preserving his life against his  
 enemies; ...every man has a Right to everything--even to one another's body... as  
 long as this natural Right of every man to own everything exists, there can be no  
 security to any man. (Hobbes 1651)

He originally envisioned an ahistorical state of nature, the collective result of man's own nature, as a world of fear in which the life of man was "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short". Only a powerful Sovereign, he reasoned, could rescue man from this horribly violent state by imposing a fear of death on those who dared to defy the law.

Given the modern understanding of aggression in human males, his words do not seem too far off the mark given the right circumstances. Males, specifically human and chimpanzee

males, have the capacity for brutal acts of violence against one another (Wrangham and Peterson 1996). In their book, *Demonic Males: Apes and the Origins of Human Violence*, Richard Wrangham and Dale Peterson explore the connection between humans and their closest relative, the chimpanzee. Aggression, they argue, is at the very root of human nature in men, and, perhaps more shockingly, it is an adaptation and not simply nature gone wrong. It was selected for in our ancestors and survives to this day because it is what works best in certain environments. It increases the chance of survival, the possibility of passing on genes through offspring in future generations, and even better the potential survival of those offspring. Aggression is a necessary part of the nature of man, despite its repugnance at times.

However, this proclivity for physical aggression and violence is not blind. Much as Hobbes suggests that the natural tendency toward destructive hostility can be reigned in within the framework of Sovereign power, David Buss notes in *Evolutionary Psychology* that aggression is triggered through the context of the situation, whether it is directed toward men or women (Buss 2011). It does not simply spring forth uncontrollably. The various contexts through which physical aggression and violence can be channeled are important for many reasons, not least of which is understanding better when men, as they are more often the perpetrators, are more likely to commit these acts and what contexts may help subdue this tendency. Hobbes, cutting straight to the point, suggested that fear of death is the only way to truly restrain this inclination in mankind. He wasn't that far off the mark in many cases. It is therefore important to understand the potential benefits to be reaped through violent acts and risk and to address the cues and circumstances that are more likely to provoke this response.

### ***Aggression as Natural and Adaptive***



Wrangham and Peterson begin their chapter entitled “Raiding” in arguing for the strong similarities and ancestral connection between humans and chimpanzees (Wrangham and Peterson 1996). They share a startling amount of similarities as well as DNA. They are also the only two animal species to “kill members of neighboring groups of their own species... a startling exception to the normal rule for animals” (1996). The more scientists and researchers understand of chimpanzees, the more they are convinced of their proximity to humans on the evolutionary family tree. Wrangham and Peterson continue, “This idea of a common origin is made more haunting by the clues that suggest modern chimpanzees are not merely fellow time-travelers and evolutionary relatives, but surprisingly excellent models of our direct ancestors” (1996). Being such, discoveries offering new light on the aggressive nature of chimpanzees simultaneously re-enforces how deeply engrained violence is on the human male psyche. Back in 2003, Michael Wilson, William Wallauer, and Anne Pusey reported their more recent discoveries and findings in observing and studying the chimpanzees at Gombe. They focused their attention specifically to the parameters of the groups within the park, which included the Mitumba, the Kasekela, and the Kalande (2004). Data collection consisted simply of following the specific individuals of the different tribes throughout the day and observing their interactions with one another. Many of the same patterns, which first emerged with Jane Goodall’s original team, were evident in their findings.

On March 30, 1993, one group of the scientists followed the Kasekela chimps into the rival Mitumba chimps’ territory. Of the traveling party, there was present Rafiki, an older female chimpanzee, and her young daughter Rejea, whom she kept close to herself. At 15:21, however, the group was violently interrupted by another traveling party, made up mostly of another tribe’s male chimpanzees. The mother, clutching her young daughter to her chest, tried desperately to

fight off the oncoming to attack and save Rejea. However, at 15:43, “while Rafiki still held Rejea, Prof [one of the other party’s male chimps] killed the infant with a bite to the stomach”, and he “snatched Rejea from Rafiki” (532). The mother made little noise shortly after the attack and loss of her child, and it was presumed by those present that she had been badly wounded. Shortly after this incident, another display of intergroup violence resulted in another infanticide. Wrangham and Peterson originally suggested that male infanticide was simply a way of securing more females to themselves and their group. By killing an infant not yet weaned, some primates are able to put females back into heat so that they will have more access to them in the future and a greater chance at impregnating as many females as possible, thus increasing their Darwinian fitness (1996).

However, the researchers of this particular experiment report, “Neither of the infanticides was followed by observed mating between the mother and the killers of the infant, but only in the case of the Mitumba female Rafiki was the mother known and sufficiently habituated to make strong inference about her mating behavior” (Wilson et al 2004). Besides the infanticides, there were also many young males killed by the violent males of rival groups. This falls very much in line with what is believed of aggression in chimps according to evolutionary theory; aggression in this instance is directed more toward eliminating potential rivals, effectively stopping them from passing on their genes, and also removing any progeny not their own, successfully eradicating competition from the gene pool before it has the chance to become a threat. The nature of the violence itself and the fact that it is directed toward members of the same species offers a curious looking glass into our own evolutionary heritage and just how deeply those tendencies run. Though this example is not precisely relatable to male humans, it does showcase the fact that violence is strategic and aggression is employed as a tactic when it pays to do so. It

is not senseless, but tactical.

Blind, unfettered aggression would probably mean a quick death for most males. When trying to understand an act of violence, it is important to pay attention to the potential payoff as well. Aggression has clearly been selected for, which means it had to offer an edge over the non-aggressive or passive members of the species. One particularly fascinating study that helps to illustrate this fact involves the adaptation of bullying. Clearly, bullying is highly immoral, unethical, and cruel, but is it adaptive or maladaptive? Because it is so prevalent, many wonder if it has some evolutionary benefit. In the literature, bullying is widely defined as “an imbalance of power, where the stronger individual repeatedly causes harm to the weaker individual” (2012). A study conducted by Books, Volk, and Hosker took 310 adolescents, 121 boys and 189 girls, and had them fill out questionnaires to assess if they had taken the role of the bully and how often, asking questions such as “In school, how often have you made fun of someone much weaker or less popular because of their religion or race last term?” (2012).

They then took measurements through a series of tests for personality and aggressiveness respectively. Their results were rather surprising. First, boys were more likely than girls to bully and show physical aggression, and they were more likely to bully and even to bully more as they grew older, especially as they hit puberty and became more sexually aware. (2012). Second, bullies tended to score well on the personality tests; they had good relationships with friends and family. There are a few implications that can be drawn from these findings. First, that males, and particularly males who were hitting puberty and becoming awakened to the competition for mates, were more likely to be aggressive. The bullies were not social misfits or socially inept. They were not outcasts, but rather fairly social and intelligent for their age among their peers. They were completely normal, healthy, and thriving. They had a higher tendency than other

students tested to have higher IQs and to be more athletically gifted. The fact that aggression shows itself in humans at such an early age—and the fact that the bullies were more likely to be more intelligent and well-liked—points to the assertion that bullying and aggression are perhaps adaptive. When used at the right moment, it offers power and few real negative drawbacks. Rather than a defect, it's an advantage.

### ***Potential Advantages to Aggressive Behavior in Males***

David Buss explores seven possible evolutionary payoffs that may come as a result of aggression, including cooping the resources of others, the ability to defend against attacks, inflicting costs on intra-sexual rivals, negotiating status and power hierarchies, deterring rivals from future aggression, and deterring long-term mates from sexual infidelity (Buss 2011). Many of these will become important in the analysis in Part III, but for now, I am going to focus on how showing how some of these tendencies for violence are hardwired into man's nature and the direct advantages to be reaped through its strategically use.

One of the major payoffs of violence can be warding off potential sexual rivals and gaining other male's resources. A rather recent experiment from Mitani, Watts, and Amstler that focused on a group of chimpanzees points to the truth behind the theory of gaining resources through increased aggression. Data was collected through observation of the Ngogo chimpanzees, which gained a sizeable chunk of land to the northeast of their territory by seizing it from their neighbors (2010). The researchers reported that the Ngogos "traveled, fed, and socialized in this region in ways similar to that in the central part of their territory" (2010). However, the rivals, who had only just recently occupied the area, disappeared. Though this study is conducted through simple observation, the significance of the resources gained is

extremely high. With more territory comes more food and space and thus the chance to expand and multiply in population. The ramifications for an act of violence against a neighboring tribe result in a payoff, which will resonate through generations and generations to come. In driving their rivals away and probably in some cases killing them outright, this group of chimpanzees had gained two of the most treasured and vital necessities in the race to pass on as many copies of themselves as possible. They have more resources with fewer threats to themselves and their offspring, and, for the males at least, there are fewer rivals to compete with for the highly valued females.

Besides the benefit of gaining rivals' resources and helping to eliminate competition, acts of aggression also have a huge benefit in attracting mates. Though Don Corleone famously said in Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* that "a man who doesn't spend time with his family can never be a real man", actual gangsters and men who engage in violence tend to have considerably more sexual partners than the average man, suggesting that violence may be useful in attracting women. Understandably, in a hunter-gatherer tribe, the dominant male, the tactfully aggressive man who can dominate his rivals, presents himself as a more desirable partner because, being dominant, he is in a better position to provide for a mate and any children they may conceive. Palmer and Tilley, who conducted a study on gang members and their levels of sexual activity, open the discussion of their findings up with a quote from Bernard P. Wong, who states, "Many are recruited [to gangs] because they are promised the companionship of pretty girls" (1995). Their method consisted in finding an STD outbreak among a group, which had to be "primarily produced by a relatively small interconnected population...primarily young and urban" (1995). They took a core group of 120 of the males and found that 57 reported being members of a gang and 63 reported that they were not involved in gang activity. Research on the

EPCHD had originally reported that the outbreak had been the result of high amounts of sexual activity from several of the gang members. However, they were not able to “make a direct correlation between STD rates and numbers of sexual partners” (1995). Therefore, to test the connection between gang membership and sexual access to females, Palmer and Tilley with the help of Stephen Muth created a computer program that would analyze the original data and remove possible confounding variables, focusing on just these two most prevalent details to find the connection.

Their results showed a higher number of sexual partners for gang members within the last 30 day period and an even higher number of partners for gang leaders who had 10 or 11 partners. The non-gang members numbers never went over 5 reported partners (1995). This experiment was compared to Laumann’s study of 1994, which looked for the breakdown of the number of sexual partners within the United States. He had found that 55.3 percent of males 18-29 reported having one or fewer sexual partners over the course of the last year, and only 14.2 percent had over four sex partners during that same period. Comparably, members of gangs were gaining, on average, considerably more sexual partners than an average man.

There are many possible reasons as to why this might be, but two of the most probable are that women, in some ways, are naturally drawn to aggression in males and/or that higher levels of aggression lead to greater status among other men, another possible reason for women’s attraction. For the first reason, that women are simply drawn to shows of aggression in men, evolutionary theory would predict that aggressive males are more capable of offering protection to a female, thereby increasing females attraction to aggression. Though this is not a conscious process, if aggressive males were better fit to protect a female or females, they would have been presented as more desirable mates, thus sexually selecting for the trait of aggression as well as

naturally selecting for it. Aggression, however, also elevates the status of men among other men. Ancestral men would have benefited from aligning with other powerful and aggressive men for the sake of waging war or attacking other groups to gain their resources as well as retaining the ability to defend their own. Thus, aggression is rewarded among men with higher levels of status and prestige. Women, particularly in their long-term mating strategy, are drawn to men with high status and lots of resources because it's an indicator that that particular male will be better able to provide for them than others. Again, it is important to remember that none of this is a conscious process. Modern women in this day and age can be incredibly independent and still find a dominant or slightly aggressive man to be attractive without doing the mental calculus of how he can provide for or protect them. These tendencies are hardwired in the brain and can simply be expressed through the feeling of attraction.

High status and resources also became sexually selected for through women's preferences over time. Aggression, therefore, not only has the potential to increase the resources of the aggressor, as shown by the aggression of the chimpanzees, but it can also increase access to females and a variety of partners, which allows for the pursuit of successful short-term mating strategies. These benefits insured and still insure that aggression is a trait that will continue to be selected for because of its numerous important benefits and advantages. However, aggression, when misdirected, can have its consequences too.

***Context: When Aggression is Best and When It is Best Avoided***

While there are many benefits to aggression in males, there are also many potential costs, not least of which is death. Men commit the grand majority of violent crimes such as assault and murder. Not surprisingly, many of their victims are other men (Buss 2011). They are more likely

to engage in greater risk-related behavior, and are therefore more often injured by it even if they are also injurious to others. Clearly, however, the trait has endured so the benefits must outweigh the costs, but men have also developed the ability to be more sensitive to their environment and situation so as to employ their aggressive strategy when it will be more advantageous to them. After all, the gang members of the previous study would hardly be able to reap the benefits of their aggression if no one was ever witness to their violence or if they were often aggressive toward others who were clearly more capable of overpowering them. Aggression is only truly beneficial when employed strategically.

This notion helps us to understand another fairly recent study from Crabb who looked at studying the commonality of homicidal fantasies in men and women and also looked at the tools typically used in their imagination to carry out the act (2000). The study took 300 undergraduate students enrolled in introductory psychology at a university in the northeast United States and asked them to complete a questionnaire. The questions were developed to ask if they had ever thought of killing another person, and the second portion asked them to write about their most recent experience with such (2000). The prompt read:

Even normal people occasionally have angry and violent thoughts about others.

These range from thoughts about “telling someone off” to thoughts about striking others and even sometimes thoughts about killing another person. Although there has been a great deal of research into the circumstances surrounding actual violent behavior that violates important social norms, we know very little about *thoughts* about violence in normal people. (2000)

They were then prompted to either write that they could not remember having any thoughts or, if they had, to write it out in as much detail as they could recall. 295 participants completed the



questionnaire.

The results were divided up into two subheadings of “Prevalence of Homicidal Fantasies” and “Weapons that Appear in Fantasies” (2000). In the first section, the results were found to mirror those of Kenrick and Sheets, who performed a similar experiment in 1993. 45.4 percent of participants reported remembering a recent homicidal fantasy. Of those, “nearly twice as many males (60.4%) reported having had recent homicidal fantasies as females (32.1%)” (2000). They then grouped the fantasies according to the cause or the reason why the participant had fantasized about killing them. The number one reason was a lover’s quarrel followed by a trivial dispute. Family conflict, which made up just 11 percent of the total homicidal fantasies, made up fewer causes for the fantasy than other conflicts with non-related people.

These results are fairly significant because they show men to have considerably more homicidal fantasies than women. Buss proposed that, as the aggressive sex of the species, men are more psychologically capable just as they are physically capable of homicide (2011). He goes on to suggest that “in many circumstances the costs are too great: In all societies, the person risks the wrath of kin and punishment from other interested members of the group” (2011). Thus such fantasies serve as a way of being able to properly evaluate the situation to determine whether or not it would be more beneficial or more harmful to attempt the act. Many times, it isn’t worth it, and so this exercise serves as a deterrent from potentially bringing more harm upon oneself rather than the benefits of aggression. This is what is known as homicide adaptation theory (2011).

Also significant in the findings was the motivation for such acts. People in general were more likely to consider homicide due to conflict with a mate, and they were less likely, in general, to consider killing a blood relative (Crabb 2000). This strategy makes sense in terms of

evolutionary theory because mates are valuable resources; to lose one is bad, but to lose one to someone else is even worse. In that case, not only has a person lost their chance to pass on offspring to the next generation, but also they have given it directly to their competitor (Buss 2011). On the other hand, killing someone who is kin is effectively limiting one's own genes because of the shared traits between blood relatives. Evolutionarily, it is beneficial to have kin passing on their genes because they share so much in common with one's own, but if a related family member gets directly in the way of passing on one's own genes, it may still be better simply to cut the losses. However, this still explains why there are considerably fewer homicidal thoughts directed at family members, despite the fact that there tends to be more interaction there and thus more potential for conflict.

The second half of analysis details the weapons more commonly used to commit the act within the fantasy, and, perhaps not surprisingly, the results mirror the weapons most commonly used in actual homicides. Cultural weapons, most notably firearms, were chosen more frequently than other weapons or strategies, though of any single category, the body was the weapon of choice, such as strangling or beating a person (2000). Many of the weapon choices suggest, however, a certain level of discreetness; that is, many chose a weapon they believed would help them better conceal the crime, thereby gaining the benefits of the violence while shrugging the consequences and drawbacks. This fits the theory outlined by Buss that perhaps men are able to use this ability to think through a potential violent crime to evaluate the benefits and the costs before pursuing action (2011). Aggression is very context specific.

Another study performed by Van der Meij, Buunk, and Salvador in 2010 looks specifically at the connection between attractive women and the rise of certain hormone levels in men, namely cortisol. Much has already been found in regard to the testosterone spike in men

when they are around attractive women, and cortisol is another hormone, a stressor, that provides energy to the muscles, allowing for more strenuous behavior and specifically risky behavior. It “has an adaptive function as it diverts energy to exercising muscles, enhances cardiovascular tone, and suppresses unessential processes such as digestion, growth and reproduction” (2010). The study was conducted with 84 male students; they worked to control for other possible variables by having them fill out questionnaires in regard to their sexuality well before the day of the experiment and asked them to keep to their normal sleep and eating schedule in the days leading up to the experiment, avoiding coffee, coke, and other stimulants just before (2010). They then assigned half of the men to a room with another man serving as the confederate and the other half to a room with a woman confederate. Three saliva samples were collected from each participant before they began the experiment, after they worked on the puzzles and again after having come in contact with the confederate.

Cortisol levels were found to increase more for the men in the room who found the woman to be attractive or very attractive (2010). This points to the fact that there is a considerable link between aggression in men and the presence of a woman. Men gain a rush through hormones that makes them more inclined to take risks, to show off, to be a little more dangerous. Part of the aggressive nature of men is chemical, and again, context specific.

While there are a great many different contexts that encourage aggressive behavior and acts, such as this previous study would suggest, the dynamics between groups can also be a source of conflict. Crabb in 1989 explored this issue of intergroup conflict among humans through a questionnaire. He took a sample of students from Temple University and from the Arab community in Philadelphia. They were self-assigned to groups as being either Israeli or Jewish-American, Arab or Arab-American, or non-Arab, non-Jewish U.S. citizens. They were

then given scenarios of aggressive action by one group against the other and asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 9 whether the action was justified or unjustified (1989). As was hypothesized, those who identified themselves as Jews or Israelis said that violent actions taken against Arabs were quite justified, and vice versa for those who identified themselves as Arab or Arab-American (1989). Crabb helps to show that the dynamics of the in-group, out-group can have a significant bearing on the way people perceive and feel about violent acts. This, evolutionarily, would make sense because it allows for more bonding and cohesion within the group and allows it as a whole to focus collective aggression on a threat or rival group.

The nature of aggression itself and the contexts in which it is employed hearken strikingly back to Hobbes's theorizing. Men have the capacity to commit horribly violent acts and even murder if it will substantially better their lot. As Hobbes famously described, in the state of nature it is the "natural Right of every man to own everything that exists" so long as he can seize it for himself (1651). Given this picture of aggression, it is not entirely difficult to conceive of some truth in the Hobbesian state of nature as a state of constant warfare. The only way Hobbes could conceive of leaving a violent state of nature behind was to create what he deemed to be a social contract in which people surrender some of their rights, like their right to everything and everybody, to a Sovereign who can enforce law on pain of death, all for the sake of escaping the state where fear and death reign supreme in the state of nature.

Interestingly, a current day hunter-gatherer group known as the Waorani found themselves in a constant state of war, engaging in endless violent conflict with neighboring tribes. Their tribe was losing a significant number of men in the fighting, and the other side was faring just a poorly. In fact, "the rate of violent death among the Waorani was calculated to be an astonishing 60 percent" (Wrangham and Peterson 1996). Given the nature of such aggression in

attacks and counter-attacks, once they had started, they snowballed, until there was little way of escaping the constant violence, even as it was detrimental to both parties far more than it was beneficial. Taking a page out of Hobbes's *Leviathan*, however, they decided that they could not stand to remain in the state of nature and the "age old habit of killing each other in lethal raids ended among the Waorani 'because the people themselves made a conscious decision to end it'" (1996). In essence, they created for themselves a social contract, trading the right to raid, kill, and abduct women for the ability to live in peace and without a constant fear of death.

Again, however, it is important to note just how important context is to the nature of aggression itself. Among the Waorani, a man is a coward if he does not fight; he will not gain status or attract mates, the common benefits bestowed upon warriors. The tribe rewards aggression, and passivity is weeded out. Refusing to fight means sinking to the lowest status within the tribe. However, by the group as a whole making a conscious decision to enforce a general law across groups and imposing a fear of committing these violent acts rather than a dread of not committing them, men's aggressive natures can be subdued rather than actively provoked in the name of honor and courage. Aggression is once again shown to be highly context specific. Aggression was necessary on an individual level before the agreement had been reached, but it would have been damning after the peace had been called. Being sensitive to that change was vital to remaining in good standing with the group.

Hobbes was, perhaps, a little too vehement in arguing the strength and vivacity of male aggression. He believed the only way to keep men from destroying each other was a strong, all-powerful Sovereign, a monarch during his time or, as we would probably refer to it now, a dictator. Anything less would not be strong enough to combat the "Right to everything", the

aggressive part of man's nature. This certainly presents a problem in our current understanding of the workings of a democracy.

The philosopher John Locke envisioned a very different state of nature, a nature based on mutual cooperation where men work together and treat each other well for the benefit of receiving the same in the future. It is this vision of reciprocal altruism upon which our understanding and even the workings of democracy itself are based. Both understandings of human nature, however, are incredibly viable and true to the source. Aggression, cooperation, and even altruism are all fruits from the same tree, different players in the same game.

### ***Cooperation and How it Can Trump Aggressive Behavior in the Right Setting***

Certainly, aggression has its advantages, but how do the advantages of cooperation stack up? Isn't it most beneficial to be the aggressive actor in a sea of cooperative ones? Actually, the answer varies depending on the situation. Free-riding is one of the most effective strategies if a person can get away with it. If they can benefit from the group without having to contribute in any way to the cost of cooperation, they stand to gain the most. However, the group is often conscious of, and trying to combat the problem of free-riding. It becomes the classic dilemma of the stag hunt: in hunting, it theoretically takes a group of people to bring down a stag, and, though there is less certainty in the success of the hunt, it would be enough to feed all of the actors if they are successful. If one person defects, the stag goes free. However, if one of the hunters sees a rabbit, a sure catch nearby, he faces a moral dilemma. Does he defect and leave the rest of the group to go hungry or does he remain with the other hunters and risk going hungry himself? Through the evolutionary development of group dynamics, if they know that the one hunter defects, he will stand to lose a lot more than a mere rabbit for dinner.

Christopher Boehm delves further into the nature of social selection and the evolutionary need for and development of a moral conscience. He asserts,

Both punitive and positive social selection were closely involved with group political dynamics, and when band members started to form consensual moral opinions, and were systematically punishing deviant behaviors and rewarding prosocial behaviors, a novel and powerful new element was added to the human evolutionary process. The ultimate result was the human nature we carry around with us today, which of course combines selfish egoism with nepotism but also includes enough sympathetic altruism to make a major difference socially. (83)

Before the onset of the modern era and modern times, people tended to live in hunter-gatherer groups. There are a few still in existence around the world today, which can offer some insight into a distant past and the environment in which the human psyche and human nature formed by the evolutionary process. In hunter-gatherer groups, cooperation, on some level, is absolutely vital. Without working within the confines of a group, an individual would likely have struggled to survive alone. Thus, as Boehm's quote alludes to, it is necessary to have a mixture of the selfish and the social, and the social requires developing the altruistic, empathizing being who gives as well as takes. Else, the individual is expelled, banished, outcast.

So what keeps an individual not only surviving but also thriving within the group dynamic? The development of a moral conscience to restrict action when away from the eyes of the group and, surprisingly, a strong sense of egalitarianism. Hunter-gatherer groups tend to despise when one member tries to seize control or bully the rest of the group, which allows for an interesting paradox to form within human nature. Chimpanzees, one of our closest evolutionary relatives, are very hierarchical, and certainly humans possess strong tendencies toward hierarchy.

However, in the long expanse of time that was dominated by hunter-gatherer groups, egalitarianism and the desire to keep any one member from dominating the whole of the group was also a prominent characteristic. Now, the two are very much compounded together, each ready to be triggered under the right circumstances.

Boehm summons an excellent example of this dynamic in practice, citing a study produced by anthropologist Colin Turnbull of the Mbuti Pygmies. As he describes, there are basic “core moral values in forager life”, most of which center on the sharing of game and meat (37). The Pygmies, too, are very egalitarian like most hunter-gatherer groups. Boehm asserts,

All over the world, hunter-gatherers use social control guided by moral rules to see to it that when a successful hunter kills a large mammal, his ego is held in check. To this end, he is not only precluded from decisively favoring his family and kinsmen with larger portions of the meat, but usually he is also forbidden by his fellow egalitarians even to preside over and distribute the meat—for fear that he might use this position to gain political or social advantages. (37-38)

Thus, when a rather arrogant member of the Mbuti Pygmies, Cephu, tried to cheat, to free-ride off of the group, he was punished. The Pygmies sometimes choose to hunt collectively, each family taking their net and slowly closing in upon an area of dense forest, encircling it as a large group. The animals will try to escape, running into the nets. They tend to be small to medium, but because they run in all directions, what each family catches is basically what they keep. Most capture about the same amount of prey.

However, Cephu felt that he was not getting enough, so, when he thought no one was looking, he moved his net ahead of the others so that game that might well have run into other nets, ran into his first, giving him the meat that should have belonged to other families. A few



group members, however, witnessed this bit of treachery, and when he returned they angrily insulted him, chiding that they had been treating him as a man when in fact he was little more than an animal. His cheating was immoral, corrupt. He protested angrily, defending his innocence. The rest of the group was outraged by his arrogance and his lies, and they considered expelling Cephu and his small ring of families from the group altogether. When Cephu realized the weight of his punishment—he had only four or five families, which was not enough to form a reliable and efficient hunting group on his own—he began to dramatically and profusely apologize, offering to give up all of the meat he had collected in his net to be divided amongst the other families (40-41). He needed the group to survive and for the families that depended on him to survive. He was welcomed back into the fold after being left to stew in his humiliation a while, but Cephu serves as an interesting example in extrapolating on the evolutionary significance of the group dynamic. When given the chance to benefit in the ignorance of the group, Cephu quickly seized upon it. The expression of his selfishness would have worked in his favor, too, had he not been caught. This is certainly a facet of human nature—to be sorely tempted to deviate from one's moral conscience for the sake of gaining some elusive boon. However, the Pygmies reaction to Cephu's duplicity is also very telling. They were not merely angry because they were left with less food. They were morally outraged at his behavior, that he would take food that was the rightful property of other families and then lie. They did not respect him as a man because of his actions. The high value placed on a set of moral values and egalitarianism in societies around the world speaks to the part it plays in a social setting, whether in hunter-gatherer groups or in a more advanced atmosphere.

### ***Triggering Cooperative Responses***

The question then becomes, much like aggression, what triggers cooperation among people? What triggers altruism and mutual aid? Like aggression, such responses are context-specific; cooperation isn't simply blind but, again, strategic. It mainly ties into the group dynamic. That is, cooperation tends to be prioritized with members that are perceived to be kin or a member of the in-group. In the book, *In the Light of Evolution V: Cooperation and Conflict*, one such context centers on what is commonly known as Hamilton's Rule. Prior to William D. Hamilton's discovery, things such as altruism or sacrifice, which can so clearly be seen among people and even certain animals and insects, didn't have a good explanation among evolutionary scientists. After all, a person who possess the altruistic trait will intuitively not fare as well as someone who doesn't have it.

So how can it be so prevalent in so many different populations? It had to be passing itself on because it was useful or adaptive in a way that didn't immediately catch the attention. Hamilton put forth the claim that cooperation did, in fact, have its benefits, and sometimes it paid to cooperate and thrive socially rather than to be unequivocally selfish. He argued, "social evolution could be understood in terms of direct gains to the actor's own fitness or indirect benefits to the fitness of others who share the cooperation allele" (xvi). This is, in essence, an argument in favor of the concept of kin selection. It is beneficial to an organism to have other organisms, which share certain genetic material in common with it, reproduce. In other words, if a man has a biological sister, it is a advantage evolutionarily for her to have children because while those children will not have his genes exactly, he shares genes in common with his sister and thus shares traits and genetic material with his nephews. It therefore makes sense from an evolution standpoint for him to sacrifice and help his sister and his nephews because they are also carrying similar genes. Indeed, people in general are more willing to cooperate and sacrifice

for their kin or those who share their genetic material in some way. The study I cited before regarding homicidal fantasies helps to further this point as well because people are less likely to have violent thoughts about, or to be violent with, people they are related to, family.

Besides family or kin, cooperation can also hinge on the in-group/out-group distinction. This can also be linked back to the nature of hunter-gatherer groups. The group in that sense would have been a close, tight-knit community where cooperation would be necessary for survival. It also fascinatingly ties into the idea of cooperating with kin because after a certain period of time, most people in the hunter-gatherer group would probably share some genes in common, making much if not all of the group, kin. Ross Hammon and Robert Axelrod interestingly link the distinction between the in-group and out-group with the trait of ethnocentrism. They explain:

Ethnocentrism is a nearly universal syndrome of attitudes and behaviors, typically including in-group favoritism. Empirical evidence suggests that a predisposition to favor in-groups can be easily triggered by even arbitrary group distinctions and that preferred cooperation within groups occurs even when it is individually costly....they show that [in-group favoritism behaviors] can become widespread under a broad range of conditions and can support very high levels of cooperation, even in one-move prisoner's dilemma games. When cooperation is especially costly to individuals...ethnocentrism itself can be necessary to sustain cooperation. (926)

Essentially, the in-group/out-group distinction and instinct is so strong that even tricking that mechanism by identifying people in one's in-group who are dissimilar in many ways is enough to create strong, perceived bonds and flourishing cooperation. Inversely, identifying someone as

being a member of the out-group can cause conflict and tension. However, it is again important to stress that these people could be strangers. They are not members of the same group in the sense that they necessarily see each other ever and they are undoubtedly not living in the tight-knit community of the hunter-gatherer group, but these instincts that helped their ancestors needed to survive and thrive are hardwired into them after thousands upon thousands of years of selecting for them, and the mechanisms for these behaviors and strategies can be tricked. The in-group/out-group distinction seems to have had some evolutionary significance because it is universal in mankind today, and intuitively it kind of makes sense why it would be useful in the hunter-gatherer period. It would probably bring more harm than good to simply trust any person, especially if they are not a member of the in-group. Having the ability to distinguish between the two is a necessary trait that has been passed on because it has proved useful. However, the trouble is trying to understand what can trick that mechanism within a person's mind to identify others as members of the in-group rather than the out-group.

These are just some of the ways in which an environment or a given situation can trigger aggression or cooperation, and why both strategies work in the context of evolutionary theory and in hunter-gatherer groups. Throughout centuries, philosophers, political scientists, and theorists have tried understanding government through the process of theoretical thought experiments. From Hobbes, to Locke, to Rosseau, brilliant thinkers for centuries have tried to grasp the nature of man to understand how rulers should govern and why people respond to certain methods the way they do. They have each laid their foundation in the 'nature of man' and the theoretical 'state of nature' but of course, these were all philosophical musings. In this day and age, we have a firmer grasp on the actual nature of man and how it was formed out of the real state of nature. Evolutionary psychology allows us to more closely examine a complex being

who has the capacity for Hobbes's violence while simultaneously possessing the capacity for Locke's reciprocal altruism and cooperation. We also have a firmer grasp on the nature of a weak vs. strong state and the effects certain trends can have on the individual within that political space. Let us now turn in an attempt to understand how larger trends within a failed state might affect the mechanisms of evolutionary psychology in the psyche of that individual, and how that may, in turn, further affect the stability of the state and society.

**Part III:**

**No Man is an Island, Entire of Itself: Tracing the Overarching  
Trends of the State to the Evolutionary Mechanisms of the  
Individual**

### *The Case of China's Missing Daughters*

Though China is not what the FSI would classify as a “failed state”, it is listed 66<sup>th</sup> on the 2013 Failed States Index with other countries that qualify as “warning” and just beneath the highest classification of “alert” (FSI). Many scholars and policy-makers are suggesting that China is, however, heading toward instability, possibly in the near future. Ironically, the roots of the problem seem miles away from the final expression of it, but all of it follows a surprisingly predictive pattern in regards to evolutionary theory.

Here's the problem: tens of millions of women are missing from China's population due to female-selective infanticide and abortion. The result is many single men who will not be able to wed or settle down and have a family. As a direct result, there's been a spike in violence, crime, rape, and human trafficking. It's seems a rather simple, straightforward unpacking of the facts, and most critics attribute the trouble to China's one-child policy that was enacted back in the 1970s. However, this is only to scratch the surface of what's happening in China and why it's happening.

Let's first begin with understanding why China's daughters went missing. First, there's the obvious pressure of the one-child policy. The government partially contributed to its own woes in this regard by adding this legal pressure on families to choose between a daughter or son. However, the law is far from the only thing to blame for this sizeable gender gap. The second major contributing factor is China's gender roles. Men are the representation of the family name; they are the workers, the breadwinners, the socialites. Women, on the other hand, are “perceived as subservient because of their role as carers and homemakers” (Female Infanticide). They are made less than men through culture, crippled by it. Families typically need the benefits that in Chinese culture only sons can really bring in. Sons can offer support, whereas daughters will

always need to be supported. This leads easily into the third reason for the widening gap, which is the nature of Chinese tradition, especially when it comes to a bride's family paying the dowry for her wedding. Many Chinese families simply cannot afford a daughter because not only cannot she not bring in much, if any money, for the family, but they will have to pay an exceptional price for her to transfer to another household.

The inducements for violence do not begin with the single men who cannot find wives and turn to crime and risk-taking strategies. Rather, the allure of violence begins when a new mother hears the first cries of her newborn daughter. Though males are certainly the more aggressive and physically violent of the two sexes historically and from an evolutionary perspective, women are capable of violence as well. Though it goes against the gender role of the 'mother' that has often been shaped and constructed around women, they are capable of the violence of infanticide. Catherine Driscoll nicely summarizes a point put forward by Sarah Hrdy in the book *Mother Nature* when she articulates,

The adaptiveness of the conditions under which infanticide occurs and its universality suggests that it is part of a larger reproductive strategy that is an adaptation. Infanticide is usually induced in women in *very difficult social and economic circumstances*. Superficially, at least, killing or abandoning one's own children appears to be maladaptive—such behavior appears to reduce the number of children a woman has and therefore her fitness. Nevertheless, Hrdy claims the *prima facie* belief that infanticide is maladaptive is mistaken, since a woman's reproductive success is not to be equated straightforwardly with the number of children to which she gives birth but rather with the number of children she is able to raise to sexual maturity. (Emphasis added) (271-72)



Hrdy goes on to argue that men's and women's fitness are not equivalent. Essentially, a man's opportunity for offspring is almost limitless because he can impregnate as many women as he can have sexual relations with. A woman can have only one baby a year, but she must also invest in the children and raise them to adulthood, a very different responsibility and constraint when compared to a man's ability to sow as many wild oats as he pleases. A mother has to be concerned with the viability of her offspring and how likely it is they will make it to adulthood because she will be investing so much of her time, energy, and resources getting the child to that stage. She is, therefore, much more attuned and sensitive to things like the child's health when first born or whether or not she has the social, economic, and physical resources to tie up so much of herself in one of her children. As callous as it may seem, that evaluative instinct is a remnant of the evolutionary process. Successful mothers who raised viable offspring invested in children who would prosper, sometimes at the cost of those who's chances were slimmer. Mothers in China, especially in the poorer classes, are receiving a lot of socially constructed cues that daughters are simply not the viable offspring. Not only are they a vulnerability economically, but because of the growing gender gap, they are also more likely to fall prey to sexual violence or human trafficking. Mothers are simply reacting as they would be predicted to act under the circumstances. They are acting as successful mothers throughout time have acted. To suggest that this is all a mere result of the one-child policy enacted by the Chinese government, even though it does have its role to play, is to miss the deeper issue of what is being done to China's daughters and why they are going missing.

Of course, the missing daughters will have their affect on the men who are present. Currently, it is predicted that 14% of China's men will be without a wife, a rather large percentage of the population. As is predicted, this could have very destabilizing effects on

China's population. When mates are scarce and competition is high, men will often resort to risky behavior or turn to violence. As I discussed in Part II, evolutionary theory has shown that women are more attracted to men who engage in violence in many instances. It's an evolutionary cue for dominance, status, and capability and so many young men in China are turning to crime or being driven to other organizations because of this desire to prove themselves. The gender gap has also predictably increased the human trafficking trade in China as well as instances of rape and sexual assault, leading to greater fear and instability in parts of the country. It's a very complex problem that really requires an understanding of where it is placing the individual in the constructed environment of society and the state.

In truth, there would be many ways to consider approaching this problem, but I would argue a very strong component of it would involve considering the equality of men and women in China, through law, society, culture, and tradition. Only by restoring the viability of China's young women to prosper outside of the home will China be able to increase its daughters and restore the gender balance that has the potential to wreak so much havoc on the state's stability down the road. That, in all honesty, is where everything starts. China's problem of young men is merely one of the latter, falling dominos. Interestingly, this hearkens back nicely to "What Sex Means for World Peace" by Valerie Hudson who suggested that states that had a greater level of equality among men and women tended to be more stable. Considering that both China and India and other parts of Asia are missing a considerable amount of daughters collectively, perhaps this analysis can explain why. Where there is severe gender inequality and especially poverty and overpopulation, there are probably more men than women because the women are being lost to gender-specific infanticide and sex-selective abortion. That will cause instability down the road, and it's all linked together.

## *Conclusion*

I had hoped to be able to cover another case study that I have been researching in regards to Kenya, which is considered to be a failed state, but I felt that China had more relevance to the theories in political science that I discussed in Part I as part of the literature review as well as more detailed, and specific information that I could readily tie back to the parts of evolutionary theory that I discussed in Part II. Parts of Kenya's conflict can be tied to a changing environment that also produces resource scarcity in certain areas or else a "curse of abundance" in others. This tied back well to sources of aggression and the potential benefit of cooping another's resources. However, I am actually continuing to pursue my research of Kenya and its conflict in relation to the changing climate with my political science senior seminar thesis, so I am working on that in that piece rather than including it here, though if I had enough time, I would happily integrate both.

However, China was personally my favorite issue to research in the context of this paper. It illustrates very nicely the interaction of these larger, macro forces with the predisposition and basic hardwiring of the individual. I believe the state of nature, man's nature, and the government all have their interactions, but the relationship is in fact considerably more complicated than any of the philosophical thought experiments could reasonably reach. A person's relationship to the state, to the regime, and to the government is influenced by so many other things such as gender dynamics, culture, tradition, civic culture, equality. There are so many different nuances that play into the final expression or response. My analysis, however, did lead me to wonder, given its significance to the stability and internal security of the state, how concerned should governments be with a gender gap, or inequality, or a healthy culture? Should they be always on guard as to how the construction they build around the individuals of a state

may trigger certain reactions? Can they find ways to “trick” the mechanisms that are more conducive to cooperation over violence? I think the answer to many of these things is ‘yes’. For example, a country needs to have a strong national identity because that can seemingly trick individuals into associating their fellow country-men (and women) into their in-group. Identifying with a smaller sub-group within the country over the national identity could potentially lead to conflict depending on how serious that identity construction is. Ultimately, these larger influences, even identity construction by a society, can have an impact in triggering these ‘unconscious’ evolutionary responses. Man’s nature is a complicated animal and understanding its well-worn avenues and channels is important for both society and the stability of the state.

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