

From Our Readers

Dear Courtenay Young,

I received a notice about the special war issue from *The International Body Psychotherapy Journal*, which perked my interest because I am often preoccupied and anguished by occurring wars, especially since the imperialist war on Ukraine by Russia.

Let me say first that I am not a therapist, but simply a person who has been personally interested in neo-Freudian therapy for about fifty years, especially Reich, Lowen, Arthur Janov... and others, not necessarily explicitly body-oriented. I am always concerned about how their findings could be applied at social and political levels.

With regard to your article, I was disappointed you did not point out some of the relevant findings of nearly all neo-Freudians. Your only allusion was to the fact that there is necessarily a deep pathology (true!). Does it not come down to the fact that people are either inherently sadistic to a certain degree, as Freud thought, or, as is probably the case, that they are neurotic on a mass scale for some reason. This neuroticism manifests not only in personal symptoms, but as greed, brutality, cruelty, etc.

What are the sources of this brutality? Are they, for instance, perhaps rationalized by militaristic ideologies? On the extreme case of the Nazis, Reich wrote: "the natural sexual strivings towards the other sex, which seeks gratification from childhood on, were replaced in the main by distorted and diverted homosexual and sadistic feelings, also in part by ascetism. *The hidden motive was to unleash brutality, and make it ready for the use in imperialistic wars.* Sadism originated from ungratified orgastic yearning." (Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*)

Whether one agrees or not that sex has as much of an importance as Reich argues, certainly some powerful distorted emotions can lead to irrational brutality. The italicized sentence above has much explanatory power as far as some of the sources of irrational wars (as distinguished from the rare defensive wars against sadistic psychopaths, such as Putin and his clique of murderers).

Another work similar to Reich's is Erich Fromm's *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* – a book full of insight on the sources of brutality, cruelty, and war.

Thanks again for your article.

Marco Ermacora
Montreal, Québec, Canada



Dear Marco Ermacora,

Thank you very much for your response to my article *Why War?* in the *IBPJ*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 2023. You make some good points, and I am delighted that you – as a non-therapist – show an interest in “neo-Freudian therapy,” although that is not how I would describe the intensive work done in many different fields of the psychotherapies, body-oriented and otherwise. It gives Freud far too much prominence as, in my view, he stole many of his ideas from Charcot’s pupil Pierre Janet, when Janet was in Paris for four months during the winter of 1885–86. As Charcot was purely a neurologist, it was probably Janet who inspired Freud, and who was perhaps the first proper psychotherapist (he also happened to be a body-oriented one: see Boadella, (1997), *Awakening sensibility, recovering motility. Psycho-physical synthesis at the foundations of body-psychotherapy: the 100-year legacy of Pierre Janet (1859-1947)*. *International Journal of Psychotherapy*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 45–56).

I am not quite sure what you mean by “relevant findings of almost all neo-Freudians.” You suggest either that people are, to a degree, inherently sadistic. I cannot buy that, especially given the extended need of human infants for familial care – much longer than that of any other mammal or primate. I don’t think there are any grounds for that assumption – if so, we would probably have exterminated ourselves long ago.

Your second – more likely – possibility is that people are, for some reason, neurotic on a mass scale. This is closer to what I alluded to in the article *Why War?* I hypothesized that we (*homo sapiens*) were sufficiently ruthless (nature is, of course, red in tooth and claw) to have eliminated one of our predecessors (*homo neanderthalensis*), which had been extremely successful in establishing itself in Europe for over 200,000 years. There is no doubt there were significant differences between our species and theirs that had evolved since the Neanderthals emerged from the humanoid gene pool (see my internet article on *A Physiological Theory of Evolution*, written from a body psychotherapy perspective: www.courtenay-young.co.uk/courtenay/articles/A_Theory_of_Evolution_1.2.pdf).

It has already been reasonably well-established that *homo sapiens*’ brains were more flexible and innovative than that of Neandertals (see the Pearce, Stringer, & Dunbar reference in my *IBPJ* article). But this fact alone would not necessarily have resulted in their extinction. Theoretically, we could have co-inhabited prehistoric Europe and would probably have interbred. Therefore, the “greed, brutality and cruelty” you ascribe to our ancestors was probably a result of some genetic traumatization that still exists.

This is not a pretty thought, but since we have been concerned with psychological healing for only about 130 years, the idea of trying to heal such a built-in level of traumatization (over 100,000 years or more) is relatively recent. We are also only just now able to put together a picture of what might have happened to that early gene pool. If we (*homo sapiens*) were traumatized, rather than wise, this could explain why a) we attacked and exterminated a rival species for shelter and food, and b) the trauma has persisted over the generations such that we are wired to fear the Other – be they another genus, a different tribe, or imagined aliens.

I did not choose to go further into this theory as the article focused on war, and I wanted to define and track something of its early history. To posit that war descends from an early form of genocide, and, since we have no Others (as a close species), we extended this trait into warfare with members of our own species, and to the destruction of many other species of plants and animals as well as our own environment, is perhaps a step too far for the scope of this article. I therefore thank you – deeply – for giving me the opportunity to share my thinking a bit more widely.

Finally, you mention Reich's fascism theory. If you suppose that we have a traumatized component in our psyche, then the development of fascism is a social manifestation of this trauma. Yes, of course, it involves sexual repression; I think that Reich was right – and Freud was wrong – in identifying sexuality as a prime mover in our psyche. A distorted psyche will therefore manifest in many different variations: aggression, brutality, sadism, rape, misogyny, violence, self-harm, war, oppression, slavery, etc.

Thank you also for referencing Fromm's *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness*. I had overlooked that work in writing my article. Yes, it is very insightful. So are some of these:

- Morgan Phillip's *A Humanistic Approach to Warfare*, which uses examples of human skeletons that resulted from war, in a bio-archeological manner to try to reconstruct these individual's experience in order to provide a perspective that could help uncover the motivations and functions of various aspects of warfare. I wanted to go back earlier than the examples used in this article, and also explore more broadly, as the author presumes that "warfare is always going to persist in society ..." Though this may well be true, my theory presumes at least a possibility of finding ways to heal transgenerational trauma.
- Sam Keen's *Faces of the Enemy: Reflections of the Hostile Imagination* introduces the concept of a "*homo hostilis*: the enemy maker," which is a very well-illustrated collection of how we often portray the other. This was also slightly too far from the theme of my article.
- There is also a nice article, *Homo Hostilis*, or how the worship of cows prevents genocide, by Miruna Ruxandra Rolea, which looks at the "otherness" of religious affiliation, and how we create social differences and project subhuman images onto the other so as to justify our hostility. Rolea writes: "The process of hate-creation is so subtle that we cannot even sense it – at one time it is there – and we lack the much necessary introspection for discovering how it got there in the first place. ...Answer me, if you can: If we didn't have enemies whom would we blame for our problems? Define peace for me if you can. Can we love our country, our traditions and our values without falling into blind patriotism and ethnocentrism? Without making foreigners our enemies? What are the words you use to define those you fear and hate? If you claim that "God is on your side," and they claim that God is on their side, who's right? You talk about what Others are doing to you – How about what you are doing to yourselves?"

I have been attempting to understand how this hate-creating, paranoid, genocidal tendency can have originated, and the creation of a severe traumatization of our species is the only answer that I come up with.

If there really were a mitochondrial Eve (living in Africa, about 200,000 years ago), she was almost certainly part of a quite small population. If she were living in a relatively peaceful environment that would have allowed the evolution of the various hominid

species and that might have – much earlier – spawned several other hominid types, then something happened to that environment that caused her to move out – possibly the destruction of that environment. My hypothesis (mentioned above) is that the “Sea of Eden” was actually located in the Afar Depression in northern Ethiopia, which is on the conjunction of three geological plates, and which would easily have been destroyed in a violent tectonic upheaval.

All someone now needs to do is go there and try to excavate. However, in that particular extremely salty basin, it is quite likely that any fossil remains would have been destroyed. There are several human remains from that era nearby (such as Lucy), but, as yet, no anthropological evidence of five million years of evolution. So, all we can do, as I am doing, is speculate.

Again, I thank you for your letter.

Yours,
Courtenay Young

Note: Please see the *Personal Viewpoint* section for additional material on the **Why War?** article.

