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The elephant in the garden

Commentary on [Chapman & Huffman](#) on *Human Difference*

Ila France Porcher

Independent Researcher

Abstract: The other commentators on Chapman & Huffman (2018) have pointed out in different ways that despite our biological nature, there is a widespread tendency for humans to believe that we are not only superior to animals, but that we are not animals at all. Alongside our denial of animal sentience and cognition, this has resulted in the denial of our own instinctive natures. It is this denial that is our error, for it is only by understanding our true natural heritage that we can begin to change the runaway path we are on.

[Ila France Porcher](#) began observing wildlife behaviour early in life and initially painted her subjects to finance her studies in ethology. She began writing books about the intelligent awareness of wild animals after the community of sharks she was studying in French Polynesia was massacred for shark fin soup. [Website](#)



"The line between good and evil runs not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either — but right through every human heart." --- Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Gulag Archipelago

Chapman & Huffman (2018) present the traditional human attitude to animals and why it is indefensible, pointing out how our assumed human exceptionalism has been used to justify cruelty. I agree with them and with the points added by the commentators, which consider multiple facets of this subject. It has become a quite remarkable discussion among authorities from so many backgrounds and is likely unique on the Internet in that respect.

Stepping back to take in a wide perspective, we see that on a small planet far out in an ordinary galaxy, one species evolved the right set of capacities (e.g. hands, language, social skills, inventiveness, and aggression) to dominate the rest of the biosphere. Nature will try anything, and, like a peacock evolving a fabulous tail, *Homo sapiens* has emerged. Though human delusion (Kopnina, 2019) and ego lead to a persistent claim that we are not animals and are above all other life forms, there can be no doubt of our biological nature. (To deny this is to invoke a Creation in which we sprang fully formed upon the Earth, and this contradicts the evidence.) Though we do have a tendency to over-think everything because of our extremely active cognitive functions, we are biological and run on instinct. An obvious example: In our dimorphic species, it is self-evident that all the feelings and inclinations that lead to reproduction and child-care are instinctual, and that human male instincts differ greatly from those of the female (Rigby & Kulathinal 2015).

As mentioned (Benvenuti 2018, Kiley-Worthington 2019, Criscione & Keenan 2019, Schoof & L'Allier 2019), our mass behaviour is irrational. It can only be explained in terms of the universal patterns that have been used by living beings over the eons, to survive and reproduce within their available habitats (Darwin 1859, Lorenz 1963).

The tendency to regard those in a perceived 'out-group' as being inferior to the home group (Chapman & Huffman 2018)—as well as the quest for ever more impressive material possessions—have been identified as an aspects of the territorial instinct (Lorenz 1963),

which is clearly evident in human behaviour. Not counting animals that kill indirectly by spreading disease, *H. sapiens* is the species that is most dangerous to humans. A study by the United Nations (2019) determined that about 437,000 people annually are homicide victims, and 90% of the perpetrators are men; their victims are often conspecific females. (However, the need for human females to beware of being murdered as they go about their daily lives is never added to the lists of things that make humans exceptional.) In terms of murderous behaviour, there is no counterpart in other vertebrates. As Kaplan (2019) pointed out, many humans even kill for entertainment.

Lorenz (1963) hypothesized that human cruelty is due to the lack of the inhibitions that evolved to control intra-specific aggression in other social animals. Like sharks, animals that have evolved dangerous weapons will also have evolved behavioural strategies to keep them from mortally injuring conspecifics (Lorenz 1963, Klimley et al. 1996). But, when the animal did not evolve its weapons, but invented, there was no selection pressure to develop inhibitions against killing conspecifics. Hence *H. sapiens* lacks the ability to refrain from using his finely crafted weapons against his fellow man. Though dogs will not bite another who makes the gesture of submission, gunmen do not hesitate to shoot people who are begging for mercy. Individuals of such species can kill others slowly and cruelly in situations in which the victim cannot escape (Lorenz 1963).

Lorenz (1963) presented the possibility that the Christian story about Jesus Christ's admonition to "*turn the other cheek*" did not mean that one should submit to more violence, but that one should present the other cheek so that the aggressor could *not* strike again. Lorenz considered this, along with the ritual of the '*peace pipe*' (in which a pipe is communally smoked before peace talks), as perhaps being efforts by modern humans to control the instinct for conflict and violence (Lorenz 1963).

Though war kills fewer people than homicide, human history is an account of successive wars (Keeley 1996). Tribal warfare was on average 20 times more deadly than modern warfare, calculated as either a percentage of total deaths from war, or as average war deaths each year as a percentage of the population (Keeley 1996). These numbers are echoed by deaths in modern tribal societies in which death rates from war are between four and six times the highest death rates in 20th century Germany or Russia (Keeley 1996). The popularity of war and violence in media entertainment provides further evidence of human instinctive violence.

Benz-Schwarzburg (2018) pointed out that animals do not condemn others as criminals but humans do, citing sexually aggressive dolphins as an example. However, only certain types of violence are condemned by humans. Others are commonly accepted as if they do not count—crimes against conspecifics who are considered to be inferior being just one example. Through decades of experimentation with human subjects, Altemeyer (2006) found that one would only have to ask three or four people before finding someone who says he would be willing to hold you down and electrocute you fatally on the request of a minor authority (Altemeyer 2006).

Zangwill (2021) mentioned that humans have the power to change their behaviour given new information. However, such a capacity is not generally evident. Humans readily avoid facing the facts and will defend their beliefs against them (Kahan et al. 2017). For example, the discoveries concerning the size and nature of the universe (Penrose 2007) and the mysteries concerning the presence of life and of consciousness, are reasons to consider the biosphere on Earth to be remarkable and precious. But the failure to do so is the subject of the target article and all of the accompanying commentaries. How can it be that an

intelligent species, one that is exploring the solar system and holds detailed concepts of what to look for as signs of alien life, is destroying the plant cover of its own planet? Given our situation as the dominant species on a delicately balanced planet with nothing but an icy void for an infinity of light years around, the understanding of human biology with the goal of healthy sustainability should have been top priority for decades. It was warned in the 1970s that growth on a planet (with finite resources) cannot continue for long (Meadows *et al.* 1972), but growth did continue and has put the planet into a catastrophic state.

Chapman & Huffman (2018) end with the problem of what to do to remedy the situation. They suggest that we ought to use our powers to effect positive change. But what powers? Assuming that a species can change, what is needed is a complete paradigm shift. In much of human society, however, the prevailing power structure is headed by a military/industrial/political complex that is motivated by financial gain. It is able to use the media to squash or twist any new information that might weaken its interests. If we were actually intelligent, our most learned academics would have been at work for many decades, doing research on the best avenues to take with respect to a sustainable future—avenues implemented by willing leaders.

We may be the only animal that has evolved enough to understand the difference between reasoned thought and instinct. That understanding, in my opinion, is the only thing that can save us from the usual fate that befalls over-populated and highly aggressive species.

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