

the *obsessive* desire for material possessions, irrationally placing material gain before all other values and being oblivious to the psychological consequences of such single-minded pursuit of wealth on oneself and others.

The rulers of the Soviet Union – Lenin, Stalin, Krushchev – were some of the wealthiest people in history. They literally owned the wealth of their country and could seize any house, business, or bank account. They were not shy about using violence, and killed millions of their own citizens to maintain their power.

However, these all-powerful despots were also some of the most miserable people who ever existed. They lived in continual fear of assassination. They couldn't even speak freely within their inner circle for fear of losing their power. And they had to live with the knowledge that the system they preserved was making their fellow citizens ever poorer and more miserable.

A life of wealth maintained through violence and deceit, which creates only misery and poverty for others, is to be pitied, not envied.

## Collectivism

Collectivism is the doctrine that the social collective – called society, the people, the state, etc. – has rights, needs, or moral authority above and apart from the individuals who comprise it. We hear this idea continually championed in such familiar platitudes as “the needs of the people take precedence over the rights of the individual,” “production for people, not profits,” and “the common good.”

Collectivism often sounds humane because it stresses the importance of human needs. In reality, it is little more than a rationalization for sacrificing you and me to the desires of others.

To achieve the communist utopia of *economic equality* and *social justice*, hundreds of millions of people were robbed, tortured, and slaughtered. Prof. R. J. Rummel, author of *Death by Government*, estimates that the Soviet Union killed some 69,911,000 human beings. In communist Cambodia, nearly 1/3 of the entire population was murdered by the state. In Nazi (national socialist) Germany, some 6 million Jews, Catholics and other “enemies of the state” were slaughtered.

Collectivists justify their atrocities by such assertions as “the end justifies the means.” However, their philosophical justifications are nonsense.

Collections of people do not have unique consciousness or identities. “Society” and “the people” do not feel, need, think, or have rights. Only individuals exist.

The myth of the collective, in one form or another, is accepted by the vast majority of people alive today, and it is responsible for a great deal of the violence in our world today.

## Ending Aggression

Three steps would end most of the aggression in the world today:

- 1) Create free societies where prosperity is the norm, not the exception.
- 2) Provide rational moral education for young people, explaining that aggression is almost never in their long-term interest and that greed and envy are irrational.
- 3) Reject the “myth of the collective” – the idea that the nation, state or race has an identity above and apart from the individuals comprising it.

Human beings are not inherently violent, rapacious animals bent on brutality and self-destruction. Aggression is rather a result of repressive cultural and political environments that conspire to frustrate and degrade our humanity.

Aggression may never be eliminated entirely, but it can be reduced to very low levels by creating societies of freedom, self-awareness and compassion.

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# THE CAUSES OF AGGRESSION



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We live in a world which often seems more violent with every passing day. Terrorist bombings, school-yard massacres, war, and atrocities fill news headlines. At times it even seems that humanity has a collective death wish.

Human aggression has been blamed on many things, including broken homes, poverty, racism, inequality, chemical imbalances in the brain, toy guns, TV violence, sexual repression, sexual freedom, overpopulation, alienation, bad genes, and original sin. However, virtually all of these potential causes have one thing in common:

## Unfulfilled human needs and desires

Human needs and desires are endless. Virtually all of us would like to have fancy homes, social status in our community, the ability to eat all we want without getting fat, sex whenever we want it, perpetual health, unconditional love, and the ability to live until we're 200. Most of us will enjoy few of these things.

Fortunately, most people are realistic and sane enough not to turn to violence to deal with their frustrations. However, self-control sometimes breaks down – resulting in aggressions ranging from petty theft ... to the Columbine massacre ... to the mass killing fields of Cambodia.

What causes people and societies to turn to aggression? Throughout history there have been five key factors: neurosis, desperation, envy, greed, and collectivism.

## Neurosis

Neurosis consists of irrational thoughts and acts that cause significant harm to one's self or others. But what causes neurosis?

The humanistic psychologist Abraham Maslow gave a great answer. He argued that the standard for proper human behavior should not be some statistical average of how people actually behave, but rather how the best, happiest, most productive, most creative, and most fulfilled human beings act – people such as Thomas Jefferson and Albert Einstein. In other words, Maslow argues that the standard for mental health should be *human beings at their best*. Maslow called these exemplary people “self-actualizers” or “the growing tip” of the human race.

Comparing self-actualizers to less-fulfilled, less-creative, and less-happy people, Maslow found that most neurosis is caused by the frustration of *basic* human needs.

A basic, as opposed to a derived need, is an innate and fundamental biological or psychological requirement for human well-being. In *Toward a Psychology of Being* (1962), Maslow listed five basic criteria which established a hierarchy of needs:

1. Its absence breeds illness.
2. Its presence prevents illness.
3. Its restoration cures illness.

4. Under certain, free-choice situations, it is preferred by the deprived person over other satisfactions.
5. It is found to be inactive, at a low ebb, or functionally absent in the “healthy person” because it is a fulfilled need and thus no longer a strong motivating force.

Maslow held there were seven basic levels of human needs:

- 1) **Physiological needs** such as air, food, sleep, shelter, and sex;
- 2) **Safety needs**, including security, order and stability;
- 3) **Belongingness and love**;
- 4) **Esteem needs**, the need for a stable, firmly-based, high level of self-respect;
- 5) **Self-actualization**, the desire to become everything that one is capable of becoming;
- 6) **The desire to know and understand**;
- 7) **Aesthetic needs**, the need for beauty in one's life.

Aggression, Maslow maintained, is principally a result of the frustration of basic needs. In other words, aggression is not an essential part of human nature, but rather a reaction to circumstances in which essential requirements of our nature are unfulfilled.

Examples are legion. In Communist China – one of the most sexually-repressed and controlling societies on earth – depression and suicide are commonplace. In the Middle East, which has been at war for 5,000 years – there is little safety, and massive anger, fear, distrust and hostility. In countries like North Korea, where there is massive starvation and even the most basic physiological needs are not met for millions of people, depression and suicide are rampant.

What is the solution? To create societies in which basic human needs are easily fulfilled. That means removing institutional barriers to productivity and wealth, so the necessities of life will be inexpensive and easily acquired. That means getting rid of taxes and regulations and letting a free market flourish.

It also means eliminating class systems which destroy opportunity and self-esteem by branding certain people “untouchables” (India); peasants (China and South America); or vermin (Nazi Germany). It means teaching that sex is natural and healthy, rather than sinful and evil.

## Desperation

Imagine that you have lived in an inner-city slum your entire life. All around you is massive poverty, crime, and violence. Your mother is on welfare and you don't know who your father is.

The only people in the neighborhood who have money, power and respect are drug-dealers, pimps and gang leaders. True, some die violent deaths. But so do many of your friends who are living straight.

Under such circumstances, it's quite rational to conclude that to succeed, you need to become a drug dealer or gang-banger.

The only solution for this type of desperation is breaking the cycle of poverty and violence. Government tried to end such desperation by spending over \$2 trillion on welfare programs. The result: destruction of the family by subsidizing children born out of wedlock ... destruction of inner-city jobs and businesses by minimum-wage and licensing laws. (In New York, a license to operate a taxicab costs over \$150,000. In Washington, D.C. a push-cart license costs \$7,000!). The real solution: (1) compassionate charity through churches and other voluntary organizations, and (2) eliminating insane economic regulations that perpetuate desperation.

## Envy

Envy is hatred of the wealthy and successful for being wealthy and successful. Envy is not simply an attack on a particular person's wealth or success, but an attack on wealth and success *per se*. Envy is most prevalent in cultures that preach egalitarianism (that inequality or wealth is inherently unfair or evil) such as in communist China or fundamentalist Iran.

The denigration of wealth and success is both irrational and destructive since: (1) people are inherently different and will never be the same, (2) wealth and success increase your security, freedom and potential happiness, and (3) the attempt to eliminate differences in income and success destroys the incentive for all achievement and success – making life worse for everyone.

Fifty years ago, a British politician contrasted the difference between American and British attitudes toward wealth in this way:

“When an American sees a well-dressed man riding in a Rolls Royce with a beautiful woman by his side, he thinks, ‘some day I'll be there.’ But when a typical Englishman sees the same man ride by, he thinks, ‘We'll find a way to get you out of there.’” Sadly, in the past few decades American attitudes toward wealth have gotten a lot closer to English attitudes.

## Greed

There is nothing wrong with wanting to be wealthy. We are material beings and we need material possessions to survive, prosper and be happy.

Just a few hundred years ago, the average person lived less than 35 years and in desperate poverty. He froze in the winter, sweltered in the summer, and was lucky merely to survive childhood diseases. Today, material goods – such as central heat, air conditioning, the electric light, the stereo, and the computer – have given even “poor” Americans lives of material comfort that would be envied by the richest kings of old.

However, greed is another matter entirely. **Greed** is