

**'TO BE ANGRY  
IS NOT TO BE HUMAN,  
BUT TO BE FEARFUL IS':**

*Chewong concepts of human nature*

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper I shall consider an alternative theory of human nature, that of the Chewong of Peninsular Malaysia which, I shall argue, is closely linked with the 'peaceful way of life'. My argument is that ideology is also a moral system, and that moral values must be directly related to ideas of human nature: what it is to be a person. An integral part of any theory of personhood concerns inner states of all kinds, and I shall be centring my discussion on indigenous ideas relating to some inner states important to the Chewong, an understanding of which, I shall argue, is necessary in order to understand their interpersonal behaviour and associated values.

Such an approach is in keeping with the guidelines for the original conference, which stressed the interpretative importance of indigenous concepts of self. To avoid becoming embroiled in psychological or philosophical debates concerning selfhood, most of which are individually oriented as well as universalistic in their conclusions, I prefer to use alternative expressions; either concept of personhood, or concept of human nature.

The Chewong are a hunter-gatherer, shifting cultivating group of people who live in the tropical rain forest of the Malay Peninsula. Linguistically and culturally they are related to the Semai about whom Robarchek is writing in this volume. The Malaysian aboriginals are usually classified as non-violent, non-aggressive, peaceful etc., as well as non-hierarchical (see Dentan 1976, 1978; Robarchek 1977, 1979; Robarchek and Dentan 1987; Howell 1981, 1984, 1988). The problem lies in how to account for this, to the Western observer, astonishing phenomenon.

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PHILOSOPHY

By human nature, I here mean Chewong nature: what it means to be a Chewong human being. As is commonly found in small-scale societies, the definition of humanity excludes all but the we-group. The we-group of the Chewong, however, extends into the domains of non-human beings, that is, it includes all those things in the environment such as trees, stones, rivers, mountains, which are supposed to have consciousness — and thus in Chewong parlance are 'people' (*beri*), as well as the large number of beings who are said to exist, but who are invisible to the ordinary eye. They are all 'people' with identical person attributes to the Chewong. In order to understand the guiding ideas of the Chewong moral universe, it is necessary to examine the ordinary human beings in relationship with this large world of non-human or superhuman beings. I have argued elsewhere (1984) that Chewong society is co-existent with their universe, and for this reason ideas concerning all categories of conscious beings must be taken into account when establishing indigenous person attributes.

A healthy, rational, and fully functioning person is one whose being is in balance. This means that the body; the 'soul' (*ruwai*) — the main indicator of consciousness and rationality; the liver — seat of inner states of all kinds and reference point for personality; the smell — an integral and unique part of the individual; and the eyes — the medium which allows one to perceive reality in conformity with those of one's own species, are all present and in the correct state. In addition, certain specific characteristics associated with the liver (shy and fearful) are also required, while others (angry, quarrelsome, brave) are definitely not part of the Chewong person. These will be discussed in detail below. It is important to stress that the Chewong do not conceptualise specifically male characteristics as opposed to female ones. Unlike many other societies, including our own, Chewong ideas about human nature are truly applicable to both sexes. This is particularly clear in childrearing practices where boys and girls are treated identically, and are expected to develop similar person characteristics. While the Chewong are fully aware of the physiological differences between the sexes, these are not valued relative to each other, nor do they constitute any base for symbolic ordering (see Howell 1983, 1988 for further discussion on Chewong gender).

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Another aspect of humanness is an egalitarian social order. Thus neither the Chewong nor any of the superhuman beings are organized in a hierarchical ranking system. They are explicit on this point. Social stratification with a chief at the top is part of the outside world, not theirs.

Ideas of health and disease are integrally linked to personhood ideas, and it is therefore important to consider these. To the Chewong, disease is always explained in terms of one of the above-mentioned attributes being upset in some way, usually through the interference of a non-human being. When an illness occurs, those who are knowledgeable in such matters proffer a diagnosis. This means trying to identify which kind of being might be responsible, based on evidence from the patient's recent behaviour (this includes improper experiencing and/or expressing of emotionality; see Howell 1981, 1984 for a more detailed discussion). Once this is done, healing is attempted. This may be done by spells directed at the harmful being, hoping to negate its influence, or by the performance of a large-scale shamanistic seance in which those who have spirit guides send their 'souls' (*ruwai*) out into the worlds of the various nonhuman beings looking for the one responsible. The most serious forms of illness are those where the patient's *ruwai* or smell has been taken by one of these beings. In such cases, it is of utmost importance to retrieve it lest the patient dies.

To assist the healing process, humans need the co-operation of others. Anything or anyone non-human may become the spirit guide of an individual human. The relationship is initiated by an encounter when the object or being reveals itself as 'people' (*beri*) — a person with consciousness — in a dream, trance, or during a waking state in the jungle. During a seance, humans request their spirit guides to come and to help them. Various preparations must be made to entice them. Spirit guides, regardless of what kind, are always described as extremely timid. The slightest disturbance makes them retreat in fear (I shall return to this point below). The most common species of spirit guide, and those most loved by the Chewong, are the so-called 'leaf-people'. They are beings who live in plants, trees, and flowers. There is a perceived identity in looks and dress between Chewong and the leaf-people — and, as I shall show, in their personalities.

The other main kind of beings with whom the Chewong claim close affinity is the 'original people' who live on Earth Six, above the human Earth Seven. These beings used to live on Earth Seven a long

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time ago, but they retreated to Earth Six because it was too hot and too dirty here. They are immortal because of the cool temperature on Earth Six and because they eat nothing but fruit, a cooling food. The Chewong are mortal because the reverse conditions prevail on their earth. The jungle is hot, and they eat meat, a food which is hot and dirty because of the blood content. The leaf-people are also cool, their food being the morning dew and the cool incense smoke offered them by the Chewong.

What about the rest of the superhuman beings in the Chewong universe? There is a vast number of these, and they fall into several distinct kinds. However, the broadest distinction being made, and one which is of most relevance in the present context, is that between the 'good' (*baig*) and the 'bad' (*yabud*) — or, as I prefer, the helpful and the harmful, designations which have less of Western moral connotations and which in the particular context correspond more closely to Chewong associations. Related attributes are beautiful and generous, and ugly and stingy respectively. These are directly congruent with the beings' activities: whether they cause harm, in the form of disease and mishap, or whether they help to set things right following such a damaging occurrence.

There are many different beings in the Chewong universe who may inflict harm upon them. With the possible exception of only two — Tanko, who causes the thunder and lightning, and a group of beings known collectively as *keoi* (or *nlab*), beings who are transformed humans but who have lost their humanness completely — none of them is portrayed as evil, malicious, or in any way seeking to harm humans. Rather, their intentions and activities are perceived as identical to those of humans: to feed themselves and to prevent or overcome mishaps.

One major distinguishing feature between all conscious beings is the eyes. The actual constitution of the eyes is different in all species. This means that they all perceive the world in slightly different ways. All beings who live on Earth Seven — with the exception of the leaf-people — are carnivorous. What constitutes their meat, however, differs and this is linked to their perceptions of the environment. Thus the Chewong see a wild pig, or any other animal normally hunted, primarily as potential meat and they set about trying to catch it. Similarly, the harmful beings see meat when they look upon the human body, the human 'soul' (*ruwai*), or human smell, and they will also set about trying to catch these. Just like humans, they go hunting

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with their blowpipes and they erect snares and traps in the jungle. The Chewong do not perceive these activities as expressing any anger or aggressive feelings, however, even when they themselves are the victims. Rather, they explain it in terms of each species behaving according to its 'nature'. In this regard they make no distinction between animals and superhumans. Dangerous animals do not attack unless an individual has made this possible through his or her incorrect behaviour. I shall return to this below.

### INNER STATES AND THEIR RELATIVE VALUE

I now wish to look at some Chewong words that pertain to inner states and relate these to ideas of what it means to be human. I have examined this vocabulary elsewhere (1981) and will here confine myself to noting that the range and elaboration of emotional and mental terms is relatively limited. People are not concerned with discussing their emotional states; emotionality in most instances is negatively valued. However, a few such are heavily elaborated culturally, and I propose that an examination of these is one means by which we might achieve an understanding of Chewong 'peacefulness'. I shall look at five indigenous concepts which I think throw some light on the particularity of Chewong social and individual behaviour. Two are highly valued, namely *lidyā* (shy, timid, ashamed) and *höntugen* (frightened, fearful), and can be said to be integral aspects of the Chewong person (Howell 1988). The other three are subject to severe cultural condemnation and can be said to represent the non-Chewong person, by which I mean people outside the wider social universe of humans and superhumans, in effect Malays and Chinese. These are *chan* (angry), *oklahi* (quarrelsome), and, of a somewhat different but related order, *berani* (brave, daring).

#### *Shy and fearful*

The Chewong learn to fear as very young children. Adults take great delight in frightening them by invoking unexperienced horrors, such as being confronted by a Malay or a tiger. Parents speak approvingly of their timid children, and adults are constantly at great pains to convince others of their own fearfulness. Similarly, shyness is constantly invoked as a legitimate reason for failure to do something. There is no ambiguity about the value of these characteristics. They

are integral parts of the Chewong concept of human nature — and valued ones at that. However, it is important to stress that the Chewong mainly fear the unknown, or the uncontrollable. The jungle presents no terror to them. They know how to behave properly in it, thereby avoiding danger (for a contrasted view of Malaysian aboriginals' attitude to their jungle environment, see Robarchek, this volume).

It is interesting to examine various superhuman beings and determine which of them are presented as inherently shy and fearful. Whenever confronted with perceived danger the leaf-people and the original people flee. This is of course the way the Chewong themselves react under similar circumstances. To flee from danger is the explicit mechanism of Chewong defence. There are numerous incidents to exemplify this. They fled from the marauding Malays of earlier times; they flee from the approach of any stranger today; they flee from any imagined threatening event or confrontation. Such immediate and terror-filled reaction is a constant topic of conversation, just as is the fearfulness of the leaf-people and the original people. While sharing many similarities, the relationship between humans and the original people, and humans and the leaf-people, is not identical. The original people are ancestors of the Chewong in so far as they represent the mythical past, but not in the sense that they are transformed dead of today. The leaf-people are not linked to humans in such a direct way, but structurally the relationships are analogous. These two categories of superhuman beings occupy a very special place in Chewong philosophy; they are both — in their different ways — the *alter ego* of humans. It is interesting therefore to note that the chief emotional and behavioural characteristic of them both is timidity, fearfulness, and retreat in the face of perceived danger. None of the other superhuman beings is described as inherently shy or fearful, a further indication of their being conceptually set apart from human beings.

However, we cannot posit an opposition in terms of fearful, helpful, and good beings versus brave, aggressive, harmful beings. There is a set of rules which inform and direct human behaviour, and the transgression of any of these usually leads to some form of superhuman intervention in the form of illness and mishap. None of the superhuman beings — with the exception of the two already mentioned — can thus interfere with a human being unless a rule has been broken. So with regard to these beings, the Chewong know that

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they are vulnerable to attack, but that if they take proper care in their day-to-day behaviour and avoid places where potentially harmful beings are known to live and set their traps, they have a fairly good chance of being healthy and fit. The important point is that none of these beings is referred to as evil, nor their harmful acts as aggressive or violent. They are just carrying out their life in accordance with the rules given them, as all 'people' including Chewong do. The potentially harmful beings may be described by the adjective *yabud* (bad, harmful, ugly), but whenever thus designated, the speaker will invariably qualify this by saying that they are not 'truly bad' because they only cause harm if a person breaks a rule, or inadvertently falls into a trap.

Contrary to influential theories in primatology and ethology, hunting among the Chewong cannot be described as an aggressive or violent activity (see the Introduction, this volume, for discussion of problems in connection with the definition of these terms). Hunters do not portray the hunt in ways that could be construed as aggressive, either in the hunter's emotional state or in his attitude to the prey. The various non-human beings who hunt humans are not portrayed as violent or aggressive either. Everyone, visible and invisible, has to eat according to Chewong notions of the world order. Part of the diet is meat, and to many the human body, soul, and smell constitute meat. If someone catches a human soul or throws their spear into a human body thereby causing illness to the victim, then this is either plain bad luck or the direct result of some transgression which permits the animal/being to attack. Humans must diagnose who has done the deed and try to rectify it. The point is that hunting, whether performed by humans, animals, or superhuman beings, is not an activity associated by the Chewong with any aroused inner state. It is not a violent act; it is not conceptualized as an attack. The words used make this clear. There are numerous words for the hunting activity, mainly dependent upon the object of the hunt or the tools employed, but none corresponds to words denoting violent acts. Of course there are several such words, for the Chewong are not ignorant of other modes of behaviour than those practised by themselves. They have in their language, and frequently use, Malay imported words for attack, fight, war, to quarrel, and to be angry. However, there appear to be no words for compete or coerce. It is an interesting feature of Chewong social relations that no competitive games are played, either between adults or children. Hunting is not an occasion for male

striving after status. On the contrary, the Chewong in hunting as in other matters tend to ignore or negate any demonstration of individual superior skill.

While to some extent the harmful and the helpful beings in the Chewong universe can be thought of as opposed, they do not fall into neatly discernible complementary categories. A previously harmful being may change and become a helpful spirit guide to an individual, at which point it will also become circumspect, if not fearful, in its relationship with humans. However, the leaf people and the original people alone are described automatically as shy and fearful. Only these two kinds of helpful people are unequivocally desirable spirit guides. The Chewong wish for their attendance and assistance. Ideally, they do not wish for any interaction at all with the other kinds of superhuman beings. The myths which describe encounters with superhuman beings of all kinds never describe the various harmful ones as shy or fearful, whereas they always do with respect to the helpful.

The two beings who unanimously are characterized as not fearful are Tanko and *keoi*. Tanko is a very complex character (see Howell 1984), but in several of his aspects, Tanko is described as deceitful. He is portrayed as having a voracious sexual appetite. He tricks young girls into having sexual intercourse with him, and he steals children whom he gives as food to his dogs. He is untrustworthy, pretending to be something pleasant when he has harmful designs. This is also the case with the group of beings called *keoi*. *Keoi* look like ordinary human individuals — men and women — and in fact they were this at some time, but they performed a forbidden act which transformed them into *keoi*. As *keoi* their eyes are completely different, and they see other humans as potential meat and set about catching them. But their hunting is qualitatively different to that of other species — animal or superhuman. While living amongst their intended victims they brazenly plot to catch them, all the while lying and playing tricks. In the myths both Tanko and *keoi* take the wildest risks to achieve their ends. They are explicitly said not to be fearful. As such, humans fear them, and as such, they are firmly set apart from the Chewong. Interestingly, *keoi* are the only beings the Chewong may kill. This can be explained, I think, in terms of the former Chewong status of these beings. Through their wholly unacceptable behaviour, *keoi* mark themselves apart from humans, while reminding them of the possibility of such behaviour. In conformity with their special

status, *keoi* cannot be killed with ordinary weapons, but only with fire.

*Brave, angry, and quarrelsome*

If we examine an inner state/behavioural model possibly opposed to that of shy and fearful, namely brave, we find that this is not a characteristic the Chewong associate with themselves. The word they use for this (*berani*) is Malay but, more commonly, they simply negate the word fearful. An example of what it means to be brave (or not fearful) was provided by myself. I had left my mother and father and husband to go alone to a place which was completely unknown to me in order to live with people who were equally unknown. Every Chewong, man and woman, insisted that they would never be able to do such a thing, they would be much too frightened. 'What if we had been bad people?' they kept asking. Their image of non-Chewong is that they are 'bad' (*yabud*) — they cannot be trusted not to harm one. This attitude explains the general terror that my arrival provoked. Outsiders, in their experience mainly Malays and Chinese, are portrayed as thieves and cheaters who will not stop at physical violence. The meaning of *yabud* in this instance is therefore qualitatively different from that used in the context of harmful super humans. Malays and Chinese *are* bad. They are also fearless. Of course they are not part of the Chewong wider social universe of humans and superhumans, and hence they fall outside their moral universe. There are no shared 'rules' governing their relationship which enable individuals to avoid dangers through correct behaviour. Ideologically speaking, the Malays and Chinese are not human. There were numerous adults, mainly women but also some men, who had never left the jungle to visit the nearby Malay villages or Chinese trading station. They declared they were much too frightened. Even those who went regularly, and who spoke Malay fairly fluently, were always tense and on the look-out for danger. Stories of alleged atrocities performed by Malays or Chinese were frequently brought back. When hearing such tales those in the jungle would become quite terrified, and I once met a group of Chewong on the move with all their worldly belongings, having abandoned their settlement in order to resettle much deeper in the jungle because they had heard rumours that the Malays wanted Chewong heads.

Fleeing has always been the Chewong response to violence. To

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remain and confront the aggressors is not a viable alternative. 'No, no, we are not brave, we are very frightened', was the inevitable response when I asked why they always fled. This was not a matter of excuse, but a statement of fact. To be brave is not desirable. I suggest that if this were not so, the conceptual link between humans and the leaf and original peoples would be severed.

Another emotion which is somewhat elaborated upon by the Chewong is that expressed by the word *chan* which I translate as anger or angry. What are the circumstances in which they use this word and what are their attitudes to a person thus described? While it is recognized that anyone might experience anger at some time, and engage in a quarrel, most would not admit to having done so. I never witnessed a serious quarrel or observed anyone I would describe as angry. This, of course, does not mean that the Chewong think the same; their standards are very different from mine in this regard. Very occasionally a small child would throw a tantrum when denied something, and it would be described as *chan*. Adults ignored such outbursts as much as possible, occasionally shouting at the child to stop. They offered no theory as to why the child behaved in such a way, no external event was allowed an explanatory status; rather the outburst was reflected back to the personality of the child, who was said to have a very angry liver (the liver being the seat of inner states).

When adults get upset about someone's behavior, they tend not to confront the protagonist, but withdraw into themselves. A frequent cause is marital infidelity. The injured parties say that their livers are 'not good' (we would say we were feeling depressed), they 'miss their spouse'. It was my experience that they took an extremely passive line, waiting to see if the situation would change and the spouse return. Alternatively, an illness may befall the injured party. The adulterer is the cause of this in so far as his/her act has allowed a superhuman being to attack the spouse. Illness is thus one way of coping with jealousy. The sick person would not be described as *chan* in such instances, although the cause would be identified as directly related to the behaviour of the spouse. Alternatively, it is possible to take a retaliatory line and attack the errant spouse, either verbally the most common form — or by attacking his/her things; never their person. For instance, one woman who was described by all as extremely jealous of her husband (he was said to be innocent) had an angry liver, and she was always quarrelling. Thus she not only shouted at him, she once took his best blowpipe, broke it in two and

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stamped on it. This was a most amazing act; the Chewong continued to talk about it for weeks. Everyone was extremely upset and disturbed by her. Institutionally, there are no mechanisms for punishing someone for deviant behaviour of any kind. This woman did behave antisocially. Several families who lived in the same settlement decided to leave as a result of her behaviour, and others insisted that they would never go to live in the same place as her. But such an occurrence of anger was extremely rare. When I cited instances when I thought anger might have been appropriate, I was always told 'this is not our way!'

So again, we find that Chewong reaction to perceived violence — which is how I would describe the abuse of the jealous woman — is to retreat from it. Anger is ignored as much as possible, as with angry children, but when it becomes too manifest, people physically remove themselves, just as they flee from outsiders. Those Chewong who behave in unacceptable ways cannot be confronted directly. This is the case with all deviant social behaviour, such as incorrect marriages or theft. In such instances the culprit would normally leave, but never at an explicit request. More violent crimes than that performed by the jealous woman did not occur among the Chewong while I was with them, nor could anyone tell me of others in the past. Their mythology has no instances of human physical violence. I asked about murder. They insisted it never happened. When I pressed them to imagine the result of such an event, they replied the murderer would be so ashamed (*lidyá*) that she/he would leave the region altogether never to return; again withdrawal.

The host of different beings attributed with consciousness that exist within the Chewong universe have structurally similar qualities to humans. With the possible exception of Tanko and *keoi*, none is perceived as hierarchical, aggressive, competitive, quarrelsome, angry, or domineering. Neither are they brave. Humans and the rest of the conscious non-humans are shy and fearful. Of these, semantically and ideologically the leaf-people and the original people stand closest to the Chewong, while Tanko and *keoi* stand closest to the outsiders. On the whole, the terms bad, brave, quarrelsome, and angry are associated with outsiders, not with the Chewong or the various super-human beings who participate in the wider Chewong social universe. The Malays and Chinese represent the prototypes of these characteristics. They are therefore to be feared and avoided. There is very little the Chewong can do to prevent the Chinese and Malays from

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harming them, except to stay out of their way as much as possible. Not being part of the Chewong social universe, they operate according to different rules but, interestingly, this does not mean that they can be treated in qualitatively different ways — such as be attacked. There are thus no circumstances in which the Chewong may behave in contradiction to their ideologically constructed concept of human nature. To them, the meaning of human is to be fearful, and this permeates their cosmology. Conversely, to be angry, quarrelsome, or brave marks one off as not human. Such characteristics, in effect, either prevent social relations from being established or, whenever manifested through behaviour, they cut them off.

## CONCLUSION

In the Introduction to this volume we ask: can anthropologists contribute anything to questions concerning human aggression? Have I done so in this paper? I have tried to present a society where aggressive behaviour as we understand it — however loosely defined — is not much in evidence. Robarchek (1979) has suggested that the Semai, from the earliest childhood, learn to fear arousal of all kinds, resulting in a general ethos of low-key emotionality. I agree with much of his interpretation and find that my understanding of the Chewong coincides in many instances with his of the Semai. But I would place a somewhat different emphasis, and suggest that in the Chewong case fear is a positive emotion and encouraged in children because to be fearful is to be human, while the arousal of other inner states is negatively valued and discouraged — as manifest in the various rules that forbid them (see Howell 1981). They are not part of being human. In an earlier paper (1977) Robarchek argues that Schachter's frustration - aggression theory can be found to hold among the Semai when we examine one of their rules, *punan*, whereby any kind of 'frustration' (I call it 'unfulfilled desire' as found in the rule *punen* among the Chewong) must never be allowed to persist. It is only by alleviating frustration immediately, or even before it becomes experienced, Robarchek argues, that the Semai are able to be so non-violent. Thus he seems to be arguing from within a position which holds that aggression is an innate attribute of sufficient strength that it needs to be redirected in some way for it not to manifest itself in interhuman relations. However, he argues strongly for the claim that successful

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handling of aggressive impulses is culturally possible (see also his paper in this volume).

I have argued throughout this paper against the various theories that hold that human aggression is so formidable as to require special mechanisms for handling or redirection. Thus, in the anthropological literature, ritual is often explained in terms of 'letting off steam'. Various pent-up emotions can be released and an emotional equilibrium restored (Scheff 1979; Gluckman 1963; Heelas 1983; Briggs 1970). Heelas (1982) has also discussed the usefulness of catharsis as a general explanation for shedding undesirable violent emotions, and argues that the catharsis view of aggression may be too simplistic. Not only does the contradictory nature of the evidence preclude any generalization, but it is difficult to conduct any cross-cultural comparisons because there is no agreement as to what should be compared. While admitting that the actor's definition of violence may differ from culture to culture, thereby making a universal definition impossible, Heelas nevertheless accepts *a priori* the presence of the 'thing' violence in all of us. ' . . . [I]t cannot be argued that violence exists solely as a cultural phenomenon. . . violence is almost certainly embedded in the natural world' (1982: 54). Explicitly or implicitly, the various theories treat aggression as an absolute discrete 'thing', which, when it appears to be absent in a particular society, has somehow to be accounted for. It is this assumption which I have been questioning in this paper.

If one is still searching for ways to explain this absence, believing with most ethologists, socio-biologists, and even some social anthropologists that aggression is part of human nature, then the obvious place to look is for some form of ritual as catharsis, or try to identify some other culturally constructed behaviour pattern which allows the individual Chewong to shed negatively valued arousal states, like anger, which according to such theories would build up and erupt in uncontrolled violent behaviour. Not only have I been unable to identify any such ritual — it would, for instance, be incorrect to interpret the shamanistic seance as practised by the Chewong in such terms — but other practices, analogous to eskimo dog beating as presented by Briggs (1970) are equally absent. However, I would argue that it begs the question to phrase it in such a way. I do not disregard the possibility that some rituals in some societies do indeed perform such a function, but this interpretation would be meaningful only if the members of those societies could be shown in their various ideas

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and practices — in particular those concerning personhood — to endorse such an interpretation. In other words, let us avoid *a priori* assertions about human nature and try instead to perform a systematic explication of indigenous ideas concerning human nature and social and cosmological relationships.

The question I think we should ask is not, 'Is violence learnt or innate?', but rather, 'What are the ideological constructs that encourage violent or peaceful behaviour and make it meaningful and proper?', and the closely related one, 'What do the behaviour patterns *mean* to the participants?' Do *they* perceive themselves as 'aggressive' or 'peaceful', and if so, 'What are the semantic connotations of the words used?' In order to ascertain the indigenous meanings, I suggest that indigenous concepts be explored, and the vocabulary denoting inner states examined. Which experiential and behavioural characteristics are valued by the members of a particular social group? There are only a few societies where all members hold the same characteristics to be applicable to everyone. Men and women, for instance, may in many cases be characterized as different in this regard — their human nature may not be identical — and proper interpretative emphasis must be given in such cases. While such an approach may seem inconclusive, it is one that allows each cultural situation to be interpreted in internally appropriate ways, while at the same time giving full credence to the psychic and cognitive unity of humanity.

Empirical examples of peaceful societies, which do not need some release mechanism for assumed aggressive drives, should at least alert us to the possibly false linking of human aggression and human nature. As Montagu (1976) has stated again and again, the social activity of war need have no relationship with the inner state of aggression. To confuse the two confuses the issue in general. As fearful, angry, brave, quarrelsome, competitive, kind, generous, cooperative etc. do not exist in the world as measurable qualities, but humans as social beings may develop all, or none, to varying extents, so social behaviour like war can only be explained with reference to complex social factors, not to some assumed universal inner state.

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