



**Quickly read the article. What is the main topic?**

- a the differences between human and animal behaviour
- b the effects of war and why it is so destructive
- c whether future wars are inevitable
- d the groups of people who are more likely to be violent

## Evolution and War

Will there ever be an end to war? The majority of the attendees on my current anthropology course answered a fatalistic 'No'. Their response was largely predictable, given that we are relentlessly bombarded with images of the military, its machinery and weapons, war-torn cities and grieving civilians. The media grimly reminds us of the sheer number of ongoing conflicts around the world; about the huge casualty rate in countries which we would probably struggle to locate on a map. There seems to be a general impression that there is no chance of a peaceful life on the planet, so long as there is human life.

It's certainly true that conflict appears to have escalated in the last decade. Some anthropologists claim that this is natural, insofar as it is an intrinsic part of human nature to be aggressive. Primates, our closest living relatives, also have a tendency towards violence. Therefore it is easy to draw the conclusion that humans fight because it is an ineradicable part of our genetic heritage. However, are we wrong to make this assumption?

While primates can display exceptional levels of brutality towards outsiders, they are also capable of reconciliation (mainly through grooming and mating) and can even avoid conflict when they perceive that there is a strategic advantage in doing so. Put more simply, apes and monkeys will only fight if they believe they can win or escape retribution. Surely, then, humans have the capacity to avoid hostility too. There is already some evidence that the world's major powers have realised the lose-lose scenario that would follow nuclear conflict, as many governments are currently discussing disarmament and arms reduction programmes.

So are there more proactive ways to avoid conflict? The more instinctively peaceful primates are the ones with access to plentiful food, and this should tell us something basic about human conflict. If human populations were more willing to distribute their food, fuel and other natural resources more equitably, there would be less reason to fight. Even if our motive for sharing is technically self-centred, this is irrelevant because in the long term it simply makes sense for us to do so.

Historically, whenever there has been more demand than supply for food, fuel or land, conflict has arisen. Therefore, in order to share these resources, it is vital that population growth is limited. One way to achieve this is through the schooling of women; statistics show that in countries where women are more educated, the birth

rate tends to be lower. And with greater education, women are also able to participate more in decision-making at all levels of society, including government. While I hesitate to label women as the more peaceful gender, they have a different set of negotiation skills than men. And we need the skills of both to help find the kind of compromises required to avoid large-scale conflict. Evolution may have instilled within us the instinct to fight, but we can also evolve to overcome it.

**Read the article again. For statements 1-9 , decide whether the writer agrees (A), disagrees (D) or doesn't comment (DC).**

- 1 It is surprising what students believe about war.
- 2 The press should pay far less attention to war stories.
- 3 The number of wars seems to have increased recently.
- 4 Primates are more likely than humans to engage in conflict.
- 5 Certain countries have made progress in considering a more peaceful approach.
- 6 People shouldn't share what they have if their reasons for doing so are selfish.
- 7 We don't need to reduce the number of children we have.
- 8 The ratio of men to women in government should be equal.
- 9 It may be possible for humans to stop acting aggressively towards one another.

**Find words or phrases in the article which mean**

- 1 ordinary people in a war situation, not soldiers (*paragraph 1*)
- 2 the number of people who died in war (*paragraph 1*)
- 3 making peace (*paragraph 3*)
- 4 punishment (*paragraph 3*)
- 5 agreements between two groups, with both sides getting part of what they want (*paragraph 5*)
- 6 defeat (*paragraph 5*)