

BOOK REVIEWS

SÉBASTIEN PENMELLEN BORET, *Japanese tree burial: ecology, kinship, and the culture of death*, London and New York: Routledge 2014, xvii, 219 pp.

Boret's book offers a clear and well-documented account of 'tree burial', defined as 'concealing a corpse inside a tree or beneath its roots' (p. 4), a practice which has emerged in Japan over the last sixteen years. The author's core argument is that, while there has been a decline in ancestor worship in Japan since the 1970s, new forms of burial and ancestor worship such as tree burial are not so much a rejection of Japanese ancestral rites and tradition as a symptom of the desire to liberalize and innovate what the author calls 'ways of death' in Japan today. In particular, tree burial provides the Japanese with an ecologically sustainable alternative to cremation and grave burial, as well as a way to avoid the exorbitant expenses associated with funeral practices in Japan today (e.g. the author quotes a figure of no less than £70,000 as the average price for a typical grave in Tokyo as of 2010).

In Chapters 1 and 6, the author claims that the growing interest in tree burial in Japan and elsewhere (this is far from being a uniquely Japanese practice, having started in the UK in 1993, i.e. six years before Japan) is inscribed in the transnational desire to live on after death through the perpetuation of the life cycle. Chapter 6 particularly puts forward Davies' concept of 'ecological immortality' in which one conceives of a corpse's elements as a way to regenerate other forms of life through burial. Chapter 2 successfully explores the correlations between Japan's environmental crises and changes in the ways in which the Japanese dispose of the dead. This is an important chapter, as the author shows that, in Japan today, individual action may come to undermine cultural norms and tradition if it needs to produce new social paradigms and new acceptable *praxis*. This is reminiscent of other forms of civil disobedience in East Asia today, particularly in Japan, Korea and China. In Japan, public demonstration of dissatisfaction was hardly observable between the 1970s and the early 2010s, but online protests have increased recently following the 2011 earthquake in the Tōhoku region, which Boret, interestingly enough, identifies as the 'land of tree burial'. In Chapter 3, the author argues that tree burial is a symptom not so much of the rejection of traditional discourses and values associated with Japanese kinship and household inheritance (the widely discussed *ie* system), but rather of diversification in the ideology and practice of personalization and self-representation. Chapter 4 proposes the following thesis: in tree burial and other non-ancestral burial practices, the dead-to-be, the living and the dead all negotiate and celebrate social and

family relationships at the grave. As such, the author argues, novel 'ways of death' in Japan show an increase in the perception of burial as a collective process of memorialization. In Chapter 5 the author argues that, by practising tree burial, the Japanese take care of the environment, thus contributing to (life) continuity and to the well-being of the Japanese people as a whole. A specific section on the intrusion of foreign species in tree cemeteries is particularly interesting as it suggests that these new practices are not necessarily being undertaken by ecologically minded citizens. Indeed, by bringing foreign species of trees to the places where they wish to be buried or to bury their relatives, people are blighting the ecosystem of the environment that is hosting the remains of their dead.

While this is a very well-written and well-documented monograph, the author is unsuccessful in avoiding what has been widely recognized in philosophy and social anthropology as an epistemological pitfall, namely treating life, death, nature and society as autonomous entities. As such, the author uses a conceptual framework that is somewhat dated. For instance, instead of engaging with current anthropological debates about the trans-species cosmologies and intersubjective experiences that arose after the ontological and (more relevant to this discussion) trans-species turns, he proposes to approach Japan's decline in ancestor worship practices and its increase in alternative burial practices as a symptom of his participants' desire to 're-appropriate' nature and death. This presupposes that his participants perceive life, society, nature and death as autonomous entities. As such, the reader might prefer the author's engagement with his participants' discourse about continuity, a discourse that, in my experience, often arises among East Asian participants when they engage in discussions about life and cosmological responsibilities. The monograph reads as though the author tried artificially to combine his participants' discourses about environmental cosmology with his own inclination to conceive of death, life, nature and society as independent processes capable of 're-uniting' through novel ecological configurations. It is possible that, when the author mentions the 're-appropriation' of nature and death, he means to engage with current debates about what Eduardo Kohn has recently called the 'anthropology of life', which urges anthropologists to start approaching living and non-living entities as fluid environments that inform and transform each other through intersubjective experience. However, the conspicuous lack of reference to these debates indicates that this might not be the case.

Nonetheless, this is a very informative monograph which makes for an enjoyable read. The personal experiences of the author with death are particularly gripping and give an emotional depth to his ethnography from beginning to end.

JULIEN DUGNOILLE

TIMOTHY LARSEN, *The slain god: anthropologists and the Christian faith*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 256 pp.

In his latest book, *The Slain God*, Timothy Larsen provides a compelling account of the complex relationship between anthropology and the Christian faith by studying the lives and work of the most prominent British social anthropologists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. From its inception, anthropology has been considered a secular and rationalist discipline whose insights have often questioned and challenged as untenable the claims and doctrines of Christianity. Yet, as Larsen demonstrates powerfully in his book, anthropological insights have also often reinforced these claims and doctrines, as some prominent anthropologists have seen no contradiction in being professional anthropologists as well as practising Christians.

Larsen starts his discussion with the founding fathers of the discipline – Edward Tylor and James Frazer – and proceeds with chapters on E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Mary Douglas, and Victor and Edith Turner. While this structure can be read in a linear historical progression as a history of British social anthropology, in the *Afterword* the author tells us that this has not been his intention. Instead, he suggests, his book is best read as a ring composition in which the main argument is not to be found in the *Introduction*, but in the middle of the book.

Quite tellingly, perhaps, the central chapter in *The Slain God* is dedicated to E.E. Evans-Pritchard, the famous Oxford anthropologist whose contribution to the methodological and theoretical maturing of the discipline has been of such significance that he was acknowledged as the greatest and most brilliant anthropologist of his time even by those who did not agree with some of his views (p. 81). Evans-Pritchard was born into an Anglican family but converted to Catholicism later in life. Even though he described himself as a ‘bad Catholic’ (perhaps because he drank and rarely attended mass), he nonetheless seemed genuinely to believe in the creeds of the Catholic Church and argued that they had an important role to play in the modern world. Throughout his life, Evans-Pritchard advocated a departure from the then predominant trend in British social anthropology to discredit religion and expose it as a superstition akin to the false beliefs of ‘primitive’ peoples. As he sought to distance himself from the tradition of religious scepticism and agnosticism, Evans-Pritchard made abundant use of the Bible as a point of authoritative reference in his work.

By contrast, Evans-Pritchard's famous predecessors, E.B. Tylor and James Frazer, had been famous religious sceptics. Tylor's evolutionary model of human life – progressing through the stages of savagery, barbarism and civilisation – reflected his belief that religion was a superstitious fallacy created by 'savages' in order to try and make sense of their world. However, as society advances (or becomes 'civilised', in Tylor's terms), scientific thought provides a far better understanding of the world, and religion should be removed. By using Christian categories to describe the religious practices of 'savages' and 'by insisting that Christian beliefs were no different from savage ones' (p. 31), Tylor sought to demonstrate that Christianity was fundamentally pagan. This explicit anti-Christian stance was retained throughout his life and contributed to deepening the opposition between religion and science.

In James Frazer's own work, this opposition was elevated to the state of warfare: for Frazer, religion was altogether wrong and bound to be replaced by science. Moreover, his work was full of numerous comparisons between Christian and 'savage' beliefs and practices which served to show his readers that Christianity was essentially based on wrong assumptions about the world. Characteristically, however, Frazer was much more ambivalent and covert in his criticisms of Christianity than Tylor had ever been. Larsen attributes this ambivalence to two factors. On the one hand, it was a peculiarity of Frazer's temperament that he shied away from open confrontation and debate regarding his views on religion and wrote so as to make it appear that he was praising religion while in reality he meant to discredit it. On the other hand, there were several important figures in Frazer's life whose Christian sentiments he seemed reluctant to hurt during their lifetimes (these included his parents and his mentor, William Robertson Smith). This changed upon their deaths, and in subsequent work Frazer attempted more overtly to undermine the foundations of Christianity. At the same time, perhaps paradoxically, in later life Frazer started attending church and read the Bible each morning while vehemently denying being a Christian.

Other eminent anthropologists took a special pride in openly declaring themselves to be devout Christians. Mary Douglas was one of them. She was born and raised as a Catholic, and Larsen describes her as a distinctly 'Catholic intellectual using her training and gifts to serve her co-religionists' (p. 160). Throughout her life Douglas wrote in defence of the Christian faith against modernist and secularist claims and contended that it could provide answers to contemporary anthropological issues. In *Purity and Danger* (1966) she attempted to explain that religious taboos regarding diet were not arbitrary but had structure and meaning; in *Natural Symbols* (1970) she argued that the elaborate ritualism and symbolism of Catholicism was essential to sustaining the faith and had to be preserved. Douglas's theoretical

preoccupations with structure and hierarchy reflected her personal convictions that structure and hierarchy were good because the Catholic Church was structured and hierarchical. Douglas referred to the Bible in all her anthropological writing, and transcended disciplinary boundaries by contributing regularly to Catholic periodicals and writing Biblical exegeses in which she always sought to interpret the Bible favourably and depict God as compassionate and good. Douglas's commitment to her faith remained so strong that Larsen concludes: 'Douglas never wrote a single book – whatever the subject matter – that did not include Christian examples' (p. 162).

Larsen devotes the last chapter in his book to Victor and Edith Turner, two leading British anthropologists of the twentieth century who started their academic careers as Marxists. However, their study of African ritual convinced them of the centrality of religion to the human condition, as a consequence of which they converted to Roman Catholicism. Throughout his life as a conservative Roman Catholic who protested against the liberal reforms introduced by Vatican II, Victor Turner remained interested in the work of theologians of all ages, and his anthropological writing was heavily influenced by their ideas and by Christian categories. The Turners pioneered pilgrimage studies at the University of Chicago, which Victor Turner joined in 1968, and this reflected both their spiritual quests and their academic interests. Their interest in pilgrimage as a prolonged stage of liminality that produced *communitas* resulted in the publication of *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (1978), the only book the Turners co-authored. Because of its deep engagement with Christian theology, Larsen describes the book as 'one long confession of faith' (p. 196). Upon her husband's death, Edith Turner further developed her interest in ritual and healing by promoting the idea of the reality of spirits and introducing a new, and somewhat extreme methodological approach which requires anthropologists to believe in all instances of miracles reported by their informants.

Even though Larsen remains sceptical of the usefulness of this new approach, it aptly completes the ring composition of his book and illustrates his main argument: anthropologists might have attempted to slay the Christian God in their work, but His influence has remained discernible within the discipline, where some of the most influential anthropologists have managed to maintain a balance between their Christian convictions and their academic writing. For Larsen, keeping this balance and remaining open to interdisciplinary dialogue is at the heart of the discipline of anthropology. His book is the first book-length study of the relationship between anthropology and Christianity and as such is of interest to anyone who

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wishes to understand this relationship better. The book is also particularly timely in view of the recent resurgence of interest in these issues in the anthropology of Christianity.

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DOUGLAS P. FRY, *War, Peace, and Human Nature: The Convergence of Evolutionary and Cultural Views*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013, 582 pp.

Is war inevitable? Is organized lethal aggression prevalent in our deep evolutionary history and, if so, does warfare's antiquity mean that humans have a strong proclivity for violence over peaceful cooperation? Anthropologist Douglas Fry doesn't think so. Fry has published widely on aggression and conflict since his days as a doctoral student at Indiana University, where he studied socialization for aggression among Zapotec children. *War, Peace, and Human Nature* reflects Fry's thirty years of research on the topic. To produce this edited volume, Fry gathered eminent contributors from a variety of fields, including archaeology, anthropology, primatology, ethology, and evolutionary biology. Unfortunately, this book's initial expense (£64), length (582 pages across 27 chapters), and limited formatting options deterred many and caused several early reviewers to focus on a handful of chapters, especially those by Brian Ferguson, who posted scanned versions of his contributions (Chapters 7 and 11) on his faculty website. In February 2015, a paperback was released by OUP for £26, while ebook versions are now available in a variety of formats. A lower price and increased formatting options will enable this timely book to reach a larger audience in its entirety. It is well worth a second look, but its noticeable flaws remain.

War, Peace, and Human Nature is organized into six broad parts. The first, 'Ecological and Evolutionary Models' (Chapters 2-5), introduces major topics in evolutionary biology, including game theory, multilevel selection, and the complementarity of ultimate and proximate levels of evolutionary explanation. Peter Verbeek (Chapter 4) writes with particular

clarity when he asks ‘whether war, as an organized form of lethal aggression, is species-typical or atypical for the human species’ (p. 63). In other words, Verbeek asks whether war is either (1) a context-dependent behaviour that is commonly shown by members of the species (species-typical) or (2) a context-independent behaviour that is infrequently shown by members of the species (species-atypical). Much later, Anna Szala and Douglas Fry (Chapter 23) conclude that the restraint against conspecific killing in humans is species-typical (p. 452), whereas conspecific killing in humans is a species-atypical behaviour (p. 469; see also pp. 13-14). This conclusion, however, differs from those of several contributors to Part 1. David Barash, for example, in ‘Evolution and Peace: A Janus Connection’ (Chapter 2) concludes, ‘[i]nsofar as we are subject to genetic influences, not determinism, it is equally certain that just as these influences don’t mandate violence, neither do they mandate nonviolence. We have within us the biologically generated, Janus-like capacity to face either direction...’ (p. 36). Hanna Kokko (Chapter 3), citing research on aggressive behaviour on a variety of organisms, reaches a similar conclusion when she states: ‘[t]he somewhat depressing message from biology is that aggressive interactions, including ones where conspecifics can be killed, are certainly an expected part of life.... The upside is, perhaps, that much of aggressive behavior is also predicted to be very plastic, tending to surface only when the unconscious calculations predict that gentler routes to success are not more profitable’ (p. 51).

Part two, ‘Lessons from Prehistory: War and Peace in the Past’ (Chapters 6-11), addresses the question of warfare’s antiquity by marshalling archaeological evidence from North America (Chapters 8 and 9) and Europe and the Near East (Chapters 10 and 11), as well as ethnographic evidence of groups of foragers from around the globe (Chapter 9). These chapters endeavour to overcome the hitherto shallow temporal focus on warfare during the Neolithic period, finding that, while there is evidence of periodic homicide during the Pleistocene, warfare may be attested only recently, arising approximately 12,000 years ago. However, Brian Ferguson (Chapter 7) and Robert Kelly (Chapter 9) are quick to point out how difficult it is to distinguish between homicide and warfare in the material record. Nevertheless, Jonathan Haas and Matthew Piscitelli (Chapter 10) conclude that ‘there is extremely limited empirical evidence of any warfare among past hunter and gatherers...’ (p. 184). More importantly, Kelley (Chapter 9) observes, ‘it is not useful to ask whether hunter-gatherers ... are peaceful or warlike; we find evidence for both among them. The better question is: when do foragers resort to war?’ (p. 158). Kelly continues, ‘[e]ven with a genetic proclivity for violence, we can eradicate it if we remove the conditions that make war seem

unavoidable [which begs the question] under what conditions does the benefit of cooperation outweigh the benefit of competition, and, assuming that we would like to rid the world of war, how do we encourage those conditions for cooperation?' (p. 165). Haas and Piscitelli (Chapter 10) also call for a different set of questions, saying that, while an understanding of warfare's antiquity is important, they wish to 'understand *why humans go to war, why wars start and stop, and what is the role of warfare* in either the biological or cultural evolution of humanity' (p. 184, emphasis in the original). Haas and Piscitelli's 'The Prehistory of Warfare: Misled by Ethnography' (Chapter 10) goes on to summarize the benefits and perils of using ethnographic data to make inferences about warfare across human history and emphasise the importance of archaeological data to answer questions about human history before the evolution of socio-political complexity. They highlight a number of important incongruities between the results of ethnographic and archaeological surveys before concluding: '[b]y confining ourselves only to the record of the modern world and historical depth of written history we are disallowing 98 percent of human history, diversity, and creativity, as well as our incredible uniqueness as primates. Assuming that warfare has been constant since the beginning of human history, based on the present, relieves us of responsibility for investigating the causes of war and the potential for peace' (pp. 184-5).

Part three, 'Nomadic Foragers: Insights about Human Nature' (Chapters 12-17), uses ethnographic descriptions of extant nomadic foragers to make inferences about the selection pressures to which humans adapted in what evolutionary psychologists call the 'environment of evolutionary adaptedness' or EEA. Chapters 12, 13, and 14 provide case-study data on particular nomadic forager societies, while Chapter 15 provides data on six south Indian foraging societies, and Chapter 16 provides sample data on 49 nomadic forager societies. A number of conflict management and resolution strategies (e.g., certain types of religious rituals) are noted throughout these sections, while evidence of warfare is found to be rare across cases. Part three, however, suffers from several methodological problems and does not adhere to Fry's own criteria for 'achieving scientific objectivity' in the study of warfare. First, when selecting nomadic forager societies Fry states emphatically: '*using a sample selected on the basis of explicit criteria is far better than self-selecting ethnographic examples [...] to bolster a particular argument. Self-selection is ripe for bias*' (p. 10, emphasis in the original). Despite this call for methodological rigour, five chapters in *War, Peace, and Human Nature*, including the majority of chapters in Part three, are vulnerable to the charge of ethnographic

cherry-picking¹ (Chapters 12, 13, 14, 15, and 27). Secondly, Fry states quite correctly that there is a ‘semantic muddle’ in the literature with regard to what researchers mean when they refer to groups of ‘hunter-gatherers’. Fry offers a more precise typology by differentiating between (1) nomadic egalitarian bands, (2) horse-dependent bands, and (3) hierarchical (non-egalitarian) semi-sedentary or sedentary hunter-gatherers. He then describes the selection criteria for selecting the groups appropriate to analysis in the ‘forager analogy’ (i.e., nomadic egalitarian bands). Confusion, however, emerges when the contributors to this section fail to adhere to a shared typology or selection criteria for the inclusion of the human groups appropriate for use when making the ‘forager analogy’ (Chapters 12-19). Thirdly, the contributors in Part three do little to address the limitations associated with using ethnographic data to make inferences about warfare in human evolutionary history, including those outlined by Haas and Piscitelli in Chapter 10.

Part four, ‘The Primatological Context of Human Nature’ (Chapters 18-22), uses comparative primatological data to provide an evolutionary perspective on the antiquity and function of warfare. Chapters 18 and 19 contrast behavioural traits towards aggression/passivity in bonobos and chimpanzees, while Chapters 20 and 22 survey experimental data on the social interactions and conflict resolution strategies of non-human primates. In Chapter 21, Robert Sapolsky focuses on the role of ‘culture’ in conflict management and prosociality in baboons, particularly amongst a ‘Forest Troop’, a group of baboons that he has been studying continuously since the mid-1970s. Oddly, while Fry dedicates the five chapters of Part four to the contributions of primatological data, his comments in Chapter 1 suggest that he is unsure of their utility. Fry, like Peter Verbeek (Chapter 4) and Nikolaas Tinbergen (1968: 1414) before him, believes ‘that each species should be studied in its own right. So, to understand peace and war in humans, we should look toward the human data directly, and to understand intergroup and intragroup killing in chimpanzees, we should study chimpanzees directly’ (p. 13). Despite this early call for a focused approach on war and peace in humans, primatological data becomes a cornerstone of Fry’s summary in Chapter 27, where he states, ‘[t]he grand conclusion, therefore, from archaeology, nomadic forager studies, primatology, and evolutionary theory, as applied afresh to aggression, is that in humans, war is recent, not ancient, and war is a capacity, not an evolved adaptation. In short, war was rare to nonexistent under the conditions in which our species evolved but obviously prevalent in more recent times that are dramatically different

¹ ‘Cherry-picking’ is a form of the fallacy of selective attention which preferences bodies of evidence and experimental designs likely to confirm a given position.

ecological and cultural circumstances' (p. 543). Fry's 'grand conclusion', however, is at odds with the conclusions drawn from the primatological and ethnographic data by Michael Wilson in 'Chimpanzees, Warfare, and the Invention of Peace' (Chapter 18). According to Wilson, '[i]f humans have lived with chronic warfare for long stretches of evolutionary time, various psychological mechanisms underlying warfare in humans are plausible candidates for adaptation.... If this view is correct, then peace, not war, is the invention—a profoundly important and good invention, but an invention all the same. [...] Like language, war appears to be a human universal—or at least nearly so. [...] In contrast, peace appears to be an achievement...' (pp. 379-80).

While Parts two through four are organized primarily by data source (archaeological, ethnographic, and primatological, respectively), Part five, 'Taking Restraint against Killing Seriously' (Chapters 23-26), is organized around the topic of restraint against killing and other forms of serious violence. Chapter 23 builds on insights garnered from the primatological data in Part four, while Chapter 25 contains a fascinating discussion of the resistance to killing in military contexts. Chapters 24 and 26 examine cultural mechanisms for restraint against killing using ethnographic data. In Part five, which begins with a chapter co-authored by Fry and Anna Szala, Fry attempts to redress what he considers to be a 'cultural bias' toward the belief that war is ancient, prevalent and ultimately inevitable by turning the conversation to the evidence for restraint in human agonism, which Fry believes is often overlooked and taken for granted. According to Fry, human restraint, while 'vitaly important and regularly according, has remained invisible' (p. 14). Fry returns to contend that a 'cultural bias' exists toward a belief in the antiquity and inevitability of war in part six, which consists of a single chapter (Chapter 27). Here, Fry relies primarily on roughly a dozen potentially cherry-picked ethnographies on indigenous cultures to evidence his argument. According to Fry, the prevailing account of war is based not on scientific research, but a particular Western view of nature that is 'passed down over generations, integrated into religious and historical narratives, reinforced in daily conversations, recounted in drama and literature, expressed in political discourse, bolstered by cultural symbols and cherished values, and reproduced as it is learned and absorbed by the young...' (p. 2; see also Chapters 1, 6, and 27).

This final chapter reveals the stark incongruity between what we were promised in Chapter 1 and what we receive during the ensuing 26 chapters. In Chapter 1, Fry sets out to overcome 'the cultural bias' towards the belief that warfare is ancient by 'achieving scientific objectivity'. Fry calls for the elimination of sampling bias, a broad evolutionary perspective, and the need for precise and explicit sampling criteria for groups of foragers. When carried

out in practice, these are small steps in the right direction, but much more is needed to achieve ‘scientific objectivity’ in the study of human warfare. First, Fry needs to transform his broad predictions about warfare in human history into explicit hypotheses that can be tested with historical and archaeological data. Several of the contributors to this book make significant progress to this end. For example, Robert Kelley’s question about the causal factors that may drive foragers to cease cooperation and resort to war (Chapter 9) can be readily transformed into a set of empirical historical predictions. Are increased levels of organised lethal aggression associated historically with increased group size (as argued in e.g., Chapters 5, 7, 8, and 10), high levels of population density (e.g., Chapters 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 18), resource scarcity (e.g., Chapters 8, 9, 10 and 11), cultural distance (e.g., Chapters 7 and 11), geographical proximity (e.g., Chapters 7 and 8), sedentism (e.g., Chapters 7, 8, and 11), or socio-economic inequality (e.g., Chapters 7, 8, and 11)? Might one or more of these factors interact in complex causal feedback loops? It may seem obvious, but to answer historical empirical questions of this sort, we need to construct large, historical and archaeological datasets of theoretically relevant variables that were collected systematically from high-quality data sources before being verified by teams of experts. Explicit mathematical models are also necessary to help us to avoid simplistic monocausal thinking, while ensuring that two of the most important aspects of a scientific method are maintained—falsifiability and replicability. A global sampling strategy is necessary to maximize cultural variability and increase the generalizability of the results, while statistical manipulations should be incorporated to account for the much-discussed problem of non-independence between data points or what anthropologists call ‘Galton’s problem’ (Naroll 1961: 15; Tylor 1889: 270).

One notable project, ‘Seshat: Global History Databank’ (Turchin et al., in press) is beginning to produce the historical data necessary to test competing predictions about the relationship between warfare and each of the causal factors proposed above, in addition to many others. This databank is currently collecting data on over a thousand variables across the last 10,000 years of human history, including approximately 200 variables on warfare alone. The data provided by Seshat allows researchers to test a myriad of historical predictions directly without having to rely on analogues from primatological data (Part 1), largely unsystematic archaeological data (Part 2), or ethnographic data in the ‘nomadic forager analogy’ (Part 3). Incorporating the data collected in ‘Seshat: Global History Databank’ is the next logical step for Fry in his pursuit of scientific objectivity in the study of warfare. The contributions of Brian Ferguson (especially Chapter 11) and several others provides some rich data to evidence the claim that war is neither ancient or widespread, while

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peacefulness is both ancient and widespread, but much more systematic data are needed to adjudicate between competing hypotheses (such as those forwarded in Steven Pinker's *The Better Angels of our Nature*, 2011).

Fry should be commended for tying together evidence from a variety of relevant disciplines and advancing the study of warfare and peace in human evolutionary history. He needs to hold his contributors to his own standards of methodological rigour and then redouble his efforts toward scientific objectivity. To progress toward this goal, he should transform his broad and encompassing predictions into explicit hypotheses that can be tested with large amounts of systematic historical data that have been collected across a large, global sample of human groups. This approach will lay bare popular and scholastic biases, while allowing us to understand—and hopefully avoid—the conditions in which humans resort to war. 'Seshat: Global History Databank' offers the best example of this approach to date.

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