

4. *On Aggression*

Konrad Lorenz, Harcourt Books, 1966

Dr. Lorenz, a zoologist, shares what the animal world can teach about human aggression. Within-group aggression must be tempered so that a social group can survive. In nature, he writes, the aggressive instinct is retained – re-directed in some way – but not suppressed.

We humans still possess many drives and instincts from when we lived closer to nature, including aggression, the subject of this book. Lorenz also notes that tradition and ritual arise in animal and human societies, partly in order to tame the destructive sides of individual survival instincts, and partly so that all individuals can help each other to live safely together, thrive, and increase.

When people developed weapons, he suggests, a balance between two opposing aggressive instincts (survival of self vs. survival of group) was lost. That is, if a person can be aggressive with a tool, rather than with hands and teeth, his or her mind and body do not appreciate the true impact of the violence and may cause more harm than is healthy, or natural.

Other authors point to the aggressive (survival) instinct in explaining an in-group/out-group mentality in human societies. Interpreting Lorenz, Annie says we direct our natural aggression to the out-group, so it will not manifest in and destroy in-group cohesion. If society is divided, then each subgroup may become an “in-group,” interacting little with “out-groups,” reinforcing divisions among them.

“To the Death”

