

## CHAPTER 10

# “GREATER-GOOD” ARGUMENTS AS A RESTRAINT ON ACADEMIC FREEDOM IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

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### ABSTRACT

*Academic freedom is often constrained by self-censorship. Measurement of this constraint is difficult because it is often unconscious, so it is useful to explore the underlying motivations. Greater-good arguments are an important motivator of self-censorship. Humans are social creatures who fear being accused of harming the greater good. When a scholar's findings conflict with a paradigm alleged to serve the greater good, self-censorship is tempting. However, the greater good is not necessarily served by paradigms that invoke it. Discrepant data often lead to truths that a dominant paradigm obscures. Thus, the greater good is better served by a free flow of evidence than by conforming to a paradigm that evokes the greater good. This chapter presents an example in the Social Sciences. The paradigm of social harmony in the state of nature appears to serve the greater good, and evidence of aggression in the state of nature is often dismissed. But understanding the conflict in the state of nature can help people manage aggression today. This example can help scholars recognize and transcend the natural tendency to self-censor.*

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The Social Sciences broadly embrace the Rousseauian presumption that human nature is peaceful and harmonious. Evidence that fits this paradigm is widely reported, while evidence of conflict among animals and early humans is widely overlooked. This bias is often justified with greater-good arguments. A public interest is believed to be served by evidence that peace and harmony are the default state of nature. Evidence of aggression in the state of nature is thus seen as detrimental to the greater good.

Researchers invoke the scientific method in public, but privately, they intuit the reward structure of their discipline. They see how Rousseauian research is rewarded, while evidence of primal aggression is disparaged. Thus, it is important to know whether the greater good is actually served by such filtering of facts.

This chapter shows that it does not. For most of human history, the aggression among animals and earlier humans was easily visible. Animals and people learned to restrain their aggression through interactions with stronger individuals. Learning self-restraint serves the greater good. The Rousseauian paradigm makes such learning unnecessary because children are presumed to be peaceful and harmonious at birth, and only corrupted by “our society.” This leads to the conclusion that tearing down “our society” would restore the world to its original state of peace and harmony. The facts about human nature are thus a matter of great urgency. Freedom of information about aggression among animals and early humans best serves the greater good.

## FREE THINKING ABOUT HUMAN NATURE

For most of human history, people could observe the conflict among animals for themselves. They would not have been persuaded by assertions that animals are cooperative and altruistic (e.g., de Waal, 1996) because they had firsthand data. Today, hardly anyone is in a position to observe wild animals directly (as opposed to domesticated animals). This lack of direct experience makes it easy to accept “studies” representing animals as altruistic and cooperative.

For most of human history, people learned about the conflicts of their group from tribal elders. Today, we learn about the past from credentialed teachers, and students are often trained to distrust their elders’ view of history. Thus, students are inclined to believe that peace and harmony prevailed before “our society.”

This Rousseauian paradigm has significant implications: if you believe that peace and harmony prevailed before “our society,” then tearing down “our

society” seems like a way to restore it. From that perspective, the greater good is served by evidence of harmony in the state of nature; and the greater good is harmed by evidence of conflict among animals and earlier humans.

This bias is not stated overtly. The scientific method is invoked in public, but privately, a researcher intuits the reward structure of their discipline. They see rewards accrue to research that reinforces the peace-and-harmony paradigm. And they see disparagement heaped on discrepant data. Academics are understandably reluctant to be labeled an enemy of the greater good. So without formal restraint on academic freedom, an abundance of “evidence” that animals and tribal peoples are cooperative is reported while evidence of conflict in the state of nature disappears (e.g., de Waal, 2010).

This chapter does not debate the roots of aggression since that has been thoroughly explored in the past (e.g., Montagu, 1968). The goal here is to challenge the greater-good strategy for privileging one set of facts over another. While most academics acknowledge a duty to empirical objectivity, the call to serve the greater good has strong appeal. We must address the greater-good argument if we want academic freedom to survive.

Will ignoring the facts about primal conflict indeed reduce conflict? Is the public good indeed served by believing in primal harmony whether or not it fits the facts? This essay suggests not. It shows that:

- conflict is a primal impulse;
- early training builds the skill of restraining aggression in the state of nature; and
- when aggressive impulses are denied, the need for early training in self-restraint is denied.

Thus, aggression can even increase with the Rousseauian paradigm as it obscures the need for early learning. The greater good is better served by a free flow of information.

The Rousseauian bias in academic research is difficult to prove since our information is already shaped by the paradigm. Alternative evidence is hard to imagine since we hear so little of it. Let us start there.

## **EVIDENCE OF THE CONFLICT IN NATURE**

Conflict has pervaded human history (Keely 1996; LeBlanc & Register, 2003), and before there were humans, conflict pervaded the animal world (Lorenz, 1963). These facts are easily available, yet they are rarely acknowledged in the social sciences today. Instead, we have a profusion of studies suggesting that cooperation and altruism are the default state of nature (de Waal, 2010). The mind has difficulty accepting or even noticing discrepant data once trained to see human nature through the lens of the peace-and-harmony paradigm. Kuhn’s (1970) explanation of neglected data does not quite fit here because his model pertained to new data emerging from new research. In this case, the neglected data have always been

available – they have simply become unmentionable due to a presumed greater good.

Our aim here is not to re-debate the origins of aggression, but to see how an enormous accumulation of evidence can be excluded from consideration, and how that exclusion is rationalized with greater-good arguments.

The accumulated evidence of conflict among animals comes from a century of research in a discipline called *ethology*. That research made it clear that animals are very competitive with each other (An excellent compilation of such research is Wilson (1975)). Mammals invest significant energy in efforts to gain competitive advantage over conspecifics because that enhances reproductive success. They are aggressive when that promotes reproductive success, and they restrain their aggression when that promotes success.

Today, this knowledge is often dismissed as “disproven,” and people who recognize it are often dismissed as “social darwinists,” authoritarians, and worse (Chagnon, 2014). With such pejoratives, a century of meticulous field research is banished from public awareness.

I was not aware of it myself despite a long career in academia. I only discovered the evidence when *emerita* status brought me real academic freedom. My eyes were first opened by nature videos, especially those of David Attenborough. They present the facts of animal conflict so simply that the discrepancy with my social science training was too big to ignore. This motivated me to explore the wealth of research I had never known.

At the same time, I stumbled onto new evidence of aggression among pre-industrial humans. My retirement brought extensive travel, and I took to reading the original journals of early travelers to the places I was visiting. These journals reported endless warfare. One chronicle after another brought detailed accounts of long-standing tribal warfare (e.g., the journals of Captain Cook, Charles Darwin, Joseph Banks, Henry Stanley, and John Lloyd Stephens). Today, the observations of early explorers are often dismissed as racist and imperialist, but there are a lot of them and the patterns are remarkably consistent. This evidence challenged my belief in the peace-and-harmony mindset.

I was struck by the extent of my omissions: the breadth of research I had not known of; its relevance to human events; and the consequent loss to my students. I wondered how the academic community could ignore such a vast accumulation of knowledge. Then I witnessed the same facts being ignored by a new community when I became a Zoo Docent.

## **HOW A COMMUNITY EXCLUDES DISCREPANT INFORMATION**

When I took *emerita* status, I trained to be a docent at my local zoo. This brought me closer to the raw facts of animal behavior, but it also filtered those facts with a new variant of the Rousseauian paradigm. Zookeepers know that their animals risk being attacked and injured by a dominant group mate when food is presented. Animals protect themselves from injury by restraining the impulse to

reach for food or mating opportunity in the presence of a more dominant individual. Zookeepers cannot let their animals starve, so they have developed a procedure called "cooperative feeding." This involves two keepers: one to continually feed the dominant individual while the other feeds the rest of the group. I was irked by the labeling of this practice as "cooperative." It obscures reality with a Rousseauian veneer. Animal-management professionals cannot ignore reality because they have to deal with the consequences, so they put a nice face on it by suggesting that the dominant individual is "cooperating" with the feeding. Defining cooperation in this way protects everyone from the forbidden thought that animals strive to dominate when they are strong enough to prevail.

Zookeepers also know that a newly acquired animal risks severe attack if it is placed in an enclosure with an existing group. They have developed sophisticated "introduction" procedures to manage this danger. I had the opportunity to participate in one of these procedures when I was assigned to watch two pairs of birds for signs of aggression. Each pair was in a separate cage, but the cages were placed side-by-side during the "introduction." While I was scanning for threat gestures, a zoo visitor came and told me that a bird could fit through the small gap at the hinge of the cage door. I duly reported this to my supervisor, but neither of us anticipated the consequences. The next morning, two birds were found dead – a male from one pair and a female from the other. It seems that one bird had passed through the gap to kill its new rival, and the grieving mate went over to retaliate. The zoo's staff is highly conscientious, but the extent of animal aggression is often hard to imagine.

When captive animals are aggressive, the captivity is usually blamed. This inference feels true if one ignores aggression in the wild. My knowledge of aggression in the wild gradually grew beyond my ability to ignore it. One contribution to that knowledge came when I was assigned to support advocates of mountain lion sanctuaries for a day. I asked them why mountain lions need sanctuaries, so I could better explain it to the public. Their answer was murky, so I persisted. Finally, I learned that mountain lions who wander into residential areas cannot be returned to the wild because they would be killed by the lion who dominates whatever territory they happen to be released into. Animal-management professionals want to protect the lions, but they do not want to acknowledge such violence to the public. Thus, they advocate for sanctuaries without directly explaining why.

Each violent incident can be blamed on human and situational factors. One can avoid connecting the dots if the number of dots is limited and each is carefully given a Rousseauian explanation. But each discrepant experience drove me back to read more from the century of research on ethology. I even started collecting old ethology books to help protect them from extinction. No one wants these books now because the research conflicts with the dominant paradigm. When people fear to read inconvenient research, old books get shredded without much digitalization. Academic freedom is just an empty phrase if it is used to support popular findings and ignore unpopular findings.

The facts about animal conflict are sometimes dismissed with the assertion that they do not apply to humans (the debate is explained in Pinker, 2002).

Many writers embrace positive animal traits while skimming over the negative ones (e.g., de Waal, 2010). My education drilled me with the message that “our society” causes conflict, so I thought I had to get away from “our society” in order to have peace. I lived and worked abroad extensively for this reason. But behind closed doors, I learned about the conflict in other cultures. Their conflict is widely blamed on the corrupting influence of “our society,” but after observing so much of it, I decided to take a closer look at the evidence for the peace-and-harmony view of other cultures.

I discovered that Anthropology began with the express intent of elevating perceptions of other cultures; notably, the pioneering work of Franz Boas and the many students he trained. Research that does not elevate perceptions of other cultures is simply not deemed Anthropology. An individual who reported such information would not get the credentials necessary to contribute to the “facts” about human origins. Thus, the peace-and-harmony view of human origins remains intact.

Occasionally, an established anthropologist encounters discrepant evidence in the course of doing what Kuhn (1970) calls “normal science.” And occasionally, that scholar reports those facts despite the personal risk. Well-known examples of such controversies are the work of Napoleon Chagnon, Derek Freeman, Robert Ardrey, and Johann van der Dennen. Such scholars are accused of justifying and normalizing violence, and thus undermining the greater good (e.g., Raymont, 1968). These accusations are so stigmatizing that the discrepant data are ignored. The superior ethics of the peace-and-harmony mindset are taken for granted instead of addressing the empirical question of whether the greater good is actually served. Let us now turn to that question. Do the facts about primal conflict really hurt us? Or can they help us?

### WHAT WOULD ROUSSEAU DO?

Jean-Jacque Rousseau asserted that children are peaceful and cooperative until society corrupts them (Rousseau, 2007). He suggested that children are better left to their natural impulses than formed by social constraints. This view has grown in popularity since he wrote it in the eighteenth century. It is now so entrenched that you risk being accused of child abuse if you question it, and animal abuse in regard to pets.

I raised my children this way, but I started to have doubts. I could see that children do not necessarily restrain their undesirable impulses. So I wondered how it worked out for Rousseau’s children. Did he truly leave them to frolic in the state of nature without the taint of society? Did it bring them effortless peace and harmony?

The shocking fact is that he brought each of his four children to an orphanage as soon as they were born (His autobiography, *Confessions*, (Rousseau, 1992) explores this at length).

Rousseau’s babies came from a long-term casual relationship, and he had each new arrival taken to a convent. His *Confessions* assert that the children would be

better off with the good sisters than with their mother because he had observed the ill manners of their mother's family.

Some background is useful. Rousseau himself was repeatedly abandoned by his family. He was left to fend for himself as a child, and experienced the harshness of society without the aid of healthy nurturing. He did not see the value of healthy nurturing because he had never experienced it. So he posited a simple dichotomy between the perfection of children and the corruption of society – the dichotomy on which today's social science paradigm rests.

The truth is that even animals do not let their children run wild. Animals bite their young when they misbehave, and that builds the internal restraint needed to survive in the adult world (e.g., Cheney & Seyfarth, 2008). The point is not that we should inflict pain on our children, but that our natural impulses are shaped by early training.

Early learning of self-restraint is essential. After the peak neuroplasticity of youth, the skill of restraining one's aggression is harder to learn (Breuning, 2015). When we ignore primal conflict, we ignore the urgency of learning self-restraint. Thus, the peace-and-harmony paradigm can lead to more conflict rather than less. The full facts about aggression in the state of nature serve the greater good by alerting societies to the importance of early training.

## **THE ROMANTIC VIEW OF HUMAN NATURE AND THE GREATER GOOD**

Animals restrain their impulses because a bigger critter bites them if they do not (Another excellent investigation of this dynamic is Maestriperi, 2007). We do not want to teach our children this way, but we need to know how conflict is restrained in nature. If we jump to the conclusion that peace and harmony come automatically, we fail to address core impulses and get bad results.

The century of research on animals shows that animals steal food from weaker individuals, even juveniles (Cheney & Seyfarth, 2008; de Waal, 1982; Maestriperi, 2007; Pinker, 2002; Trivers, 1985; Wilson, 1975). Research suggesting cooperation among animals often omits the big picture (de Waal, 2010). For example, lions share a kill when it is more than they can eat. Their time is better spent feasting than fending off conspecifics because they risk losing their kill to hyenas at any moment. They share when it leads to more food. They refuse to share quite aggressively when that leads to more food (Schaller, 1976; for more on this natural decision-making process search "optimal foraging theory"). So a smaller lion keeps its distance from a bigger lion while eating. The point is not that aggression is good; the point is that every young lion learns when to act on its impulses and when to restrain them. To ignore that and highlight the occasional share is a distortion of reality.

Chimpanzees have the same dynamic. Researchers have made much of the sharing of meat among chimpanzees without acknowledging the way that chimp who made the kill turns the meat over to the group leader to avoid getting bitten. The leader controls the distribution of resources. It rewards its friends and

punishes its enemies (e.g., Goodall, 1986). The system is less utopian and more totalitarian than reports imply.

We are often told that mammals are social, and “social” is widely interpreted as an “all-for-one-and-one-for-all” solidarity. But the century of research showed that social animals are quite hierarchical (a good explanation is in de Waal, 1982). Mammals need groups for protection from predators, so they stick with their groups despite internal conflict. Herd animals push their way to the center of the group for additional safety. Group life means weaker and stronger individuals must live side-by-side (an excellent presentation of the research on this topic is Trivers, 1985). If a weaker individual reaches for food or mating opportunity when a stronger individual is present, the weaker individual gets bitten. Pain wires the brain to avoid repeating the behavior that triggered it. Weaker individuals avoid reaching for food in the presence of stronger individuals. They avoid reaching for mating opportunity as well.

An individual who never reached for food or mating opportunity would not reproduce, so natural selection built a brain that makes careful decisions about when to assert and when to hold back (Cheney & Seyfarth, 2008; de Waal, 1982; Maestriperi, 2007; Pinker, 2002; Trivers, 1985; Wilson, 1975). Animals make these decisions without a large cortex capable of processing language. We humans use language to explain our social decisions, but we do not actually make these decisions with our verbal brain the way we imagine. We make them with brain structures that all mammals have in common (the amygdala, hippocampus, hypothalamus, pituitary, and other structures collectively known as the “limbic system”). The human limbic system shapes our social responses in ways our verbal brain is not aware of (e.g., LeDoux, 1998). Understanding these decisions in animals can help us understand them in ourselves.

The limbic system controls the reward chemicals and threat chemicals. The mammal brain releases a threat chemical (cortisol) when it sees that it is in a position of weakness, and this motivates withdrawal. When a mammal finds a position of strength, its brain releases serotonin and it asserts itself (Schmeck, 1983; for a collection of sources on this topic, see Breuning, 2018). Neurons connect when these chemicals flow, which wires an individual to assert or withdraw in similar future situations (Breuning, 2011). Over time, each young mammal wires itself to make social decisions that meet its needs while avoiding threats. This applies equally to females and males.

When you see young mammals “playing,” it is clear that they are quite rough. This experience trains a brain to gauge its strength against others, thus building the neural network that will guide its future social interactions.

The neural pathways we build when we are young become the superhighways of our brain due to a substance called *myelin*. It coats neurons the way insulation coats a wire, allowing electricity to flow at super speeds. Myelin is abundant in a young brain, so the experiences of youth build the pathways where our electricity flows effortlessly. After puberty, we only have enough to repair the myelination we have. This makes it hard to build new pathways, which is why the internal restraints learned in youth have so much power (for a more detailed explanation, see Breuning, 2015).



Each species of mammal has dominance gestures and submission gestures known to all members of the species. When two individuals meet, one of them makes a dominance gesture and the other chooses to submit or fight. Mammals avoid fighting most of the time because the weaker individual submits (Trivers, 2006). You can call this "peace," but that misrepresents the true dynamic.

A dominant individual controls any resources that appear, such as food or mating opportunity. The dominant individual may "share," but typically uses resources to reward those who help it in the face of threat. Calling this a "sharing economy" misrepresents the true dynamic. It bears repeating that such behavior is not being advocated; it is simply being recognized because we are ill served by illusions about the state of nature.

The importance of social learning is well illustrated by the proverbial little poodle who barks at big dogs. Such poodles would not survive in the state of nature. The anomalous behavior only exists in the artificial environment that pet-owners create. A little poodle makes unwise dominance gestures because it got submission from humans in its early experience. It got wired to expect submission from all instead of learning realistic social judgment. It will be hard for this poodle to learn new impulse controls once its years of peak neuroplasticity are over. Humans may have good intentions when they submit to their poodles, but they end up increasing conflict rather than decreasing it. No greater good is served by ignoring the animals' true nature.

Now let us consider a young human child who steals cookies from their brother. A cookie is a reward from the child-brain's perspective, so the child gets wired to expect aggression to be rewarded. Now imagine a mother who says "kids need to work these things out for themselves." Imagine a father who says, "they grow out of these things." Imagine a teacher who says "I don't want to judge." Wiring for aggression builds with repetition. School administrators notice, and they say, "Our society is the problem." Soon the child is past their years of peak neuroplasticity without having learned to restrain its aggressive impulses.

The point is not that harsh restraint is good for children. The point is quite the opposite: harsh restraint is only needed when a young brain does not have the opportunity to learn from mild restraint. When internal restraint is not learned, conflict erupts unless external restraint is applied. External restraint includes a wide range of unpleasant consequences. Parents hope to protect their children from these unpleasant consequences by teaching internal restraint.

Humans have successfully reduced aggression by teaching self-restraint. And we have also developed kinder ways of teaching self-restraint over time. But in the name of kindness, the teaching of self-restraint risks falling to nothing. Romantic notions about animals are often used to justify such dangerous pedagogy. We need the facts about animals to avoid letting our children grow into poodles who bark incessantly.

If a little poodle is attacked by a big dog, blame tends to settle on the big dog. We do not want little dogs to live in fear, so we find it hard to hold them responsible for their outcomes. Yet the aggression of little dogs is still aggression. When you submit to little dogs and to children, you help build aggression. You can only know that with free access to the facts.

## THE POWER OF ACADEMIC MINDSETS

Each brain filters facts through the lens of its own past experience. We do not notice our own lens because it is just the network of neural pathways built from past experience. We do not notice our own act of filtering because it is just electricity flowing into neurons developed by past activation. Without conscious awareness of our lens, we believe we are just seeing the world as it is. Those who pride themselves on objectivity may stridently deny their own lens. But if their early years are full of messages about peace and love in the state of nature, and the flaws of “our society,” they have well-developed neural pathways representing this information. When they look at the world, electricity flows effortlessly into those pathways.

The mammal brain learns from rewards and pain. Academics are mammals, and their brains learn from rewards and pain whether or not they consciously acknowledge this. We get rewarded for saying we do not care about selfish rewards and only care about the greater good. Repetition builds a neural pathway that makes it easy to believe that you have no interest in selfish rewards and care only about the greater good.

The mammal brain cannot process language, so it is literally not on speaking terms with the verbal brain it is attached to (Pinker, 1997). When your mammal brain sees an opportunity to gain a reward, dopamine is released and the good feeling motivates action steps. Your mammal brain cannot tell your verbal brain why it turned on the good feeling. Our verbal brain always struggles to make sense of the neurochemistry released by the mammalian operating system it is attached to. If you got wired with specific beliefs about your own motivations, your electricity flows there and the belief feels like a fact about the external world. This makes it easy to invoke the greater good while actively seeking what is good for you.

Mammals are social animals. Their brains reward social behavior because that promotes survival. Academics are social animals whose brains respond to social rewards as well as material rewards. Social threats trigger our threat chemistry without conscious intent because social isolation is a survival threat in the state of nature. Neurons connect when our threat chemicals flow, which wires our brains to avoid similar threats in the future.

In the academic world, the risk of social ostracism is a constant decision factor, whether or not your verbal brain acknowledges it (Haidt, 2017; Horowitz & Laskin, 2009). When you see information that violates the paradigm of your discipline, your inner mammal quickly perceives the threat of lost rewards and potential attack. Your brain motivates you to withdraw from such information with brain chemicals that create a life-or-death sense of urgency. While your mammal brain does what it takes to restore a sense of safety, your verbal brain looks for a way to make sense of this response. Your concern for the greater good is a convenient explanation.

This is why academic freedom requires eternal vigilance. We are tempted to restrain our own freedom because adverse experience wires the brain to avoid such experience (Skinner, 1965) and reporting data that conflicts with the dominant

paradigm often produces adverse experience (Haidt, 2017; Horowitz & Laskin, 2009). Greater-good arguments help a scholar justify the impulse to conform to shared norms.

Here is a simple thought experiment to illuminate that cost. Imagine yourself transported to a tropical island where you find the idyllic society of your dreams. Imagine yourself greeting the people with profound good intentions. Their smiles and their dancing fit the template you learned in anthropology class. "This is the good life," you tell yourself, and you decide to stay.

Soon, you notice a lot of child labor. You tell yourself it is creative rather than exploitive, because the culture is creative rather than exploitive. But over time, you see how the children of this island submit to the expectations of everyone bigger than them. You see how aggression erupts if they do not submit fast enough. You are disappointed. This is not the good life, you think. You decide to remain on this island and teach people a better way of life.

A year later, you are pleased to see children frolicking the way you saw in anthropology class. But troubling warning signs are in evidence too. Children are ignoring calls to participate in routine labor. They respond with aggression to the expectations of their elders. Mothers stop insisting on participation in labor because they are too busy completing tasks without help. Fathers stop insisting because you have publicly shamed them for doing so. But parents see that their children are not learning the survival skills handed down in their culture. They fear for their future survival without this knowledge. You want to help, so you decide to stay longer.

A year later, you see more and more fits of rage from these children. And there are disappearances. Children wander away from their hamlet and are not seen again. In the past, the risk of being taken by neighboring tribes was impressed on children by cultural admonitions. Now, children ignore those admonitions because you have taught them to love their neighbors instead of fearing them. You are not sure what has happened to the disappeared children, but you insist to their worried parents that children must open to the joy of exploration.

You realize that this island needs more help than you can provide on your own so you apply for grants. Soon, you have a whole team of experts teaching parents about the joy of childhood.

## **THE GREATER GOOD: FROM ATOMIC SCALE TO PLANETARY**

Macro-level conflict gets our attention in school, in the news, and in the movies. But micro-level conflict is what motivates the choices of each brain. Representations of conflict in the movies, the news, and in education, are so pervasive that they command our attention and shape our insight into the micro-level conflicts we experience in real life. Academic representations of good societies and bad societies shape our understanding of our everyday lives. Distorted academic information leads to distorted insight.

Fortunately, better information leads to better insight. Here is a simple example of better information. Baby mammals are not fed by their elders, except for mother's milk. A child only gets solid food by getting it for themselves. (Carnivores are an exception because it takes so long to learn to hunt. Carnivores allow their children to feed on their kill, but the children only get what is left after all the adults have eaten.) A species can only survive if each newborn child learns to do what it takes to get food. Yet each child learns because hunger is an effective motivator.

Biologists know this, but rarely mention it. They are rewarded when they produce information that puts animals in a positive light. Like any mammal, they loathe to put their rewards at risk. So you can study biology without going beyond romanticized notions of their superior empathy and intelligence. You are not likely to learn how hard animals struggle to survive. You do not learn how young animals struggle to acquire the skills necessary to survive. No one rescues a young mammal if it does not learn these skills. If a young monkey cannot crack open a nut, no one cracks their nut for them. A monkey does not get rewards unless it masters the skill. It does not get points for effort. Monkeys who fail to crack nuts lack the nutrition necessary to reproduce successfully. We are not descended from such monkeys.

We are descended from monkeys who tried again when they failed to crack a nut. Such persistence is fascinating to watch on nature videos. A monkey gets frustrated when it fails repeatedly. But if it yielded to frustration, it would not survive. It learns to conquer its frustration because it goes hungry otherwise. The mammal brain learns self-restraint because that gets rewards.

What if we rewarded young monkeys whether or not they managed their frustration and learned a skill? What if we redistributed the nuts of a monkey troop? We would effectively be rewarding young mammals who failed to control their frustration. We would end up with a lot of mammals who cannot crack their own nuts or restrain their own frustration. No greater good is served by such rewards, even if they are given with good intentions.

Better information about the state of nature can lead to better decisions about our daily lives. Filtered information helps protect old paradigms but it does not serve the greater good.

## CONCLUSION

Pain was the motivator of human history. The pain of hunger continued until you foraged successfully. Agriculture brought the risk of starving next year unless you take steps now. And if you didn't feel like milking the cow, you went without butter. Maybe your children went without milk.

Children grew up with an awareness of such threats. They milked the cow and appreciated the butter. Today, children are freed from labor in order to study, but if they don't study, they get the butter anyway. They even critique the butter they are given without an investment of effort. This wires them with unrealistic expectations about life. (Breuning, 2019, p. 69)

Much harm can be done by the presumption that peace and harmony are the effortless default state of nature. We need the facts about human nature to make good decisions. Good intentions may tempt people to privilege one set of facts over another. But idealized information does not lead to an ideal world. We are best served by the facts.

No individual is an objective judge of facts. That is why academic freedom came into being. The diverse conceptions of fact that emerge from diverse scholars can help us approach the truth. When scholars are restrained by *a priori* presumptions about which facts are acceptable, it distances us from the truth. Thus, it harms the greater good even if it is done in the name of the greater good. And the harm is done even if the restraint is imposed by fellow scholars in the peer-review process rather than by administrators.

Yet utopian ideals are alluring. It is hard to stop believing that life would be an effortless flow of rewards if it were not for the flaws of society. It is hard to stop blaming a big dog every time you hear a little poodle bark. It is hard to stop believing in one's own moral superiority.

In the short run, it feels good to protect little poodles from big dogs, so you do it again. The more you repeat this, the more you build your Rousseauian lens. It is hard to see the rest of the story when your brain zeroes in on one set of facts. The romantic view of human nature seems indisputably true.

People who produce information are understandably inclined to supply what the market demands. They have reason to offer the kind of information our brains zero in on. Academics see themselves as above such concerns, but their work tends to be ignored if it violates accepted paradigms. In the end, the facts about the conflict in nature are not easily available, and that reinforces our tendency to ignore them.

But the facts are available, thanks to academic freedom. You can find them if you look with persistence and an open mind. And you can weigh them for yourself instead of relying on information that is more accessible, more familiar, and more lauded. Academic freedom makes it possible for you to seek and find all sides of the story instead of just the most accessible side.

All through human history, people have stumbled on information that conflicted with their cognitive frameworks. This dissonance often felt like a threat to the greater good, since that was defined by their old frameworks. Thus, people have always used greater-good arguments to stop new information. But in time, old orthodoxies have yielded to new data. And in time, the new consensus becomes a new orthodoxy that resists new discrepant findings. Academic freedom will always be necessary because old cognitive frameworks make it impossible to judge the impact of new findings on the greater good. And every brain functions on old cognitive frameworks.

Life would be easier if we were aware of our cognitive biases. But that is not realistic because we do not notice our own neural pathways. We notice the biases of others, and often react with alarm. But when it comes to our own perceptions, we feel like we are just registering the truth. We big-brained mammals will always need academic freedom to improve our truth-seeking ability.

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