We Are All Going to Die

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Abstract

Humanity lives in a fragile balance between the true nature of our natural instincts, and a modernized world built faster than our nature could evolve. Behind modern structures such as technology, nations, and economics our older, more powerful, impulses continue to dictate our behavior in ways we rarely acknowledge. Aggression, fear and control take over when we are faced with uncertainty, determining how societies react to conflict, scarcity and collapse. As our environment is strained and global tensions rise, the question is no longer whether human nature is good or evil, but whether or not our natural instincts that are designed to protect our survival in nature will be able to handle the modern threat of collapse.

We Are All Going to Die

Human beings consider themselves the dominant species. With most of our societies having no natural predators, and while having major travel and technological inventions, it seems as if we are the smartest species. However, underneath all this modernization we are more animalistic than we think. Humans are the only species we know of that have evolved to this level and, in fact, we accomplished it very quickly. Humans have evolved too quickly to give our natural instincts time to adjust. Humans naturally want to be good but without a major biological change, our true nature will drive us to our ultimate demise.

Philosophers Perspective

Sigmund Freud, an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist, focused much of his work on the unconscious mind and how it drives human behavior. Freud saw human nature as aggressive and said “The existence of this inclination to aggression, which we can detect in ourselves and justly assume to be present in others, is the factor which disturbs our relations with our neighbor and which forces civilization into such a high expenditure [of energy]. In consequence of this primary mutual hostility of human beings, civilized society is perpetually threatened with disintegration. The interest of work in common would not hold it together; instinctual passions are stronger than reasonable interests” (Freud, Strachey, 1930). Freud believed not only that humans' natural instinct would lead us to violence but also that it was stronger than our capacity for reasonable thought.

Unlike many other psychiatrists, Freud did not see humans as being above animals; rather he saw them as similar when it came to natural instinct. In his book, Civilization and Its Discontents, he wrote “Men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose

instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness". He says "Homo homini lupus" or "Man is a wolf to man" (Freud, 1930).

Early Evolution

Species evolve over long periods of time through natural selection and in order to survive, "about seven million years ago, our early ancestors climbed trees and walked on four legs when on the ground". "By five million years ago, our ancestors had developed the ability to walk on two legs" (Blaxland & Dorey, 2020). Meaning, it took human beings a period of 2 million years to walk on two feet. Our minds had to grow in order to build tools to increase our chances of survival. "Our ancestors used stone tools as long as 3.3 million years ago and by 1.75 million years ago they'd adopted the Acheulean culture, a suit of chunky handaxes and other cutting implements". "As recently as 400,000 years ago, thrusting spears used during the hunt of large prey were state of the art" (Handwerk, 2021). It took over a million years to go from simple handheld stone tools to learn how to make cutting instruments like hand axes. However, it was only 400,000 years ago that we were still using thrusting spears to hunt.

We evolved from hunter gatherers to create pastoral societies. "Pastoral societies are communities primarily engaged in the raising of livestock on natural pastures, adapting their movements according to seasonal changes and environmental conditions" (Heather, 2021). This was the first time in history we saw humans engaging in what we would consider modern agriculture. We were breeding animals and rotating them through fields depending on the season. "Of course, the transition to agriculture was far from rapid. The period around 14,500 years ago has been regarded as the point at which the first indications appear of cultural change associated with agriculture" (Stock, 2012). This was the period where human beings no longer relied only on hunting for survival. We were able to create a surplus of food, and that coupled with the

breeding of animals allowed us to become self-sustainable. However, with this progress we lost all of our natural predators. What do humans do when they have evolved to the point of no longer needing to evolve in order to survive in a natural environment?

The industrial revolution came about during the 18th century. It was “the process of change from an agrarian and handicraft economy to one dominated by industry and machine manufacturing” (Britannica, 2025). People started creating machines to assist with farming and created large scale factories to mass produce products. Steam powered railroads, connecting every town and city, became cheap and accessible to the average person. People had evolved to the point of being the most connected than they ever had been and yet they weren't. With the large-scale rise of the industrial revolution and products being mass produced, specialized skills were no longer needed. “Before the Industrial Revolutions, most goods were made by craftsmen, including jewelers and blacksmiths” (National Geographic). In the days of early societies, people were honored for being able to make tools, now people were being lumped together in factory jobs and working for large corporations rather than personal interest.

Social relationships shifted during the industrial revolution. Early societies relied on families in order to maintain agricultural goals. People would develop personal relationships with others in order to trade for resources. During the industrial revolution, people started shifting from agriculture to industrial factory jobs. This shift made it so that the majority of workers were working in assembly lines rather than connecting with their neighbors for survival. “We are herd animals. Our families, our communities, our tribes - we all tend to follow the leader of thought and behavior” (McDonough, 2022). Working in a factory made the leader the factory owner, who during this time (and you may even argue in modern times) did not care about the well-being of their workers. Their main focus was to make money.

People became isolated from having a purpose. Individuality was becoming lost and the value of a worker was decreasing. What is considered the industrial revolution "took place between the eighteenth century and the mid-nineteenth century" (Brain, 2019). Before the industrial revolution the majority were still reliant on hunting and farming for survival. In the past humans have taken millions of years to evolve yet, within a hundred years we had a complete shift to modernization.

War

Not long after the industrial revolution came two major world wars. Humans had fought bloody battles in the past but the difference here was the tools that we now possessed. We have atomic bombs, heavy artillery and deadly chemical weapons. With these technologies being new, there was no standard on how not to use them. World war two, which resulted in "15,000,000 Battle Deaths, 25,000,000 Battle wounded and 45,000,000 Civilian deaths" (The National WWII Museum) was the deadliest war fought in all of history.

The question is, "did humans want to fight those wars and if not, what made them do so?" Animals in the wild are programmed to have self-preservation, or a survival instinct. Meaning they will take as many resources as they are able, regardless of the cost and are willing to commit brutalities if their survival is threatened. However, animals in the wild will eventually reach a point where they have either depleted all the resources, or competition with other animals prevents them from gaining any more. Humans, on the other hand, have not yet reached the point where they have depleted their resources nor do they have any other species to compete with. The only other species we compete with is ourselves.

Most humans do not consciously seek to engage in warfare, and many given the opportunity do not wish to take the life of another human needlessly. In fact, Colonel Samuel

Lyman Marshall, the author of Men Against Fire who served in World War Two claimed that "no more than one-fifth, and generally as few as 15 percent, had ever fired their weapons at an enemy, indeed ever fired their weapons at all" (Smoler, 1989). The very people fighting the wars that we consider "evil" would not be considered evil within the animal kingdom. The idea of killing another for territory, food or security is instilled in every species.

Many of the people that fight in wars have no say in why or what they are fighting over. It is common for those who call for war to be disconnected from what the war actually looks like for soldiers on the ground. In the US, congress is responsible for declaring war. "In 1973, only one in every four members of Congress had ever served in the military. In 2025, about one in every six members will be veterans" (Shane, 2025). Using the US as an example, congress looks at issues from a paperwork standpoint. They ask questions on what needs to be done in order to secure American safety and foreign commerce. Congress members will not be the ones on the ground fighting the war. To be more specific, even though some have military experience the majority will not be able to fully comprehend the tragedy it brings. They may get a piece of paper with a death count or watch videos on the news, but they will not be the ones burying their loved ones in the ground.

A major factor that drives humans into war, despite not wanting to kill, is social pressure and obedience to authority. Psychologist Stanley Milgram found that ordinary people will follow orders from authority figures even when those orders go against their moral instincts. He conducted "an experiment where an authority figure, the conductor of the experiment, would instruct a volunteer participant, labeled the "teacher," to administer painful, even dangerous, electric shocks to the "learner," who was actually an actor" (Eldridge, 2025). Obedience to authority creates a powerful psychological trap: people stop thinking as individuals. When fear

rises and leaders point to an enemy, many will follow the group even when violence goes against their own moral judgment.

Herd mentality is one of the oldest survival instincts. “Herding behaviors evolved as a defense against predators. A group of animals facing a predator will demonstrate herd behavior for protection. Herd animals find safety in numbers” (Science Direct, n.d.). E.O. Wilson, a leading biologist says, “Our bloody nature, it can now be argued in the context of modern biology, is ingrained because group-versus-group competition was a principal driving force that made us what we are” (Wilson, 2012). Herd instincts appear in human behavior, often accompanied by a scapegoat mentality. “Scapegoating is an analysis of violence and aggression in which people who have undergone or who are undergoing negative experiences — such as failure or abuse by others — blame an innocent individual or group for the experience” (Nickerson, 2023). These collective instincts become especially dangerous when they are directed at a single group, allowing societies to justify hostility through scapegoating.

We see the scapegoat mentality in both the past and modern day in humans. The scapegoating of the Jewish population was the most prevalent factor that led to World War two. The scapegoating of the Muslim American population after 9/11. Covid 19 led to an increase in racist acts against Asian Americans. The herd mentality built into human nature is only necessitated when there is a competing herd. When our resources start to deplete, humans will naturally try and find someone to blame, and that blame will turn to violence. These patterns show that when humans feel unsafe, whether from war, terrorism, disease, or scarcity, we revert to the same primal strategies that once helped us survive join the herd, find an enemy, and strike first. As the pressures facing humanity escalate, these instincts will not disappear. Instead, they

will guide our actions, pulling us closer to conflict and farther from cooperation and closer to our own self destruction.

According to Azar Gat “war is not unique to human civilizations and that violence arises when any primates—baboons, chimpanzees, gelada monkeys—come into competition for resources”. Humans, just like animals, are hardwired to commit violent or evil acts when we feel our safety is threatened, whether that be literal or over resources. “Biologists tell us that the highest-ranking primates have the lowest stress and the lowest-ranking have the highest. But this is during times of stability or equilibrium. During times of instability, the highest-ranking animals have the most to lose, and so they have the highest stress. As Albert Camus, who wrote about excesses during the Algerian War of Independence, remarked, it is easy “to do violence when it is more natural to you than thinking.”” (Beehner, 2017). For those in power to call for war during times of stress is as natural to human instinct as is taking care of our young.

The theoretical physicist and cosmologist, Stephen Hawking once said “[s]ince civilization began, aggression has been useful in as much as it has definite survival advantages. It is hard-wired into our genes by Darwinian evolution”. Now, however, technology has advanced at such a pace that this aggression may destroy us all by nuclear or biological war. We need to control this inherited instinct by our logic and reason" (CBS Philadelphia, 2017). Since World War Two, the deadliest war in history, technological advancements have drastically changed the defense industry. “Forces that have shaped the sector in recent years - digital transformation, supply chain volatility, talent constraints, and geopolitical events - are converging with new catalysts such as agentic AI, emerging vehicles, and the rapid evolution of autonomous systems” (Berckman, 2025). With our natural instinct for violence combined with our technological

advancements, we have no way to predict what the next mass war is going to look like or whether we will come out of it alive.

Zoochosis

We also have to consider that although we have natural instincts which drive us towards violent or destructive behaviors, we have also created an unnatural environment. As discussed, earlier humans evolved to modernization at an alarming speed, and based upon the speed of human evolution in the past; did our minds have enough time to adjust? “Zoochosis is a psychological condition that affects wild animals held in captivity, leading to repetitive, compulsive behaviors not seen in the wild. These behaviors—sometimes called stereotypical behavior—include pacing, swaying, head-bobbing, feather plucking, bar-biting, and even self-mutilation” (Cappiello, 2025). The animals in captivity, living in an environment unnatural to their instincts, start to exhibit behaviours we could consider unnatural or “crazy”.

When looking at animals we have domesticated like horses, dogs or cats, they show a substantial difference from their wild relatives when it comes to behaviour. In order to achieve those results, it took generations of selective breeding of animals with the right temperaments to live in a domestic modernized environment. Humans, on the other hand, have not been “bred” for modernization. We have had to evolve as a whole rather than selective individuals reproducing. This is not to suggest that the breeding of successful human beings is a solution to the human species' natural destructive instincts. However, it is an important comparison to consider. Is it not a possibility that the human mind, like cats, dogs or horses, needs more time to adjust to living in a domestic, civilized world that our instincts were never designed for? A world we built faster than our nature could follow.

What Will Lead to Our Ultimate Demise?

There are many different scenarios that could lead to our demise. According to Freud, war “seems a natural thing enough, biologically sound and practically unavoidable” (Freud, 1936). Despite civilization, our primal drives still govern decision-making: dominance, fear, greed and revenge. “Humans impact the physical environment in many ways: pollution, burning fossil fuels, deforestation, and more. Changes like these have triggered climate change, soil erosion, poor air quality, mass extinction, and undrinkable water, among other effects” (National Geographic). When we reach the point where we have depleted all of earth's resources, we will have no choice but to destroy each other for survival.

Stephen Hawking, famous for his space and mathematical achievements, doubted the continuation of the human race. He said, “I don’t think we will survive another 1,000 years without escaping beyond our fragile planet”. Stephen Hawking encouraged the human race to “continue to go into space for the future of humanity". Hawking sees humanity focused on greed rather than an interest in collective survival. He says “We will need to adapt, rethink, refocus and change some of our fundamental assumptions about what we mean by wealth, by possessions, by mine and yours. Just like children, we will have to learn to share” (Gunaratna, 2016). There is a finite number of resources on this planet. With humans showing no end in sight to depleting these resources without a major chance we will be the cause of not only our demise, but the planets.

Humans are dependent on soil for survival. Without healthy soil, we will have no way to grow crops, and without crops we will starve. Soil is also necessary “for filtering water, preventing droughts and erosion, and acts as one of the largest carbon sinks on the planet: there’s more carbon in our soil than in our atmosphere”. Despite its importance, “52% of our soil is

already degraded. In a grim look to the future, projections suggest that degradation levels could rise to 90% by 2050" (Sridhar, 2024). "According to the FAO, soil erosion "occurs naturally under all climatic conditions and on all continents, but it is significantly increased and accelerated by unsustainable human activities (up to 1,000 times) through intensive agriculture, deforestation, overgrazing and improper land use changes." (Marsden, 2024). While there are ways to help reverse soil degradation "It takes hundreds and thousands of years to form an inch of topsoil and many more centuries before it's fertile" (Begum, n.d.).

If we estimate "Around one-quarter of the world's labor force work in agriculture. In many low-to-middle-income countries, the majority work in farming and rely on it as their primary source of income" (Roser). In the US alone, "agriculture, food, and related industries contributed roughly $1.537 trillion to U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) in 2023, a 5.5-percent share" (Zahniser, 2024). If humans continue to destroy soil, limiting agriculture, it will inevitably lead to a food shortage.

Climate change is another threatening factor to human extinction. "Air temperatures on Earth have been rising since the Industrial Revolution. While natural variability plays some part, the preponderance of evidence indicates that human activities-particularly emissions of heat-trapping greenhouse gases-are mostly responsible for making our planet warmer"(NASA). "According to an ongoing temperature analysis led by scientists at NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies (GISS), the average global temperature on Earth has increased by at least 1.1° Celsius (1.9° Fahrenheit) since 1880. The majority of the warming has occurred since 1975, at a rate of roughly 0.15 to 0.20°C per decade" (NASA).

In addition to warming temperatures being uncomfortable, they lead to larger risks for the human race. "Climate change is directly contributing to humanitarian emergencies from

heatwaves, wildfires, floods, tropical storms and hurricanes and they are increasing in scale, frequency and intensity" (World Health Organization, 2023). On top of increased natural disasters, warming climates threaten crop production, which along with soil degradation will result in an inevitable food shortage.

Even if we were to magically reverse the damage human greed has caused to the environment, we have to consider our violent nature towards each other. As discussed earlier, World War II was the deadliest war fought in human history. With resources continuing to be depleted, without change, it will lead to a global war over survival, for food, water, and the last remnants of habitable land. Not to mention already increasing tension over trade, tariffs and political opinions.

With the conflict in Ukraine and Russia creeping up on Nato allies, a full-on World War could be closer than we think. "If Russia takes military action against any NATO member state, it will force the military alliance into an all-out conflict. In that scenario, Russia could call on its allies to join in a global war". "Serious analysts express concern that Russia may escalate and the world, as it has done so many times in the era of mass warfare, may sleepwalk its way into an engulfing conflict," said The New Statesman"(Are we…, 2025). Not to mention growing tensions between Taiwan and China, Pakistan and Israel, and threats like North Korea.

It's not only politicians concerned with the threat of an upcoming world war. "YouGov survey conducted in Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Spain showing that between 41% and 55% in each country think that another world war is likely to occur within the next 5-10 years" (Smith, 2025). Taken together, these conflicts reveal a global landscape where instability is no longer isolated but interconnected.

Steven Pinker

In contrast, Steven Pinker, a Harvard psychologist, argues that violence is decreasing and human cooperation is increasing. In an interview with UCTV, where he talks about his book, he says “I spend many pages in the book and many graphs, first persuading the reader that it *is* a fact — that violence really has gone down” (Pinker, 2014). In other words, Pinker believes that our better instincts are gradually overpowering our destructive ones. His research revealed a side of human nature that leans towards improvement rather than collapse.

Later in his interview Pinker says, “Human nature is complex… Together with these temptations toward violence, we have a number of things that inhibit us from violence… self-control… empathy… moral norms… reason” and that “Our cognitive processes of reason can pull us away from violence”. However, even Pinker admits that when certain conditions are met humans turn to a destructive violent nature. He recalls the Quebec police strike saying that “In 1969, it was the police who went on strike, and within a few hours, all hell broke loose. There was looting and riots. Not one but two people were shot to death until the Mounties were brought in to restore order” (Pinker, 2014). Pinker’s story makes it clear that while humanity can rise above violence, we do so only when guided by stable institutions and shared norms. When those structures fall into disarray, our nature returns to a state of chaos and self-destruction.

The human race is constantly living in a fragile balance between our ancient survival instincts and the modern world we have created. Our biology was designed for a world of scarcity, predators and tribal conflict. Now, we live in a civilization built faster than our nature could adapt to. Philosophers like Freud warn that aggression is embedded in our unconscious, and scientists like Steven Hawking caution that our technological advancements have outpaced self-control. Even Steven Pinker, who argues that violence is decreasing shows how easily order

collapses when the structures restraining our instincts disappear. As our resources continue to be reduced, climates destabilize and global tensions rise, the human race moves closer to conflict that could wipe out our existence. Without a deliberate effort to overcome our evolutionary impulses, our greatest threat will remain ourselves.

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