

## Dale Berry

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March 4, 2003

Friend David Chandler,

I don't have e-mail but saw in the March 2003 *Friends Bulletin* that you have a web site to encourage "thinking deeply" about war and peace.

I obtained my 1-O (C.O.) classification in 1959 or '60, age 20, and served two years alternative service, 1962-64. The core of my position came from contemplating the "first" commandment, "You shall have no other gods" (Exodus 20:3, Deuteronomy 5:6-7). Among other things, that commandment means that we ought not to give unquestioning obedience to a fellow human being including, of course, a military officer. Leaving out the "God" concept it simply means that every individual adult is always responsible for his/her actions and it is simply dishonest to let the voice of another person override one's conscience. Military training is carefully organized to disable the inner resistance that most people have to killing other people. Had I been classified 1-A and drafted, I would have refused to take the oath of obedience, which was the official moment of induction. I don't know current procedure in the U.S., but the cancellation of personal conscience is probably implicit in military training even in Israel where the legal claim of conscience is strongly supported.

Following the thought of Gandhi I believe that nonviolent struggle is the only way to build a broadly egalitarian democratic society. Military organization is as essential to authoritarian, oligarchic, totalitarian, tyrannical, despotic government as democratic organization is to a nonviolent society. Therefore, in resisting militarism we are simultaneously struggling for democracy (not "peace" which seems to me to be a dangerously ambiguous word-see my letter in January 2003 *Friends Bulletin*). Human beings will always have conflicts with each other. What we need are institutions designed for non-destructive management of conflict and voluntary organizations where we can learn and practice consensus building, negotiation, and democratic procedures.

For many years I've very interested in the psychology of militarism and have enclosed some of the fruits of my reading and meditation.

Dale Berry

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## **A Call for Noncooperation**

By Dale Berry

For a long time our ancestors must have appeased competing scavengers and predators by allowing them to eat their fill before moving in to use the remains (Barbara Ehrenreich, ***Blood Rites***). This works because our animal kin are less dangerous when their bellies are full. But the inherited inclination to appease other dangerous forces has never worked. Rain has never watered dry fields in response to the spilling of blood. No storm at sea has ever been lulled by throwing someone overboard. No army has ever been made gentler by giving gifts to the commander or by allowing the slaughter of "disposable" people. No tyranny is ever ameliorated by paying the tribute or tax it demands, or by giving aid and comfort to lawless militarism.

When the Taliban demanded a judicial process with a presentation of evidence before they would turn over Osama bin Laden they were acting in the best interest of humanity. This is true whatever their motives were. Now that militarism has tasted blood in Afghanistan its appetite is whetted for more. We should not cooperate with people who are blinded by the archaic emotional hunger for blood sacrifice.

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## **Primordial Religion**

By Dale Berry

Barbara Ehrenreich in ***Blood Rites*** suggests that the original blood rite was the synchronized menstrual flow in a band of ancient hominids. Each month when the blood is flowing large predators are attracted by the smell. The band clusters together making noise, throwing rocks, brandishing any weapons they have and, if pressed too closely, throwing out a member to appease the predators. A similar drama is enacted around large carcasses. The hominids keep the predators and other scavengers at bay, when necessary, by throwing them an appeasing chunk of flesh and bone.

Time passes. People have shifted from scavenging to killing big game. When they make a big kill, such as driving a herd off a cliff, they have days of gorging in safety while other predators are scavenging the excess flesh. During interludes in the feasting they dance and sing, unconsciously reenacting the ancient communal defense against

terrifying predators. How do we stimulate the ecstasy of communal feeling when most of the big animals are gone? We invent bloodthirsty gods, but nothing works as well as war.

War takes on a life of its own, subordinating all other social institutions. But "the passions we bring to war can be brought just as well to the struggle *against* war. What have all the millennia of warfare prepared us for, if not this Armageddon fought, once more, against a predator beast?"

The modern equivalent of the big predator, it seems to me, is the godlike tyrant (Hitler, Stalin, Pol Pot, Bush?) War is merely a blood sacrifice through which we try to appease the tyrant. Rid the world of absolutist ideologies and there should be no more excuse for war.

Ehrenreich, in effect, presents a hypothesis for the evolutionary origin of music, dance, religion, and war. She stresses war as a stimulant of community feeling, but fails to mention that music and dance would fill the emotional need and that imagination and reason can resolve conflicts without bloodshed. The vast inhospitable cosmos is the ultimate predator that will surely erase us if we are not diligent in learning the laws of nature.

The neurology of mysticism (*Why God Won't Go Away*, by Newberg, et. al.) seems to be consistent with the above scenario. The "absorption of the self into some larger sense of reality" is precisely the awareness one would wish to have while being offered in sacrifice. And family honor is enhanced if sacrificed individuals go willingly, heroically.

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## Science and Religion

Book Review by Dale Berry in the  
Albuquerque Friends Monthly Meeting Newsletter  
June 2002

***"Different ways of understanding the divine life may occur among us. These differences should not be ignored for the sake of a superficial agreement." from *Advices and Queries-Fifth Month****

Thanks to Hillary and Jim Dudley, *Skeptics and true Believers* by Chet Raymo recently came into my hands. The book is a poetic and beautiful sampling of modern science with a somewhat less convincing attempt to link science and religion. The problem is

that Raymo doesn't seem to notice a contradiction between mystery and revelation. "It is the nature of God to reside in mystery..." but, "He is everywhere revealed in all that exists..." It would be consistent with most of the book to say that God is revealed in all that we know. Raymo quotes from E. O. Wilson's *Biophilia* but chooses not to refer to the theme of that book, which is that our emotional life, including the sense of mystery that Raymo cherishes, is adapted to our ancestors' way of life. For thousands of years they were nomadic, closely dependent on many other species and our very sanity depends on not changing the earth beyond the recognition of our instinctive, intuitive powers.

In *Blood Rites* Barbara Ehrenreich finds that the intense feelings associated with religion and war originated in relationship to the large predators, especially big cats. Before hunting skills developed, our ancestors may have stayed as close as possible to big predators in order to scavenge meat from their kills. If so, God is a cultural memory of those powerful and dangerous benefactors.

Gratitude and fear, awe and a spine tingling sense of mystery. These feelings can be directed toward the world or even the cosmos. But remember, the earth too can devour us if we don't use our brains.

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**Now retired after working in environmental public health law enforcement and teaching biology, Dale Berry lives in Grants NM, where he grows some of his own food, enjoys being car free (yes car, not care) and reads books on subjects such as psychology, evolution and ethics, which are long term interests. As a conscientious objector, he feels obligated to seek nonmilitary ways to cope with human conflict.**