Human history has been punctuated by widespread and recurring violent conflicts. Attempts to explain the causes, utility and effects of the phenomenon have engaged the minds of scholars and other stakeholders for centuries. At the centre of the inquiry are questions about human nature: whether and to what extent violence is innately determined in humans or influenced by the external environment.

According to ethnology, aggression or violence is innate and essentially genetic, not learned or a response to environmental conditions. The role of the environment, K. Lorenz posits, is simply to provide stimuli that trigger or hinder intraspecific aggression. This view, which modifies and restates the Social Darwinian theory of natural selection, maintains that aggression is not dysfunctional. Rather, it serves a number of important functions: the preservation of species through natural selection; the creation of social ranks which imposes social order and stability, thus reducing intraspecific damage; defense of territory; protection of mate, siblings and community; and the distribution of members over available habitat. What makes aggression dangerous, however, is the spontaneity of instinct. Thus, Lorenz concludes that it is important to provide channels into which aggressive instinct can be beneficially diverted or redirected. Viewing aggressive sport, it is asserted, provides such an outlet.1

However, this hydraulic model—which envisages a bottled up flow of aggression constantly seeking expression and overflowing into violence—has been severely challenged because

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