

Under the Power of a Monster

Stephen J Brewer, September 2015*

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In which Freya is horrified at the thought we are governed by fear but Max argues it's the only way we can to live in peace

Freya: The world is such a mess, wars breaking out everywhere and the misery it causes. Look at the state of these poor refugees fleeing from tyrants and civil wars. If only we could all live together in peace.

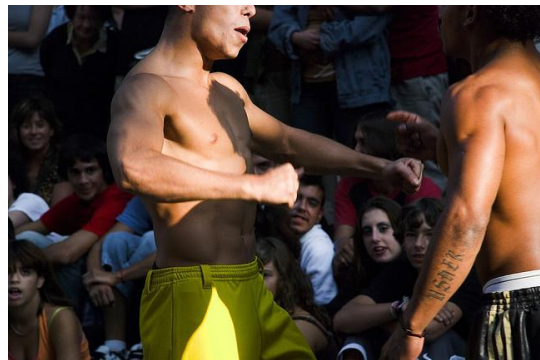
Max: A world where everyone is nice and lives in peace is a fantasy. You, a biologist, must accept that we are by nature selfish brutes and this nature is needed to survive and reproduce. Without it our species would not have evolved. In fact, without this natural selfishness there would be no life and no humanity for you to worry about. The downside of this struggle is that living creatures are in a constant state of war.

Freya: I can't see how you can live with such a negative view of the world.

Max: It's not at all negative because it's only our natural selfishness that results in us being civilized.

Freya: And how is that so?

Max: It's in the interest of selfish individuals to have the most physically and mentally powerful take on the leadership. Evolution has produced us apes with an inbuilt mechanism for subservience to a good leader. The leader is rewarded by the choice of mates and food, that's what being an alpha male is all about. And you females compete to become his mate because he's going to provide you with good genes and protection. The problem is that in order to retain this power, the leader must continually fight to secure his position from all threats, whether internal or external.



Freya: Yes I know all this, but we humans have raised ourselves above this. It's our compassion and ability to cooperate for the common good that's the root of civilization.

Max: Is it really? The evidence points otherwise. With our advanced social skills, intelligence and technology, the leader takes ever more power which is controlled by an organization of loyal subordinates who assist in protecting and projecting this power. But this loyalty is only achieved by allowing them to compete for special privileges. The higher they go, the more they have to lose so the more they must fight in order to retain their position. The whole system is driven by competition for dominance.

Freya: But during this battle for dominance there must be internal peace so that the family can exist. After all, this is the reason we accepted leadership in the first place. Without safety, the group will diminish and lose their collective power. For my family to survive I demand peace not war from my leaders.

Max: This internal stability is achieved by preventing internal conflicts. So individuals of the group are forced to give up the natural freedom to defend and take what they want by their own force. So we see the introduction of laws of behaviour and a system of governance to enforce them. Then you must stop individuals from forming powerful interest groups that might ferment internal rebellion. If the group is to grow from being a tribe into a nation, you need ever greater restrictions to an individual's freedom and ever more draconian punishments for transgression.

Freya: So in this way the leaders keep their power by imposing a reign of terror!

Max: This is how tyrants do it and in their own brutal way do impose peace. Look at Iraq and Libya. These were run by tyrants, but take away their reign of terror and the countries break apart into a civil war. This puts everyone into an even more terrible situation. ISIL's solution is to reunite these warring groups by imposing even more terror. The fact is that states run by tyrants are unstable. Topple the leader and civil war breaks out as all the other factions struggle for dominance. One way to achieve stability is to distribute the power amongst the citizens in the form of a democracy. This seems to provide stability during change, but constant vigilance is required to ensure that powerful interest groups don't take over. Whether the ruler is a single person or a congress, all use the fear of punishment to retain control.



Freya: You realize you are saying the terror inflicted by a state on its people is our fault because we're all selfish bastards. This is such a terrible way to look at people. Why can't you see the good in people instead of seeing the worst? People can be nice, can sacrifice themselves or others. Your world is one I don't want to belong to.

Max: You might not like living with the force of gravity, but that's the nature of things. Life's fight for survival is another fact of nature. The way to avoid disaster is accept the world as it is, not pretend it's a utopia; one you feel *ought* to exist. We all want peace, but by nature we are selfish and warlike, so the solution is "enforced cooperation". That's why these powerful and highly dangerous entities called nation states have emerged.



Freya: You present an image where each nation produces a monster with a club in their hands ready to attack their neighbours and a whip in the other to suppress their own people.

Max: That's a good picture about how things are. The problem is that today these giants wield such destructive power that no one can dominate the other by war. So again fear is the only thing that will force them to cooperate and the United Nations and International Courts of Justice were

set up to contain the fear of mutual destruction. But if the monsters gang up and behead another monster, the result always seems to be even more misery for its people. Look at Libya, Iraqi and Afghanistan if you don't believe me.

Freya: So what's your terrible conclusion?

Max: The only way to live in peace is to live in a state of fear!

"Hitherto I have set forth the nature of Man, (whose Pride and other Passions have compelled him to submit himselfe to Government;) together with the great power of his Governour, whom I have compared to Leviathan 'King of the Proud'." (Thomas Hobbes Leviathan)

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