

## **Fiction vs reality: compete unto death vs cooperate to survive: human nature vs B=PxE**

Merrelyn Emery

May, 2020

In recent days we have seen headlines and news articles reporting on a real life example of *Lord of the Flies* albeit one with an entirely opposite lesson. The lesson from the original novel was that there is only a thin veneer of 'civilization' keeping us all from the savagery that always lurks deep within every person. Remove us from that civilization and the inner darkness will triumph with horrible destruction and death.

In the real life example, the six Tongan boys, 13-16 years old, who were shipwrecked for 15 months did not indulge in any of the negative or aggressive behaviours so emphasized in the book but cooperated fully to survive while setting up a food garden with chooks, water storage, a permanent fire and a gym, a badminton court and a guitar. They worked in pairs on a strict roster for garden, kitchen and guard duty. They set an injured boy's leg with their improvisations. "The local physician...expressed astonishment at their muscled physiques and Stephen's perfectly healed leg." ***No destruction, no death, no horrors.***

Bregman's new book *Humankind: A Hopeful History*, (2020), Bloomsbury, in which the real life case is discussed has reopened a debate we should no longer have to have. It always was a rubbish debate. It comes in two parts which can be summarized as follows: firstly it is in our human nature to be selfish or as a minority would claim, to be altruistic, and secondly, denying the human nature argument, that our behaviour is usually a product of factors springing from our internal natures and from factors impinging from external sources.

That it is a stupid debate is the result of one simple factor:

- Fish do not know they are swimming in water
- Birds do not know they are flying through air
- People who have not been directly educated about the genotypical organizational design principles have no conscious conceptual knowledge of them
- Therefore, these uneducated people are like fish and birds

Since the industrial revolution we in the West have experienced little but bureaucratic organizations, hierarchies of dominance where those above have the right and the responsibility to tell those below what to do and how to do it. These structures produce competition and when people are forced to compete, they must look after their own interests or go down.

After years of living and working in these structures, self interest can become a way of life. Is it any surprise then that when people look around them and see so many examples of self interest, greed and all the other unattractive behaviours that go with it, some can assume that it must be some innate feature of the human species. And indeed, Bregman begins his article by saying "For centuries now western culture has been permeated by the idea that humans are selfish creatures", a cynical image of humanity that has been reinforced in every medium, not least by influential books such as *Lord of the Flies*.

However much it was unthinking conventional 'wisdom', it was always a rubbish debate because anybody old enough to be able to look around them would have noticed that at any time, there will be people behaving selfishly and some altruistically or generously. Some

people will also have noticed that on occasion, some individuals behave selfishly at times and altruistically at other times.

Then again, there is the wealth of evidence from anthropologists and the remnants of these great ancient cultures that were governed by the second principle to the effect that they were cooperative and peaceful, where the arts flourished and people looked after the land. How then could it possibly be ‘human nature’ to behave selfishly?

Bregman knows from his extensive research that we can be kind, caring and cooperative. “We used to be like that – and we can be again” (Freedland, Jonathan. ‘Rutger Bregman, the Dutch historian who rocked Davos and unearthed the real Lord of the Flies.’ *The Guardian*, 9<sup>th</sup> May, 2020).

The second part of the debate, static human nature vs dynamic changing behaviour to meet circumstances is an offshoot of the open vs closed systems debate and also should have been put to bed years ago. We will return to this below.

Fish are unaware that there is an alternative medium called air. Birds are unaware that there is a medium called water. People who have not been educated about these design principles are often unaware that there is an alternative to living and working in structures designed on the basis of the first design principle.

Therefore, when there is no obvious or known alternative, it is easy to accept as self evident that people put self interest and personal advancement above any concern about the welfare of others or the collective, the community. Exceptions are just that, to be disregarded. Anything like a news item or a novel that features our destructive individuality and selfishness will be accepted as gospel – of course we know that, everybody knows that. ***It is human nature.***

Ever since *The Lord of the Flies* was published in 1951, it seems to have been accepted by the vast majority as a true story, as fiction educating us about our nasty reality. Of course that may be because of the great myth that Britain and all thing British are the epitome of civilization or as Bregman points out, there was a generation that was concerned there may be a Nazi hiding in each of us.

It is also no coincidence that Golding was a schoolmaster where especially boy’s schools were, and probably still are, known to be hot beds of domination/submission with such rituals as initiations of extreme brutality and inhumanity. Golding also apparently admitted to writing the book partly out of knowledge of himself sharing some characteristics of the Nazis. All these factors are further evidence that the book came to be taken as reality because we fish do not know we are swimming in water.

“But in the last 20 years something extraordinary has happened. Scientists from all over the world have switched to a more hopeful view of mankind. This development is still so young that researchers in different fields often don’t know about each other” (Bregman, Rutger, ‘The real Lord of the Flies: what happened when six boys were shipwrecked for 15 months’. *The Guardian*, 9<sup>th</sup> May, 2020).

Fred Emery published his discovery of the genotypical design principles that underlie structures which produce either competition or cooperation in 1967. The first principle (DP1) produces competition, the second (DP2) cooperation. These principles are explored in detail in the website [www.socialsciencethatactuallyworks.com](http://www.socialsciencethatactuallyworks.com).

1967 is 53 years ago. Since then numerous organizations have changed their structures using the Participative Design Workshop or other methods to achieve the higher quality of life and productivity afforded by the second rather than the first principle. It isn’t difficult.

This should all be widely known but it is not. The ideas started falling by the wayside when the advocates of Neoliberalism arrived with a ‘better offer’ to workplaces and governments – don’t go to that trouble democratizing your structure, just screw it and the people down even harder as you engineer a culture towards a single goal which is financial riches only. Pursue it single mindedly to the point where ‘there is no alternative’. Divide and conquer.

You would not have to go any further than John Howard, Prime Minister of Australia from 1996-2007, the man behind the Orwellian named legislation, Work Choices, to see the whole bundle of the philosophy of Neoliberalism in action.

Bregman himself has noted neoliberalism, the dominant ideology of the last 40 years, as a potent force in prolonging our belief in the negative side of ‘human nature’, the same dogma that we are all selfish in the end. He is convinced it is wrong, simply wrong, and of course he is right (Reported by Michael Delaney for *Conversations*, ‘Real-life Lord of the Flies author R Bregman on why we need a kinder view of human nature’, 21.5.20).

I have not read Bregman’s new book but it is obvious he has not caught up with the design principles. He refers only to a more hopeful view of ‘human nature’ so has not managed to escape from the typical closed system appreciation that every human is governed entirely from the inside. Whereas the old view he is disputing claims it is our nature to be selfish, his new view is just as flawed in proposing that it is our nature to be cooperative, altruistic and generous. Mind you, from the reviews, he does seem to equivocate on this point.

As human history should have taught us, and many social scientists of different flavours have also tried to teach us, humans are capable of anything. Our actual behaviour is the result of a mixture of forces from both within and without, our nature and the external world in which we live. Hence Kurt Lewin’s equation that Behaviour = Person x Environment,  $B=P \times E$  as in the heading.

The genotypical design principles are a powerful part of that external environment, one of the forces that impinge on our behaviour inclining it one way or the other. If there was widespread knowledge of these design principles and their effects which are many and far reaching, we could put all these silly debates behind us and concentrate on the massive task we face in redesigning our organizations on the second principle which is the only one which can deliver us from the mess we have gotten ourselves into with climate change and all its ramifications.

The time has come for another education campaign. In most parts of the world like Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Germany and many other countries in Europe, we had witnessed a demonstration of how some people automatically know the right thing to do and come together to work towards the good of the whole when it comes to dealing with Covid-19. Unfortunately, there are countries where this has not happened because their governments or so called ‘leaders’ have followed the ideology of Neoliberalism rather than the age old knowledge of how to defeat a common enemy.

These cases tell us that in this age, we must have conscious conceptual knowledge of the design principles if we are to survive the climate catastrophes which are already enveloping us and will get progressively worse as time passes.