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Violence in Human Society

All forms of life – humans included - are in a constant struggle for survival and reproduction. In this struggle humans are torn between their biological inheritance and cultural substitutes for relaxing instincts. As man's ability to organize and to master the environment grew, the threatening pressures of nature decreased. With the ascent of thinking man (homo sapiens) cultural rules became more important. They shaped man's behavioral pattern through communal rites, traditions, customs, and – after the invention of writing – laws. But despite all culture's intention to reduce violence and increase security for its members, a new threat arose: man as man's most dangerous enemy. As societies became better organized, so did group violence between them. Power in its every form – as control, wealth, status, ideological dominance etc. - became a dominant issue, within and between societies. In the pursuit of power, violence has been a dominant factor, and within the last few generations man has developed tools of destruction that in their potency far outgrow his capacity to control them, considering modern scientific findings that human behavior and decision making is dominated by (often unconscious) emotional factors much more than by rational thinking. Thus, in the 21. century mankind finds itself confronted with the simple imperative: if we want to survive, we have to find ways to contain our violence. This lecture intends to trace the roots of human violence and to give an overview of its history and its phenomenology and in the end tries to present a road map of some basic construction sites where this work of containment has to begin.