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Letters

Instinctive take on warfare

I find the debate among anthropologists about the roots of warfare almost laughable ("Seeds of Warfare Precede Agriculture," SN: 1/7/95, p.4). If one has the courage to throw off the thought shackles of "special status" for humans, one can see that organized conflict preceded not only agriculture but all species of *Homo*.

Lions, hyenas, wolves, and many other predatory, social mammals practice what could be termed warfare. The universal instincts to produce an excess of young and to seek food naturally result in territorial aggression. Humans, like lions, are not driven solely by reason. All brains service instincts, and the large brains of humans merely provide these fundamental drives with a very powerful tool!

Homo is not what it pretends to be, namely, sapient.

Russell W. Agreen
Fulton, Md.

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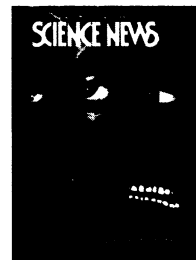
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Cover: New data suggest that the low IQs of many hard-core delinquents reflect subtle brain disruptions that occur early in life and severely impair verbal abilities. The same findings indicate that a lifelong tendency to think and behave impulsively contributes as much to criminality as having a low IQ. (Artwork: Sol Aquino, "Communication Breakdown," 1991)

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Some scientists argue that we need to shed the "thought shackles" often used to relegate instincts to the status of a few crude reflexes rather than to view them as a multitude of evolved brain mechanisms that underlie decision making and reason (SN: 1/29/94, p.72).

— B. Bower

Drawing conclusions

The unintentional reversal of the photograph published with "French cave yields Stone Age art gallery" (SN: 1/28/95, p.52) actually highlights an interesting aspect of these remarkable paintings and their creators.

Almost all the animal pictures shared thus far with the public were drawn facing the observer's left. The preponderance of left-facing images may be coincidence, or it may be one of the oldest human records supporting the dominance of the right cerebral hemisphere in the realm of visual and artistic perception.

The prehistoric artists who executed this stunning display were probably right-handed, since it is unlikely that the brain center

for handedness would be in the same hemisphere as their strongly represented visual sense.

Sheldon Peck
Newton, Mass.

Violence and disorders

I wish to raise a concern with regard to the MacArthur Foundation study ("Law and Disorders," SN: 1/7/95, p.8). While it will go far in supporting more accurate assessment of individual circumstances, it would have a greater impact on service outcomes if it integrated into its interpretations the social context from which mental illness emerges.

What continues to be lost in discussing the abhorrent circumstances of severe and persistent mental illness is the fact that individuals who seek or are coerced into seeking treatment are often themselves victims of unremitting violence.

David W. Hilton
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