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David Damrel

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CONTROLLING AGGRESSIVE INSTINCT FOR PEACE

Gunawan Suryoputro and Fadhlan Mudhafir
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Abstract

At present, the escalation of violence has been intense nationally and globally due to variety of reasons such as religions, human rights, culture, and politics. The violence has threatened the peace, harmony, and plurality in the community. One of the main sources of the violence is the uncontrolled aggressive instinct of the human being. In line with this issue, this article attempts to reintroduce religious, cultural, and social values that the people can use to control their provocative aggressive instinct and transform it into good deeds for the sake of the peace and harmony among the pluralistic society.

Introduction

To protect and develop his life, every mankind requires peace as prerequisite or *condition sine qua none* of his existence and development. Seen from the social dimension, the peace can be generated by the human who has the potential sound of mind which can direct and guide him in the interaction with others. However, the phenomena of violence directed to individual and community have kept on going around the globe. These

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tragedies might be endorsed the *jargon* put forward by Thomas Hobbes (1588-1697) that the mankind is like a wolf for the fellow men or *homo homini lupus*.

The stream and intensity of violence have increased in the last ten years in Indonesia. One of the forms of the violence is the horizontal conflicts in the expense of a lot of casualties among individuals and a member of community. These casualties have kept on occurring and wounded the victims. The mass violence that occurred sporadically in May 1998, for instance, seemed to be the starting point of violence in several regions with various and different backgrounds. After that event, the conflict went up and generated the violence with nuances of SARA (Tribes, Religions, Races, and Among Societies). In November 1998, for example, some students brawled with violence in Jakarta. They used physical force or weapons to hurt a numbers of people, to kill more than ten people, to destroy some churches and school buildings, and to burn some vehicles. In Kupang, the violence had caused the destruction of mosques, houses, and shops. In Poso, the conflict with SARA nuances killed more than 1,000 people, and about 20,000 people were evacuated. A similar conflict occurred in Ambon in which more than 3,000 people were killed, 4,000 wounded and 300,000 evacuated. And then the holocaust of Madura ethnic in Sambas had completed the story of violence in this country.

The history of the world civilization has, in fact, not only recorded the violence of the mankind but also peaceful coexistence among them. And the readiness of

the peaceful coexistence is essentially derived from the ability of one in directing his aggressive instinct for the benefit of himself and other people as exemplified by the Prophet Muhammad (May Allah bless him and grant him salvation). For that reason, it is reasonable why the chairman of Muhammadiyah, Din Syamsuddin states that Islamic Organizations are not still busy thinking about their existence but neglect *dakwah* to develop Islam together (Kompas, 11 June 2008). This statement reflects the moderate stance and the inclusive of Muhammadiyah in disseminating *dakwa* of Islam to *ummah*.

In line with the above issues, this article aims to review the human aggressive instinct, its sources, and effects on the behavior of the human and to offer plausible ways to control and transform this provocative instinct into nonviolent deeds.

A Brief Overview of Aggressive Instinct

The aggressive behavior has become the object of study for scientists of a variety of disciplines for many years. Formally, the researchers investigated this phenomena descriptively based on their observation of the initial emerge of the individual and collective aggressive behavior. In 1940, Dollard and his colleagues at Yale University observed and studied the aggressive behavior empirically and drew a conclusion that the aggressive behavior is forced by the frustration defined as "an interference with occurrence of an instigated goal—response at its proper time in the behavior sequence" (Dollard et al. 1939). Thus, the frustration

generates the force of the aggressive behavior. This conclusion is certainly without flaws but, at least, it can be used as the plausible reason to describe why the aggressive behavior emerges.

The theory of the aggressive behavior which explains the relationships between the frustration and the aggression is, in fact, different from the Freud's theory which relates the frustration and catharsis—the realization of the hindered energy. The accumulation of the frustration is psychological blasted due to the various blockages.

Thus, the blockage energy accumulates and forms the negative force expressing the motive through catharsis that result in the aggressive and other behaviors. There are similarity and difference between the concept of Dollard and Freud. Both scientists are of the opinion that the accumulation of the frustration generating the force to release. For Dollard, the release tends to be the aggressive behavior, but Freud views that it is not necessary the aggressive behavior.

Another theory advanced by Berkowitz (1969) states that the aggressive actions are resulted from the social learning. The proponents of this school of thought concluded that the aggressive conduct can be easily done by one who has been experienced with what he observed in his environment. For example, he emulates and acts what he watches the violence screened on TV or read it in newspapers. Thus, the social learning can affect the aggressive behavior since the learning process coming from the society which often illustrates intensively the violence can generate the idolization of the violence. As a

result, one is familiar with the use weapons to make violence.

There are still many studies to construct theorem of the aggressive behavior and violence. In generally they can be classified into three each of which can be used as a reference to understand and explain the aggressive behavior and violence. They are (1) blocked opportunity theories, (2) sub-cultural theories, and (3) control theories (Berkowitz 1969, 79).

First, the *blocked opportunity theories* state that the realization of the aggressive behavior is caused by the blocked opportunities to obtain the right such as education, jobs, welfare and the like. Next, the *sub-cultural theories* state that the aggressive behavior in relation to certain values followed and magnified by individuals or a member of community such as the values of courage, the pride of being "hero," or a member of organized gangs. Third, the *control theories* state that the aggressive behavior is the result of the failure of the control function to the aggressive instinct. The aggressive behavior may not emerge if the control function is still effective. The control function is derived from inner side of the individuals such as consciousness, super ego, feeling of guilty and the like, and outside of the individuals such as treats, punishment, and discrimination. All these theories may be useful for clarifying the current violence in the community.

Controlling the Aggressive Instinct for Peace

Literally *aggressive* refers to a quality of anger and determination to attack (Collin Cobuild English Diction-

ary 2001). One with an aggressive instinct has the quality of anger and purposes to attack other people. Now the question is how to control this instinct. To answer it, we can refer to several *Surahs of Al-Qur'an* such as *Al-Baqarah* and *Asy-Syura*. In *Al-Baqarah*, surah 155, for example, Allah commands: "*And certainly, We shall test you with something of fear, hunger, loss of wealth, lives and fruits, but give glad tidings to As-Sabirin (the patient).*"

It is very obvious then that a weapon to control the aggressive instinct is *As-Sabirin*, meaning the patient. Such a weapon may be used to change this instinct to positive force which, in turn, provides peace for oneself as well as other people. In line with it, *Hadist*, narrated by HR. Bukhari, states that a strong man is not the one who is a skillful fighter, but the one who is able to control his anger.

A billion of tremendous examples which can not be cited in this article have been shown by the Prophet Muhammad SAW (May be Allah bless him and give him peace) to control the aggressive instinct. For example, when a 45-year-old Muhammad was assigned as the Prophethood, he was pressured, hated, terrorized, and tyrannized by pagans in Mecca, but he kept on disseminating his mission or *dakwah* peacefully and courteously to improve behavior in line with Islamic thinking. These pressure, terror, and tyranny did not generate the Prophet's aggressive instinct explode and revenge the pagans because he believed that the revenge and the violence are prohibited. He remained patient until he was instructed to fight them by Allah. Another

example is the way the Prophet Muhammad SAW ruled *Madinah* with peace, harmony, and non-violence.

Next, how did the Prophet Muhammad SAW deal with the people who rejected Islam? He disseminated Islamic teachings wisely and peacefully. He called for the people to learn and to be a follower of the comprehensive religion. If they objected the Prophet Muhammad's calling and remained to be the follower of their previous religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Paganism, their human rights were still protected, and the Prophet Muhammad SAW absolutely guaranteed their freedoms to carry out orders of their religions. The Prophet Muhammad SAW banned his followers to interfere the internal business of other religion, and therefore, he is also known as the most firm and righteous leader. His firm and righteous behavior could combat individuals to conduct criminals and terrors. These could make various religious adherents in *Madinah* feel peace and freedom of fear.

All examples illustrated above show that the hatred and the tyranny by the pagans do not make the Prophet Muhammad SAW and his followers frustrated. The Prophet and his followers did not make violence and revenge to their enemies because they were able to keep on controlling their aggressive instinct. By contrast, the Prophet Muhammad SAW was able to transform his aggressive instinct into the virtue for the mankind. He was always called *Al-Amin* (honest), and because of his honesty and patience he could create peace in the pluralistic community.

Transforming the Aggressive Instinct into Good Deeds

Every mankind owns the soul with two dimension— *al-nafs al-haywaniyah* and *al-nafs al-nathiqah*. The former soul is beastlike, and the aggressive instinct is the natural part of it. With this aggressive instinct, the human being is able to survive his life. The latter is *logica* or rationality which is not possessed by animals. This *logica* or *'aql*, in an Arabic term, differs the human from the animal. Unlike the aggressive instinct, the *logica* is not only able to survive the human existence in the world but also to ennoble his life. In short, with the inherent soul, does not only the human being have to survive but also to ennoble his life.

In order to survive and to ennoble his life, the human being has to stand his *logica* over the aggressive instinct. In other words, the *logica* has to be superior over the aggressive instinct. Naturally, the aggressive instinct has the right to survive, and no need to eradicate it. But when the human being can place the *logica* as the superior, it can control and transform the aggressive instinct into the positive force. In order that the *logica* can control, manipulate, and change the aggressive instinct into good deeds, one should improve the quality of his religious conviction, cultivate his religious values, obey and uphold social customs and law, and care about suffering.

First, one should improve the quality of his religious conviction. One way to improve this quality, he has to perform his religious duties or obligations regularly and consistently. In Islam, for example, there

are two compulsory Ibadah (and other compulsory services to Allah that will not be discussed in this article) — *Sholat* (the ritual prayer prescribed by Islam) and *Puasa* (the fasting month of Ramadan). *Sholat* can make Muslims be a far from a foul act and disobey. As stated in Al-Qur'an, "... and perform *As-Salat* (Iqamat-as-Salat), Verly, *As Sa-Salat* or the prayer prevents from *Al-Fasha* (i.e. great sins of every kind, unlawful sexual intercourse ...)" (Al-Ankanbut, 45). Thus, it implies that if a Muslim performs *Sholat* with devotion and reverence he can control his aggressive instinct. As for *Puasa*, it teaches Muslims to control his lust as narrated by Bukhari and Abu Daud, "Fasting is fortress. Thus if one of you is fasting, don't utter vulgar and provocative words!" (Sabiq 1990, 162). Therefore, the Muslim who fasts with devotion and reverence will not violate, provoke, and abuse other people since he is able to control his aggressive instinct. In sum, by doing the right *Sholat* and *Puasa*, one can improve the quality of his religious belief and, as result, control his aggressive instinct.

Next, the human being should cultivate the cultural values which can control his aggressive instinct. Each community has its own social and cultural values such as the norms of behaving conventionally compatibly to its culture. These norms are usually used as the measurement of acceptable behavior, and therefore, one has to learn these cultural values that he can measure himself whether what he acts is compatible to the social and cultural values in given community. Who has to cultivate the cultural values? Ideally, the cultivation of

the cultural values should be done both in micro and macro scopes. In the micro scope, a family has the crucial role in cultivating the cultural values since the head of the family, who is close to his children, is able to teach, control, direct, and guide them to behave compatible to their cultural values. The community is also responsible to cultivate the cultural values. In this community, public figures, religious teachers and law officials are usually the idol, model, and leader for their society. In the wider scope, the *Umma* (the government officials) are responsible to cultivate the cultural values. The moral of *Umma* has to be idol of the people, and for that reason *Umma* have to be able to control their covetousness and alter his aggressive instinct into patience.

Third, the mankind is born with the human right which can not be nullified by anyone and institution. One of the most essential right of the human being is the right to live in the world as stated in *Al-Qur'an*, "And do not kill anyone whose Allah has forbidden, except for a just cause" (Al-Isra, 33). In fulfilling his human right, however, he has to obey, respect, and uphold the social customs and law. In other words, he has to consider the right of the other people. Thus, the essential point is that one can not use his right unlimitedly and unconditionally because of the social customs and law. This condition often triggers someone to force his intension pushed by his aggressive instinct which may disobey and disrespect the other right. As a consequence, someone has to control and transform his provocative aggressive instinct into good deeds in order to obey, respect, and uphold the human right, law, and social customs, which can result in peace, harmony, and justice

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in the community.

At last but not least, the mankind has to care about suffering and poverty. In Islam, for example, a Muslim is asked to pay *Zakat*, literally meaning the obligation to contribute to those in need or to religious activities. *Zakat* is like a strong bridge or relationships between the have and the poor. It can also purify one's soul, make one's wise and kind, generate peace, love, and brotherhood which can block the possibility of the provocative aggressive instinct emerge. *Zakat* can help people protect their property, protect the robbery and violence as commanded by Allah, "Truly, those who believe, and do deeds of righteousness, and perform *As-Salat* (Iqmat-as-Salat), and give *Zakat*, they will have their reward with their Lord. On them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve," (Al-Baqarah, 277).

In short, all of us have to control our provocative aggressive instinct and transform it into good deeds. In addition to some efforts that are illustrated above, we are still able to cultivate and apply our religious, cultural and social values which can be used to control our provocative aggressive instinct.

Concluding Remarks

The efforts to generate peace and harmony in life have been the main concerns for all of us though we can not deny that the development of the civilization has been colored with the war, brutality, and violence which are against the human right to exist in the community.

The human right is a gift from God, and nobody or institution can abolish it. One of the essential ingredients of the human right is the right to be alive, which is

impure and inalienable so that its existence must be respected in order to make the human being with different backgrounds—culture, social, and religion—coexistent harmoniously and peacefully.

Respecting the human right demands the human being to control their aggressive instinct which can be provocative and generate violence. For this reason, it is the human being, who has a soul and differs from animals, has to control his provocative instinct to emerge. In order to able to control this provocative aggressive instinct, one can transform it into good deeds by improving the quality of his religious conviction, cultivating his religious values, obeying and upholding social customs and law, and caring about suffering.

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