

2011

## **Passing Pains: Revenge, Retaliation, and Redirected Aggression in a New Light**

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## Evolutionary Psychology

www.epjournal.net – 2011. 9(3): 449-450

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### Book Review

#### Passing Pains: Revenge, Retaliation, and Redirected Aggression in a New Light

A review of David P. Barash and Judith Eve Lipton, *Payback: Why We Retaliate, Redirect Aggression, and Take Revenge*, Oxford University Press: New York, 2011, 209 pp., US\$24.95, ISBN 019539514X (hardcover).

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Fishes do it; reptiles do it; birds do it; mammals do it; monkeys do it; we do it. It is not about food or sex; it is about passing pains: A hurts B, B vents on C, and so on, until the last one in the chain, be it the omega individual in the hierarchy or an inanimate object, absorbs the entire grudge. In contrast to sexual selection, research on redirected aggression, a major topic in classical ethology, has been a haphazard sidekick in recent decades, despite occasional bright spots. Fortunately, David Barash and Judith Lipton's recent book, *Payback*, assertively reiterates the importance of the issue in the study of evolutionary psychology and behavioral biology. Regarding humans, pain passing is ubiquitous, often with grave social consequences. In the authors' words (p. 13):

...[pain passing] has left its mark in the genocidal wars of the twentieth century, as well as those that threaten to overwhelm the twenty-first, just as it underlies many of the most prominent, enduring themes of literature, history, psychology, and religion, it haunts our criminal courts, our streets, our battlefields, our homes, and our hearts. It lurks behind some of the nastiest and seemingly inexplicable things that otherwise decent people do, from road rage to yelling at a crying baby. It exists across boundaries of every kind—culture, time, geography, and even species.

Pivoted on the theory of evolution by natural selection, *Payback* unfurls a kaleidoscopic diversity of instances of revenge, retaliation, and redirected aggression—the so-called Three Rs—in both animals and humans under a vast array of circumstances. Far more than reviving a topic in traditional ethology, *Payback* merges redirected aggression with revenge and retaliation and shows how they are biologically and psychologically entwined in light of evolution, an overdue theoretical synthesis that has waited for completion since the time of Konrad Lorenz and Niko Tinbergen. With the publication of

this book, redirected aggression, a stubborn bastion in our quest to unravel the scientific myth surrounding aggressive behavior, has finally been given its due attention.

The authors approach pain passing and the Three Rs from a wide range of disciplines including psychology, biology, anthropology, sociology, psychiatry, literature, and legal philosophy. Chapter 1 explains the Three Rs and their prevalence using a wide range of examples in animals and humans. Chapter 2 focuses on biological aspects of the Three Rs and pain passing including ethological, physiological, and hormonal causations. It integrates information uncovered from holistic behavioral experimentations to molecular mechanisms concerning redirected aggression in particular. With a varietal collection of examples in animals and humans, the chapter shows the evolutionary origins of the Three Rs, their resultant loops of pain passing, and their negative consequences. Chapter 3 deals with aggressive and violent experience in relation to personality and development especially in humans. Particularly insightful is the authors' analysis of the ethological, psychological, and sociological aspects of scapegoating. Chapter 4 zeroes in on topics about revenge, feuding, and rioting with new insights into terrorism and war in light of redirected aggression. It looks into many cases of historic and contemporary violence from the biological, psychological, and cultural perspectives. Chapter 5 analyzes literary stories and elucidates how the Three Rs play out in enduring master pieces and personalities in literature. It stands for a substantial effort in applying evolutionary psychology to literature, an emerging paradigm in literary analysis and criticism in recent years. Chapter 6 poses controversial issues related to law and justice in handling revenge, shedding a new scientific light on the legal philosophy of retributive justice. In the last chapter, the authors draw on human wisdom from religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism), philosophies (e.g., Gandhi's non-violence), and science (psychology, physiology, game theory, economics, and psychiatry) to provide a range of practical coping strategies for overcoming the negative consequences of the Three Rs in humans.

In terms of theoretical originality, the most distinct aspect of *Payback* probably lies in its network perspective. It is all the more refreshing to view redirected aggression not only as a series of dyadic interactions but also as a chain of response events, with pain passing as a frequent result. This is a standpoint apparently remiss in classical ethology, and, as such, our scholarly inquiries into redirected aggression should not only be about who does what to whom but also about how physical and mental pains travel between victims-cum-victimizers in a loop.

Beautifully and elegantly written with an extraordinary breadth of information, *Payback* is both enlightening and enriching to read for a wide range of scholars interested in animal and human behavior. Although concise and cohesive with many insights into major social issues (such as why Indians in South Africa, Chinese in Indonesia, and Jews in many European countries in history were victimized, and why the U.S. would invade Iraq after the 9/11 attack), the book appears to raise more questions than it answers. If this is something unsatisfying about the book, I think it is mainly because behavioral research on The Three Rs is lagging. In this sense, evolutionary psychologists and other scholars interested in aggressive behavior will find a wealth of new and provocative ideas in the book.