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The following is adapted from a talk given on the campus to alumni.

Human aggression is a growing social problem. At the societal level, the spread of technological capacity for massive destruction threatens vast numbers of people. At the personal level, violence increasingly encroaches on daily human affairs to impair the quality of life. A notable example is the public's growing fear of becoming a victim of violence. Physical assaults against strangers do not occur often. Nevertheless they arouse widespread anxiety.

There are several aspects of criminal victimization that enable a few violent incidents to instill widespread public fear:

- **Unpredictability:** There are no forewarnings on when, or where, one might be victimized.
- **Gravity:** The consequences can involve crippling injury, or death. People would not restrict their daily activities if the risk was merely loss of one's wallet or watch. But they are unwilling to risk being maimed for life, or killed, even though the chance of being victimized by a stranger is relatively low (less than two per thousand people).
- **Helplessness:** People feel a lack of control over whether or not they might be victimized. The risk of personal injury or death from driving an automobile is much higher. But people fear the streets more than their automobiles, because they feel they can exercise some personal control over the chance of personal injury by how they drive.

Fear for one's own personal safety permeates all aspects of people's lives—they live behind locked doors, avoid most downtown areas, desert their streets at night, and more and more people are arming themselves.

A society is faced with a dual task: first, how to reduce the level of violence. The second, is how to combat the fear of violence. With the mass media magnifying the threat by over-reporting isolated criminal acts, it may be easier to reduce criminality, than the public fear of crime.

Terrorism

The rising use of terrorist tactics is adding a new source of public apprehension.

When people were widely dispersed in small communities, the consequences of any given act affected mainly the persons toward whom the behavior was directed. Under conditions of urbanized life the welfare of entire populations depends upon a functional transportation system and safe power, water, and food supplies. A single destructive act, that is easy to perform, and requires no elaborate apparatus, instantly can harm vast numbers of people.

At present, most terrorist acts are directed at political leaders and wealthy individuals. Since the acts have proven highly profitable through large ransom payments, such means will undoubtedly become more common.

As in other criminal activities, the disquieting prospect is that isolated acts, magnified by the media, will create widespread public fear. A frightened public is willing to buy protection against potential threats with enormously

expensive security measures and curtailment of personal liberties.

Airline hijacking is a good case in point. By the time the electronic surveillance systems were instituted, hijacking was on the wane for several other reasons. Airlines developed improved ways of identifying and coping with hijackers. Because of international agreements, hijackers could find few, if any, friendly hosts. The security cost alone, for the period 1973-76, was \$194 million. With rapidly escalating costs, the financial burden will continue to grow.

Some terrorist activities are partly designed to provoke police-state countermeasures that breed public disaffection with the system. In such cases, the overreaction to a few isolated acts may be a greater danger than the acts themselves.

Theories of Aggression

Aggression means different things to different people. There are few disagreements about direct, assaultive behavior. But disputes over the labeling of aggression arise in the case of societal practices that are injurious to many people, and over the use of coercive power for social control and for social change.

In conflicts of power, one person's violence is another person's benevolence. One group's terrorists are another group's freedom fighters. This is why moral appeals against violence usually fall on deaf ears. People do not ordinarily engage in collective violence until they have justified to themselves the morality of their actions.

Aggression has been explained in several different ways.

Instinct Theory

According to the instinct doctrine, people are by nature aggressive. Presumably they come innately equipped with a biological mechanism that generates an aggressive drive, requiring periodic discharge through some form of injurious behavior. Freud invoked a death instinct that keeps regenerating itself. More recently, Lorenz postulated a fighting drive that automatically builds up with time in the absence of environmental releasers.

The instinct theory, however does not correspond with the facts. Researchers have been unable to find any evidence for an inborn autonomous drive of the type proposed by the instinctivists. Nevertheless, ascribing aggression to innate forces gains some popular appeal, by relieving people of the responsibility for their inhumanities toward each other.

Frustration-Aggression Theory

For years aggression was viewed as a product of frustration. Frustration is said to generate an aggressive drive which, in turn, motivates aggressive behavior. Frustration replaced instinct as the motivator of aggression, but the two theories are much alike in their social implications. Since frustration is ever present, in both views people are continuously burdened with aggressive energy that must be

drained from time to time. The belief that aggression is a product of frustration is widely accepted even though research findings dispute it. Frustration produces different types of reactions. Aggression does not require frustration.

Consider the social learning theory of aggression. What people call frustration includes a variety of distressing experiences. Distress produces emotional arousal, rather than an aggressive drive. Arousal can activate any number of responses, depending on how one has learned to cope with troublesome situations, and their relative effectiveness.

When frustrated, some people seek assistance. Others display withdrawal, and resignation. Some aggress. Others respond with psychosomatic disturbances. Still others anesthetize themselves with drugs or alcohol against a miserable existence. But most people intensify constructive efforts to modify the sources of distress.

The frustration theory assumes that the aroused aggressive drive remains active until discharged by some form of aggression. Actually, anger arousal dissipates rapidly, but it can be easily regenerated on later occasions, by ruminating on anger-provoking incidents.

Many of people's distresses arise because, in their thoughts, they live more in the past, and in the future, than in the present. They ruminate about the past, and they worry about the future. By thinking about past insulting treatment, people can work themselves into a rage long after their emotional reactions have subsided. Persisting tension comes from the head, not from an undischarged reservoir of aggressive energy.

Consider the example of a person who becomes angered by the thought that he has been excluded from a party. He receives the invitation in the next day's mail. The person will show an immediate drop in anger, without having to assault, or denounce someone, to drain a roused drive.

Aggression-prone individuals are helped more by developing constructive ways of thinking, and better ways of coping with conflict, than by venting aggression. The hydraulic metaphor of pent-up aggressive energy pressing for release suggests misleading causes, and erroneous solutions, to human aggression.

Emotional arousal is not necessary for aggressive behavior. A great deal of human aggression is prompted by the benefits anticipated by such actions. Here, the instigator is the pull of expected gains, rather than the push of distress. The anticipated rewards of aggression constitute the second source of motivation for aggressive behavior.

Three Aspects of Aggression

A complete account of aggression must explain how aggressive patterns are developed; what provokes people to behave aggressively; and what determines whether they will continue to resort to aggressive behavior, on future occasions. I should like to comment on each of these aspects of aggression. Let us first consider how aggressive conduct is developed.

People do not come equipped with inborn aggressive skills. They must learn them. Most behavior is learned observationally through the power of example. This is particularly true of aggression, where the dangers of crippling, or fatal consequences, limit the value of learning by trial and error. By observing the aggressive conduct of others, people learn the behavior, and on later occasions, the example can serve as a guide for action.

Familial Sources

In a modern society, aggressive styles of conduct may be adopted from three primary sources—the family, one's subculture, and the media.

One origin is the aggression modeled, and reinforced, by family members. Studies show that parents who favor aggressive solutions to problems have children who tend to use similar aggressive tactics in dealing with others.

That familial violence breeds violence is confirmed by longitudinal studies of child abuse over several generations. Children who suffer brutal treatment at the hands of assaultive parents are themselves inclined to use abusive behavior in the future.

Subcultural Sources

Although familial influences play a major role in setting the direction of social development, the family is embedded in a network of other social systems. The subculture in which people reside provides a second important source of aggression. Not surprisingly, the highest incidence of aggression is found in communities in which aggressive models abound, and fighting prowess is a valued attribute.

Because of insufficient attention to the human consequences of societal projects, living environments are often inadvertently created that are conducive to criminal victimization. A study of public housing projects, conducted by Oscar Newman, illustrates this point. The high-rise tower, with apartments lining both sides of a long central corridor, invites crime. In this building design:

- * Vast numbers of people share the same entrance, so that the residents can't distinguish occupants from intruders.
- * Residents are most vulnerable to assault in the interior public spaces of the building—the corridors, lobbies, stairs, and the elevators. These spaces are public, yet hidden from public view. Numerous stairwells provide convenient escape routes. The chances of

being caught committing crimes on the project grounds are more than twice as high as being apprehended for crimes within the building.

* Parents are fearful of letting their children out of the apartment because the playground is far removed, they cannot oversee their children's activities, and the lack of security poses risks in navigating through the building.

In the low, walk-up apartment, a few families share an entry so they come to know each other. They regard the interior public space, and even the street in front; as a semi-private extension of their dwelling. Children enjoy greater freedom of movement because recreational areas are easily accessible, and parents can continually keep track of what's going on outside. Public surveillance deters criminal activities.

The effects of urban design on criminal victimization are most clearly revealed in a comparison of two housing projects located across the street from each other.

They have the same population density, socioeconomic levels, ethnic and racial distributions, and comparable proportions of elderly, and teenage residents. They differ only in the height of the residential buildings—14 story slabs in one case, and low building apartments (3—6 stories) in the other.

The high-rises produced 66% more crime. The impersonal, inhospitable buildings suffer as well. The high-rises required 72% more maintenance repair work. These findings are confirmed in an urban redevelopment project in London. The high-rise tower produced more violence and physical destruction than the old row houses across the street.

Media Sources

The third source of aggressive conduct is the abundant modeling provided by the mass media. The advent of television has greatly expanded the range of models available to a growing child. Whereas their predecessors had limited occasions to observe brutal aggression, both children and adults today have unlimited opportunities to learn the whole gamut of homicidal conduct from television, within the comfort of their homes.

A considerable amount of research has been conducted during the past 10 years on the effects of television. The overall findings show that exposure to televised

violence can have at least four different effects on viewers:

- * It teaches aggressive styles of conduct. Learning from aggressive example has been well documented in studies with children and adults.
- * A recent study of inmates in a maximum-security prison revealed that they improve their criminal skills by watching crime programs.
- * They learn better burglary techniques, how to hot-wire cars, and how to pull off bunco frauds.
- * They learn how cops work in apprehending transgressors; how alarm systems operate; they are brought up to date on modern police procedures.

For the inmates, crime shows are educational TV. Many take notes while they are watching. If they act on insufficient information, their attempts may prove unsuccessful. An 18-year old learned from a crime show how to break open pay-phone coin boxes. However, the script writers failed to explain that Ma Bell has a silent alarm system built into her pay phones. He was arrested on his first attempt.

In addition to teaching aggressive conduct, televised violence reduces restraints over aggressive behavior. This is because physical aggression is often shown to be the preferred solution to interpersonal conflicts.

- * Violence is portrayed as acceptable, successful, and relatively clean.
- * Superheroes are doing most of the killing. When good triumphs over evil by violent means, viewers are more strongly influenced than when aggressive conduct is not morally sanctioned by admired characters.

Results of numerous studies show that adults behave more punitively after they have seen others act aggressively, than if they had not been exposed to aggressive models. This is especially true if the modeled aggression is socially justified.

Heavy exposures to televised violence desensitize and habituate people to human cruelty.

Image Production

In addition, television shapes people's images of reality, upon which they base many of their actions. During the course of our daily lives, we have direct contact with only a small sector of the environment. In our daily routines we travel the same limited routes, visit the same places, and see the same group of friends and associates. Consequently, people partly form impressions from televised representations of society of the social realities with which they have little or no contact.

Communication researchers have found that heavy viewers of television are less trustful of others and overestimate their chances of being criminally victimized than do light viewers. Many of the misconceptions that people develop about certain occupations, ethnic groups, sex roles, and other aspects of life are cultivated, in part, through modeling of stereotypes by the media.

Being an influential tutor, television can foster humanitarian qualities, as well as injurious conduct. Programs that portray positive attitudes and social behavior encourage cooperativeness and sharing, and reduce aggressiveness, in young children. It is regrettable that television does not provide more such experiences to cultivate positive potentialities in the developing child.

Social Diffusion

Modeling through the media plays an especially significant role in the shaping and rapid spread of collective aggression. Social diffusion of new styles of aggression conforms to the generalized pattern of most other contagious activities: new aggressive behavior is initiated by salient example. It spreads rapidly in a contagious fashion. After it has been widely adopted, it is discarded, often in favor of a new form that follows a similar course.

Airline hijacking provides a recent example of the rapid diffusion and decline of aggressive tactics. Air piracy was unheard of in the United States until an airliner was hijacked to Havana in 1961. Prior to that incident, Cubans were hijacking planes to Miami. These incidents were followed by a wave of hijackings, both in the United

States and abroad, eventually involving over 70 nations.

When Cubans were hijacking planes to Miami they were hailed as heroes. When Americans were hijacking planes to Havana, they were diagnosed, as mentally deranged people driven by inner turmoil arising largely from sexual disorders. Diagnoses changed radically depending on the direction of the unscheduled flight.

An inventive hijacker, C.D. Cooper, devised an extortion technique in which he exchanged passengers for a parachute and a sizeable bundle of money. He then parachuted from the plane in a remote area in Oregon. This episode temporarily revived a declining phenomenon in the United States, as others became inspired by his successful example.

The example of punishment is intended to serve as a deterrent. But punishment is also informative. Publicized failures can promote innovative improvements in antisocial behavior.

Colorado: The first hijacker was apprehended as he parachuted over Colorado because the Air Force planted an electronic signal device on the parachute he demanded. The Air Force announced that this failure should serve as a lesson to others. It did.

* **Utah:** The next hijacker brought his own parachute aboard the plane and tossed out the bugged Air Force one. This sent the pursuit planes astray as he descended unmolested on the sweeping plains of Utah.

* **Honduras:** The third extortionist parachuted over a Honduras jungle, which does not provide a good landing surface for pursuit planes.

The extortion component was added to international hijackings. The first time it was tried the hijacker was overpowered by the money courier, who was an FBI agent. This led to further refinements in the hijacking-extortion procedure. Hijackers insisted that the money couriers be nude. The public display of nudity did not improve the already tarnished image of the FBI.

Deterrence through Prosocial Alternatives

For people who lack socially acceptable means of getting what they want, the best mode of prevention is to combine deterrents with development of prosocial options. Most law abiding behavior relies more on deterrence through prosocial options, than on threat of punishment.

Linear Projection Error

The course of collective aggression is often misjudged on the linear projection error, when it is assumed that events will continue to increase at the same, or accelerating rates. Expecting a continuing heightening of troublesome activities, overkill countermeasures are applied at the point at which the activities have already declined.

This is because a society does not recognize it has a problem on its hands until the incidence rates become high. By the time it cranks up its political and legal machinery, the behavior is usually brought under control by other means. In the case of airline hijacking, the electronic search procedures were introduced in January 1973 after hijackings already had dropped markedly.

Strict laws are usually passed after the problematic behavior is on the decline. The countermeasures take the credit for the decline.

Direct Experience

Aggressive behavior also can be learned through a more rudimentary form of learning, relying on rewarding and punishing experiences. Passive children can be shaped into aggressors through a process of victimization and successful counteraggression. Passive children who were mistreated by peers, but occasionally halted at-

tacks by defending themselves aggressively, eventually become ready aggressors. Passive children who were maltreated, and whose counteraggression proved unsuccessful, remained submissive.

Cross-Cultural Studies

The way in which modeling and reinforcement influences operate jointly in producing aggression, is graphically revealed in cross-cultural comparisons of societies that pursue a warlike mode of life, with those that follow pacific styles of behavior. In cultures that do not provide aggressive models and devalue injurious conduct, people live peaceably. In other societies that provide extensive training in aggression, attach prestige to it, and make its use rewarding, people threaten, fight, maim, and kill each other.

Instigators of Aggression

Aggression elicitors take many forms. Social interchanges are often escalated into physical violence by threats and insults. Humiliating affronts and challenges to reputation emerge as major

precipitants of violence in assault prone individuals. People who are easily embarrassed and lack verbal skills for resolving disputes and restoring their self-esteem, are prone to dispose of their antagonists physically.

Adverse conditions of life can provoke people to aggressive actions. Explanations of collective aggression usually include discontent arising from privations as a principal cause.

The view that discontent breeds violence requires qualification, however. Most discontented people do not aggress. In fact, severe privation is more likely to produce feelings of hopelessness and apathy, rather than aggression. Additional social conditions determine whether discontent will give rise to aggression, or to other forms of behavior.

Researchers have examined three factors that determine the severity of civil disorder in nations:

* First, the level of social discontent, arising from economic declines, oppressive restrictions, and social inequities.

* Second, the traditional acceptance of force to achieve desired goals. In some societies aggressive tactics are disavowed; in others, mass protests and coups d'etats are considered acceptable ways of forcing change.

* Third, the balance of coercive power between the system and the challengers. This is measured by the amount of military, police, industrial, labor, and foreign support the protagonists can enlist on their side.

When aggressive tactics are considered acceptable, and challengers possess coercive power, they will use collective force to change social practices within a system without requiring much discontent. Revolutionary violence, however, requires widespread discontent, and strong coercive power by challengers, while tactical traditions are of less importance.

Obedient Aggression

In the course of development, people are trained to obey orders. By rewarding compliance and punishing disobedience, directives elicit obedient behavior. After this form of social influence is

established, authorities can secure obedient aggression from others, especially if the actions are presented as justified and necessary, and the authorities possess coercive power. As Snow has perceptively observed, "When you think of the long history of man, you will find more hideous crimes have been committed in the name of obedience, than in the name of rebellion."

Psychological studies of obedient aggression corroborate historical evidence: It requires particular social conditions, rather than monstrous people, to produce heinous deeds.

Delusional Control

In addition to the various external instigators, bizarre beliefs can give rise to aggression of appalling proportions. Every so often tragic episodes occur in which individuals are led by delusional beliefs to commit acts of violence.

A study of American Presidential assassins shows that, almost without exception, the assaults were delusionally instigated. Assassins tend to be loners, who have experienced serious personal failures. They acted either under divine mandate, through alarm that the President was in conspiracy with treacherous foreign agents, or on the conviction that their own problems resulted from presidential persecution. Being unusually seclusive, the assassins had few opportunities to correct their beliefs by discussing them with others.

Maintaining Conditions

Thus far we have discussed how aggressive behavior is learned, and what activates it. The third major issue concerns the conditions that sustain aggressive tendencies. Injurious conduct, like other forms of social behavior, is strongly influenced by the effects it produces.

People aggress for many different reasons. Some resort to force to gain material things they desire. Some behave aggressively because it wins them approval, or status. Still others may rely on aggressive conquests to bolster their self-esteem, and sense of manliness. Under certain conditions people may derive satisfaction from seeing the expressions of suffering they inflict on their victims.

Defensive forms of aggression are often reinforced by their capacity to terminate humiliating, and painful treatment.

People repeatedly observe the behavior of others, and the occasions on which their actions are rewarded, ignored, or punished. Seeing what happens to others can influence behavior in much the same way as experiencing consequences personally. People can, therefore, profit from the successes and mistakes of others as well as from their own experiences. As a general rule, seeing aggression rewarded in others increases, and seeing it punished, decreases, the tendency to behave in similar ways.

Observed punishment, however, is informative, as well as inhibitory. Given strong instigation to aggression and limited options, a person witnessing the failures of others more likely will refine the prohibited behavior to improve its chances of success, than the deterred by the punishment.

People can, and do, regulate their behavior to some extent by the consequences they produce for themselves. They do things that give them self-satisfaction, and a feeling of self-worth. They refrain from behaving in ways that result in self-condemnation. Because of self-reactive tendencies, people must contend with themselves as well as with others, when they act in injurious ways. Most individuals acquire, through example and precept, negative sanctions against cruelty. As a result, they are restrained from injurious acts by self-censure.

But moral codes do not function as fixed internal regulators of behavior. There are various means by which moral reactions can be disengaged from reprehensible conduct. Social justifications and self-exonerations permit variations in conduct with the same moral principles.

Dissociative Processes

People do not behave in ways they consider reprehensible until they interpret such activities as serving worthy purposes. Through moral justification, activities that are ordinarily self-disapproved become personally acceptable. Over the years, much cruelty has been perpetrated by decent, moral people, in the name of religious principles, righteous ideologies, and social policies.

In everyday transactions, euphemistic language is a handy device for masking reprehensible activities, or according them a respectable status. Self-deplored acts can also be made to appear acceptable by contrasting them with flagrant inhumanities. One's own acts appear trifling by comparison. Such justifications serve as especially effective disinhibitors because they not only eliminate self-deterrents, but engage self-reward in the service of inhumane conduct. What was reprehensible becomes, through redefinition, a source of self-pride.

Self-censure is activated most strongly when the causal connection between moral behavior and its consequences is apparent. Self-prohibitions can be dissociated from conduct by obscuring, or distorting, the relationship between actions and the effects they cause. People will behave in ways they normally repudiate if a legitimate authority assumes responsibility for what they do. By displacing responsibility elsewhere, people need not hold themselves accountable for their actions, and are thus spared self-prohibiting reactions.

Exemption from self-censure is likewise facilitated by diffusing responsibility for culpable behavior. Through division of labor, group decision making, and group action, people can behave reproachfully, without feeling personally responsible.

Attributing blame to the victim is still another exonerative expedient. Victims are faulted for bringing suffering on themselves, or extraordinary circumstances are invoked, as vindications for injurious conduct. One need not engage in self-reproof for committing acts dictated by compelling circumstances.

A further means of weakening self-prohibitions is to dehumanize the victims. Mistreatment of people reduced to a subhuman level is less apt to arouse self-reproof than if they are regarded as sensitive individuals.

Many conditions of contemporary life are conducive to dehumanizing behavior. Bureaucratization, automation, urbanization, and high social mobility all lead people to relate to each other in anonymous, impersonal ways. In addition, social practices that divide people into in-group and out-group members, produce human estrangement, conducive to dehumanization. Strangers can be more easily cast as subhuman villains, than can personal acquaintances.

Additional ways of weakening personal deterrents operate by misrepresenting the results actions produce. As long as detrimental effects are disregarded, misconstrued, or minimized, there is low likelihood of self-reprimands.

Given the variety of self-exonerating devices, a society cannot rely solely on individuals, however noble their convictions, to protect against brutal deeds. Just as aggression is not rooted in the individual, neither does its control reside only there. Humaneness requires, in addition to moral codes of conduct, safeguards built into social systems that discourage cruelty and uphold compassionate behavior.

Remedial Measures

Like so many other problems confronting people, there is no single grand design for lowering the level of destructiveness within a society. It requires both individual corrective effort, and group action aimed at changing the practices of social systems.

Space does not permit a detailed discussion of remedial measures. In a recently published book on aggression, I discuss ways in which social systems that contribute to violence can be changed to function in more constructive ways.

* **Familial Practices:** We now possess the knowledge and means for helping families to reduce the level of aggression in the home.

* **Educational Systems:** Given our present knowledge, educational systems should not be turning out large numbers of students so lacking in basic skills that their choices of livelihood are essentially restricted to dependent subsistence, or a life of crime. Methods exist for creating learning environments that can transform academic failure to success.

* **Mass Media:** Different courses of action are available by which the public can reduce the commercial marketing of violence on television, and change it into an instrument of human betterment.

* **Correctional Systems:** Almost everyone acknowledges that present correctional systems are antiquated. High recidivism

rates attest to the fact that they do not accomplish the purposes by which they are justified. Although the need for drastic reforms is repeatedly voiced by insiders and outsiders alike, the corrosive practices remain.

It is difficult to alter huge malfunctioning agencies by internal modification alone. Agencies can be changed faster by devising successful programs on a limited scale outside the traditional structure, and then using the power of superior alternatives as the instrument of influence.

Change through superior alternatives is illustrated in homestyle programs that are being developed for juvenile offenders as a substitute for correctional facilities. In these programs, two adults who know how to create home environments conducive to positive development live with a group of delinquents in homes located in the community. Within this atmosphere, children develop their potentialities and learn to assume responsibility for their behavior. By setting up home-based incentives for learning in the classroom, the children begin to learn and work productively in school.

Such homestyle treatment programs are more humane, much more effective in changing attitudes and behavior, and considerably less expensive. It costs about \$15,000 to incarcerate a child in a institution. It costs less than half that amount to treat a child in a home-style program.

* **Enforcement Agencies:** Programs can be devised for modifying provocative police practices, that arise, either from individual ineptitude in the exercise of authority, or through official sanction.

* **Community Services:** In public agencies that enjoy monopolies over given services, the practices that evolve are more likely to serve the interests, and convenience of those who run the services, than to maximize benefits for the people the agencies are designed to serve. Systems of accountability are needed for making public agencies more responsive to the needs of those they serve.

* **Legal System:** The law can be used as an instrument of constructive social change, as well as to preserve existing practices.

* **Political System:** The political system is a major agency of social change. People improve their society through reform legislation. They rely on the sanctions of agencies to enforce rules that affect their everyday life. The governmental apparatus, however, is often diverted from its public function by the pressure of vested interests. Efforts to improve the functioning of society must also be directed at governmental practices to make them serve the public more equitably.

Aggression is not an inevitable, or unchangeable aspect of people, but a product of conditions operating within a society. One can hold an optimistic view of people's power to reduce their level of aggressiveness. But much greater effort is needed to ensure that this capability is used beneficially, rather than destructively.

