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Steve Pinker demolishes John Horgan's view of war

May 22, 2016 • 8:45 am

As you may recall, Science Contrarian John Horgan's notorious "admonition to skeptics" [blog post at *Scientific American*](#) criticized the entire skeptical community for its supposed failure to campaign against war. That "hard target", said Horgan, should take precedence over our attempts to attack "soft targets" like homeopathy, global warming denialism, and opposition to vaccination and GMO foods. But he also criticized those who propounded what he called the "deep-roots theory of war". Let me refresh you on what he said (note that *every single one* of his "references" goes to a Horgan blog post!):

Horgan:

The biological theory that really drives me nuts is the [deep-roots theory of war](#). According to the theory, lethal group violence is in our genes. Its roots reach back millions of years, [all the way to our common ancestor with chimpanzees](#).

The deep-roots theory is promoted by scientific heavy hitters like Harvard's [Steven Pinker](#), Richard Wrangham and Edward Wilson. Skeptic Michael Shermer [tirelessly touts the theory](#), and the media love it, because it involves lurid stories about [bloodthirsty chimps](#) and [Stone Age humans](#).

But the [evidence is overwhelming](#) that war was a cultural innovation—like agriculture, religion, or slavery—that emerged [less than 12,000 years ago](#).

I hate the deep-roots theory not only because it's wrong, but also because [it encourages fatalism toward war](#). [War is our most urgent problem](#), more urgent than global warming, poverty, disease or political oppression. War makes these and other problems worse, directly or indirectly, by diverting resources away from their solution.

But war is a *really* hard target. Most people—most of you, probably—dismiss world peace as a **pipe dream**. Perhaps you believe the deep-roots theory. If war is ancient and innate, it must also be inevitable, right?

You might also think that religious fanaticism—and especially *Muslim* fanaticism—is the greatest threat to peace. That's the claim of religion-bashers like Dawkins, Krauss, **Sam Harris**, **Jerry Coyne** and the late, great warmonger Christopher Hitchens.

The United States, I submit, **is the greatest threat to peace**. Since 9/11, U.S. wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan **have killed 370,000 people**. That includes more than 210,000 civilians, **many of them children**. These are conservative estimates.

Far from solving the problem of Muslim militancy, U.S. actions have made it worse. **ISIS is a reaction to the anti-Muslim violence of the U.S.** and its allies.

Several of those attacked by Horgan have tendered responses. Here's another one I got, quoted with permission.

Steve Pinker:

John Horgan says that he "hates" the deep roots theory of war, and that it "drives him nuts," because "it encourages fatalism toward war." But what John Horgan hates has nothing to do with what is true, and his decades-long habit of letting his hatred guide his thinking has left a trail of fallacies and distortions.

Horgan has tirelessly endorsed the non sequitur that if war has deep roots in human prehistory, it would be futile to try to reduce it. This is an obvious blunder, because we can reduce all kinds of things that have deep roots in prehistory (illiteracy, disease, polygyny, etc.). In any case, history contains no examples of a leader justifying a war by citing human evolutionary history, to say nothing of chimpanzees.

Horgan writes, "Most people—most of you, probably—dismiss world peace as a pipe dream. Perhaps you believe the deep-roots theory. If war is ancient and innate, it must also be inevitable, right?" But he knows this is nonsense. He cites me as an advocate of the deep-roots theory, and he is well aware that I, of all people, do not dismiss world peace as a pipe dream: I've repeatedly gone on the record (most recently **last month**) as saying that we're heading in just that direction. The military historian Azar Gat (with whom Horgan is familiar) has also documented both the deep roots and the recent decline of war.

Having chained himself to the fallacy that deep roots imply permanent war, Horgan has had to prosecute the case that war is a "cultural invention" on pain of being a war-monger. Sixteen years ago, in a *New York Times review*, he endorsed a vicious and **fraudulent blood libel** against the anthropologist Napoleon Chagnon, who had documented high rates of warfare among the Yanomamö. Today Horgan claims that the evidence is that war is a cultural invention is "*overwhelming*" (his italics). One wonders how the scattershot archeological record from thinly

spread human bands could ever constitute “overwhelming evidence” for anything. Horgan cites the dubious **Margaret Mead** (who infamously misdescribed the headhunting Chambri tribe as peace-loving) and the “anthropologists of peace” Brian Ferguson and Douglas Fry, who for decades have pushed the same moralistic fallacy as Horgan (Fry writes, for example, “If war is seen as natural, then there is little point in trying to prevent, reduce, or abolish it.”)

In the years since I provided a review of quantitative estimates of rates of non-state violence in *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, **Gat** and **Richard Wrangham** have published their own reviews, which address the Ferguson and Fry claims (see also a new volume edited by Mark Allen and Terry Jones, *Violence and Warfare among Hunter-Gatherers*). Gat shows how the evidence has been steadily forcing the “anthropologists of peace” to retreat from denying that pre-state peoples engaged in lethal violence, to denying that they engage in “war,” to denying that they engage in it very often. Thus in a recent book Ferguson writes, “If there are people out there who believe that violence and war did not exist until after the advent of Western colonialism, or of the state, or agriculture, this volume proves them wrong.” Gat and Wrangham point out that one can define prehistoric war out of existence only by excluding feuds, raids, and individual homicides. But it's common for a homicide to be avenged by more than one relative of the victim, setting off revenge for the revenge, which easily grows into a cycle of feuding. Whether this counts as “war” becomes a semantic question.

So does “cultural invention.” Unlike clear-cut cultural inventions such as agriculture and writing, which originated in a small number of cradles a few thousand years ago and spread to the rest of the world, collective violence has been documented in a large number of independent and uncontacted tribes, and, earlier this year, in a **10,000-year-old hunter-gatherer site in Kenya**. If war is a “cultural invention,” it's one that our species is particularly prone to inventing and reinventing, making the dichotomy between “in our genes” and “cultural invention” meaningless.

And speaking of false dichotomies, the question of whether we should blame “Muslim fanaticism” or the United States as “the greatest threat to peace” is hardly a sophisticated way for skeptical scientists to analyze war, as Horgan exhorts them to do. Certainly the reckless American invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq led to incompetent governments, failed states, or outright anarchy that allowed Sunni-vs-Shiite and other internecine violence to explode—but this is true only because these regions harbored fanatical hatreds which nothing short of a brutal dictatorship could repress. According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Project, out of the 11 ongoing wars in 2014, 8 (73%) involved radical Muslim forces as one of the combatants, another 2 involved Putin-backed militias against Ukraine, and the 11th was the tribal war in South Sudan. (Results for 2015 will be similar.) To blame all these wars, together with ISIS atrocities, on the United States, may be cathartic to those with certain political sensibilities, but it's hardly the way for scientists to understand the complex causes of war and peace in the world today.

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Posted on **May 22, 2016** by **whyevolutionistrue**
Posted in **science journalism, war** Posted at 8:45 am


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98 THOUGHTS ON "STEVE PINKER DEMOLISHES JOHN HORGAN'S VIEW OF WAR"

1.  **Randall Schenck**
May 22, 2016 at 9:04 am


Excellent piece in response to Horgan's remarks. I thought his take on war was very strange and it's good to see Steve Pinker bring us back to earth.

Reply

2.  **mkgjones**
May 22, 2016 at 9:10 am

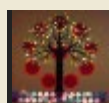
+1

Reply

3.  **Coel**
May 22, 2016 at 9:11 am

Smallpox is entirely natural with deep roots in history, therefore it is pointless to try to eradicate ... err, um ...

Reply



Yakaru
May 22, 2016 at 10:05 am

...Dogs inherently tend to pee on the carpet and jump onto the couch, so it is pointless to try to...

Reply



DrBrydon

May 22, 2016 at 11:15 am

I came here to say that the argument from nature never carries much weight with me. Not only dogs, but humans naturally perform their bodily eliminations anywhere. We've managed to learn tidier and more sanitary habits. Neither the fatalism that Horgan, nor the certainty of correctness that people attempt to draw from nature, are very compelling in the face of the toilet. `

Reply

4.



Michael

May 22, 2016 at 9:20 am

I appreciate Mr. Horgan's piece, only because it resulted in the excellent responses on this site from Messrs. Krauss, Schermer, Pinker, and our host. It's been entertaining. Thanks.

Reply



Siggy in Costa Rica

May 22, 2016 at 9:34 am

I agree, all of the responses have been interesting and enjoyable to read.

Reply

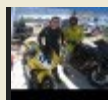


Heather Hastie

May 22, 2016 at 2:09 pm

Me too. As I was reading Pinker's response, and some of the others (including our host of course), I was just enjoying how well they presented their arguments. They were just a pleasure to read.

Reply



darrelle

May 23, 2016 at 7:28 am

Yes indeed. And reading Pinker's response here made it evident to me that despite Pinker's seemingly inherent kindness and politeness it is not a good idea to misrepresent him and thereby invite him to set the record straight at your expense.

Of course, Horgan does show signs that he is egotistical enough that chagrin is not something he is capable of experiencing.

Reply

5.



John Danley

May 22, 2016 at 10:00 am

Horgan undoubtedly understands the deep-roots theory of logical fallacies. Nurture makes the effects of Horgan's nature possible.

Reply



christophercourington

May 22, 2016 at 1:59 pm

+1, and another +1 just because it's Sunday...

Oops! Wait—maybe that's a sign of my deeply rooted drive to promote benevolence on the sabbath. Gosh darn it all!! I suppose it's then pointless for me to continue being an atheist, as I am therefore consigning myself to a life of hopeless hypocrisy and "soul" crushing inner turmoil. Whew! Glad I was shown the light and spared the indignation that results from frothing adherence to a sack of unsupportable ideas and a Fox "News" Channel rhetorical style, all of which are intellectually bankrupt and transparently ego-boosting, bizarre as the latter may sound. If I didn't know better (oh wait again, maybe I don't) I'd say I feel the rapturous warmth and embrace of...SALVATION!

Reply

6.



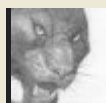
Jonathan Dore

May 22, 2016 at 10:17 am

"Certainly the reckless American invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq led to incompetent governments, failed states, or outright anarchy..."

My only point of dissent from Pinker's otherwise brilliant rebuttal. Iraq certainly, but it's largely in hindsight that Afghanistan has become conflated with it. At the time of the invasion in November/December 2001, it was, IIRC, the most widely backed military action the UN had ever authorized (in terms of the number of countries participating in or supporting it), and it removed what was, until ISIS, the most anti-human and destructive Islamist regime on earth. A large part of the failure to establish a stable post-Taliban government was down to the critical *reduction* of forces and resources that occurred just a year later as the US shifted its focus to the buildup in Mesopotamia, fatally weakening military strength before the Taliban had been properly flushed out and dealt with. If the Bush family obsession with Saddam Hussein hadn't intervened, I think it's quite plausible that heavy and sustained investment in defending and rebuilding (and educating...) the country over the following decade could have established a post-Taliban government there strongly enough to have prevented a Taliban resurgence.

Reply



Torbjörn Larsson

May 22, 2016 at 12:44 pm

"At the time of the invasion in November/December 2001, it was, IIRC, the most widely backed military action the UN had ever authorized (in terms of the number of countries participating in or supporting it),"

vs

"In 2001, U.S. President George W. Bush demanded that the Taliban hand over Osama bin Laden and expel al-Qaeda; bin Laden had already been wanted by the United Nations since 1999. The Taliban declined to extradite him unless given what they deemed convincing evidence of his involvement in the 9/11 attacks[38] and declined demands to extradite other terrorism suspects apart from bin Laden. The request was dismissed by the U.S. as a delaying tactic, and on 7 October 2001 it launched Operation Enduring Freedom with the United Kingdom. The two were later joined by other forces, including the Northern Alliance.[39][40] In December 2001, the United Nations Security Council established the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), to assist the Afghan interim authorities with securing Kabul."

[[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_in_Afghanistan_\(2001%E2%80%932021\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_in_Afghanistan_(2001%E2%80%932021))]

"For almost two years, the ISAF mandate did not go beyond the boundaries of Kabul."

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Security_Assistance_Force#Jurisdiction]

So 2 nations later joined by the NA, and a UN action at first limited to Kabul.

The origins of ISAF is hidden in shadows, where little light can be made. But the Flask of Wikipedia notes:

“United Nations Security Council Resolution 1373, adopted unanimously on 28 September 2001, is a counter-terrorism measure passed following the 11 September terrorist attacks on the United States.[1] The resolution was adopted under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, and is therefore binding on all UN member states.

It marks a shift in international law, as the latter was presumed to be valid only if the concerned state had voluntarily signed the international treaty; whereas here the Security Council imposed the resolution on all member states. According to the press release, the “meeting, which began at 10:50 pm, adjourned at 10:53 pm” and thus lasted three minutes. [1] There is no record of the meeting,[2] and although the United States is widely credited with initiating Resolution 1373, it is not known who really was responsible for its passage. [citation needed]”

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Security_Council]

So if we substitute to “the most widely backed military action the US had ever authorized (in terms of the number of countries participating”, maybe the origins of the war is shown in its full light.

UN as the lapdog to Bush acting out a revenge fantasy. Who knew? I didn't, so thanks for the historical input!

Reply



Jonathan Dore

May 22, 2016 at 5:08 pm

“So 2 nations later joined by the NA, and a UN action at first limited to Kabul.”

Well that's not what the quote you're summarizing actually says: it says 2 nations joined by others *including* the NA. So what does that “including” cover? According to https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Participants_in_Operation_Enduring_Freedom, 59 nations were involved either in contributing forces, money, or cooperation.

Reply



Lou Jost

May 22, 2016 at 12:47 pm

I partly agree, but you are making the Vietnam fallacy—in a complex geographic region you cannot militarily flush out a segment of the population if that segment has broad local support.

Reply



Jonathan Dore

May 22, 2016 at 5:23 pm

But the Taliban never has had broad local support, has it? Their success has been built on its unembarrassed willingness to coerce, maim and kill anyone who resisted them. These are not people who have ever subjected their popularity to the test of an election, even when they were in charge. Possibly you're too young to remember the reports that came out of Afghanistan in the 90s. They were the most brutally misogynistic regime on earth, making the Saudis look like amateurs. Can you imagine testing their "broad local support" among the female population? Another sad result of the Iraq invasion is the way many on the left soon forgot this history and began presenting the Taliban as noble "resistance" fighters against the evil imperialists.

The geographical aspect is interesting. Vietnam is in the subtropical zone with thick, year-round forest vegetation cover in all areas not either built on or farmed. Afghanistan on the other hand is mostly semi-desert with negligible forestation; far harder for a guerilla army to hide in. Which is why their tactic in the insurgency phase has always been to capture villages and use their inhabitants as human shields. The key problem I was talking about however was in 2002, when the battle was mobile and the Taliban were on the run. If enough coalition forces had been on the ground for long enough, they could have encircled or driven out the remaining Taliban pockets, and then secured the borders (mostly mountainous, so possible crossing points are at the heads of passes and therefore by definition narrow and relatively easy to control).

Reply

7.



reasonshark

May 22, 2016 at 10:35 am

According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Project, out of the 11 ongoing wars in 2014, 8 (73%)

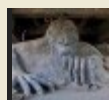
involved radical Muslim forces as one of the combatants, another 2 involved Putin-backed militias against Ukraine, and the 11th was the tribal war in South Sudan. (Results for 2015 will be similar.)

Well, this caught me by surprise (I was expecting the number to be much higher), but it is worth putting this into context, so the original can be found here:

<http://www.ucdp.uu.se/#/year/2014>

In context, it actually looks pretty grim as it's the result of a record increase in conflicts. Hopefully, it's just a temporary effect, but I doubt the 2015 results will necessarily be similar.

Reply



darwinwins

May 22, 2016 at 11:07 am

141K deaths is a tragic number, and most of that is accounted by two conflicts (Syria and Central Africa.) 7.5 million deaths is another tragic number. That is the number the UN estimates die each year from starvation, many of them children. No doubt some of those starvation deaths are attributable to war, but the majority are preventable. Ending deaths from starvation seems to me to be a more attainable goal than ending war, if one has to choose the worst evil as Horgan seems to think.

Reply



Mike Paps

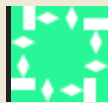
May 22, 2016 at 4:36 pm

“Ending deaths from starvation seems to me to be a more attainable goal than ending war, if one has to choose the worst evil as Horgan seems to think.”

Agreed, and wouldn't dying or witnessing a child or family member die a long slow painful preventable death from starvation be worse than being killed or witnessing a child or family member being killed instantly from a bomb?

The problem is starvation isn't as entertaining as war coverage on the nightly news. If starvation received coverage comparable to it's death toll we'd rarely hear about war, unless it threatened us directly.

Reply



Diane G.

May 23, 2016 at 12:24 am

Starvation is often a direct result of war.

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/23/opinion/nicholas-kristof-starvation-as-a-product-of-war.html?_r=0

Reply



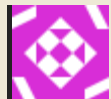
mayamarkov

May 26, 2016 at 3:06 pm

+ 1. I will never forget how Mohamed Farrah Aidid used starvation as a weapon in Somalia, and when US forces were sent to guarantee that the food reaches the starving, some were killed and their bodies were dragged along streets.

Reply

8.



W.Benson

May 22, 2016 at 11:08 am

“another 2 [armed conflicts] involved Putin-backed militias against Ukraine”. My alternative viewpoint: Ukraine is a failed state, brought to you by the US State Department. The Russian population in the east did not want to participate in the Ukrainian kleptocratic neo-fascist enterprise and rebelled.

Reply



Paul Beard

May 22, 2016 at 11:21 am

Yes the news coverage was very much trying to push the new Ukrainian regime as a popular movement for democracy when what we were seeing was a Western backed coup.

A group of swastika wearing militia were described by one commentator as the old government's soldiers suppressing the civilian uprising. Probably correct but not in the sense he meant it.

Reply



mayamarkov

May 26, 2016 at 3:07 pm

Is this sarcasm?

Reply



Heather Hastie

May 22, 2016 at 2:41 pm

The Ukrainian president was a corrupt puppet of Putin, receiving millions from him to fund his life of extreme luxury. He allied himself with Putin to the detriment of his own country. Putin also put pressure on by doing things like cutting off the gas to Ukraine in the winter, and, in the East, cutting off television broadcasts from the West and making Russian propaganda the only news sources available.

The Nazi myth is also one promoted by Russia to a people who had suffered more than most under that regime. In reality, Nazi/fascist parties received only 1% of the vote.

And don't forget that Putin's puppet Yanukovich, who came to power in an election process riddled with fraud, bribery, and voter intimidation, ordered his own people to be fired upon during a peaceful protest resulting in the deaths of at least 77 and the injury of hundreds.

He tried to model Ukrainian politics on those of Russia by making his political party the only effective one. He arrested opposition politicians on trumped up charges, and Reporters Without Borders reported the arrest of multiple journalists. He also instituted anti-protest laws.

Reply



Edward Duggal

May 24, 2016 at 12:24 pm

The bottom line is that the United States and its allies in the European Union backed the overthrow of the democratically elected President of Ukraine, despite three EU foreign ministers and the Russians agreeing that early elections should be held later that year.

Imagine how the United States would have reacted if the Warsaw Pact had expanded to its borders, and Russian ministers were seen on the ground supporting the overthrow of the elected Prime Minister of Canada?

Reply



mayamarkov

May 26, 2016 at 3:10 pm

If a democratically elected president becomes too tyrannical or incompetent, people have the right to riot and demand his resignation (I have), and the Russians are not to say when Ukrainians will have elections. You are justifying aggression.

Reply



mayamarkov

May 26, 2016 at 3:08 pm

Thank you for this comment, well-informed and humane! It really depresses me to read pro-Putin propaganda here.

Reply



mayamarkov

May 26, 2016 at 3:07 pm

Are you sarcastic?

Reply

9.



Historian

May 22, 2016 at 11:22 am

Pinker refers to an article he and Joshua Goldstein published in the Boston Globe that documents how violence in the world has diminished. This is a familiar theme of Pinker's that I accept as true, but it can breed an unjustified complacency. The fact that the world is now relatively peaceful should not delude people into thinking that this condition will necessarily last. If a rogue state, such as North Korea, or a non-state actor such as ISIS should unleash nuclear or other

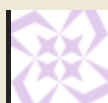
weapons of mass destruction, then the Pinker observation will become nothing more than an historical curiosity. What do you think of the odds of this happening in the next decade or two?

The current world situation makes me think of the years just before World War I. Historians have noted that most observers of the time believed that the world seemed to be a relatively peaceful place and that this condition was likely to last. These observations were not very different from Pinker's description of today's world. True, pundits of the time were aware that war had not totally disappeared, particularly in the pesky Balkans and that the major powers were engaged in a very expensive arms race and had competing imperialistic and territorial ambitions, but they pointed out that Europe had not had a truly major war for nearly a century, since the end of the Napoleonic wars. There was no reason to believe that the powers could not continue to resolve disputes without war as they had done over a series of incidents in the preceding two decades.

Educated Europeans were not particularly concerned about the foolish assassination of a certain archduke in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914. Tensions in the Balkans had been settled before without the major powers fighting each other. Certainly that would be the case now. But, to the surprise of many, things spun out of control and by August a 30 year catastrophe had begun, whose ramifications are still with us today.

The lesson of the origins of World War I is that things may be happening below the surface that are not apparent to casual observers. And like the results of the surprise eruption of a volcano, these things can quickly change the world, destroy lives, and end a way of living.

Reply



reasonshark

May 22, 2016 at 12:06 pm

By the same token, we cannot assume a resurgence in conflicts is due because of a resemblance to a pre-war period. For starters, there were still numerous wars being orchestrated by the wealthy European nations between the Napoleonic Wars and the First World War; it's just that most of them were wars of conquest and territorial squabbling rather than ideological wars between powerful nations, like nationalistic ones.

Also, the European nations (or at least the leaders) were itching for a conflict with their rivals at the time, and the First World War was notable in that a strong anti-war sentiment arose during the conflict, a sentiment virtually unprecedented in European history and which we now take for granted. There certainly wasn't such an analog for the current international agreements and alliances, such as the UN and the OECD, and popular sensibilities about wars have changed so much in that time that a body count considered unremarkable back then would be considered monstrous in the modern era.

It's certainly true there are no guarantees, but Pinker's data – and he's been careful to pre-

empt any complacency himself – favour a relatively peaceable future, at least over the next few years or decades.

Reply



Zado

May 22, 2016 at 1:47 pm

“The current world situation makes me think of the years just before World War I.”

I find this sentence baffling, even with the paragraph that followed it. And even if a rogue state managed to kill thousands of people with a weapon, that event, while horrible, would hardly reverse the overall trend away from war we're currently enjoying.

Reply



Historian

May 22, 2016 at 2:13 pm

Depending on the weapon, many more than thousands could be killed. Moreover, it is naïve to think that an attack by a weapon of mass destruction would be contained to a single incident. I used the World War I analogy to illustrate how a single incident, i.e., the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand, on the surface not particularly important in and of itself, resulted in its repercussions quickly spinning out of control, resulting in a cataclysm. In other words, the presence of weapons of mass destruction and the willingness of certain parties to use them creates the real potential that a “peaceful” world could come to an end in an instance.

Quite simply, Pinker's analysis of the world as it now is says little of what the future holds. Trends are not destiny.

Reply



Heather Hastie

May 22, 2016 at 2:56 pm

I agree. While Pinker is right about the trend, there are several situations that could blow up around the world without proper management.

Putin's behaviour in relation to Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, and his desire to see these NATO states back under Russian control is particularly concerning. An analysis a couple of years ago showed that if Putin invaded (and he has tens of thousands of troops permanently on the borders), NATO would not be able to react quickly enough to stop him.

They are working on getting more troops etc into the region because the possibility of Putin invading is judged so high. There have also been frequent diplomatic signals, especially by the US, expressing their support for the Baltic states.

Another reason why Trump needs to be kept as far from the presidency as possible.

Reply



Filippo

May 22, 2016 at 4:08 pm

Is the extension of NATO into Poland a response to Putin's behavior? Or is it the reverse?

IIRC – and cheerily acknowledging that I don't know everything it's possible to know about the situation – the Dubya Admin made noises about extending NATO into E. Europe. Should one be surprised that Putin would not be a happy camper about that prospect?

Reply



Heather Hastie

May 22, 2016 at 6:12 pm

There was an agreement (Helsinki Accords, 1975) that NATO wouldn't encroach further on Russia, and NATO has broken that agreement. They have admitted new members since, including the Baltic states. However, the reason the Baltic states wanted in was because they were terrified by actions on the part of Russia. It's not something we hear about much, but there are constant threatening moves, abduction of citizens, flyovers of military aircraft, threats from the Kremlin etc which left them feeling extremely insecure. They feel (and I think they are right) their fear is justified by what Russia has done in Georgia and Ukraine too.

Putin says that the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the 20th century is the

break-up of the Soviet Union and their power in Eastern Europe. (Not WWI, WWII, the Holocaust, the Stalinist purges etc, but the break-up.) He wants to re-establish it. He wants to destroy the EU and NATO as that's essential to him getting his way. Authoritarian Nationalists in Britain/Europe are inadvertently helping him with EU (it will be much, much weaker if Brexit succeeds) and Trump is making idiot noises about NATO.

So yes, NATO expanded thus breaking a treaty, and that's a valid argument on Putin's part. However, there was never any danger of NATO actually invading Russia. Allowing the other countries to join was a move to keep the peace by stopping Russia from invading them.

Georgia didn't join and got invaded. Ukraine already had a separate non-aggression treaty with Russia (as part of which Ukraine gave their entire and huge nuclear arsenal to Russia), but that didn't stop them being invaded. The others are only safe because they are backed by NATO, and currently even that's at risk because they've been relying on their size for years and most of them haven't been spending the amount they're supposed to and relying on the huge US military.

Despite what the GOP says, the Obama Administration gave them a bit of a talking to about that at a NATO summit about a year ago and other countries have become better at pulling their weight since. The actions of Putin had a lot to do with what spurred them into action.

Reply



mayamarkov

May 26, 2016 at 3:16 pm

I am too lazy to find and read the text of the Helsinki accord, but some claim that it has not been violated by the NATO expansion:

<http://sputniknews.com/military/20150707/1024323221.html>



Aneris

May 22, 2016 at 9:36 pm

The World Wars were unique as they are placed technologically between two brackets, the invention of industrial slaughter with machine gun fire and firestorm bombardment on one side, and the atom bomb on the other. Armies were fighting large scale symmetrical conflicts on horseback at the beginning and

it could be ended with total nuclear obliteration at the end.

Save eccentric scenarios in the year 7523 when the mutant-humans fight on lizardback against the neighbouring feudal lords, we will never see such conditions again. It's either quick and total, or asymmetrical not-really-a-war.

Reply

10.  **jaxkayaker**

May 22, 2016 at 11:23 am

An excellent riposte from The Pinkah. Thanks for sharing it with us.

By the way, I think there's a typo: overwhelming should be overwhelming.

Reply



Filippo

May 22, 2016 at 4:12 pm

Yep, could be significant, as "overwhelming" is possibly a yachting term.

Reply




whyevolutionistrue

May 22, 2016 at 7:14 pm

Fixed, thanks!

Reply

11.  **musical beef**

May 22, 2016 at 11:29 am

The biological urge to consume lots of fat and sugar has deep roots, so it would simply be futile for me to eat a salad and go on a jog. I guess I'm just doomed to become morbidly obese and die of congestive heart failure.

Reply



musical beef

May 22, 2016 at 11:33 am

(Well, either that or the deep-seated urge to consume energy-rich foods is a fiction imposed on us by doughnut-mongers.)

Reply



christophercourington

May 22, 2016 at 3:01 pm

Agreed! Is there TRULY any greater threat to a positive long term prognosis for our species than the shadow DMTS (doughnut-maker terrorist state)? While it's easy to poke holes in the ideology of the doughnut-maker insurgency, the irresistible fact is that members of that state never can get their filling of guerilla-style attacks upon our citizens with an ever increasing number of Hole Defining Lipid (HDL) bombs, often deployed in groups of six, 12, or 13, occasionally in multiples of 12***. These diabolical HDL bombs (strangely, the DMTS calls them "systolical" and "diastolical" bombs instead) clog vital supply thruways with a slippery glaze or crystallized icing, either of which render vital supply arteries unnavigable, making substantive travel impossible. (***)they sometimes deploy a less potent but more portable type of HDL bomb, given the deceptive and darkly cute name of "munchkin." These HDL "mini-bombs, almost always deployed 24 to 48 at a time, showcase the strategy of insinuating a smaller theater of HDL-driven destruction, to justify the battery to ensue later.)

Unlike their homonymnic fundamentalist Muslim brethren, members of the DMTS formed into rings of competition with each other, often referred to with sets of double initials, "KK" and "DD" for example. They often refer to themselves as "icers," and to successful deployment of HDL bombs as "icing." However, reports that some of the DMTS leaders are known as "Vanilla," "Cube," "Tea," and "Dry" are not confirmed at this time. It is clear that the goal of one of the largest DMTS groups—"DD"—is nothing short of HDL saturation into the very pulse of our country. Their war cry, recorded throughout their aggressive DM campaign, is to make "America run on DD." This perhaps chillingly refers to the DMTS-DD plans to establish a Doughnut-delivered, HDL-and-glaze driven shadow economy that will enslave the American citizenry and make them exponentially more sedentary, if deliriously happy.

As I drank my jumbo coffee contemplating it all, I wondered if the specter of HDL terrorism and enslavement were sufficient grounds to construct a protective wall around

our country. However, a member of the NSA who insisted on anonymity said he already had hoped to score points with top military brass by pitching that idea, but they boiled it down, and he came up with a big bagel on that one, plain and simple.

Reply



musical beef

May 22, 2016 at 9:17 pm

Indeed.

Now, what to do about the evil, evil French. Silk pie, that is.

Reply



christophercourington

May 24, 2016 at 9:51 am

Sacre Bleu, monsieur! Vous dites la verite' avec intrepidite', mon guerriere des gateux! Deux des fleaux des gateux "French Silk" ce sont que trop de cal et matieres-pourtant, voila pourquoi les gateux ont la gout c'est comme un million masseuses bien foutues, avec les mains s'ont mettent a' faire un sculpture de chair a' la maximum de douceur, tumors et encores...hmmm, peut-etre la "French Silk" gateux n'ont past des fleaux apres tout; peut-etre, "les gateux non-fleaux" sont, vraiment un force de la nature de beaute' et eclairage...MAIS OUI!!

Reply

12.



Aneris

May 22, 2016 at 11:30 am

A great response. I'll like to expand on the semantics of war, Steven Pinker alludes to. Our conceptions of war go back to Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) and his *De jure belli ac pacis* (1625) which sought to order the inherently chaotic nature of conflicts. He forced them into a symmetrical brace, with binary states: who's a combatant and who's not, how do wars begin and how they end, what is peace and what is war.

I. Scope of the treatise: Controversies among those who are not held together by a common bond of municipal law are related either to times of war or to times of peace.

Of course, Grotius did not invent the terms, nor was the idea of fighting against someone in a large-scale manner a newfangled idea that spontaneously emerged. Pushing the date back by thousands of years doesn't make an "invention of war" any more plausible. It becomes an excersize in definitions, and supposedly humans needed to have formed large enough groups to conceive it as "war".

It shows the matter is not as simple as being "aware of the concept of war" as Horgan writes in one of his articles on Margaret Mead, on which apparently the premise rests that someone had to invent it.

Even when he can gain some ground by suggesting counterintuitive ideas, which might be attractive to skeptics: playing such word game defeats his own argument quickly. Our modern conflicts are precisely not any longer these finely laid out symmetrical conflicts.

Is the "War on Terror" really a war? Are terrorists combatants, or aren't they rather criminals? Which state did the USA fought against when they invaded Afghanistan? Is the IS really a nation and will they sign capitulation terms some day? How is peace like with Islamists?

Reply



Rowena Kitchen

May 22, 2016 at 1:45 pm

"Our conceptions of war go back to Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) and his *De jure belli ac pacis* (1625) which sought to order the inherently chaotic nature of conflicts. He forced them into a symmetrical brace, with binary states: who's a combatant and who's not, how do wars begin and how they end, what is peace and what is war."

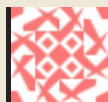
I haven't studied the history of warfare, but as a student of history and based on what I have read, I think that war has existed since long before Grotius attempted to categorize it into binary states to discover symmetries. Warfare has been conducted by every kind of grouping imaginable (for many possible "reasons"), not just by states or city-states, but also by tribes, religious groups and coalitions. Simplifying chaotic warfare does not improve our understanding. Most human endeavors are very complex. I do not know of a time that we haven't had a war, or multiple wars, somewhere on the globe.

What did Grotius think of "the Roman Peace" enforced by Rome's massive military power? What would he think about what China is doing now to control precious resources by taking control of the land through warfare, intimidation or purchase? What would he think about the numerous religious wars throughout history? And, as we well know, we have not been innocent either.

Increased communication by cell phone, computers and internet may help us to have fewer

wars. I agree that preventing deaths by starvation or diseases for which there are cures should have a much higher priority. They are not minuscule problems.

Reply



Filippo

May 22, 2016 at 4:26 pm

"What would he [Grotius] think about what China is doing now to control precious resources by taking control of the land through warfare, intimidation or purchase?"

In that regard, I wonder how China views U.S. history, specifically its expansion westward, the "Trail of Tears," the Louisiana Purchase, the Seminole War, the Mexican-American War, the Spanish-American War and the subsequent quelling of the Philippine "insurrection," Vietnam, the bombing of Cambodia and Laos, the British (U.S.) acquisition/control of Diego Garcia.

Reply

13.



Stan

May 22, 2016 at 11:49 am

So Horgan is in bed with Noam Chomsky. Now there's a surprise.

Reply



christophercourington

May 22, 2016 at 3:22 pm

"...Horgan is in bed with Noam Chomsky."

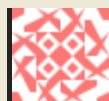
Horgan doesn't seem to possess the synaptic capacity to understand the full range of Chomsky's arguments, much less sufficiently engage them in an evening of compelling discussion which would a subsequent late evening horizontal tete-a-tete (and tete-a-tete, perhaps).

That is to say, give me a f___ing break with that nonsense. Your statement is just as much a gross misrepresentation of Chomsky as was Horgan's statement which dismissed Christopher Hitchens as a "warmonger."

The author of this page, and many others, practice the principle of providing citations, or at least a well-formed argument, when making a substantive truth claim (or "truth" claim, as the case is here). So, back it up or back off.

"...Horgan is in bed with Noam Chomsky." The myriad problems with such a statement mirror those of Horgan's piece to begin with. How surprising.

Reply



Filippo

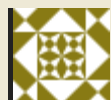
May 22, 2016 at 5:17 pm

In the last couple of years I've watched a short video wherein Chomsky disagreed with Pinker on the reduction of violence. IIRC, his references included the Cambodian genocide and East Timor massacre. I can't at the moment cite it. Maybe it was Democracy Now.

As I reasonably assume not a few viewers here know from perusing Sam Harris's site, he and Chomsky have locked horns. I need to reread the transcript of their conversation(s) to refresh my memory as to the source of his problem with Harris. (My subjective, imperfect impression was that) He seemed uncharacteristically peevish and obstreperous dealing with Harris (who seemed quite reasonably self-disciplined and temperate and congenial in response, as with Ben Affleck), as if Harris were "rubbing him the wrong way." A personality conflict out of control? But in this regard I don't see how Harris could possibly compete with John Silber: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXY6E7wCZZs>

Reply

14.

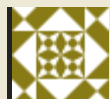


Geoffrey Howe

May 22, 2016 at 11:52 am

The urge to resort to fallacious reasoning and emotion over logic has deep roots in human psychology, therefore it is futile to attempt skepticism.

Reply



Geoffrey Howe

May 22, 2016 at 11:58 am

For a lengthier post, his idea that war isn't deeply rooted in psychology is just baffling. I have

no idea how he can defend this when one of the major causes of war is “I want their stuff, and I’m willing to kill them to get it”.

That is not only a description of war, but of predation itself. What is a wolf doing when it eats a deer, but killing it and taking it’s stuff (in this case, protein, energy, etc...) This major fundamental reason to go to war isn’t just in human genes, it’s in the genes of EVERY SINGLE ANIMAL, since every animal (by definition I believe) kills things and eats them in order to live.

Whether it’s a group of lions taking down an elephant, or a horse munching on some grass, these animals are killing things to take their energy.

So unless Horgan wants to claim that we are all secretly plants, then the willingness to kill people and take their things, and thus the willingness to go to war, is fundamental to us, and long predates us.

Reply



Rowena Kitchen

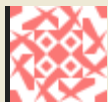
May 22, 2016 at 12:51 pm

“Whether it’s a group of lions taking down an elephant, or a horse munching on some grass, these animals are killing things to take their energy.

So unless Horgan wants to claim that we are all secretly plants,...”

All life forms,including plants, gain and sustain their lives by taking energy from sources other than themselves. Sun. Soil. Other plants. Etc. Plants have survival mechanisms that might be viewed as not only self-protective, but as a form of warfare. Plants may use: poisons, briars or nettles,camouflage, traps, etc. to preserve themselves.

Reply



Filippo

May 22, 2016 at 5:33 pm

Hmm, perhaps the human genome can be modified so that we have chloroplasts and can make our own food. But then would we go to war over the sunniest climes?

Reply



musical beef

May 22, 2016 at 9:27 pm

There is always something to war about.

Reply



musical beef

May 22, 2016 at 9:27 pm

+1

Reply



Diane G.

May 23, 2016 at 12:47 am

"The urge to resort to fallacious reasoning and emotion over logic has deep roots in human psychology, therefore it is futile to attempt skepticism."

You could meaningfully substitute "science" for "skepticism" in that sentence.

Reply

15.



William Bill Fish

May 22, 2016 at 11:56 am

Great article. Warfare has changed. Are the allies air attacks on ISIS considered war? Are drone attacks on high ranking Al Qaeda officials considered war?

Reply

16.



Damien McLeod

May 22, 2016 at 12:08 pm

Steve Pinker demolishes John Horgan's view of war

Very good post, and one I agree with mostly if not completely.

Reply


17.  **maryemangan**

May 22, 2016 at 1:31 pm

BTW, they finally fixed comments over at the original piece, with Horgan's talk. Feel free to leave comments over there. My long form one went up, and appears to have stayed there.

Reply


18. Pingback: [Deep Roots Update | War, Numbers and Human Losses](#)

19.  **Ant (@antallan)**

May 22, 2016 at 3:17 pm

Reply

20. Pingback: [Carl Mosk's Economics Site](#)

21.  **keith cook + / -**

May 22, 2016 at 5:36 pm

Horgan in his anthropological arrogance forgets he is product of natural selection and evolution, a hairless ape. At a guess, Horgan is special and not subject to something so lowly in origin. All roads stem from these simple facts and until it clicks he will forever deny us of a decent conversation on the subject of war.

We will harp on about politics, land grabbing and historical hates and miss the point of our nature and how to mediate it's dominance, the preying on others for gain rather than support in trade, sharing of resources, promoting education and health and for our own well being, let alone the health of all creatures and planet.

I noticed a few alluding to hidden currents that could undermine the recent and relatively peaceful global state we are now under.

I tend to think we are informed enough to know that war and violence is a failed strategy

(although I wonder what it f@@king takes sometimes).. terrible costs, human and otherwise, unproductive (other than for a few elites and cronies) and this has enough momentum to keep us on a steady track to a diminishing desire for war.

It does not mean I am not wary of this stance and with the efforts of Mr Pinker and others we can track our progress, pitfalls and new data and analyst to help keep the 'better nature' at the fore.

Reply

22.



Zach

May 22, 2016 at 6:55 pm

It seems that Pinker still hasn't got over Ferguson's critique. I won't go into it, although it's worth pointing out that he has the problem backwards; it's the corrections of Ferguson et. al. that have caused Pinker and his ilk to retreat into semantic quibbling over what "war" and "collective violence" actually mean, and how well the fossil record supports such claims.

But his ugly sentiments about the wars in the Middle East: "this is true only because these regions harbored fanatical hatreds which nothing short of a brutal dictatorship could repress" are beyond ignorant. Pinker has lost what little credibility he had; his fanatical adherence to pro-Western ideology has corroded his senses. This ought to be treated only with scorn.

Reply



Tim Harris

May 23, 2016 at 6:25 am

Yes, Ferguson's essay 'Pinker's List' (of prehistoric sites where the remains of people thought to have died violent deaths) is worth reading. It contains these words, 'Is this sample representative of war death rates among prehistoric populations? Hardly. It is a selective compilation of highly unusual cases, grossly distorting war's antiquity and lethality. The elaborate castle of evolutionary and other theorizing that rises on this sample is built upon sand.'

And Pinker's Vietnamese were also 'fanatical', which is why they didn't give in to the forces of 'civilisation'; what happened after Yugoslavia fell apart should show us that 'fanatical hatreds' are far from being the possession of those who belong to a different race or religion.

Reply

Tim Harris



May 23, 2016 at 6:33 am

'the REMAINS of people...' Not 'reins'

Reply



mayamarkov

May 26, 2016 at 3:45 pm

I find it difficult to deny that the Viet Kong and the North Vietnamese hawks were fanatical, like militant communists elsewhere. I find it important to call with the proper epithets those who want to take away other people's property by force.

Reply



Tim Harris

May 23, 2016 at 6:45 am

And, in Syria at least, it has been brutal dictatorships that have exacerbated hatreds, and how did those dictatorships begin? 'The March 1949 Syrian coup d'état was a bloodless coup d'état that took place on 29 March, and was the first military coup in modern Syrian history which overthrew democratic rule. It was led by the Syrian Army chief of staff at the time, Husni al-Za'im, who became President of Syria on 11 April 1949. Among the officers that assisted al-Za'im's takeover were Adib al-Shishakli and Sami al-Hinnawi, both of whom would later also become military leaders of the country. The then president, Shukri al-Quwatli, was accused of purchasing inferior arms for the Syrian Army and of poor leadership. He was briefly imprisoned, but then released into exile in Egypt. Syria's legislature, then called the House of Representatives, was dissolved. al-Za'im also imprisoned many political leaders, such as Munir al-Ajlani, whom he accused of conspiring to overthrow the republic.

The coup was carried out with the discreet backing of the United States government and especially the newly formed Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)...

It's all a bit too easy to put everything that is not very nice down to 'fanatical hatreds' that seem to exist in some a-historical vacuum.

Reply



Tim Harris

May 23, 2016 at 6:46 am

The quotation, by the way, is from Wikipedia.

Reply



musical beef

May 23, 2016 at 8:32 am

I don't know what point you're making by claiming Pinker has no credibility. Is it that there really is no link between our evolved propensities and war?

Reply



Zach

May 24, 2016 at 11:40 am

I was referring to Pinker's relentless parroting of pro-Western bigotry regarding the millions of inhabitants of the Middle East, who "required brutal dictatorships to keep them from killing each other" (paraphrasing, but not much.) This completely ignores the very good work done showing that sectarian conflicts were quite minor, even nonexistent in some places (such as Iraq).

His sloppiness with the research surrounding early incidents of warfare damaged his credibility, his willful blindness to recent political history destroyed it outright.

Reply

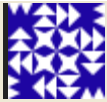


mayamarkov

May 26, 2016 at 3:48 pm

Unfortunately, recent history of the Middle East seems to prove Pinker right, at least so far.

Reply



May 23, 2016 at 1:23 am

Ah.., it's always a pleasure to have the calm, rational and penetrating insight of Steven Pinker as a counterpoint to the regressive bullshit spouted by the likes of Horgan. It's akin to a strong, cool breeze on a stiflingly hot day. I knew Horgan was full of it when, way back in the 90s, he said that Science had come to an end. Internet troll is right.

Reply

24.



Tim Harris

May 23, 2016 at 1:56 am

I am surprised by Pinker's continuing support for Napoleon Chagnon, who seems to be a rather unpleasant piece of work. Tierney's attack on the man was dishonest in many ways and has been discredited, but there are many responsible critics about and instead of directing his fire at a discredited book, Pinker should address what they say and not suggest by omission that Chagnon's work is universally accepted among responsible anthropologists.

They include Marshall Sahlins, of the University of Chicago, who resigned from the National Academy of Sciences partly in protest against Chagnon's election to that body.

And there is James C. Scott of Yale University who in reviewing a book by Jared Diamond writes this: 'No matter how one defines violence and warfare in existing hunter-gatherer societies, the greater part of it by far can be shown to be an effect of the perils and opportunities represented by a world of states. A great deal of the warfare among the Yanomamo was, in this sense, initiated to monopolise key commodities on the trade routes to commercial outlets (see, for example, R. Brian Ferguson's Yanomami Warfare: A Political History, a strong antidote to the pseudo-scientific account of Napoleon Chagnon on which Diamond relies heavily).' Note that 'pseudo-scientific'.

And here is a letter to to the Daily Telegraph in connexion with Chagnon's claims: 'Chagnon claims that the Yanomami are savage and murderous – and supports this observation with data which many anthropologists consider to be deeply suspect. This is his opinion, but it has unfortunately been presented as scientific fact for over 30 years, and has been used to reinforce a prejudice exploited by those who oppress the Yanomami.

We have, between us, spent over 80 years working with the Yanomami. Most of us speak one or more Yanomami dialect. Not one of us recognises the society portrayed in Chagnon's books, and we deplore his sensationalism and name-calling. The biggest threat the Yanomami face is not internal warfare but the colonisation of their lands. Concerned members of the British public – including readers of this newspaper – have been of major importance in defending the Yanomami and other tribal peoples against such threats since the 1960s. Long may they continue to be so.
Yours faithfully,

Dr Bruce Albert, Centre for Scientific Research, France
Dr Alcida Ramos, University of Brasilia, Brazil

Dr Kenneth I. Taylor

Fiona Watson, Survival International'

Reply



Diane G.

May 23, 2016 at 2:45 am

I have a hard time figuring out who to believe in the Chagnon controversy. The criticisms you cite are damning, but there's just a little whiff of going to the opposite extreme, there, that of the first world romanticizing a primitive culture and deciding for them that they should remain so.

Reply



Tim Harris

May 23, 2016 at 3:33 am

Yes, there is what one might call the myth of the peaceable savage, but I am not persuaded that the best way to counter it is with what one might call the myth of the savage savage. We can see what purposes the first serves, but perhaps we should also ask what purposes the second serves.

Reply



Diane G.

May 23, 2016 at 3:51 am

What do you think is the purpose of the peaceable savage myth? (I'm just curious; I haven't really thought it through myself.)

I wasn't actually referring to that anyway, but something more like "the soft bigotry of low expectations." Who's to say these people wouldn't prefer to acquire some of the modern world's advantages?

Is it even possible to be an anthropologist without projecting one's personal leanings and cultural milieu into the stew? I'm sure that's a criticism as old as anthropology itself. (I wonder the same thing about evolutionary psychology.)

Sorry for the free association—I'm getting off-topic here.

Reply



Tim Harris

May 23, 2016 at 4:20 am

I think the myth of the 'peaceable savage' derives from Rousseau, primarily, and beyond that from the myth of the Golden Age and that of Eden, for that matter, or even the myth of the beginnings you can find in the Tao te Ch'ing : it serves, I think, as a kind of mythical standard whereby the ills and 'hypocrisies' of civilisation may be judged. Which is to say that it's a useful tool for those who want to believe that everything is getting worse. But it also has its beneficial side in suggesting that people like the Kung! or the now extinct aboriginals of Tasmania or the now extinct Yahi tribe of California are, or were, worthy of respect rather than extermination. As for the modern world's advantages, yes, they are there if you live in the right sort of place, but a film like John Pilger's 'Utopia', which is about the profoundly racist present treatment of the Australian aborigines, shows that things are not so simple.

James Scott's position is simply that the hunter-gatherer societies that exist today do not exist in some kind of special time that is apart from history, and that all are now involved in the world of states and state power – they may not be aware of much of this world, but through their interactions with their neighbours and the interactions of the latter with their neighbours and so on, they are involved and so changed. Chagnon, it seems to me, replaces one mythical 'state of nature' with another whose evolutionary hard-headedness appeals to those suppose that if something looks hard-headed, then it must be scientific.

Reply

25.



Rolf Degen

May 23, 2016 at 3:09 am

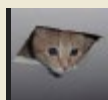
"In any case, history contains no examples of a leader justifying a war by citing human evolutionary history..." Well, the Nazis kind of did:

The Nazis favored wild animals over domestic ones at least in rhetoric, largely because wild creatures seemed untouched by human personality. The Darwinian phrase "struggle for existence" was commonly translated into German with the more severe expression "Daseinskampf," giving the impression of life as a perpetual battlefield (Bäumer, p. 64). This

phrase was echoed in Mein Kampf or “my struggle,” the title of Hitler’s autobiography. Victory in the battle of life might be expected to go to the greatest warriors. Ernst Haeckel had written that: “A ‘moral ordering’ and ‘a purposive plan’ of the world can only be visible if the prevalence of the immoral rule of the strongest ... is entirely ignored” (Haeckel, vol. 1, p. 112). Nevertheless, it was hard not to notice that large predators were dying out everywhere. Furthermore, the most powerful people very seldom looked or acted like mighty warriors. The world of everyday observation had virtually nothing to do with the martial images evoked by popular Darwinism. For many people the supposed “right of the strong” took on a moral aspect: The warriors, the wild predators, had been meant to rule, but they had been cheated of their patrimony. The primeval Aryan warrior spirit might still be present in the German people, much as the heroic lupine character survived in at least some dogs.

http://www.amazon.com/Animals-Third-Reich-Boria-Sax/dp/0922558701/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1463909656&sr=1-1&keywords=Animals+in+the+Third+Reich

Reply



whyevolutionistrue

May 23, 2016 at 5:06 am

Everybody in this thread who claims that Darwinism motivated the Nazis should read Bob Richards’ meticulously researched essay, “[Was Hitler a Darwinian?](#)” (Answer, NO!)

Reply



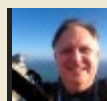
Rolf Degen

May 23, 2016 at 9:02 am

From the cited book:

The Nazis had no official position with respect to human origins. Walter Gross, who headed the Nazi party’s Office of Race Policy, advocated complete freedom of scientific research on the question (Deichmann, p. 270). The Nazis generally accepted Darwin, who seemed to hold out a promise of evolutionary progress.

Reply



Ant (@antallan)

May 23, 2016 at 9:34 am

Well, that statement suggests that they didn't really understand Darwinian evolution. Progress towards what? A slime mould is as much the end result of evolution as Hitler was.

/@

Reply



Tim Harris

May 24, 2016 at 7:52 am

Well, of course they didn't understand Darwin's theory of evolution. Nevertheless, they, like many eugenicists, racists and anti-Semites, drew on popular and mistaken understandings of Darwin's theory, in which evolution and 'progress' were often conflated, and of course it was expedient to (mis)use the authority of science to support their disgusting ideas. They did refer to Darwin's theory to support their ideas, but the real point that needs to be made is that Darwin was and is not to blame for the abuse, cynical or otherwise, of his ideas.

Reply



musical beef

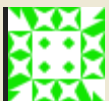
May 23, 2016 at 12:01 pm

I think you're requiring "kind of" to do much more work than it can actually do. "Citing human evolutionary history" is not the same thing as making up an ideologically motivated (mis)interpretation of Darwin and pretending it actually mandates something.

But even if leaders had cited legitimate science about human behavior and its evolution, would that make Pinker's main point wrong and Horgan right?

Reply

26.



Dev


May 23, 2016 at 3:56 am

While I agree almost entirely with Dr. Pinker's admonition of Horgan's silliness, one statement Pinker makes, "history contains no examples of a leader justifying a war by citing human evolutionary history" I must disagree with. The most cursory glance at Mein Kampf reveals that Hitler was essentially a zoological anarchist who believed that the entire opus of life ought to be

violent conflict between different racial groups for land and food. Adolf even cited Darwin as a partial inspiration for his worldview and clearly viewed the justification for WWII in Europe as 'natural' and evolutionary.


Reply

27. Pingback: [John Horgan And Agendas | Ramblings](#)

28.  **Dominic**
May 23, 2016 at 6:23 am


Horgan is clearly wrong on the roots of war. In addition to the Kenyan example, <http://intl.pnas.org/content/112/36/11217.abstract>
also –
<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2007/03/070316-britain-tombs.html>

Reply

29.  **jayfancher**
May 23, 2016 at 9:01 am


Reblogged this on [Anthropology Now](#).

Reply

30.  **geokush**
May 24, 2016 at 7:32 pm

Reblogged this on [Dr Geoff Kushnick](#).

Reply

31.  **Miron Boland**
May 24, 2016 at 9:26 pm

One can only hope that Pinker is not still paying student loans while feeling compelled to argue

with idiots.

[Reply](#)

32.



Joseph Ratliff

May 28, 2016 at 10:04 am

Reblogged this on [The Ratliff Notepad](#).

[Reply](#)

33.



Jackson

May 30, 2016 at 4:02 pm

Wonderful group of 'columns' on this topic. Thanks for trackball ping backs at the end for other blogs.

[Reply](#)

34.



santiago

June 5, 2016 at 12:59 pm

I don't know about deep roots, but what certainly is equal to permanent war is permanent weapon industry.

[Reply](#)

35. Pingback: [A Pep Talk from Steven Pinker – Low News](#)

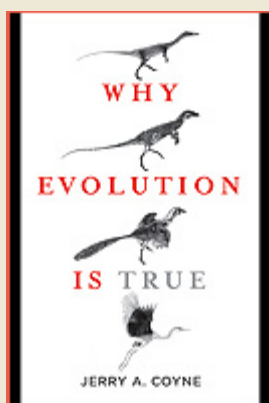
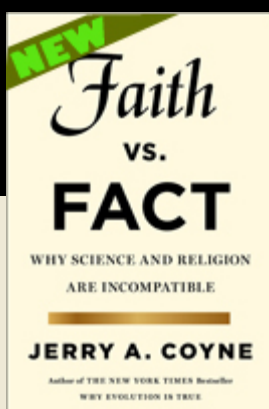
36. Pingback: [A Pep Talk from Steven Pinker – The News 24](#)

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