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Steven Pinker's *The Blank Slate: An Essay & Review*

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About a decade ago I 1<sup>st</sup> encountered the hirsute linguist Steven Pinker on an episode of the PBS interview show *Thinking Allowed*. It was a 3-part interview & I tuned in each week- so persuasive & direct were the man's ideas on the mind & language. I read his later book *How The Mind Works*, & many other essays written for popular magazines. Unlike a Carl Sagan (who was wont to hyperbole), or a Stephen Jay Gould (prone to putting good science 2<sup>nd</sup> to poetic explication), SP seemed to strike the balance between the 2- especially cogent at deconstructing the arguments of others in detail & lucidity. I had hoped to get him for an interview on [Omniversica](#), but- alas- his schedule was too busy.

His latest book- *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial Of Human Nature* (2002)- follows in the trail of the prior books, which established SP as 1 of the top dogs in neural science. In this review I want to focus a little bit on how well SP writes, as well as discussing his ideas. The former I want to put out there for this reason- rarely is the writing style of a science book ever approached; save for famously nebulous koans as *lucid, thrilling*, or *enthraling*. What exactly do terms like that mean, in general, & specifically related to the work at hand? That *is* a rhetorical question, folks.

I want to approach both of these aspects of his writing in a fairly straight-forward way. After I've chronologically highlighted some of the pros & cons of the book (artistically & scientifically), then I will go back & essay some of the ideas propounded in a bit more detail & depth.

The book's major premise is laid out in the opening chapters of the book- basically it's this: The triumvirate of ideologies upon which most of current human social engineering is based is wrong. That trio is the idea of *The Noble Savage* (NS)- that pre-societal hunter-gatherers lived a purer life, not prone to the excesses & evils of Modernity; *The Ghost In The Machine* (GIM)- a variant on the Cartesian Theater idea of the mind- i.e.- that there is some indissoluble 'essence' unique to animata, that is absent in inanimate. In other words, life is fundamentally different from non-life; whereas modern science reduces the differences to mere thresholds, or standards, that are arbitrary. Is a virus alive or not? Can a molecule or atom or quark be said to possess 'liveness', &/or at what stage of complexity is that threshold breached? The 3<sup>rd</sup>, & to SP the most noxious of the trio (hence its titular status), *The Blank Slate* (BS) is the idea that human intellect & nature is infinitely malleable- i.e.- B.F. Skinner's hardest -on! The BS comes from the Latin *tabula rasa* & SP identifies its rise with the works of 17<sup>th</sup> Century philosopher John Locke. SP attributes the contemporary wont to see all individuals as 'equal' stemming from this philosophy. All measurable differences are attributed to experience alone- i.e.- 'nurture'. As I go on I'll refer back to these ideas as SP elaborates, but his general thrust is a good 1. It's ridiculous to think that the only reason I cannot play baseball as well as Major Leaguers like Barry Bonds or Alex Rodriguez is because of my experiences. Flat-out, they are great athletes. I am not. Even were I to make their dedications to their craft pale, I still could not come near to them because I am not a great natural athlete. Similarly, in the opposite direction, I am a great poet. I have alot of natural ability with words & ideas, & no doubt my dedication to this craft has led me to my current status- but I've come across 1000s of would-be 'poets' who waste their lives trying to be *poets*, who just do not have '*the gift*', for lack of a better term. This is so manifest that it seems ludicrous that the idea ever got started in the 1<sup>st</sup> place. Oddly enough, though, this idea of the BS is used only selectively. Any suggestions that alcoholics are weak or fat people lazy or homosexuals perverse (perfectly reasonable hypotheses, according to the BS doctrine) are dismissed as bigotry. In effect, the BSers want their proverbial cake, & the ability to chow down, as well. SP brinks no such tendencies.

That goes as well for the other 2 doctrines. The NS SP actually attributes to John Dryden's 1670 poem *The Conquest Of Granada*:

I am free as nature first made man,  
Ere the base laws of servitude began.  
When wild in woods the noble savage ran.

Still, although the idea is falsely 1<sup>st</sup> attributed to 18<sup>th</sup> Century philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, there is little doubt it was JJR that popularized the notion- not JD. This is sort of a more specialized addendum to the BS- basically that indigenous humans are child-like, innocent, & free of violence, greed, lust, & the baser human

emotions. His idea was a reaction to the dominant view of the day, espoused by 17<sup>th</sup> Century philosopher Thomas Hobbes (*Is it not high time we ban such useless professions as philosophy- or its egregious Modern bastard spawn- ethology?*), that ‘...the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short’ was true. SP sees current slavishness to ‘natural’ & ‘organic’ products as evidence of this current benighted rejection of Modernity & its creature comforts. I’ve long agreed. I call this ‘Chicken Littleism’. People always yearn for days of yore when things were better, sunsets were more beautiful, & decency was all about. People point to global warming, AIDS, ethnic cleansing, serial killing, & terrorism as proof that now is not as good as yesteryears. Conveniently they elide right over things such as lack of female suffrage, slavery, Jim Crow, Colonialism, World Wars 1 & 2, Vietnam, the Cold War, the Civil War, Communism’s horrors, Fascism’s horrors, & even such banal things as pop up toasters, penicillin, & television. I ask you, go back in 25 year increments & ask if you cannot detect steady progress? In the year 2003, as I write, look at all around. Now, recall 1978: no computers, the Cold War, no MTV, the Oil Crisis. Go back to 1953: Jim Crow, lynchings, the Cold War, McCarthyism, no cure for polio. Back to 1928: the verge of the Great Depression (in the USA- in Europe it was already underway), Prohibition, Al Capone, the rise of Nazism & Stalinism. Now 1903: still Jim Crow, Child Labor, no electricity outside of small urban enclaves, a morass of a US war in the Philippines, no female suffrage. Given my choice I’d sooner live in 2003 than go back- & I’d wager that 2028 will be far better than 2003. The NS has unraveled so thoroughly that it even seems a little odd, & late, that SP thinks it still holds sway today. After all, it is now known (just to limit the idea to its North American archetypes) that when the ancestors of Native Americans arrived across the Bering land bridge 10-12,000 years ago that they lived in a constant state of war & hatred with each other for eons (a fact that Europeans exploited in a convenient divide & conquer tactic), often resorted to genocide, slavery, & cannibalism, they wiped out almost all the large mammals that populated the continent at the time (according to Jared Diamond in *Guns, Germs, And Steel* this played a pivotal role in Native Americans’ lack of technological advancement millennia later- they had no beasts of burden- BOBs), & were therefore easy prey for the BOB-ful European Conquistadores!), as well as wiping out earlier human arrivals such as the Kennewick Man’s people, & other intriguing fossil finds. It is also well-known that native Americans were wanton in their destruction of forests (flora) & buffalo (fauna), as well. Huge piles of bison bones have been found where the animals were driven off cliffs en masse. Of the 100s of beasts only a few dozen were ever eaten before scavengers finished them off. So how does the ridiculous NS idea remain? SP attributes it to a distrust of Modernity, but I would add a good dash of Madison Avenue exploitation also helps.

Idea #3 that SP takes his anger out on is the GIM- the idea propounded by 17<sup>th</sup> Century philosopher Rene Descartes. Of the 3 ideas (or ideals) this is actually the 1 that SP is least convincing on. The reason simply being that despite all the tests & cognitive studies, there has yet to be an alternative that answers all the mysteries of consciousness. The fact that the dog may eternally have to chase its tail in this field suggests, to me, that the GIM will surpass the other 3 in longevity. SP initially tries to explain away the GIM by showing the structure of rhetoric that has blossomed around the idea- such as ‘use your head’ implying a distinction between the you & the mind/soul/essence, etc. Overall I think SP does a decent, though not complete, assault on the idea, but (much like Daniel Dennett- oft-cited by SP- in his Multiple Drafts theory of consciousness expounded in *Consciousness Explained*) he leaves little niggling openings that a lot of *his* arguments are mere semiotics. Personally I doubt the homuncular idea of consciousness, but it hangs on as a viable alternative for the alternatives’ failures. Some of these alternatives are elucidated by SP, but with far more attributed success than is accepted by most. The real problem with the GIM is that- unlike the BS & NS, it is far harder to prove empirically. More on this later. Oddly, SP ends his assault on this trinity by defending philosophy as a profession- because of its influence, which he has just detailed as far too often being noxious.

This trinity also leaves wide areas of speculation open about things such as criminality, homosexuality, addiction, race, sexuality, etc. SP later opines that people fear that if genes have *some* influence on people, that influence is conflated with *total* influence. This is easily disproved, & SP does so at some length & with great clarity. But why do people conflate some with total? Probably because of innate human laziness, & the distortions that pervade the media- especially in soundbiting ideas that need speechifying to elucidate thoroughly.

1 of the best areas that SP manages to elucidate his views is that of the famed ‘twin studies’ of recent decades- wherein researchers will delineate all the habits & predilections of identical twins raised apart, & marvel at how similar their lives end up: similar favorite colors, spouses that look similar or are from the same ethnic backgrounds, political views, sexual histories, favorite sports &/or sports teams, etc. You know the drill. This is not unexpected rhetorically, nor scientifically, since identical twins share the same DNA. SP also well illustrates

that this is NOT a reason to fear cloning since a clone is a de facto identical twin merely born at a later time- not a replica of the cell donor. At these points SP has few peers in elucidation. Clarity is his explicative gift. But, the nagging thing about SP's dialectic is how easily he seems to slide by contradictory evidence. Yes, twin studies are intriguing. But no mention is made of other twin studies (that I've here & there read about over the years) where a large %- anywhere from 20-70% of identical twins- do NOT share such alarming similarities. This applies for twins raised apart & together. This also suggests a skewing of data & or the controls of the testing. This means researchers may just ignore unsupported data, or exclude possible twin sets that will not fit the preconception before the testing is begun. This does not imply deliberation (although it could) on the part of researchers, but it has to be taken into account that even unconscious biases on the part of the researchers can skew 'evidence'. Before twin studies became the rage the 'paradigm' for twins was the good/evil dichotomy- or, more prosaically, that the twins would be night & day, as different internally as they were similar externally. &, I must admit, I found this to be true with a couple of twin pairs I knew in Junior High & High School. A male set of twins- J & K- were classic: J was outgoing, successful with girls, into sports, & at the center of a social group, while K was withdrawn, shy, less athletic, & a studious loner. The pair of female twins were less diametrically opposed & more apposite, but still there were disparities. A was more social & popular with boys while D was more of a thinker, & into ideas. Does this disprove twin studies? No. I think both archetypes of the similar twins & the dualistic twins are correct- but only at the extremes of experience- perhaps anywhere from 10-25% on each side. That still leaves a wide area for all sorts of singular permutations on those themes to emerge- anywhere from 50-80% of twins- people who have been conveniently & curiously overlooked in both study & paradigm-making.

Then again, it may not be so curious since I see 2 modern parallels to twin studies in other endeavors. The 1<sup>st</sup> is in the relatively hard sciences of cosmology & cosmogony, where the Big Bang theory has held sway despite mounting evidence that does not support many of its conclusions- mainly 1) the conundrum that has bedeviled reliquists for eons (updated to): *If the Big Bang was the beginning, what came before the Big Bang?* & 2) The fundamental absence of a lot of supporting evidence that would be predicted by Big Bang physics- from strings & superstrings to dark matter & dark energy. Yet the Big Bang hegemony has constructed elaborate Rube Goldbergian ad hoc explanations to explain away these gaps, rather than admit that some modified form of the old Steady State cosmos exists- 1 where *the* Big Bang was merely *a* big bang. The 2<sup>nd</sup> area that much of the twin studies seems to find parallels with is in the belief in Near Death Experiences (NDEs). Let me state that I do not believe NDEs are truly NDEs, but rather the last second panic-modes of a dying brain that are remembered upon improbable revival. & believe me, I've had a NDE & believe the latter to be true. That said, there is the classic NDE of a weightless incorporeal essence of you floating toward some bright light where you encounter a Jesus/Buddha/deity & look back on your life surrounded by loved ones who have died. Unfortunately, this is just not the majority of NDEs. Most NDEs are far more prosaic & range from typical dream-like experiences (such as I had- however bizarre), to downright Hellish nightmares. But only the 'float to the light' NDEs are propagated by believers- convenient 'proof' of an afterdeath. In this way, NDEs also resemble claims of alien abduction, in that those 'abductions' which have occurred in the USA over the last 30 years or so are done by perverse bug-eyed gray dwarves, whereas other cultures report a wild menagerie of extraterrestrial kidnapers. Regardless, the parallels to twin studies is there, & it is something SP should have delved a little more deeply & cleanly in to. Still, overall, the explanation is a pretty convincing hammer to wield against the trinity.

SP then goes on to elaborate about how certain genes cause a cascade effect in the real world; that a gene originally meant for 1 thing or a specific task, can cause a different set of circumstances to perpetuate. I will quote fully from page 49 to show both the explanation & the masterly writing style SP uses to convey the idea:

...A human example comes from Woody Allen. Though his fame, fortune, and ability to attract beautiful women may depend on having genes that enhance a sense of humor, In *Stardust Memories* he explains to an envious childhood friend that there is a crucial environmental factor as well: "We live in a society that puts a big value on jokes...If I had been an Apache Indian, those guys didn't need comedians, so I'd be out of work."

The meaning of findings in behavioral genetics for our understanding of human nature has to be worked out for each case. An aberrant gene that causes a disorder shows the standard version of the gene is necessary to have a normal human mind. But what the standard version does is not immediately obvious. If a gear with a broken tooth goes *clunk* on every turn, we do not conclude that the tooth in its intact form

was a clunk-suppressor. And so a gene that disrupts a mental ability need not be a defective version of a gene that is 'for' that ability....

This is both SP & science writing at its best. 1<sup>st</sup> SP uses a very accessible example to make a point. Even folk unfamiliar with Woody Allen's films knows the nerdy nebbish type he portrays. A keen insight & humor may have been something that, in earlier times, may have led WA to be a court jester or fool (a role he essayed in an earlier film); a professional sycophant, whose soothings allowed him to escape hanging or torture, & let such a gene for humor spread. Whereas originally such a gene may have had literal life or death consequences, the modern version of Woody Allen can parlay such a gene's benefit to bed down with famous actresses & make a good deal of \$- purposes for which his 'humor gene' was not originally intended. Then SP turns that idea upside down with the vivid 'faulty gear' analogy. Look at the lucidity & piquancy of the example & how much excess writing it saves. & the gear analogy works. Think of the last decade or so & the almost comical attempt to find a 'gay gene' or a 'gay brain' or genes for all manner of 'abnormal' human behaviors. Because something is a little different in a gay or alcoholic mind does not mean that by 'fixing' that aberrance you will have turned a homosexual's desire to boffing a Pamela Anderson, nor an alcoholic's tastes to chewing gum. What a nifty & brief argument- & I think is correct. Before I move on, just reread the above passage again & marvel at how much information is folded into this concise bundle of 178 words, & for how many pages a lesser writer & thinker would have droned on to hammer the point home.

As SP goes on he compares homicide rates among 'noble savages' to their more civilized counterparts & finds that the NS's kill at far higher rates than we benighted Westerners who have been labeled the provocateurs of all the world's ills. This does not excuse Colonialism nor slavery, but the fact that, even factoring in Western 20th Century wars & genocides the Civilized World still has lower rates of murder, is amazing. & I have not read any credible rebuttals to SP's statistics so I will grant their rectitude. But, pages 57-58 has a paragraph that is 1 of the best in the book, for it takes on so many of the ills of our PC-obsessed society:

It is, of course, understandable that people are squeamish about acknowledging the violence of pre-state societies. For centuries the stereotype of the savage savage was used as a pretext to wipe out indigenous peoples and steal their lands. But surely it is unnecessary to paint a false picture of a people as peaceable and ecologically conscientious in order to condemn the great crimes against them, *as if genocide were wrong only when the victims are nice guys.* [*italics mine!*]

SP is absolutely correct. Because a nasty person is nasty, a liar lies, or an accountant is crooked, does not mean that they are deserving of being tortured, raped, & then drawn & quartered. Yet, we need not gloss over the nasty's nastiness, the liar's lies, nor the accountant's embezzlement. Here SP illustrates his own set of morals- his word choice- & how judiciously he tosses his ideals around. Personally, I'd have liked to have seen him clearly demarcate morals (which come from without & are grounded by a culture) from ethics (which are inward generated & free of outside opinion). Nonetheless, piquant & smack-on observations like the 1 just quoted are 1 of SP's best tools.

In a chapter on 'Culture Vultures' SP tackles the growing trend toward 'autism' as a label for any kid who's a little- shall we say?- stupid. Rather, I should say he glosses over it a bit too simply for my taste. Just as he stripped away arguments for specific genes for specific results I'd've liked to have seen SP take on the growing plethora of silly ills that have been propagated in the last decade or so- from autism to ADHD- & , even worse, the false diagnoses & medications prescribed for behaviors that are just fringe elements to be found on any Bell Curve of possible human behaviors & reactions. Instead, he focuses on another contemporary trend- the culture preservationists- be they of things or of ideas. He assails the preserve-at-all-costs mentality of some as an impediment to progress. He then convincingly cites Thomas Sowell & Jared Diamond to bolster his points about cultural success having little to do with genetic excellence. As an excellent poet, I especially disdain lesser lights who believe language must subscribe to Classical ideals at all times, even as I likewise disdain those subjectivist notions that there are no standards whatsoever. But, preservationism is a weird thing. Here in the Twin Cities there recently opened a museum to flour milling. The state spent years & millions of dollars rehabbing a burnt out old mill that had crumbled to- literally- eye level, & did so under the guise of 'preservation'. The real motive was an abstracted sense of pride & kickbacks to assorted cronies in the construction industry, but to preservationists it seemed almost palpably a need to have this museum to connect to the past, lest they would be adrift in the future. Bizarre, alright! It's 1 thing to wanna preserve what's still here, but to resurrect something

that's passed seems foolish. More often than not there was a good & viable reason the thing's time had passed! An obvious example is the Latin language- whose descendant lingos far surpassed its progenitor in expressiveness.

Still later in the book SP tackles the BS again- declaring it all but dead. SP starts by showing how plastic the brain is, how areas that are for 1 function can be moved to other areas during damage. Yet, he states this does not prove brain plasticity. Things such as sensory input do not equate with the total structure of the brain. Because slight changes in input might lead to later divergences in a personality does not imply that reasoning or mathematical aptitudes will be similarly plastic. This is just 1 of several arguments SP uses convincingly. Still, in all of his examples, I get the feeling that SP is subconsciously not looking at other data- studies, for example, where formerly comatose patients recall incidents that occurred in their rooms months or years earlier, or where people who seemingly lost the power of speech or comprehension, after regaining those powers, convey that they had not lost the powers of speech recognition & comprehension, merely the physical ability to convey information back to correspond with the input. Examples as this would refute the elegant arguments SP lays out convincingly against higher grades of neural plasticity, yet he ignores them, even as he points out similar lapses in others' thinking & dialectic.

In effect, my objection- a minor 1, granted- is that I can accept debunking a groundless canard like 'We only use 10% of our brain.' [*just an example- SP does not essay that I*], but I want to see other seemingly flighty canards addressed- pro or con- without just assuming the debunking of 1 canard equates with the debunking of all canards! For 1 as thorough as SP I do not believe this is asking too much.

Another example is when SP takes on the issue of homosexuality itself. SP grants that numerous factors can go in to why some boys- at puberty- become gay & others do not. Among the reasons are genes, hormones, numerous minor biological & psychological causes, as well as pure chance. Yet, SP then turns around & states that *sexual orientation* (his term, as opposed to *sexual preference*) can almost never be changed. Yet no logical reason is propounded. Apparently the plasticity of youth, once hardened, can never melt. This flies in the face of the very logic SP talks of earlier, not to mention everyday experience. Human beings are highly adaptable. Just as there are closeted gays there are people who are not 'born gay' who- nonetheless- through circumstances- live gay lives. Why? Well, few scientists have ever studied the underground subculture of the sexual extremities, but many runaway children end up as prostitutes- often same-sex prostitutes who engage in things such as working at gay bar glory rows, places where gay men can stick their penises through a literal hole in a wall & be fellated anonymously- usually by underaged male & female runaways. Does this mean the fellaters are gay? Is a male prostitute, forced to choose between starvation & gay sex, gay because he chooses to avoid starvation? & how about all these children once they reach maturity? Some leave the business but continue the sexual practices they've learned. Is this learned behavior simply to be dismissed as statistically insignificant? This example is merely an illustration of the many factors most scientists are not even aware of, much less overlooking, when studies of human sexuality occur. But 1 need not even be a former child prostitute to be sexually malleable- simply a bad childhood experience, rejection by a mother, & kindness from a stranger whose only wish is sexual services, may be enough. I knew dozens of kids like this when I was young. & most of these kids had chosen these paths after puberty!

As the book continues there are numerous interesting experiments & anecdotes related- such as the effects of sewing shut a kitten's eye to see how it will develop. [*Ugh!- couldn't they have used rats? Poor kitty!*] 1 that SP seems confident in, but I deem dubious, is his backing of the Bell Curve idea that as a society becomes more just its classes will not divide along religious, racial, ethnic, or financial lines- but along talent/intellectual lines. SP then defends his argument in a # of statistical ways- the whole caboodle being summed up by this idea that as variance in non-genetic factors goes down, genetic factors must increase- & these would include intellect. But, here's where SP & the Bell Curve nonsense kibosh- things such as beauty & strength (the female & male *sines qua non*) are equally heritable (genetic) & subjective (non-genetic). Were this not true we would long ago have mutated into bodacious sex goddesses & hunky super-studs. We have not, because individual human preferences do not give a damn about perceived intellect when we get moist or hard (depending on our sex & sexual preferences). Why else would vapid bimbos & himbos be the dream lovers of even generally acknowledged intelligent people? Celebrities like Brad Pitt, Denzel Washington, Jennifer Lopez, & Jennifer Garner may be close to some ideals of physical perfection, but that hardly qualifies them as the best of the human lot. I'm very intelligent, but as a teenager I happily accepted a lay or blow job from girls who were airy as hell. Had I accidentally impregnated 1 would that have led to stratification? No. And this occurs millions of times a year! This is also why the worry over neo-eugenics is quite baseless. A race of superbeings is not gonna spring from a

flawed process, governed by flawed creators. 1 parents' dream child is another's hohum. Blond hair & blue eyes? Perhaps the ideal to Euro-heritaged folk, but not to Arabs. Many a rich powerful man has impregnated a dumb female lover, & the opposite is also true- many a lonely intelligent woman has gotten knocked up by the 1<sup>st</sup> loser who was willing to give her a stiffy. & I don't wanna even get in to the very problems of the idea of intelligence itself- its many cultural aspects, as well as emotional vs. intellectual intelligence. In this regard SP slips too comfortably back in to the role of the egghead who has not examined the real world closely enough. What researchers tend to forget is that men mate for physical appeal foremost, & women mate for monetary or caregiving ability. These are not inextricably bound with intelligence- in fact, they are at best occasionally tangential.

As for eugenics itself, SP touches on its 1<sup>st</sup> misguided incarnation, & the spuriousness of its being charged against several prominent scientists in the 1990s re: their work researching the Yanomamö tribe in Amazonia. Unfortunately SP blindly swallows the charge that eugenics is bad. This based upon the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century racist-based implementation of it in the USA by #s of famed scientists. But, that only proved the misuse of eugenics is bad- not the proper use to alleviate genetic defects, disease, pain, & starvation. I am wholeheartedly pro-eugenics & pro-euthenics. It's a minor flaw that SP does not make this distinction, but a flaw nonetheless. He ends this particular chapter with some redemption, by tackling the subjective/objective problem head on by showing how social scientists conflate genetic influence on *some* things with perceptions that it influences *all* things, & genetic *influence* on human behavior with genetic *determinism* on human behavior. This is a key point SP is correct in hammering home.

Now let me point out an instance of where SP correctly chides a fellow scientist for erroneous thinking, only to mimic the error himself. On pages 124-125 he tackles the notoriously liberal (& some would chime *gullible*) humanist paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould:

Twenty years later, Gould wrote that "*Homo sapiens* is not an evil or destructive species." His new argument comes from what he calls the Great Asymmetry. It is "an essential truth," he writes, that "good and kind people outnumber all others by thousands to one." Moreover, "we perform 10,000 acts of small and unrecorded kindness for each surpassingly rare, but sadly balancing, moment of cruelty." The statistics that make up this "essential truth" are pulled out of the air and are certainly wrong: psychopaths, who are definitely not "good and kind people," make up about three or four percent of the male population, not several hundredths of a percent. But even if we accept the figures, the argument assumes that for a species to count as "evil and destructive," it would have to be evil and destructive all the time, like a deranged postal worker on a permanent rampage. It is precisely because one act *can* balance ten thousand kind ones that we call it "evil."

SP rightly nails SJG for buying into the subjectivity naïve-te- as well his well-known penchant for declaiming things from on high on only SJG's authority. My own take on things is that most humans & human interactions (as well as cosmic interactions with us) run at the ratio of about 90% indifferent, 9% malicious, & 1% good- but I admit no scientific basis for my own subjective analysis of the matters of the cosmos & its human percipients. In a similar vein I've defeated many a similar spurious argument re: subjectivity/objectivity, as SP portrays SJG making re: evil. My take is this: for the universe to be objective it needs only 1 single element to objectify all about it- a de facto measuring stick. The only way to have a purely subjective cosmos is for the subjectivity to be total. More vividly, if I could imagine that the Pacific Ocean were 100% H<sub>2</sub>O (with no impurities, & then I pricked my finger & dripped a single drop of my blood into it, the ocean would no longer be pure- even if it would take eons for my blood to thin out sufficiently to be spread amongst the whole ocean.

Yet, if SJG is guilty of overstatement, then so is SP. After rightly nailing SJG he, too goes into hyperbole mode- if not misreading mode. He ends a section with a quote from SJG, comment, a 2<sup>nd</sup> SJG quote, & a final comment:

...In a world of nuclear bombs, such unchanged (and perhaps unchangeable) inheritances may now spell our undoing (or at least propagate our tragedies)- but we cannot be blamed for these moral failings. Our accursed genes have made us creature of the night.

In this passage Gould presents a more-or-less reasonable summary of why scientists might think that human violence can be illuminated by evolution. But then he casually slips in some outrageous non sequiturs (“an ultimate escape from full moral responsibility,” “we cannot be blamed”), as if the scientists had no choice but to believe those, too. He concludes his essay:

In 1525, thousands of German peasants were slaughtered... , and Michelangelo worked on the Medici Chapel... Both sides of this dichotomy represent our common, evolved humanity. Which, ultimately, shall we choose? As to the potential path of genocide and destruction, let us take this stand. It need not be. We can do otherwise.

The implication is that anyone who believes that the causes of genocide might be illuminated by an understanding of the evolved makeup of human beings is in fact taking a stand *in favor* of genocide!

Where, exactly, does SP read that as SJG's argument? While SP is right in criticizing earlier SJG arguments, in no way was SJG arguing what SP claims in the end. & it's not because I have misquoted. SJG's simply stating life is better than death. Now, SP may have poorly selected his quotes, & SJG may *be* arguing what SP claims, BUT it is NOT there in the selection I quote from SP's quote of SJG! Hyperbole (& *hyperventilation?*), thy name is Pinker? Either way the fault is SP's, not SJG's!

Then SP tackles morals & meaning, & the right wing's obsession with it. I, for 1, will my own meaning- viva volition! Then we get another misquote of SJG. Do you think the 2 men had a little animus between them? In discussing genetic discoveries undermining moral responsibility SP ends the section thusly:

On one wing we have Gould asking the rhetorical question:

Why do we want to fob off responsibility for our violence and sexism upon our genes?

And on the other wing we find (journalist Andrew) Ferguson raising the same point:

The “scientific belief” would...appear to be corrosive of any notion of free will, personal responsibility, or universal morality.

For Rose and Gould the ghost in the machine is a “we” that can construct history and change the world at will. For Kass, Wolfe, and Ferguson it is a “soul” that makes moral judgments according to religious precepts. But all of them see genetics, neuroscience, and evolution as threats to this irreducible locus of free choice.

But note the charge against SJG is as if he believes that science threatens free will. Where does SP see this? The quote might mean that had SJG said ‘*Why do we want to fob off the propensity for our violence and sexism upon our genes?*’, but he said *responsibility*, not *the propensity*. That 1 word- responsibility- evaporates SP's charge. Responsibility is taking the heat for something regardless of its source. Is SP deliberately trying to asperse SJG, or just unaware of his misread? I don't know- although it is known the men shared a mutual antagonism. But these 2 examples of misreadings show SP's biggest weakness- out of his own specialized confines he is apt to flailing for argument. Fortunately, for most of the book he sticks to his personalized guns, & is deadly in his targeting. Unless he's not. On page 143 he states: ‘*Racial differences are largely adaptations to climate... eyelid folds were goggles for the tundra.*’ Huh? Wow, it's been decades since I've heard that canard spouted with seriousness. The prevailing theory for epicanthic folds amongst Mongoloid peoples is sexual selection. There is no benefit for the folds as SP describes, & no evidence that the epicanthus 1<sup>st</sup> developed in Arctic climes. More likely is that some Asian warlord decreed that his lovers with slightly slanty eyes were the most beautiful, & women with such were highly prized as potential mothers. Can I prove this? No- but the point is that SP's built-in goggles theory was long ago dismissed as without foundation. Fortunately, moments as this are the exception, not SP's rule- as he shows a few pages later whilst debunking the black-white IQ mythos. He shows so with philosopher John Rawls' noted theory of social justice & a society of pre-born souls drawing up their ideal society.

He then tackles rape & shows that by pointing out some of the biological underpinnings to the act 1 is in no way justifying it for, as he quotes Katherine Hepburn to Humphrey Bogart in *The African Queen*, ‘*Nature, Mr.*

*Allnut, is what we were put in this world to rise above.*' Stating a nature, even if just an individuated 1, in no way is a justification; merely a reason. I've always had a natural inclination for violence- but I have never ceded my will to it. In all my years of watching the NFL (as New York Giants fan, & despite their having won 2 Super Bowls- as of this writing) my favorite New York Giants/NFL moment came in the mid-1980s when Giants linebacker Lawrence Taylor & Giants defensive lineman Leonard Marshall crunched Washington Redskins quarterback Joe Theismann's leg so hard on a sack that you could hear it snap like a stick & see the bone jut out from the skin. I hated Theismann & loved what happened to him- but because it was 'TV'- not a real thing. I've never had the desire to duplicate the feat on some stranger in a mall. But, the vicarious joy of seeing it happen on TV- well, that's simply not where 'real' violence occurs; at least not real in my individuated sphere.

He then argues against the death penalty- relying on some of the old canards (that he never actually states), yet counters that the punitive necessity for the punishment to exist is for the good of society- quite a dexterous ballet! He then assails those who equate justice with vengeance- as if that's wrong. Justice *IS* vengeance & there's nothing wrong with it- if done fairly & impartially- that's the real point! Even so, reading SP argue with himself, at times, is fun, because he is so good with words. Some of his overstatements also stick with me. This from page 189: *'Finally, the doctrine of a soul that outlives the body is anything but righteous, because it necessarily devalues the lives we live on this earth.'* Necessarily devalues? Perhaps in the minds of nuts like the murderous Susan Smith he uses as an example- but it is not a necessity to rational folk- they are just grasping at air out of fear. It does not mean they are unappreciative when they suck in that air during respiration.

But these are minor flaws; his later arguments on the virtues of abortion (he is pro-abortion- let's damn the euphemisms!) are classic & brilliant- showing the mental contortions related to 'ensoulment'. It's actually quite funny to get into the mind of a dim-witted anti-abortionist that way! Although, he later commits a sin of understatement re: abortion. From page 269: *'...pro-choice [EUPHEMISM ALERT!- Dan] advocates are missing the point when they say, in the words of the bumper sticker, "If you're against abortion don't have one." If someone believes abortion is immoral, then allowing other people to engage in it is not an option, any more than allowing people to rape or murder is an option.'* What is unsaid is that the wrongness of rape & murder of full-grown human beings is not a sign of psychosis, but believing a fetus is a full-grown human being is psychosis- a fundamental break from reality. In fact, the whole of religious belief has often been argued as mass psychosis! Furthermore, that belief is also pathological- if not downright psychopathic. In other spots he hits home runs, too. A good example is his use of Adam Smith's moral dilemma over how should someone properly act if the whole of China were wiped out, or his takes on the Free Market's mythic 'invisible hand'. Personally, I think all have missed the point- especially re: taxes. The argument is not over high or low taxation of goods & services, but efficient vs. inefficient taxation. I don't mind paying higher taxes if I know I'll get good value & services for that. But if my government(s) squander(s) my taxes I don't care if they barely tax me- it's still robbery! He then argues over the Utopian & Tragic Visions of Mankind- & applies them to the politicization of it vis-à-vis crime. Utopians see criminals as sick & seek prevention while the Tragicks see penalties deterring the rational incentives for crime. But both views are pointless re: strictly violent crime- & most criminal acts are violence- not self-driven. He later comes to an astonishing admission for such an authority to declare- not only do *we* not know what causes crime, but neither does *he*. As for violence- he reiterates the idea that we should not waste time learning how kids learn to be aggressive, they just are. The important point is to teach them not to be aggressive. A little later on SP falls prey to an urban legend- he cites the rise in street crime from 1985-1993 as evidence of the 'crack' epidemic the media so touted during that inglorious Reagan-Bush era. But as someone who lived on the NYC streets from the late 1960s until 1991 I know that's a fallacy. The 'epidemic' was media hype because boiled cocaine had finally reached affluent suburban white kids. For those of us in the slums, we were familiar with crack by its former street name- 'pop'- going back to the mid 1960s. It was merely the voracity of young rich white drug addicts that increased the violent crime- not the drug. He then admits how naïve he was growing up in Canada, & how right his parents were regarding the necessity of law & order- as well as contrasting US & Canadian expansionism with subsequent patterns in criminality that are still with us. He then argues brilliantly against sexism, & (lacking contradiction) for there being some genetic components to occasional male tendencies toward rape. I won't detail them, as others have longwindedly pro'd & con'd them to death.

Towards the end of the book SP waxes on about art &, next to economics, it's probably the weakest section of the book. Why? Because SP does not have a Creationary intellect. In talking about evolutionary reasons for artistic natures he misses a major point: good art is always around; it simply is rarely- if ever- actively promoted by the domos of the day. Conversely, those domos worship the outside 'geniuses' from earlier eras, & revile the

earlier domos who dissed those 'greats' - just as they diss & revile the greats in their time. He then misses a point about Postmodernism- as well as Modernism, too. Yes, the major PMer's claimed art was not about beauty, but they were manifestly wrong- all the greatest works from these avowed ugly-lovers are beautiful & multi-dimensional, while their lesser stuff is not. Those PMers who have succeeded have done so in spite of themselves. Has anyone written more lovely poetic prose than James Joyce at his best? Perhaps, but that only illustrates the point! They may have intended ideas to overwhelm beauty, but smart folk know that intention is worthless in art. PMers, in their willingness to abolish the idea that aesthetics serve ideas in art, failed to notice that they'd merely inverted the equation: their ideas served their aesthetics. Yet, SP again misses a point- from page 416: '*...the political messages of most postmodern pieces are utterly banal, like "racism is bad."* [So far so good.- Dan] *But they are stated so obliquely that viewers are made to feel morally superior for being able to figure them out.*' The 2<sup>nd</sup> part is dead wrong- the problem with most PoMo is that it hits you over the head with it's message &/or intent! Unfortunately SP buys in to the Revivalist notion that art- real art- is coming back. It never went away, it goes in cycles. He then cites some notoriously banal movements like New Narrativism & New Formalism (Neo-Formalism or Neo-Fo). The truth is you can name hacks & Masters in both pre-Modernism & Modernism & its descendants. He even names 1 of the poor Neo-Fos, [Frederick Turner](#), whose work is strikingly void of beauty. In a 2002 interview with Slate magazine here is SP on his views of contemporary art: '*My quarrel isn't with Modernism itself, but with the dogmatic versions that came to dominate the elite arts and bred the even more extreme doctrines of postmodernism. These movements were based on a militant denial of human nature, especially the idea that people are born with a capacity to experience aesthetic pleasure. Beauty in art, narrative in fiction, melody in music, meter and rhyme in poetry, ornament and green space in architecture, were considered bourgeois and lightweight, or products of mass-marketing. Instead, modernist and postmodernist art was intended to raise our consciousnesses, illustrate a theory, or shock us out of our middle-class stupor.*' As I showed, this is a correct assessment of the aims of these movements, but not the results.

Yet, again, these are all nitpicks. The book is a wonderful achievement, & the last chapter, in which SP quotes Mark Twain & Isaac Bashevis Singer, is a classic in science writing. Now, as promised, I will expound a bit more on the ideas, rather than the book itself, SP engages. I'll also tackle its reception.

I take it that SP is a fairly moderate fellow- he strikes me as neither a goofy liberal, nor a blindered conservative. His major failings are in his grasp of economics & the arts. But this is not unusual for a scientist. At least he passes up most opportunities to opine philosophically- for worse than economists & artists are the damnable philosophers. Only modern day 'ethicists' are more useless. I mentioned his myopia re: art, but he does flail away a bit when tackling economics. For example, he praises the ideal that commodities have 'no fixed value' & that the opposing view is just Utopian naïve-te. While technically true, this assertion is mind-numbingly simplistic, & also 1 that could only be asserted by an Academic outside the real world economy. No dispensation is made for the real forces that make 'no fixed value' a dream: cartels, monopolies, oligopolies, price fixing, hoarding, redlining, pork barrels, keeping multiple account records, & slush funds, etc.

Then, again, the book is not an economic treatise- its aim is spelled out in its inner jacket print:

*In The Blank Slate*, Steven Pinker, bestselling author of *The Language Instinct* and *How the Mind Works*, explores the idea of human nature and its moral, emotional, and political colorings. He shows how many intellectuals have denied the existence of human nature by embracing three linked dogmas: The Blank Slate (the mind has no innate traits), The Noble Savage (people are born good and corrupted by society), and The Ghost in the Machine (each of us has a soul that makes choices free from biology). Each dogma carries a moral burden, so their defenders have engaged in the desperate tactics to discredit the scientists who are now challenging them.

Pinker tries to inject calm and rationality into these debates by showing that equality, progress, responsibility, and purpose have nothing to fear from discoveries about rich human nature. He disarms even the most menacing threats with clear thinking, common sense, and pertinent facts from science and history. Despite its popularity among intellectuals during much of the twentieth century, he argues, the doctrine of the Blank Slate may have done more harm than good. It denies our common humanity and our individual preferences, replaces hardheaded analyses of social problems with feel-good slogans, and distorts our understanding of government, violence, parenting, and the arts.

Of course, the back jacket blurbery goes over the top:

A remarkable book-- stimulating, fearless, immensely learned, and a pleasure to read.  
-Orlando Patterson, author of *The Ordeal of Integration*.

**[What peeves me is the utter lack of even attempting a single word of individuated description.]**

A mind-blowing, mind-opening exposé ... In characteristically erudite, analytic and provocative style, Pinker illustrates how convictions of dubious validity about human nature have ruled institutions on an epic scale. His profoundly positive arguments for the compatibility of biology and humanism are unrivaled for their scope and depth and should be mandatory, if disquieting, reading.

-Patricia Goldman-Rakic, Eugene Higgins Professor of Neuroscience, Yale University

**[A bit better.]**

With a powerful combination of erudition, style, and courage, Steven Pinker shatters taboos on all sides as he restores the concept of human nature to its proper place--at the center of how we think about ourselves and our communities.

-Michael Lind, coauthor of *The Radical Center*

**[OK, except for the gratuitous & silly charge of courage. Hold me, I'm shivering!]**

In a work of outstanding clarity, sheer brilliance, and unmitigated good sense, Steven Pinker banishes forever fears that a biological understanding of human nature threatens humane values.

-Helena Cronin, author of *The Ant and the Peacock*

**[Forever? Read on for some of his critics!]**

A brilliant book...*The Blank Slate* is not just a debunking job but explains wonderfully fascinating alternatives to the social constructionist mindset. And it is so very well written and entertaining that it's bound to generate great interest and enthusiasm."

-Denis Dutton, editor of *Arts and Letters Daily*

**[The best blurb so far.]**

This tour de force takes the reader on an unforgettable voyage....With this magnum opus, a new polymath arrives on the world intellectual scene.

-Martin Seligman, former president, American Psychological Association; author of *Learned Helplessness and Authentic Happiness*

**[What's that in Marty's mouth?]**

The best book on human nature that I or anyone else will ever read. Truly a magnificent job.

-Matt Ridley, author of *Genome*

**[Ain't omniscience wonderful?]**

The ideas in this book introduce exciting new considerations for conflict resolution and peacemaking that go deeper than conventional analyses.

--M. James Wilkinson, former deputy U.S. representative, United Nations Security Council

**[The UN is not a place to go fishing for intellectual depth!]**

A humane and thoughtful book, *The Blank Slate* will surprise many who are fearful of the 'consequences' of a biologically informed conception of what it means to be human.

--Eugenie Scott, executive director, National Center for Science Education

### **[A book anthropomorphized- NEXT!]**

Unfortunately, the non-jacket blurbs were just as silly. Here's a few:

The Blank Slate is brilliant in several dimensions. It is enjoyable, informative, clear, humane and sensible. ... It is difficult to be morally sensitive while treading on people's dreams. But Pinker manages it, while never compromising on the point that good morals and politics need to acknowledge the truth about human beings as they are, rather than how we might like them to be.

-Simon Blackburn, *New Scientist*, September 5, 2002.

### **[Morally sensitive?- Did he miss the part about scientific impartiality?]**

"Pinker's case is convincing and cogent, and he does a service in presenting the arguments, and the associated scientific evidence, in such an accessible fashion. Given the importance of the questions he discusses, his book is required reading."

-A. C. Grayling, *Literary Review*, September 2002.

### **[Textbook phone-in blurbery.]**

Every once in a while, a book comes along that compels us to change our minds about the world. What better example than one that reconfigures our understanding of mind itself? Such is *The Blank Slate*.... Readers ... will find it worth every effort to take on Pinker's exhilarating text; it will, literally, blow their minds.

-*Library Journal*, September 1, 2002.

### **[Better suited for next summer's blockbuster release: 'Every once in a while....']**

A magisterial and indispensable book.... A wide-ranging and unfailingly sensible discussion of the ethical and political implications of accepting that we have a common nature.

-John Gray, *New Statesman*, Sept. 16, 2002.

### **[Another Cliff's Notes blurb.]**

As a brightly lighted path between what we would like to believe and what we need to know, [*The Blank Slate*] is required reading.

-Frederic Raphael, *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 29, 2002.

### **[Raphael is usually a better critic than this buzzwording- as we will see.]**

"Steven Pinker has written an extremely good book -- clear, well argued, fair, learned, tough, witty, humane, stimulating. I only hope that people study it carefully before rising up ideologically against him. If they do, they will see that the idea of an innately flawed but wonderfully rich human nature is a force for good, not evil."

-Colin McGinn, *Washington Post*, Oct. 13, 2002.

### **[1 of the better blurbs.]**

"This book is a modern magnum opus. The scholarship alone is mind-boggling, a monument of careful research, meticulous citation, breadth of input from diverse fields, great writing and humour."

-Tom Paskal, *The Montreal Gazette*, Oct. 26, 2002.

### **[For you, my liege- Hail King Steven!]**

"The fight for a separation of politics from science is an eminently sensible, logical, and ultimately humanistic task, and it took someone as brave as Pinker to dedicate himself to it. ... [This is a] necessary book, a book that in a more truthful intellectual climate - one open to the idea that any knowledge about ourselves can only enhance our ability to act well and compassionately - would not have had to be written. In this climate, however, we should be grateful that it was."

-Daniel Smith, *Boston Globe*, Dec. 22, 2002.

**[ What is stated may be true- but how simperingly written.]**

See what I mean about the bad blurbery? On the other hand, SP's writing is very good, both by itself & by comparison. He often breaks things down in to morsels easy enough to chew on. For example, he lists some social behaviors that he thinks may be innate:

- \* Primacy of family ties, making nepotism and inheritance appealing.
- \* A propensity to share based on reciprocity where nonrelatives are concerned (within the family, it is free).
- \* A drive for dominance and a willingness to use violence to attain goals.
- \* Ethnocentrism and other forms of group-against-group hostility.
- \* Variation in intelligence (leading to inequalities) and in conscientiousness and antisocial behavior (leading to punitive constraints).
- \* Self-serving biases that deceive people into thinking they are freer, wiser and more honest than they are.
- \* A moral sense, biased toward kin and friends, and linked to ideas of purity, beauty and rank.

I could argue with some of his posits, especially the idea that morality (an external force) is innate- but I won't. He also lists some believed to be innate abilities:

- \* An intuitive physics, used to keep track of the "oomph" of objects as they fall, bounce or bend.
- \* An intuitive biology, used to understand the living world by imputing an essence to living things.
- \* An intuitive engineering, used to make and understand tools.
- \* An intuitive psychology, used to understand others by imputing to them a mind with beliefs and desires.
- \* A spatial sense and a dead reckoner tracking the body's motions.
- \* A number sense, based on ability to register small numbers of things (1, 2 and 3) exactly and to estimate larger ones.
- \* A sense of probability, used to estimate uncertain outcomes by tracking how common one event is in relation to another.
- \* An intuitive economics, used to exchange goods and calculate favors.
- \* A mental database and logic, used to represent ideas, associate one thing with another and devise causal explanations.
- \* Language, the gift of sharing ideas from the mental database with others.

It's in the use of plainspoken illustrations as this that SP is at his best. Here is SP defending himself in that same Slate interview:

**Steve Sailer:** Aren't we all better off if people believe that we are not constrained by our biology and so can achieve any future we choose?

**SP:** People are surely better off with the truth. Oddly enough, everyone agrees with this when it comes to the arts. Sophisticated people sneer at feel-good comedies and saccharine romances in which everyone lives happily ever after. But when it comes to science, these same people say, "Give us schmaltz!" They expect the science of human beings to be a source of emotional uplift and inspirational sermonizing.

Later in the interview SP is outed as an atheist, but demurs, slightly: *'My criticism of religion in "The Blank Slate" was defensive, meant to counter the argument that morality can only come from a belief in a soul that accepts God's purpose and is rewarded or punished in an afterlife. I think the evidence suggests that this doctrine is false both logically and factually. I don't make a point of criticizing religion in general. Some hard-headed biologists and evolutionary theorists believe that an abstract conception of a divine power is consistent with conventional Darwinism.'* Guess what religious nuts had to say about the book? Here are some excerpts from Right Wing Radical & Fundamentalist Christian syndicated newspaper columnist Cal Thomas. The piece is called *'Indulging in the luxury of blame'*. Let's play goldfish watcher & watch him burble:

In "The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature," which the London Times excerpted last week, Mr. Pinker boldly and credibly challenges the foundational principle of modern liberalism, to wit, that violent people and many other social pathologies are created by external forces, not an internal condition. The liberal belief that violence is learned from our environment is wrong, says Mr. Pinker, who believes we are all innately aggressive and that we should be asking not why violence occurs, but why it is so often avoided.

No fanaticism, yet:

Communism and Fascism are only two of the more obvious ones. Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, who denounced British Prime Minister Tony Blair in Johannesburg for Mr. Blair's criticism of him, has his own form of ethnic cleansing going as he forcibly removes white farmers from their land, handing it over to black farmers.

'Ethnic cleansing'? Wanna bet the Western media would have reported the killing of even so small a # as 8 or 10 white farmers? How many recall the millions of blacks killed by their own African dictators in the 1990s? That damned liberal media again!

One after another, Mr. Pinker knocks down various social myths and explanations for violence. Noting that feminists, especially, have blamed the American conception of maleness for most violent acts, Mr. Pinker notes that "Spain has its machismo, Italy its braggadocio and Japan its rigid gender roles, yet their homicide rates are a fraction of that of the more feminist-influenced U.S."

Michael Moore- take note!

He also rejects any link between violence in films and on television and violent behavior, noting that "people were more violent in the centuries before television and movies were invented. Canadians watch the same television shows as Americans but have a fourth their homicide rate. When the British colony of St. Helena installed television for the first time in 1995 its people did not become more violent. Violent computer games took off in the 1990s, a time when U.S. crime rates plummeted."

Michael Moore- deux! After appearing a bit reasonable, Old Cal just can't help himself:

Mr. Pinker is an evolutionist who believes in Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection, which carries its own set of epistemological and even theological problems. What Mr. Pinker must grapple with, but

does not effectively, is whether human nature can be changed. He believes, incorrectly in my view, that the flawed can heal the flawed of their flaws. Nothing in history or common sense gives one faith in that scenario. Human nature must be transformed by a Power greater than what wiser writers have called fallen humanity.

Had Cal actually read the book- not just gleaned it for Fundy bon mots he would have noticed that the book is all about human change. As for the flawed not being able to heal the flawed, that contradicts his earlier pat on the back to SP: *'The liberal belief that violence is learned from our environment is wrong, says Mr. Pinker, who believes we are all innately aggressive and that we should be asking not why violence occurs, but why it is so often avoided.'* But who cares of contradiction when you're stargazing for that eternal, & eternally absent, Greater Power?

Speaking of clichés, here's from that same Boston Globe review I got a blurb of above- in it the writer criticizes SP for relying too much on them, even as others decry his 'freshness' as offputting:

If a quibble can be made with "The Blank Slate" it is that it is too long and even too thorough. Pinker's scrupulousness as a scientist and his ambitions as a writer lead him to scrutinize subjects as far afield as neural plasticity and Virginia Woolf, and in this case it distracts from the simplicity and accessibility of his message. A second quibble is with style. Pinker relies heavily on clichés. This tendency, I think, stems from a desire to be readable, but because Pinker's scientific expertise is language, it is a defect that is hard to overlook.

Here's a better review. I promised you we'd revisit Frederic Raphael- 1 of the few solid critics out there. His review was called *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*:

If the theory of the blank slate is no longer tenable, must democratic theory collapse with it? Fortunately, and unarguably, there is no logical connection between how the world is and what values man chooses to impose on it and on himself. The only link between ethics and facts is that "ought entails can": We should not require of ourselves, or others, what it is beyond human capacity to achieve. It is not within our power, for instance, to be identical to our neighbors, neither more intelligent nor more comely; not even if our neighbor is our clone. Absolute equality is contrary to human nature. Why would anyone have to watch his back when saying something so matter-of-fact?

A terrific intro. In 1 paragraph FR has distilled SP's major thesis- in fact, gotten it down to 3 words: *'ought entails can'*. Few reviewers have this ability- innate or otherwise. Here he nails SP's nailing of the Left:

Yet despite the Gulag, the Khmer Rouge and Mao Tse-tung's murderous legacy, today's academia remains infatuated with Marxism. Many ranking scientists--Pinker's hit-list is starry with well-known names--refuse to extricate themselves from their implacable mind-sets. "Fascist" is their yelping Pavlovian response to facts that challenge their fantasies. Yet the same men and women deride the Nazis' idiotic denunciation of the theory of relativity as "Jewish science." Pinker would like to have them recognize that "the problem is not with the possibility that people might differ from each other, which is a factual question that could turn one way or the other. The problem is with the line of reasoning that says that if people do turn out to be different, then discrimination, oppression or genocide would be OK."

Then he distills SP's gripes with the Right:

Pinker's retort to the card-carrying pro-lifer is unequivocal and very pro-life: "I see no dignity in letting people die of hepatitis or be ravaged by Parkinson's disease when a cure may lie in research on stem-cells that religious movements seek to ban because it uses balls of cells that have made the 'ontological' leap to 'spiritual souls.' Sources of immense misery ... will be alleviated not by treating thought and emotion as manifestations of an immaterial soul, but by treating them as manifestations of physiology and genetics."

Bingo! Here FR shows how SP nails more of the usual suspects:

The sorry truth is that "most academics, journalists, social analysts and other intellectually engaged people" hide their genuine opinions because they are cowards and careerists. Christianity has, in truth, been a lot less unanimous in its moral stance than official dogma would have us believe.

But how does FR get the following take on SP's take on the arts? SP is hardly sunny-side up:

...he might have spared us his Panglossian assessment of the arts, in which he quotes a ragbag of sources, such as George Bernard Shaw, with callow deference. Nor is he wholly right about the universal aversion to incest: It was a royal privilege in ancient Egypt and widely practiced by Greek tyrants (having come to power, they wanted to keep it in the family).

More important, and much more unwise, he waxes dogmatic about educational curricula. He recommends that the study of "economics, evolutionary biology and probability and statistics" replace that of "the classics or foreign languages" in high schools and colleges.

I would add that the very ideas of the *Noble Savage & Ghost In The Machine* are not really given the level of credence SP currently attributes to them so the book might have been better off sticking to just stripping its titular mythos, & attacking these 2 separately. But let me return to the area (other than art) that is SP's biggest weakness: economics. While I mentioned how his book's premise of 'no fixed value' did not deal with the real world conundra of 'cartels, monopolies, oligopolies, price fixing, hoarding, redlining, pork barrels, keeping multiple account records, & slush funds, etc.', I want to opine a bit more. SP calls this 'no fixed value' premise the *physical fallacy*. Then SP defends the role of the middleman- yet he blithely accepts that middlemen are not redundant. This flies in the face of much of the Internet idea. Yes, dot.coms bombed a few years ago, but a truer, newer, & fairer economy is slowly emerging from that neophytic disaster. Also, SP holds little- in fact, nada- against usury's long & ignoble history. As example- suppose I were to buy a home at \$165,000, with a standard 30 year mortgage rate at a reasonable 6.75%- not unusual for the past few years. The monthly mortgage payment would be about \$1400/month for 360 months- or meaning the 'homeowner'- over 3 decades, would actually be paying between \$500-510,000 over that period- hedging his/her bets that the property value would at least appreciate to that level, just to keep up. In a good area it's a good bet, but I cannot always tell demographic trends past 5 or 10 years. But, even if the property does appreciate, why should a single homeowner have to pay over 3x the listed amount for a home, especially when the banks have barely been paying out 1% interest on accounts during the same time. Do banks/lenders take risks? Sure. But they are not great risks with single homeowners. The greater risks come from far larger projects- building factories or financing leveraged buyouts of companies. & guess what? Almost never are the super-rich, & the corporate elitists charged interest rates near that of the average borrower for a home or a car. Why? Because these same companies usually have financial stakes in the lenders- if you look around. & that does not include times when the lender is the government. A few years back I worked at AT&T. Early in that year the company touted its good citizenship in the company paper. AT&T had paid roughly \$4 billion dollars in assorted state & federal taxes. Ain't they responsible! This was front page news. A month or so later the same paper touted that in the same fiscal year AT&T had received 'aid' from the federal government so that it could 'compete' for the Far East's telecom market. How much did they get from Uncle Sam? They claimed a 'mere' \$4.9 billion. So, in essence, 1 of the largest companies on the planet not only paid NO taxes, but was financed to the tune of \$900 million from the US taxpayers- with 'aid' that did not have to be repaid. & guess what? Then-CEO Mike Armstrong made some really stupid purchases with that \$- not only in the Far East, but worldwide- like buying up outdated cable TV companies whose lines were almost worthless, & companies whose products were not competitive. AT&T lost every single penny it got in aid- but they did not sweat. The company lost nothing & had no interest to pay. The taxpayers were robbed, the employees experienced another wave of downsizing due to AT&T's plummeting stock prices, & CEO Mike Armstrong, for his inanity- received over \$2 million in salary & compensation. Yet, this is the 'free market' whose 'invisible hand' SP champions. Yet, this same system which enslaves the folk lucky enough to even 'own' property to their property, is considered just- especially by the usurers. Personally, I think lenders could be reigned in considerably, & a lot of wastefully speculative investments curtailed, if a law were passed that no lender could charge interest on what they lend out to that they pay on income invested with them at greater than a 2:1 ratio. In other words, if a bank is gonna charge 7% interest for mortgages, or other loans, they must pay at least 3.5% interest on their investors' accounts. This will cut down on some of the outrageous profit margins & force lenders to re-evaluate how they invest. *But this will cut down on cutting edge research!*, cry the defenders

of exploitation. Nonsense. That will still occur- it's just that it will take a visionary a little longer to get more lenders to invest. This will spread out the possible loss of investment, & force more people to be more diligent. The more people who have a stake in something the more people the lenders will have to answer to, & the more responsible they will have to be.

SP does acknowledge some things wrong with rampant capitalism, such as when he divides the exchange of goods into 4 parts: sharing, expropriation, equality matching, & market pricing. Market pricing, however, which is where individuals publicly come to agreement on the relative worth of things, is not nearly as difficult as SP portrays- as I've just shown above. & there is no correlation between a government setting the rules of the game, as I propose, & the government micromanaging every aspect of the economy (aka communism). To paraphrase SP- a little economic managing does not equal total engagement in the economy. & nowhere does this take on economics delve in to underground, or more 'private' markets.

As for the whole notion of the physical fallacy, I don't buy SP's rather panglossian view. SP claims the PF does not occur when, in his example, 3 chickens are exchanged for 1 knife- only if money is involved. But suppose the chickens on the farmer's farm for some reason get a mysterious illness that reduces their size from the normal chicken size, or suppose a particularly clever fox has made far more successful raids than is expected. Then, the farmer- in response to his poor situation- might claim he can only afford 2 chickens per knife. This is still all barter- no pelf. Yet the physical fallacy- as defined by SP- remains. But, again, we are far beyond barter in the modern world. We also know, & I've shown, that manipulation of markets & circumstances is rather easy for the powerful to do. Rather than the physical fallacy, a more apropos fallacy would be the *invisible hand fallacy*. At least since the 1929 Stock Market Crash (& others would argue from long before) there has been no truly 'free' market- yes, occasionally big boys like Enron & Worldcom get burned- but they were pushing their crimes past the limit. The real power players know exactly where the boundaries are, & dance just inside.

Yet, SP does not even address these sorts of issues. Would that have been too distracting? Perhaps. But, the whole digression into economics should have been lanced, then. Because 1 should not just dip 1's pinky toe into the ocean, & then demur. Jump right in! Interestingly, SP is accused of doing just that on too many subjects. In a review of *The Blank Slate* by Internet guru Dr. Fred Bortz (<http://drfred.hispeed.com/review/BlankSlate.htm>) the doctor reiterates 1 of my earlier charges:

In the first of five major sections, Pinker discusses not only the Blank Slate, but its close philosophical relatives, the Noble Savage and The Ghost in the Machine. Is it really worth spending so much time on old doctrines that modern science has long since laid to rest? Our brain is the product of evolution, and that means our human propensities have had survival value. Who could deny that a less than noble tendency toward violence is at least as great a part of human nature as altruism? Who can claim -- at least from a scientific perspective -- that the mind is an entity separate from the physical brain?

The reason for those chapters, Pinker would argue, is that those doctrines, though discredited by science, continue to play important roles in current political thinking, especially on the extremes, and have led us to risky social engineering and policy. So for the rest of the first three sections, comprising nearly half the book, science takes a back seat to a blow-by-blow description of unseemly academic squabbling.

Readers are transported back to the late 1960s and 1970s, when political agendas, primarily on the left but also on the right would -- for some academics -- trump both scientific discovery and common sense. Even worse, though not surprising given "human nature," the arguments turn heated and personal. Accusations and name-calling, spoken in cultured tones by people with sophisticated vocabularies, take political mud-slinging to a new level of repugnance.

Dr. Fred later praises the remainder of the book, but I, too, wonder, the inordinate lengths SP seems to obsess on these ideas that few still hold. The claim is that it is still pervasive in the Humanities (especially on college campuses). True enough. But, most people know how out of touch with the real world that whole little enclave is. Similarly, my friend Don Moss often forwards around emails of online stories detailing the latest PC/liberal nonsense floating around academia, distressed over the sway that the professors who propound such inanities hold. I wonder at his distress (even if minor) given that the national elections of the last 36 years have gone against the holders of such views by exactly a 2-1 margin. Personally, I think an ideal state of affairs would be a term of right-leaners, a term of moderates, a term of left-leaners, etc. But, I do not share DM's nor SP's worries over the internecine & incestual games the Academic Elitists play. Like most, they do not, & cannot affect me.

I'd rather listen to pop cultural inanities, than intelligentsia inanities.

Other online gurus have been significantly harsher. Richard Webster

(<http://www.richardwebster.net/archiveturningover.html>) tries to knock out the foundations from even SP's book's superstructure- his posits on the Blank Slate itself. He quotes from another online guru, Louis Menand:

'Locke wanted only to deny innate ideas and innate knowledge, not innate powers or tendencies, nor innate limitations, nor innate cognitive and emotional capacities. This may sound like a mere historical quibble, but it arouses a powerful doubt about Pinker's diagnosis of modernity. If Locke did not hold the doctrine of the blank slate, then Leibniz and Hume and Kant, not to mention the massed ranks of churchmen declaiming about human depravity and the Freudians declaiming about the nature of men and women, most certainly did not hold it either. And then its status as a central and unsalutary determinant of modern thought looks a little shaky.'

Um, that's stretching it. I would argue the Blank Slate was a general eraser- not just a limited 1- but it is something that may have been argued. Still, SP was dealing with the perception of the BS & the consequences of that perception. Locke's intent may have been forever lost when he bit the bullet. But, Louis Menand, is far more cogent in his own New Yorker piece on SP's book, *What Comes Naturally* [[http://www.newyorker.com/critics/books/?021125crbo\\_books](http://www.newyorker.com/critics/books/?021125crbo_books)]. Here he rips in to SP:

Having it both ways is an irritating feature of "The Blank Slate." Pinker can write, in refutation of the scarecrow theory of violent behavior, "The sad fact is that despite the repeated assurances that 'we know the conditions that breed violence,' we barely have a clue," and then, a few pages later, "It is not surprising, then, that when African American teenagers are taken out of underclass neighborhoods they are no more violent or delinquent than white teenagers." Well, that should give us one clue. He sums the matter up: "With violence, as with so many other concerns, human nature is the problem, but human nature is also the solution." This is just another way of saying that it is in human nature to socialize and to be socialized, which is, pragmatically, exactly the view of the "intellectuals."

The insistence on deprecating the efficacy of socialization leads Pinker into absurdities that he handles with a blitheness that would be charming if his self-assurance were not so overdeveloped. He argues, for example, that democracy, the rule of law, and women's reproductive freedom are all products of evolution. The Founding Fathers understood that the ideas of power sharing and individual rights are grounded in human nature. And he quotes, with approval, the claim of two evolutionary psychologists that the "evolutionary calculus" explains why women evolved "to exert control over their own sexuality, over the terms of their relationships, and over the choice of which men are to be the fathers of their children." Now, democracy, individual rights, and women's sexual autonomy are concepts almost nowhere to be found, even in the West, before the eighteenth century. Either human beings spent ten thousand years denying their own nature by slavishly obeying the whims of the rich and powerful, cheerfully burning heretics at the stake, and arranging their daughters' marriages (which would imply a pretty effective system of socialization), or modern liberal society is largely a social construction. Which hypothesis seems more plausible?

In these examples LM is correct, but 1 of the great virtues of SP & his book is that he DOES see both sides of an issue, & while not talking out of both sides of his mouth, he does try to draw some middle ground- by no means is he an extremist. LM, often sounds like a Leftist who has been spurned by a former comrade, rather than being able to see the nuances SP weaves. Here he takes on SP's views on art:

Deviations make him suspicious, and modern art, in his book, is the prime suspect. Pinker believes not only that evolutionary psychology can explain why human beings create and consume art (it's mostly for reasons having to do with the drive for prestige). He believes that evolutionary psychology can explain what is wrong with art today—the decline of the high-art traditions, the loss of the critic's social status, and the "pretentious and unintelligible scholarship" of contemporary humanities departments. "I will seek," he says, "a diagnosis for these three ailing endeavors."

The key, it is no surprise, is the denial of human nature. "The giveaway may be found," Pinker advises, "in a famous statement from Virginia Woolf: 'In or about December 1910, human nature changed.'" She

was referring, he says, to "the new philosophy of modernism that would dominate the elite arts and criticism for much of the twentieth century, and whose denial of human nature was carried over with a vengeance to postmodernism," which is "more Marxist and far more paranoid," and which gave us "Andres Serrano's Piss Christ (a crucifix in a jar of the artist's urine), Chris Ofili's painting of the Virgin Mary smeared in elephant dung," and similar outré fare. But "Woolf was wrong," he tells us. "Human nature did not change in 1910, or in any year thereafter." . . . To begin with, Virginia Woolf did not write, "In or about December 1910, human nature changed." What she wrote was "On or about December 1910 human character changed." The sentence appears in an essay called "Character in Fiction," which attacks the realist novelists of the time for treating character as entirely a product of outer circumstance—of environment and social class. These novelists look at people's clothes, their jobs, their houses, Woolf says, "but never . . . at life, never at human nature." Modernist fiction, on the other hand, because it presents character from the inside, shows how persistent personality is, and how impervious to circumstance. Woolf, in short, was a Pinkerite. . . . The modernists were obsessed with the perdurability of human nature. This is, as Woolf said, precisely what distinguishes them from the realists and romantics who preceded them. It's why Kandinsky "invented" abstraction (to help preserve, he said, "the element of pure and eternal art, found among all human beings, among all peoples and at all times"). It's why Picasso put African masks on the prostitutes in "Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)." "Heart of Darkness," "Women in Love," "A Passage to India," "Sweeney Erect," "Crazy Jane Talks with the Bishop"—they are as explicitly about the intractability of human aggression and desire as an evolutionary psychologist could wish. There is nothing Marxist about them. The preferred mode of orthodox Marxism was not modernism; it was realism. . . . Like Tom Wolfe, whose attacks on modern painting in "The Painted Word" he quotes, Pinker thinks that modern art is all ideas because it is only as ideas that he can experience it. In fact, Ofili's painting is not "smeared in elephant dung," and Serrano's "Piss Christ" is not "a crucifix in a jar of the artist's urine." It's a photograph of a crucifix in a jar of urine, and, technically and formally, a rather beautiful and evocative piece. It would satisfy a number of Komar and Melamid's populist criteria. Many people find it offensive, of course, but that reaction, too, is instinctive, and the discordance of the two sensations is part of the experience the object provokes. "Piss Christ" is not the most profound work of art ever created, but it is not just a crude prank.

Cutting to the chase, LM makes some good points but goes further afield from what SP claims than what he claims SP does from his subject matter. In order: 1) the most damning charge is the alleged misquotation of the Virginia Woolf quote. 2) While the High Moderns were not Marxist, they were hardly realists. 1 of the very reasons, as example, that stream-of-consciousness writing & Abstract Expressionist painting have become intellectual curios is that they are in no way realistic- why do you think punctuation was 1<sup>st</sup> invented, anyway? Because that's exactly how we think- punctuatedly! 3) SP does not claim that modern art is all ideas, just ideas 1<sup>st</sup>. 4) SP is merely descriptively wrong re: Ofili's painting. It is not 'smeared in elephant dung'- merely 'made of elephant dung'- a point HIGHLY promoted! 5) As for Serrano's 'Piss Christ'- it is a *premier example* of prank art, photo or not- lest why the title? Imagine the reaction to 'Amber Christ'- would I have even suspected urine's involvement? The title is the giveaway to the rather puerile intent- another artist pissed (pardon the pun) at his religious upbringing. Get real Louie! As for beauty- it's a rather banal piece in all aspects, once the furor is ignored. Of course, 'Piss Christ' is exactly the wan PoMo art that SP condemned for having a banal 'message'- in this case 'religion sucks'. & as I corrected SP earlier- the message hits you over the head! Subtlety is not 1 of its charms.

Of course, the great current promoter of prank or shock art is Karen Finley- a woefully undertalented yenta with a penchant for self-promotion that rival's P.T. Barnum's & Madonna's. I 1<sup>st</sup> saw her in some dingy Brooklyn lofts in the 1980s, smearing chocolate & feces on herself as she ranted. 20 years later she has evolved her art to smearing chocolate, feces, & *blood* on herself. Artists like KF & AS *live* for the shock- Reaction, in whatever manner, is deemed success- but, excluding corpses, how does any human engage any art without some reaction- even if mild?

But if LM reveals his own limitations & biases, others reveal incredible ignorance. Here's a snip from a David Large at <http://www.thegreatdebate.org.uk/GDBBlankDL1.html>:

Pinker, with stunning unoriginality (but, hey, let's not hold that against the guy) thinks that all humans are born with a common set of predispositions and abilities which come from our evolutionary past. Stop there. Let's ask: What are these? Where are they? Can I have surgery on them? Therapy? Can I do anything about this for me? For my children? These are what he describes as human nature. Well I don't know about you but it seems obvious to me that mere predispositions are a rotten description of human nature that begs more questions than it answers, unless of course you think that everything is a predisposition, in which case even God can't help us. I guess what I mean is, do you really think that Leonardo was predisposed to paint the Mona Lisa and that Mona was predisposed to be painted by Leonardo and that this was because of something that happened in our evolutionary past?...Tell me what a predisposition is and how everything else follows from that. To that Pinker offers no answers, just assertions.

So why do we scorn the likes of Locke, let alone the much maligned Descartes, if we bother with him at all, in favour of unthinking acceptance of paper thin so-called cognitive science that does not stand up to the slightest logical examination?

1<sup>st</sup> off, how is this inquiry 'unoriginal'? Have others probed the mind? Sure, but with the depth, & up-to-date knowledge that SP amasses? Uh-uh. As for predispositions describing human nature- hey, life is complex- I simply could not have a single flow chart for all 7 billion or so human beings. Hell, look at all the years it took to decode the utter basics of a typical human genome. To try to do the same to natures, when their substructures are not even remotely undone, is absurd. & to criticize SP for not knowing is laughable. & should not SP be lauded for not presumptively declaiming he knows how all goes, & for giving just approximate syllabi? As for cognitive science? Sure, some of it is soft, yet much of SP's takes on the plenum of phenomena he describes are quite detailed & logical- whether they are totally true is for time & research to reveal. But let me quote another fellow, named Nikolas Lloyd, who apparently has more detailed knowledge of SP's specialty & brilliantly & proverbially tears David Large a 2<sup>nd</sup> asshole- <http://www.thegreatdebate.org.uk/GDBLankLloyd1.html>:

Although David Large does not say this implicitly, he very strongly implies that Prof. Pinker is committing the same error that the journalists are. This is the reverse of the truth. Writers trying to explain to the public the tremendous advances in evolutionary psychology commonly plunge their heads into their hands in near despair when yet another journalist gets it wrong. Pinker is innocent.

As science advances, we learn more and more. No scientist is stupid enough to say that we know everything, but this does not make it true that we know *nothing*. We know a great deal about genes, and are finding out more all the time. We know their chemical formulae, we know the structure of them right down to the individual molecules. We know about meiosis and chromosomes, and this knowledge explains a wealth of observations...David writes about Nature and Nurture that, "we have long recognised the part played by both". Steven Pinker's point is that this is far from true. Many people have and still do deny that there is such a thing as human nature. Pinker is not so stupid as to suggest that genes and genes alone account for all of human behaviour. He has never said or written this, nor have any evolutionary psychologists done so. No one is that stupid. Instead, he is defending a very reasonable and moderate standpoint: that genes have a significant role in human behaviour, and he is defending this against a bizarre and extremist one: that genes have no role in human behaviour. The general public knows that what Pinker believes is right. Anyone normal person who has had any experience of dealing with human beings knows this. It takes an intellectual to deny it...David Large sees no reason for Pinker's assertion that there are people who deny human nature. This is strange, given how many and how loud these people are. I have witnessed well-educated people denying human nature in public debates on more occasions that I can count, and Pinker's book gives plenty of examples. David also criticises Pinker for unoriginality. Pinker is not claiming originality of this idea. He is writing a book to inform and entertain the public, and he is very good at this. The point isn't whether he is original or not, but whether or not he is *right*...Large writes, "Well I don't know about you but it seems obvious to me that mere predispositions are a rotten description of human nature". Rotten? Why? It is not obvious to me. Rotten because this is not the way he would prefer the world to be? If so, tough - Large will have to get used to it, and should not criticise scientists for preferring truth to a more cosy set of wrong ideas. Rotten because it is it wrong? If so, it is up to Large to show how it is wrong. Rotten because it is not clear? It seems very clear to me that I was born with innate predispositions and abilities. I can see through

my eyes very well, but I have no memory of ever having been to classes in which I was taught to use my eyes. The skill came quite naturally...."Pinker attempts to explain the roots of the behaviour of modern humans in terms of abilities that our ancestors of 100,000 years ago needed to survive. Why on earth do they do this? Why go back to no one knows where and no one knows when? Who had these ur-dispositions? Why them?" asks Large. I'll answer him. Evolutionary psychologists go back many thousands of years because that is when human nature evolved. Evolution is slow, and works by a process known as natural selection. Therefore, in order to study human nature's evolution, we have to consider the environment in which it evolved: that of stone age hunter-gatherers. This is very simple to understand and definitely necessary....Large asks his questions as though they are difficult to answer. They are not. They are very simple to answer....Large says that we should instead read the works of John Locke in 1658. This is strange because Large says that Locke came to the same conclusions as Pinker, but if Pinker is wrong, why recommend Locke?...I have a brain with the ability to reason and to spot that Large's arguments are flawed. I have my ancestors to thank for that. I have also inherited some instincts, honed by my upbringing, that spur me to write this essay. I might raise my status by writing this, and I have instincts that encourage me to seek status. I like to practice the art of putting forth an argument, and my instincts encourage me to practice such things, because one day they may help me pass on genes. I was asked to write a reply to David Large's essay and I have inherited instincts to grant such requests, because my ancestors who helped others did better than those who didn't. Not only do I have reasons to write this essay (status, fun, challenge, helpfulness etc.), but also I have a deeper understanding of my reasons thanks to evolutionary psychology.

My only quibble with Lloyd's assertion is the same I have with SP, mainly that the people who deny human nature are not that vocal, not that powerful, & generally utterly ignored by the rest of society, so why melodramaticize their import? Still, bravo to NL for his technical repartee. We see, then, that most of SP critics show gaping flaws in their logic, & even less ability to convey that illogic well. SP does not suffer from either of these flaws, whether you agree or not with the bulk of his assertions. The fact that I, as a critic cannot rail against just 1 or 2 specific major points the book makes is a testament to the depth & multifariousness of SP's approach. This especially true considering the book is over 400 pages long.

That said, let me begin wrapping up this essay. Let me do it with my own lay ideas of human intellect- & I quote from 1 of my early essays on noted literary critic & dunce Harold Bloom [<http://www.cosmoetica.com/D1-DES1.htm>]:

Here is my posit: the human mind has 3 types of intellect. #1 is the Functionary- all of us have it- it is the basic intelligence that IQ tests purport to measure, & it operates on a fairly simple add & subtract basis. #2 is the Creationary- only about 1% of the population has it in any measurable quantity- artists, discoverers, leaders & scientists have this. It is the ability to see beyond the Functionary, & also to see more deeply- especially where pattern recognition is concerned. And also to be able to *lead* observers with their art. Think of it as Functionary<sup>2</sup>. #3 is the Visionary- perhaps only 1% of the Creationary have this in measurable amounts- or 1 in 10,000 people. These are the GREAT artists, etc. It is the ability to see farther than the Creationary, not only see patterns but to make good predictive & productive use of them, to help with creative leaps of illogic (Keats' *Negative Capability*), & also not just lead an observer, but *impose will* on an observer with their art. Think of it as Creationary<sup>2</sup>, or Functionary<sup>3</sup>.

I cite this posit only because no one in SP's field, including SP, has ever even attempted to essay this rather obvious observation, & the consequences it might have upon sociology, etc. Then, again, sociology is tricky because at its heart, although sociologists deny it profusely, is really the study of how humans can become happier- this is the basis for all the phony PC posturing of probably the few remaining defenders of the 3 dogmas SP so thoroughly eviscerates. Yet SP, himself, even states in the earlier quoted Slate interview that happiness is probably not human beings' main goal. I agree- positive accomplishments are: to have effect, influence, or as the congenitally PC chirp- 'to make a difference'. This is why SP is, in my view, ideally suited (temperamentally & intellectually), & uniquely positioned, to be the person who does explore in depth the 3 Intellects stance that I have predicated. & I encourage him to do so, for I think it would be 1 of the stepping stones to making global human society a true meritocracy- 1 where the currency of exchange is not pelf, but accomplishment (not that

that is not open to interpretation, but it's a helluva big step over our current messy state). Among the things that could be elucidated in a probe of the 3 different forms of human intellect are such questions as:

- How does a mere electrical firing of a neuron make you see, in detail, a person you long ago forgot? In perfect detail. I'm not talking of the mechanics but how does that precise sequence make you see & smell a former lover to the point you reach out for them- how does the material concoct the immaterial? For all the ideas in SP's book, this is not even approached within a mile. Not to mention just what is the immaterial world- the original cyberspace? Could thought, itself, be a different level of reality/existence?
- Does evil exist? What is evil? Could it be a force in the immaterial world along the lines gravity is in the material? Could evil people or acts merely be normal people & acts who come in too close an orbit about that evil force?
- Will eugenics ever be more than a crapshoot anyway, since imperfect beings will make imperfect choices that are carried out imperfectly, & then the child will be raised in an imperfect world by imperfect parents?
- Is 'I' a delusion? If so, does it matter since even delusions are 'things'- material or not?
- Will the causes, reasons, or manners of the varieties of human sexuality ever be known- & to what degree? & what are the consequences?

Not to mention tangential questions such as *how can alcoholism be a disease if it does not physically force someone to imbibe? Or why do wannabe writers need to learn the basics of grammar & spelling if they want to be good, but need to unlearn those rules if they want to tread upon greatness?* These are all things worth exploring, & things SP should have in his crosshairs. Creeds need to be lived in order to achieve relevance- lest it all be impotent philosophy's puffery. SP has laid the groundwork, declaimed his creed. Now the hard work of proving & implementing needs to begin.

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