

Steven Pinker

Quotes

People, Thinking, Believe, Children, Brain, Mind, Men, World, Art, Mean, Psychology, Ideas, Way, War, Numbers, Book, Character, Years, Self, Violence

Art works because it appeals to certain faculties of the mind. Music depends on details of the auditory system, painting and sculpture on the visual system. Poetry and literature depend on language.

~Steven Pinker

Why are empirical questions about how the mind works so weighted down with political and moral and emotional baggage?

~Steven Pinker

All our behaviours are a result of neurophysiological activity in the brain. There is no reason to believe there is any magic going on.

~Steven Pinker

I suspect music is auditory cheesecake, an exquisite confection crafted to tickle the sensitive spots of... our mental faculties.

~Steven Pinker

Evolutionary psychology is one of four sciences that are bringing human nature back into the picture.

~Steven Pinker

Thanks to the redundancy of language, yxx cxn xndxrstxnd whxt x xm wrxtxng vxvn xf x rxplxcx xll thx vxwxls wxth xn "x" (t gts lttl hrdr f y dn't vn kn whr th vwls r)

~Steven Pinker

Photography is a kind of virtual reality, and it helps if you can create the illusion of being in an interesting world.

~Steven Pinker

Plants can't very well defend themselves by their behavior, so they resort to chemical warfare, and plants are saturated with toxins and irritants to deter creatures like us who want to eat them.

~Steven Pinker

I would argue that nothing gives life more purpose than the realization that every moment of consciousness is a precious and fragile gift.

~Steven Pinker

Babies are born with the instinct to speak, the way spiders are born with the instinct to spin webs. You don't need to train babies to speak; they just do. But reading is different.

~Steven Pinker

We will never have a perfect world, but it's not romantic or naive to work toward a better one.

~Steven Pinker

We're living in primate heaven. We're warm, dry, we're not hungry, we don't have fleas and ticks and infections. So why are we so miserable?

~Steven Pinker

Photography is a demanding action sport. The light can change so quickly. I often find myself sprinting so that I can catch the perfect light falling on a photogenic subject.

~Steven Pinker

Sex and excretion are reminders that anyone's claim to round-the-clock dignity is tenuous. The so-called rational animal has a desperate drive to pair up and moan and writhe.

~Steven Pinker

The reason I'm not a neurobiologist but a cognitive psychologist is that I think looking at brain tissue is often the wrong level of analysis. You have to look at a higher level of organization.

~Steven Pinker

Most wars are not fought over shortages of resources such as food and water, but rather over conquest, revenge, and ideology.

~Steven Pinker

By exploring the political and moral colorings of discoveries about what makes us tick, we can have a more honest science and a less fearful intellectual milieu.

~Steven Pinker

The great appeal of the doctrine that the mind is a blank slate is the simple mathematical fact that zero equals zero.

~Steven Pinker

Most intellectuals today have a phobia of any explanation of the mind that invokes genetics.

~Steven Pinker

Without goals the very concept of intelligence is meaningless

~Steven Pinker

I think this confusion leads intellectuals and artists themselves to believe that the elite arts and humanities are a kind of higher, exalted form of human endeavor.

~Steven Pinker

Morality comes from a commitment to treat other as we wish to be treated, which follows from the realization that none of us is the sole occupant of the universe.

~Steven Pinker

Societies that empower women are less violent in every way.

~Steven Pinker

Disgust is intuitive microbiology

~Steven Pinker

Racism, because it favors color over talent, is bad for business.

~Steven Pinker

Cognitive psychology tells us that the unaided human mind is vulnerable to many fallacies and illusions because of its reliance on its memory for vivid anecdotes rather than systematic statistics.

~Steven Pinker

The theory that religion is a force for peace, often heard among the religious right and its allies today, does not fit the facts of history.

~Steven Pinker

Some people believe that the nuclear bomb should be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, since it scared the major powers away from war by equating it with doomsday.

~Steven Pinker

The more you think about and interact with other people, the more you realize that it is untenable to privilege your interests over theirs.

~Steven Pinker

Commerce is a noble profession, and Jews should get over any self-hatred they might harbor from contemplating the capitalist spirit of diaspora Judaism.

~Steven Pinker

The stirrings of morality emerge early in childhood. Toddlers spontaneously offer toys and help to others and try to comfort people they see in distress.

~Steven Pinker

Personality and socialization aren't the same thing.

~Steven Pinker

If anything, Powerpoint, if used well, would ideally reflect the way we think.

~Steven Pinker

M.I.T. has a reputation for turning out Dilberts. They may be brilliant in what they do, but no one can understand what they say.

~Steven Pinker

If you give people literacy, bad ideas can be attacked and experiments tried, and lessons will accumulate.

~Steven Pinker

Working out what it would take to program goodness into a robot shows not only how much machinery it takes to be good but how slippery the concept of goodness is to start with.

~Steven Pinker

But the newest research is showing that many properties of the brain are genetically organized, and don't depend on information coming in from the senses.

~Steven Pinker

The art of photography is all about directing the attention of the viewer.

~Steven Pinker

Writers acquire their technique by spotting, savoring, and reverse-engineering examples of good prose.

~Steven Pinker

Violent movements attract thugs and firebrands who enjoy the mayhem. Violent tactics provide a pretext for retaliation by the enemy and alienate third parties who might otherwise support the movement.

~Steven Pinker

Democracy is an imperfect way of steering between the violence of anarchy and the violence of tyranny, with the least violence you can get away with.

~Steven Pinker

Heritability pertains to the entirety of the genome, not to a single gene.

~Steven Pinker

People today sometimes get uncomfortable with empirical claims that seem to clash with their political assumptions, often because they haven't given much thought to the connections.

~Steven Pinker

In any dispute, each side thinks it's in the right and the other side is demons.

~Steven Pinker

People consider the harms they inflict to be justified and forgettable, and the harms they suffer to be unprovoked and grievous.

~Steven Pinker

No matter how inured you get to atrocities, you're still always stunned and shocked by how cruel and wasteful Homo sapiens can be.

~Steven Pinker

Anything that makes it easier to imagine trading places with someone else increases your moral consideration for that other person.

~Steven Pinker

It begins with skepticism. The history of human folly, and our own susceptibility to illusions and fallacies, tell us that men and women are fallible.

~Steven Pinker

My laptop has freed me to travel.

~Steven Pinker

Tom Hanks, who starred in 'The Da Vinci Code,' turns out to be related to a number of the historic characters that feature in 'The Da Vinci Code,' including William the Conqueror and Shakespeare.

~Steven Pinker

As many political writers have pointed out, commitment to political equality is not an empirical claim that people are clones.

~Steven Pinker

Human nature is complex. Even if we do have inclinations toward violence, we also have inclination to empathy, to cooperation, to self-control.

~Steven Pinker

Astrology had an important role in the ancient world. You can't understand many things unless you know something about astrology - the plays of Shakespeare and so on.

~Steven Pinker

But in most cases even the possibility that the correlations reflect shared genes is taboo.

~Steven Pinker

'Capitalism' is a dirty word for many intellectuals, but there are a number of studies showing that open economies and free trade are negatively correlated with genocide and war.

~Steven Pinker

My opinions about human nature are shared by many psychologists, linguists, and biologists, not to mention philosophers and scholars going back centuries.

~Steven Pinker

Unfortunately, creative people are at their most creative when writing their autobiographies.

~Steven Pinker

The typical imperative from biology is not "Thou shalt...," but "If ... then ... else."

~Steven Pinker

I don't think aggression works like thirst or sleep. I think aggression is more elicited by particular situations. I think it can be mitigated.

~Steven Pinker

Many artists and scholars have pointed out that ultimately art depends on human nature.

~Steven Pinker

You wouldn't believe the kind of hate mail I get about my work on irregular verbs.

~Steven Pinker

Reading is a technology for perspective-taking. When someone else's thoughts are in your head, you are observing the world from that person's vantage point.

~Steven Pinker

An eye for beauty locks onto faces that show signs of health and fertility - just as one would predict if it had evolved to help the beholder find the fittest mate.

~Steven Pinker

The likelihood that inborn differences are one contributor to social status does not mean that it is the only contributor.

~Steven Pinker

Everyone's pedigree merges into everyone else's pedigree. So if you go back far enough, everyone is related.

~Steven Pinker

With violence, as with so many other concerns, human nature is the problem, but human nature is also the solution.

~Steven Pinker

The human capacity for compassion is not a reflex that is triggered automatically by the presence of another living thing.

~Steven Pinker

Look at almost any passage, and you'll find that a paragraph has five or six metaphors in it. It's not that the speaker is trying to be poetic, it's just that that's the way language works.

~Steven Pinker

Of course, genes can't pull the levers of our behavior directly. But they affect the wiring and workings of the brain, and the brain is the seat of our drives, temperaments and patterns of thought.

~Steven Pinker

Statisticians tell us that people underestimate the sheer number of coincidences that are bound to happen in a world governed by chance.

~Steven Pinker

We can make fun of hockey fans, but someone who enjoys Homer is indulging the same kind of vicarious bloodlust.

~Steven Pinker

Consistent style prevents presentation from getting in the way of content.

~Steven Pinker

Natural selection is not the only process that changes organisms over time. But is the only process that seemingly designs organisms over time.

~Steven Pinker

However much we might deplore the profit motive, or consumerist values, if everyone just wants i-Pods we would probably be better off than if they wanted class revolution.

~Steven Pinker

All of the violence that doesn't occur doesn't get reported on the news.

~Steven Pinker

The rules of friendship are tacit, unconscious; they are not rational. In business, though, you have to think rationally.

~Steven Pinker

Words let us say the things we want to say and also things we would be better off not having said. They let us know the things we need to know, and also things we wish we didn't.

~Steven Pinker

Terrorist bombings, like rampage shootings, are events that maximize the amount of publicity per amount of damage. That's why people do them, because they know they will set off a media frenzy.

~Steven Pinker

The elevation of parochial values to the realm of the sacred is a license to dismiss other people's interests, and an imperative to reject the possibility of compromise

~Steven Pinker

Morality is not just any old topic in psychology but close to our conception of the meaning of life. Moral goodness is what gives each of us the sense that we are worthy human beings.

~Steven Pinker

I get drawn in when I feel there is something deep and mysterious going on beneath the surface of something.

~Steven Pinker

In societies no less than individuals, acknowledging our limitations may ultimately be more humane than denying them.

~Steven Pinker

Like the early days of the Internet, the dawn of personal genomics promises benefits and pitfalls that no one can foresee.

~Steven Pinker

There has to be innate circuitry that does the learning, that creates the culture, that acquires the culture, and that responds to socialization.

~Steven Pinker

Galileo wrote that 'the book of nature is written in the language of mathematics; without its help it is impossible to comprehend a single word of it.'

~Steven Pinker

In our society, the best predictor of a man's wealth is his wife's looks, and the best predictor of a woman's looks is her husband's wealth.

~Steven Pinker

the mind is a neural computer

~Steven Pinker

Journalists say that when a dog bites a man, that is not news, but when

a man bites a dog, that is news ... Thanks to the mathematics of combinatorics, we will never run out of news.

~Steven Pinker

If people are innately saddled with certain sins and flaws, like selfishness, prejudice, sort-sightedness, and self-deception, then political reform would seem to be a waste of time.

~Steven Pinker

We often feel that a clever aphorism captures a truth that would require pages to defend in any other way.

~Steven Pinker

Something about the topic of consciousness makes people, like the White Queen in *Through The Looking Glass*, believe six impossible things before breakfast.

~Steven Pinker

Evolution is an indispensable component of any satisfying explanation of our psychology.

~Steven Pinker

Technology, ideology, and social and cultural changes periodically throw out new forms of violence for humanity to contend with.

~Steven Pinker

Students do everything on laptops these days, so I definitely think electronic books are a trend that's going to expand.

~Steven Pinker

A...reason we are so-so scientists is that our brains were shaped for fitness, not for truth. Sometimes truth is adaptive, but sometimes it is not.

~Steven Pinker

As women are empowered, violence can come down, for a number of reasons. By all measures, men are the more violent gender.

~Steven Pinker

Of course the theory of evolution would be vacuous if it offered a glib explanation for every inexplicable act.

~Steven Pinker

Thinking is a physical process, the human brain is not exempt from evolution

~Steven Pinker

Overcoming naive impressions to figure out how things really work is one of humanity's highest callings.

~Steven Pinker

Solving a problem in a hundred years is, practically speaking, the same as not solving it at all.

~Steven Pinker

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