

May 13, 2014

Spectator, UK reviews a 'troublesome' book. Trouble for those who have maintained all behavior is learned.

*'This book is an attempt to understand the world as it is, not as it ought to be.'* So writes Nicholas Wade, the British-born science editor of *The New York Times*, in his new book *A Troublesome Inheritance*.

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*But the most sensitive, and potentially troubling to the modern psyche, is the difference between human population groups that have evolved over the past 50,000 years. As Wade writes: 'The fact that human evolution has been recent, copious, and regional is not widely recognized, even though it has now been reported by many articles in the literature of genetics. The reason is in part that the knowledge is so new and in part because it raises awkward challenges to deeply held conventional wisdom.'*

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*How? By sending out such a ridiculous letter—including prominent mentions of Nigeria—that only a gullible person would take it seriously. Anyone with an ounce of sense or experience would immediately trash the email. "The scammer wants to find the guy who hasn't heard of it," Dr. Herley says. "Anybody who doesn't fall off their chair laughing is exactly who he wants to talk to." Here's how Dr. Herley put it in a research paper: "The goal of the e-mail is not so much to attract viable users as to repel the nonviable ones, who greatly outnumber them."*

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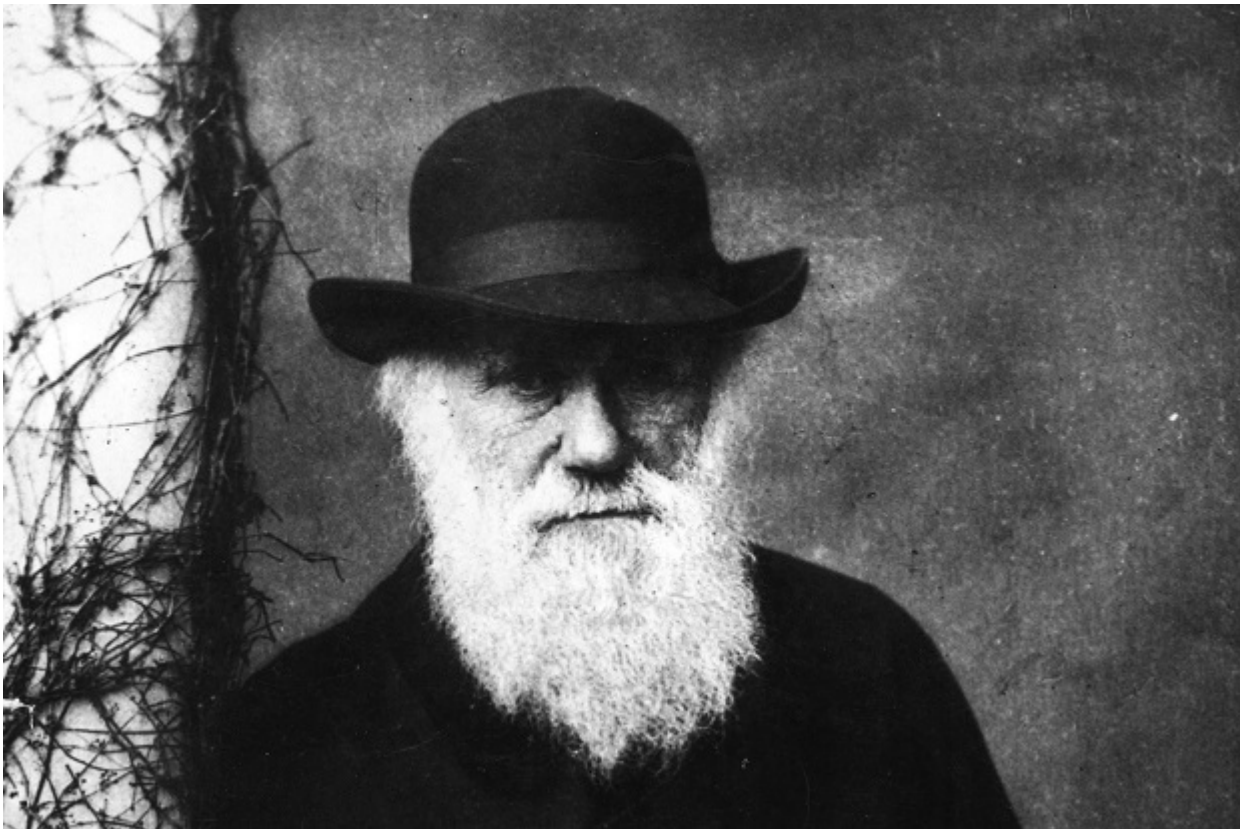
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**Spectator, UK**

**Darwin's unexploded bomb**

by Ed West



'This book is an attempt to understand the world as it is, not as it ought to be.' So writes Nicholas Wade, the British-born science editor of *The New York Times*, in his new book [\*Troublesome Inheritance\*](#).

For some time the post-War view of human nature as being largely culturally-formed has been under attack just as surely as the biblical explanation of mankind's creation began to face pressure in the early 19th century. What Steven Pinker called the blank slate view of our species, whereby humans are products of social conditions and therefore possible to mould and to perfect through reform, has been undermined by scientific discoveries in various areas.

But the most sensitive, and potentially troubling to the modern psyche, is the difference between human population groups that have evolved over the past 50,000 years. As Wade writes: 'The fact that human evolution has been recent, copious, and regional is not widely recognized, even though it has now been reported by many articles in the literature of genetics. The reason is in part that the knowledge is so new and in part because it raises awkward challenges to deeply held conventional wisdom.'

The political objections are a reaction to the horrific things done in the name of race in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, culminating in the Final Solution, after which the UN's Ashley Montagu made the influential declaration that race was to all intents and purposes a fiction. Before that, anthropologist Franz Boas had popularised the idea that we are entirely products of culture.

This has remained the conventional view, indeed the only one that academics could safely hold; yet a number of inconsistencies have begun to crack away at this noble idea.

Among them is the recent knowledge that evolution can take place far quicker than people once thought. Greg Cochran and Henry Harpending, in their book *The 10,000 Year Explosion*, argued that human evolution had sped up since the advent of the first cities. The drastic changes in our ancestors' environment created new evolutionary pressures; among them were selection for qualities that were beneficial in our larger communities, such as lower levels of aggression, deferred gratification (vital for farmers), a greater willingness to trust people outside of close kin group, and the qualities required for craftsmanship, finance and various other complex skills. Thus civilisation had increased the rate of evolution, and was continuing to do so.

Their research was solid, yet as Wade says, 'Scientific enquiry thus runs into potential conflict with the public policy interest of not generating possibly invidious comparisons that might foment racism'.

Among the areas explored by Cochran and Harpending, along with another academic, Jason Hardy, has been Ashkenazi intelligence, and yet a previous paper, despite being considered 'fascinating' by editors, could not be published in the United States.

It is obviously understandable why Jewish intelligence and success, the subject of extreme and violent jealousies through the ages, makes people nervous. But the outsized contribution of Jews to almost all fields must surely interest all but the dullest of minds: just 0.2 per cent of the world population, Jews accounted for 29 per cent of Nobel Prizes in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, and 32 per cent so far in 21st century. That tiny, remarkable country Israel recently won its fifth Chemistry Prize in a decade.

One can admire Jewish culture and the Jewish work ethic, but the idea that this enormous level of achievement is purely cultural, while possible, certainly does not pass the Occam's razor test. As Wade says, 'People are highly imitative, and if the Jewish advantage were purely cultural, such as hectoring mothers or a special devotion to education, there would be little to prevent others from copying it.' They haven't.

The same is true of the Chinese, who across Asia and now the rest of the world have formed highly successful business communities and, like the Jews, have suffered attacks from jealous neighbours: 'If Chinese business success were purely cultural, everyone should find it easy to adopt the same methods. This is not the case because social behaviour, of Chinese and others, is genetically shaped.'

As he says: 'New evidence strongly suggests that the very different kinds of society seen in the various races and in the world's great civilizations differ not just because of their received culture – in other words, in what is learned from birth – but also because of variations in the social behaviour of their members, carried down in their genes.'

The implications of this will trouble many people, seeing as it suggests that certain traits differ on average among population groups. He cites the MAO-A enzyme; people with only 2 copies (rather than 3, 4 or 5) have a much higher level of delinquency. And 'if individuals can differ in the genetic structure of their MAO-A gene and its controls, is the same also true of races and ethnicities? The answer is yes.' A team in Haifa looked at people from seven ethnicities and found 41 variations in the portions of the genes they decoded, with 'substantial differentiation between populations'.

So why do so many people confidently argue that there is no such thing as race, because there are 'no clear distinct racial boundaries'. This he calls 'verbal subterfuge', arguing: 'When a distinct boundary develops between races, they are no longer races but separate species. So to say there are no precise boundaries between races is like saying there are no square circles.'

Wade is critical of leading biologists, economists and psychologists who have simply dismissed possible non-cultural explanations as racist, or who pin their hopes in geographic determinism, or shy away from recent evolution because of the political implications. This, he says, has nothing to do with its scientific validity but the 'political dangers' that researchers face in 'pursuing the truth too far'.

The political dangers are very real; various academics have lost their jobs or faced quite extreme harassment for voicing the belief that differences in group IQ scores are partly hereditary, despite there being solid evidence that intelligence is under genetic control.

And yet these 'accusations of racism against anyone who suggests that cognitive capacities might differ between human populations groups... are shaped by leftist and Marxist political dogma, not by science.' He says: 'The common sense conclusion – that race is both a biological reality and a politically fraught idea with sometimes pernicious consequences – has also eluded' much of academia.

This book's ideas are indeed fraught but beyond carefully explaining the dangers of misusing science, the consequences are not for scientists to ponder, but rather lawmakers and others of influence; they can choose either to consider the evidence and make things work as best as they can, using what knowledge we have, or they can continue to ignore the ticking of Darwin's unexploded bomb, punishing anyone who raises the subject.

This hostility faced by those with troublesome ideas is, of course, itself explained by evolution. As Wade mentions earlier on, we are social creatures, and we have evolved behaviours to live as such: 'One is a tendency to criticise, and if necessary punish, those who do not follow the agreed norms.' That is partly why, as a species, we find it easier to talk about how the world should be, rather than how it is.

## **Investor's Business Daily** **[Putin's Land Grab Is All About Russian Pride](#)**

by Victor Davis Hanson

Russia is a disaster of a declining population, corruption, authoritarianism, a warped economy and a high rate of alcoholism. Why, then, would Vladimir Putin want to ruin additional territory in Crimea and Ukraine the way he's wrecked most of Russia?

Doesn't Russia have enough land for its diminishing population? Are there not enough minerals, timber, gas and oil for Putin's kleptocrats?

In the modern age, especially since Karl Marx, we rationalize the causes of wars as understandable fights over real things, like access to ports, oil fields, good farmland and the like. Yet in the last 2,500 years of Western history, nations have just as often invaded and attacked each other for intangibles.

The historian Thucydides wrote that the classical Athenians had won and kept their empire mostly out of "fear, honor and self-interest."

Maybe that was why most battles in ancient Greece broke out over rocky and mountainous borderlands. Possession of these largely worthless corridors did not add to the material riches of the Spartans, Thebans or Athenians. But dying for such victories did wonders for their national pride and collective sense of self.

Why did the Argentine dictatorship invade the British Falkland Islands in 1982? The great Argentine novelist Jorge Luis Borges dismissed the entire Argentine-British dispute over the isolated, windswept rocks as a pathetic fight between "two bald men over a comb."

Taking the "Malvinas" apparently was critical to restoring the Argentine dictatorship's lost pride. In contrast, the descendants of Lord Nelson were not about to allow a few peacock generals insult the honor of the British Royal Navy.

Doesn't China have enough land without starting a beef with Japan over the uninhabited Senkaku Islands? While there may be some oil in the vicinity, apparently both sides see these desolate mountainous islets as symbols of more important issues of national prestige and will. Lose the Senkaku Islands and what larger island goes next?

Saddam Hussein had enough land without invading Iran in 1980. But his impoverished Iraqis grew terrified of revolutionary Shiite Iran and lashed out. Iraq also had enough oil without taking Kuwait in 1990. But occupying it made Iraqis proud at home and feared in the Middle East neighborhood.

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Maybe. But it would be wiser to review the historical causes of war, especially why conflicts break out. Aggressors often attack their weaker neighbors to restore a sense of pride. They calibrate self-interest not so much in getting more stuff as winning greater honor, feeling safer and instilling more fear.

Just as important, history's aggressors embraced their fears and sense of honor because they thought they could get away with doing so scot-free — given the perceived loss of deterrence.

Putin, like Hitler in 1939, may be weak in geostrategic terms. But as long as he does not provoke an American and European collective response, he can assume that Russia is far stronger than any one of his next targets.

Like Hitler, Putin does not know exactly which future aggressive act will prompt a U.S. and European reaction. But until then, he is willing to continue gambling that he can restore some more of the lost empire of the czars and commissars — and with it more Russian honor, influence and pride — without consequences.

If history is any guide, these emotions are driving Putin to grab things that are not his. Putin acts now because in the era of failed reset diplomacy and recent empty American deadlines, red lines and step-over lines, he feels the old U.S. deterrent is absent or dormant. And he will keep up his aggression until he senses that the increasing risks no longer warrant the diminishing returns of absorbing his neighbors.

We should stop trying to psychoanalyze Putin, arguing that he is really weak or is an adolescent showing off his machismo — much less that he has legitimate grievances.

Instead, Putin believes that the more he grabs from others, the prouder his otherwise downtrodden citizens will become, the more respect they will earn abroad, and the less likely others will fool with him. Until that is no longer true, Putin will continue.

## WSJ

### [How to Trick the Guilty and Gullible into Revealing Themselves](#)

*It starts with a basic understanding of game theory and incentives*

by Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner

King Solomon built the First Temple in Jerusalem and was known throughout the land for his wisdom.

David Lee Roth fronted the rock band Van Halen and was known throughout the land for his prima-donna excess.

What could these two men possibly have had in common? Well, both were Jewish; both got a lot of girls; and both wrote the lyrics to a No. 1 pop song ("Jump" in Mr. Roth's case and, in Solomon's, several verses from Ecclesiastes that appeared in the Byrds' 1965 hit "Turn! Turn!



Turn"). But most improbably, they both dabbled in game theory, as seen in classic stories about their clever strategic thinking.

Early in Solomon's reign, two women came to him with a dilemma. They lived together—they were prostitutes by trade—and within the space of a few days had each given birth to a baby boy. One child had died, and now both women claimed the surviving baby as her own.

"Fetch me a sword," Solomon said. "Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other."

One woman embraced his solution. But the other begged Solomon not to hurt the baby and give it to her rival instead. Solomon promptly ruled in her favor, figuring that the real mother would rather give up her child than see it die.

As clever as that was, David Lee Roth may have been a bit cleverer—according, at least, to Mr. Roth himself. Here is how he tells the story in a Vimeo video. By the early 1980s, Van Halen had become one of the biggest rock bands in history. Their touring contract carried a 53-page rider that laid out technical and security specs as well as food and beverage requirements. The "Munchies" section demanded potato chips, nuts, pretzels and "M&M's (WARNING: ABSOLUTELY NO BROWN ONES)."

When the M&M clause found its way into the press, it seemed like a typical case of rock-star excess, of the band "being abusive of others simply because we could," Mr. Roth said. But, he explained, "the reality is quite different."

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Cue the brown M&M's. As Roth tells it, he would immediately go backstage to check out the bowl of M&M's. If he saw brown ones, he knew the promoter hadn't read the rider carefully—and that "we had to do a serious line check" to make sure that the more important details hadn't been botched either.

And so it was that David Lee Roth and King Solomon both engaged in a fruitful bit of game theory—which, narrowly defined, is the art of beating your opponent by anticipating his next move.

Both men faced a similar problem: How to sift the guilty from the innocent when no one is stepping forward to profess their guilt? A person who is lying or cheating will often respond to an incentive differently than an honest person. Wouldn't it be nice if this fact could be exploited to ferret out the bad guys?

We believe it can—by tricking the guilty parties into unwittingly revealing their guilt through their own behavior. What should this trick be called? In honor of King Solomon, we'll name it as if it is a lost proverb: Teach Your Garden to Weed Itself.



King Solomon famously threatened to cut a baby in half during a dispute between two women who both claimed to be its mother. The tactics were designed to make cheaters reveal themselves. Alinari/Getty Images

Imagine you've been accused of a crime. The police say that you stole something, but the evidence is murky.

So the judge comes up with a creative solution: He decrees that you must plunge your arm into a caldron of boiling water. If you come away unhurt, you will go free; if your arm is disfigured, you will go to prison.

This is what happened in Europe for hundreds of years. During the Middle Ages, if a court couldn't determine whether a defendant was guilty, it often turned the case over to a priest who would administer an "ordeal" using boiling water or a smoking-hot iron bar. The idea was that God, who knew the truth, would miraculously deliver from harm any suspect who had been wrongly accused.

As a means of establishing guilt, the medieval ordeal sounds barbaric and nonsensical. But according to Peter Leeson, an economist at George Mason University, it was surprisingly effective—because it let the garden weed itself.

Dr. Leeson analyzed a set of church records from 13th-century Hungary; it included 308 cases that entered the trial-by-ordeal phase. Of these, 100 were aborted before producing a final result. That left 208 cases in which the defendant was summoned by a priest to the church, climbed the altar and was forced to grab hold of a red-hot iron bar.

How many of those 208 people do you think were badly burned? All 208? We're talking about red-hot iron here. Maybe 207 or 206?

The actual number was 78. Which means that the remaining 130—nearly two-thirds of the defendants—were miraculously unharmed and thereby exonerated.

Unless these 130 miracles *were* miracles, how can they be explained? Dr. Leeson thinks he knows the answer: "priestly rigging"—that is, the priest somehow tinkered with the setup to make the ordeal look legitimate while ensuring that the defendant wouldn't be disfigured. Maybe the priest swapped out the hot iron bar for a cooler one, or—if using the boiling-water ordeal—dumped a pail of cold water into the caldron before the congregants entered the church.

Why would a priest do this? Was he simply showing mercy? Had he taken a bribe from a wealthy defendant?

Dr. Leeson sees a different explanation. As we noted, a guilty person and an innocent one often respond differently to the same incentive. So, facing a medieval ordeal, what might the guilty suspects and the innocent ones be thinking?

A guilty person is probably thinking: *God knows I am guilty. Therefore, if I undergo the ordeal, I will be horribly scalded. Not only will I then be imprisoned or fined, but I'll spend the rest of my life in pain. So perhaps I should go ahead and confess.*

And what would an innocent person think? *God knows I am innocent. Therefore I will undergo the ordeal since God would never allow this fiery curse to harm me.*

All this, Dr. Leeson writes, "created a separating equilibrium in which only innocent defendants were willing to undergo ordeals." This helps explain why 100 of the 308 ordeals were aborted: The defendants in these cases settled before the ordeal stage—often, presumably, because the defendant was guilty and figured he'd be better off accepting his punishment without the additional pain of being burned.

But 78 defendants in this data set were scalded and then fined or sent to prison. What happened in those cases?

Our best guess is that either the priests believed these defendants really were guilty—or the priests had to keep up appearances to show that trial by ordeal really worked. So these folks were sacrificed.

Of course, the threat would lose its power if the defendants didn't believe in an all-powerful, all-knowing God who punished the guilty and pardoned the innocent. Without that fear, a trial by ordeal would be as scary as the father who's always threatening to spank his child but never does. But history suggests that most people of the time did indeed believe in an all-powerful, justice-seeking God.

Which leads us to the most bizarre twist in this bizarre story: If medieval priests did manipulate the ordeals, that might make them the only parties who thought an all-knowing God didn't exist—or if He did, that He had enough faith in his priestly deputies to see their tampering as part of a divine quest for justice.

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You, too, can play God once in a while if you learn to set up a self-weeding garden.

Consider one of the most basic business transactions: hiring. This consumes a lot of time and money, especially in industries where workers come and go. So wouldn't it be great to find some quick, clever, cheap way of weeding out bad employees before they are hired?

Zappos, the online shoe-and-clothing store, has come up with one such trick. Its customer-service reps are central to the firm's success, so Zappos wants to know that each new employee is fully committed to the company's ethos.

That's where "The Offer" comes in. After a new employee has completed a few weeks of training, Zappos offers them a chance to quit. Even better, the quitter will be paid for their training time and get a bonus representing their first month's salary—roughly \$2,000—just for quitting! All they have to do is go through an exit interview and surrender their eligibility to be rehired at Zappos.

What kind of company would offer a new employee \$2,000 not to work?

A clever one. "It's really putting the employee in the position of, 'Do you care more about money, or do you care more about this culture and the company?'" said Tony Hsieh, the company's

CEO, in a radio interview. "And if they care more about the easy money, then we probably aren't the right fit for them."

Mr. Hsieh figured that any worker who would take the easy \$2,000 was the kind of worker who would end up losing the firm a lot more in the long run. By one industry estimate, it costs an average of roughly \$4,000 to replace a single employee, and one recent survey of 2,500 companies found that a single bad hire can cost more than \$25,000 in lost productivity, lower morale and the like. So Zappos decided to pay a measly \$2,000 upfront and let the bad hires weed themselves out before they took root. As of this writing, fewer than 1% of new hires at Zappos accept "The Offer."

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Seducing people into sorting themselves into different categories can be all sorts of useful—and not just in admirable ways.

Have you, for instance, ever received an email from someone purporting to be a government official from Nigeria, or perhaps a deposed prince or billionaire's widow from that country, asking for your assistance in securing a large fortune?

Of course you have! The writer, in florid language, describes the millions of dollars he has the rights to, if only he could extract it from some rigid bureaucracy or uncooperative bank.

That's where you come in. If you will send along your bank-account information, the widow or prince or government official can safely park the money in your account until everything is straightened out. Of course, you may need to advance a few thousand dollars for upfront fees. But you'll be richly rewarded for your trouble.

Variations of this scam have been practiced for centuries. Today, it lives primarily on the Internet and is often called the Nigerian scam because more emails of this sort invoke Nigeria than all other countries combined.

Which might lead you to wonder: If the Nigerian scam is so famous, why would a Nigerian scammer ever admit he is from Nigeria? That was the question Cormac Herley, a computer scientist at [Microsoft](#) Research, began to ask himself.

He'd never thought much about the Nigerian scam until he heard two people mention it from opposite angles. One talked about the billions of dollars the scammers earn. The other noted how stupid these scammers must be to send out letters full of such outlandish stories. How, Dr. Herley wondered, could both statements be true? If the scammers are so dumb and their letters so obviously a scam, how could they be successful?

He began to examine the scam from the scammers' perspective. (An August 2012 article in these pages discussed Dr. Herley's research.) For anyone wishing to commit fraud, the Internet has been a wondrous gift: It makes it easy and cheap to send out millions of bait letters to potential victims. But converting a potential victim into a real one will require a good deal of time and effort.

Imagine that for every 10,000 emails you send, 100 people take the initial bait and write back. The 9,900 who trashed your email haven't cost you anything. But now you start to invest

significantly in those 100 potential victims. For every one of them who wises up or simply loses interest, your profit margin decreases.

How many of these 100 will end up actually paying you? Let's say one of them goes all the way. The other 99 are, in the parlance of statistics, false positives.

Internet fraud is hardly the only realm haunted by false positives. Roughly 95% of the burglar alarms that U.S. police respond to are false alarms, at a yearly cost of some \$2 billion. One recent medical study found an astonishingly high rate of false positives—60% for men, 49% for women—among patients who were regularly screened for various cancers.

So how can a Nigerian scammer minimize his false positives?

Dr. Herley, while modeling this question, identified the most valuable characteristic in a potential victim: gullibility. Who else but a supremely gullible person would send thousands of dollars to a faraway stranger based on a kooky letter?

But how can a Nigerian scammer tell who is gullible and who isn't? He can't. Gullibility is, in this case, an unobservable trait. But the scammer could invite the gullible people to reveal themselves.

How? By sending out such a ridiculous letter—including prominent mentions of Nigeria—that only a gullible person would take it seriously. Anyone with an ounce of sense or experience would immediately trash the email. "The scammer wants to find the guy who hasn't heard of it," Dr. Herley says. "Anybody who doesn't fall off their chair laughing is exactly who he wants to talk to." Here's how Dr. Herley put it in a research paper: "The goal of the e-mail is not so much to attract viable users as to repel the nonviable ones, who greatly outnumber them."

So if your first instinct was to think that Nigerian scammers are stupid, perhaps you have been convinced, as Cormac Herley was, that this is exactly the kind of stupid we should all aspire to be. The ridiculous-sounding Nigerian emails seem to be quite good at getting the scammers' massive garden to weed itself.

*This essay is adapted from the latest book by Messrs. Levitt and Dubner, "Think Like a Freak," which will be published on May 12 by Morrow. Their previous books include "Freakonomics" and "SuperFreakonomics."*

## **Real Clear Science**

### **6 Surprising Facts About Caffeine**

[Caffeine](#) is many things: a stimulant, an alkaloid, and to many, a lifesaver. By counteracting a substance called adenosine in the body, which has the purpose of inhibiting activity in the central nervous system, caffeine boosts wakefulness, focus, and coordination.

It's also the world's most popular [psychoactive](#) drug. Globally, humans consume 120 million kilograms of the stuff each year, which is pretty impressive when you consider that the average cup of coffee contains just .1 grams!

Many young plant species [contain high amounts of caffeine](#). When certain herbivorous insects feed on the seedlings, they are paralyzed or even killed. As the plants grow and develop denser foliage and stronger external protection, internal levels of caffeine diminish.

Adolf Hitler's personal physician, [Theodor Gilbert Morell](#), was a noted quack. Almost everyone besides the Führer, himself, regarded Morell as opportunistic, lazy, and generally a terrible doctor. Hitler, however, was enamored with the man, and -- especially towards the end of the war -- came to rely on the daily doses of substances that Morrell supplied. Included in Morell's many injections and pills were amphetamines, E. Coli, methamphetamine, morphine, strychnine, testosterone, various vitamins, and, of course, caffeine!

Yes, caffeine use [does lead to a mild physical dependence](#), but it also doesn't threaten a person's physical, social, or economic well being the way other addictions do, like to sex, gambling, or other drugs like alcohol or heroin. Halting prolonged caffeine consumption will engender withdrawal symptoms for a couple days, including headache, fatigue, anxiety, and irritability, but, again, they'll be minor compared to the symptoms produced by other drugs.

Caffeine dependence starts out innocuous enough. Maybe it's the end of the day and you need a little extra spark for that dinner date? Or perhaps you stayed up too late the night before and are reeling in your seat at work by lunchtime? But pretty soon, you find yourself comatose in the morning before slurping down that four-dollar A.M. Starbucks. That escalated rapidly...

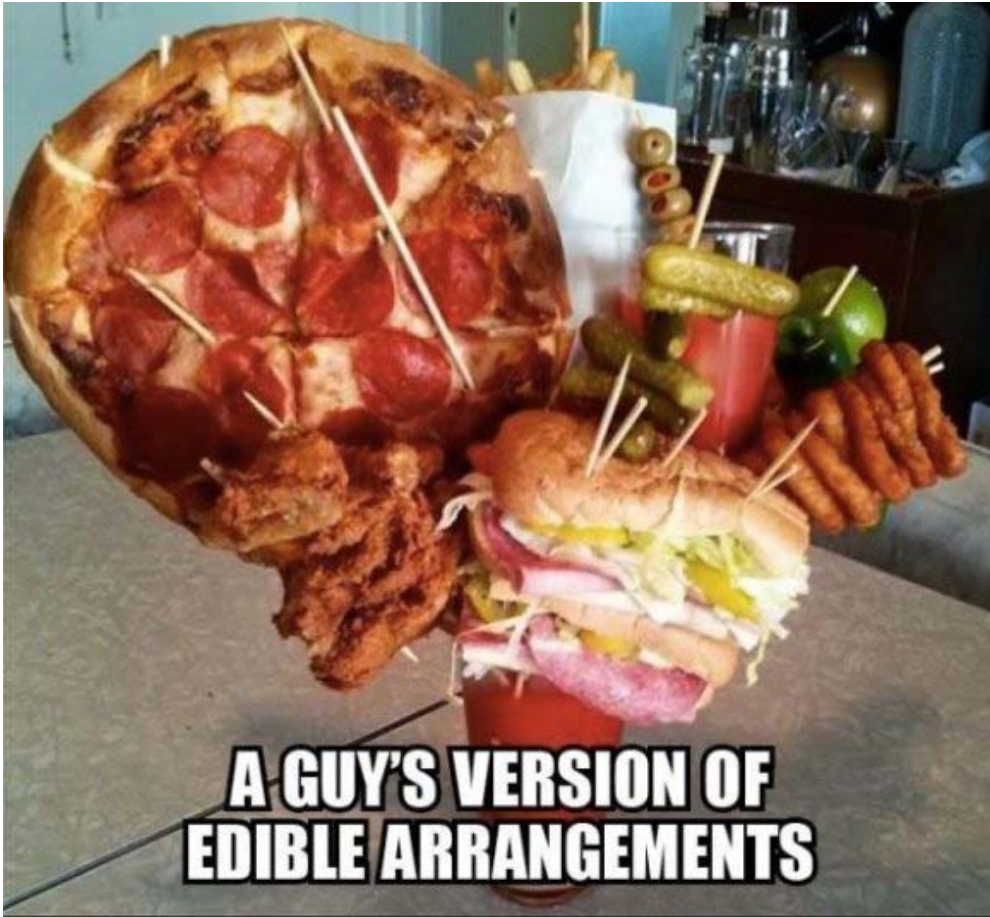
"[Caffeine] is a stimulant, so it does increase metabolism," [Yale neuroscientist Steven Novella remarked](#). "But actually you get tolerant to that effect very quickly. It takes only three weeks to get tolerant to the stimulative effect of caffeine, after that you're just basically staving off your caffeine withdrawal."

There are many processes of [decaffeination](#), and none of them are perfect. When it comes to coffee, often about 20% of initial caffeine levels remain after decaffeination. Obviously, that's far less than the original amount, but it's still [enough to provide a noticeable jolt](#).









**A GUY'S VERSION OF  
EDIBLE ARRANGEMENTS**



Now THIS is one state fair I definitely want to attend.