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Stephen Hawking Claims Aggression Will Be Downfall of Human Race

February 26, 2015 | by Lisa Winter



photo credit: Adaye Uyanwah/VisitLondon.com via Twitter



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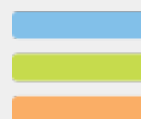
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Physicist Stephen Hawking has been garnering quite a bit of attention this week, as Eddie Redmayne won an [Academy Award](#) for his portrayal of the scientist in "[The Theory of Everything](#)." However, Professor Hawking is also making headlines for a conversation he had with Adaye Uyanwah, a 24-year-old student from California. Uyanwah was treated to a tour of London's [Science Museum](#) accompanied by Hawking as part of her prize package from the "Guest of Honor" contest by [VisitLondon.com](#). During their time together at the museum, Uyanwah asked Hawking which human trait he would most like to change.

"The human failing I would most like to correct is aggression. It may have had survival advantage in caveman days, to get more food, territory or a partner with whom to reproduce, but now it threatens to destroy us all," Hawking answered her, according to the [Independent](#). "A major nuclear war would be the end of civilization, and maybe the end of the human race," he explained."

Not only does human aggression no longer serve an obvious purpose, but technological advances, such as nuclear weaponry, have made it so that an incredible amount of damage could be done with very little effort by a small number of people. Hawking isn't the only prominent scientist to have made this observation; Carl Sagan was [outspoken](#) against the development of nuclear arms during his life.



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Uyanwah also asked the physicist which human traits he would like to see more often. Unsurprisingly, he commented that he would like to see more kindness and understanding.

“The quality I would most like to magnify is empathy. It brings us together in a peaceful, loving state,” he replied.

Hawking then went on to discuss the immense importance of continued space exploration to the longevity of the human race. Again, echoing the sentiments of Sagan and others, Hawking spoke of extending the physical presence of humanity beyond the reaches of our own planet or even our own moon.

"Sending humans to the moon changed the future of the human race in ways that we don't yet understand. It hasn't solved any of our immediate problems on planet Earth, but it has given us new perspectives on them and caused us to look both outward and inward," Hawking explained. "I believe that the long term future of the human race must be space and that it represents an important life insurance for our future survival, as it could prevent the disappearance of humanity by colonizing other planets."

Uyanwah conveyed how much she enjoyed her time with Hawking on Twitter, referring to him as a “legend” and an “inspiration.” Hawking also discussed the then-impending Academy Awards, praising Redmayne’s portrayal of him, but [quipped](#), “Unfortunately Eddie did not inherit my good looks.”

Talking to [#StephenHawking](#) was truly inspirational and he has such an awesome sense of humour! pic.twitter.com/lKoXlWUu9z

— Londons Guest (@LondonGuest) [February 20, 2015](#)



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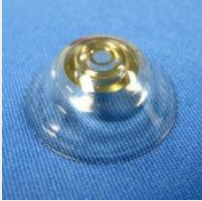
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Stephen Hawking, Eddie Redmayne, Space exploration

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Weighed · 19 hours ago

From where I sit, I can see the "belief of religion" as the main difference in the way we live our lives and the way we are taught from our parents and what to "believe" in.

Im sure by me saying I think religion is the most ridiculous thing to ever come out of a humans mind, will provoke much aggression. Peace.

107 ^ | v · Share ›



Ryan Wood → Weighed · 18 hours ago

I agree with you. Religion is an insult to human intelligence.

94 ^ | v · Share ›



daisybee9 → Weighed · 19 hours ago

Belief in religion isn't a human trait in the sense he is talking about. It's certainly a product of human traits (adaptations) +history. But belief in religion itself a cultural construct rather than an adaptation.

29 ^ | v · Share ›



Phil Page · 19 hours ago

When I read this, Putin immediately comes to mind. He's in a position to be one of the most generous and lauded people in the history of our race, if he were to be kind and benevolent.. but still he remains aggressive and instead earns the enmity and disgust of the nearly the entire human race.

25 ^ | v · Share ›



Johny JV Pětník → Phil Page · 19 hours ago

LOL, you truly believe that Putin is the only one in such position? All other world leaders are just as bad or worse. You want peace, abolish goverments, bring true democracy, ban religions and pour money into education, don't spit on one small part of the problem.

59 ^ | v · Share ›



ockd2006 → Johny JV Pětník · 19 hours ago

Yep. Ending world conflict is just so damn simple. I'm so glad we have you here to tell us!

21 ^ | v · Share ›



Johny JV Pětník → ockd2006 · 19 hours ago

Well of course it's not simple, but spiting on one small dictator, while ignoring rest of the problems is. What I've said is just a small part of what needs to done, however it needs to be done.

27 ^ | v · Share ›



Idocare · 19 hours ago

Human aggression is simply manifest destiny, of every category.

4 ^ | v · Share ›



Beezl · 19 hours ago

Let me remind everyone that is harping on technology (ugh), that man has a net positive in terms of quality of life and humanity is concerned. Things have been getting better, and with technology and science... they will continue to get better. Take a moment to "count your blessings" and its not all doom. I think to take hypothetical question to mean more than it was meant to be is the problem here....This is where media really fails. See, this headline and the tone to which it presents itself is to meant to leave the impression that this

character to which society gives much credence has pointed out that humanity is doooooooooommmmed. That is what IFL is doing here. That is what major news media and many other news outfits do today. Is this what you guys are taught in journalism school or is it like a desperate to get a click thing for ad rev...probably the ladder. But the fact remains. What we don't see is IFL outright being blatant with their hysteria, but instead, implying something that affects people.. not cool, but you know...whatever.

6 ^ | v · Share ›



Jeeebusss ➔ Beezl · 19 hours ago

We are not talking about the overall effect of technology on day to day human life quality, we are talking about the ability of isolated power structures to exact violence.

It used to be impossible to kill someone from hundreds of yards, but then came gun powder and we did it.

It used to be impossible to mow down hundreds of people at once from a distance, and then came machine guns and we did it.

It used to be impossible to blow up whole buildings but then came bombs and heavy artillery and we did it.

It used to be impossible to blow up whole cities and then came nukes and we did it.

Every time the technology has provided an opportunity, mankind has WITHOUT FAIL utilized it to benchmark a larger target. We now have the capability of the entire Earth being destroyed. Given humanity's past of achieving destruction on the largest target possible 100% of the time without fail, what makes you think nobody will do it this time around?

23 ^ | v · Share ›



daisybee9 ➔ Beezl · 19 hours ago

IFLS is guilty of saying "will" in their title, instead of "could." However the issue he raises isn't about harping on technology, it's about recognizing that technology allows for our innate aggressive tendencies to do much much much more damage than they could have previously, in the context in which they evolved.

14 ^ | v · Share ›



Jp Ogena · 19 hours ago

We already know this proffesor but as the worlds greatest mind can you find a way to solve the problem of "aggression" ??

^ | v · Share ›



daisybee9 ➔ Jp Ogena · 19 hours ago

He was asked a direct question. Was he supposed to withhold his answer because you think a lot of people agree with him?

19 ^ | v · Share ›



uglybagofwater · 19 hours ago

This "aggression" of which Dr. Hawking speaks -- is it new to human culture?

1 ^ | v · Share ›



Shaun Partee ➔ uglybagofwater · 19 hours ago

no

2 ^ | v · Share ›



Gordon Dyck → uglybagofwater · 19 hours ago

No. Its something that has been bred into us through billions of years of evolution. What he is saying is its time for it and the other major negatives of our collective psyche to take a hike but that would also mean people changing how they view the world, what they want from the world, and how they get it. Which is a lot to ask of a species that does not like change(which is another adaptation of survival).

17 ^ | v · Share ›



daisybee9 → Gordon Dyck · 19 hours ago

You can't get genes to take a hike simply by changing your world view.

And I disagree that we inherently don't like change in some across the board sense as a species. Our adaptations heavily favor variation in behavior.

3 ^ | v · Share ›



Gordon Dyck → daisybee9 · 19 hours ago

So you say that one cannot make a conscious effort to not be controlled by ones genes. I choose not to be controlled by aggression as it serves little purpose.

As for our adaptions. Yes we have adapted over 1 million years. But people do not like change on small time frames and when it does the question of which adaptions are favorable are answered. In this case aggression was one that won out through increased hormones which has been shown in experiments to increase aggression in animals. But I also hold us above animals. I do believe we can overcome our programming but it takes a conscious effort and self evaluation to do it. Am I without aggression. I can say no. But it also does not rule me. I make a choice accept it and not let it control me. That can be done without telling genes to take a hike.

5 ^ | v · Share ›



theReaL*Lydia85 · 20 hours ago

Yeah, it's what the Christians call The Apocalypse. We control our own fate and that is scary for some people, as it should be.

1 ^ | v · Share ›



Gordon Dyck → theReaL*Lydia85 · 19 hours ago

No we really do not. Its controlled by a small minority of people who happen to have too much testosterone running through their heads. And yes women can have it too(without supplements). Which results in us having aggressive power hungry individuals running the world and those who have moved past those views left scratching their heads as to how we are still stuck 1500 years ago in terms of how we think.

20 ^ | v · Share ›



Jeeebusss · 20 hours ago

He's right. Eventually, someone will press "the button." Technology is getting too advanced and too easily accessible to keep it out of the hands of all madmen everywhere forever. It might be a nuke, it might be a synthetic virus that gets out of control, it might be nano-machinery gone amok, or any number of other things that fall into the wrong hands. Eventually, Earth is probably

or other things that fall into the wrong hands. Eventually, Earth is probably toast. The only question is: can we get off it and spread ourselves out as a species before that happens? We may have 10 years or 100 or 1,000. Good luck human race, you will need it!

30 ^ | v · Share ›



daisybee9 · 20 hours ago

Behavior is complex. We can have selection for aggression and cooperation at the same time. Hawking wasn't saying that aggression was the only behavior that was being selected for in "caveman" times, just that it was previously more beneficial than it is now.

2 ^ | v · Share ›



Ian Turnbull · 20 hours ago

There was no "Great War", there was no war to end all other wars. Stephen Hawking for a clever man is stating the bleeding obvious.

He talks of the importance of space exploration, well I suspect it would never have started if nations hadn't thought of conquering space as a strategy to help in destruction of other nations.

8 ^ | v · Share ›



P3ndu1uM · 20 hours ago

makes sense considering that our threats is either an atomic war which can be enabled with aggression, global warming which is caused by greed, ebola is caused by overpopulation. but honestly a pandemic were to wipe most of out, it would solve all others. if life is to be stayed on the planet for the near future i'd say it's the only way or even better wipe out the whole human race before global warming gets out of hand, THAT future is closer than you think, it will make a snowballeffect which can't stop unless we somehow have mashines that we can massproduct to transform CO2 into O2 and leave carbon in a storage or something

1 ^ | v · Share ›



Federico Masini · 20 hours ago

“The human failing I would most like to correct is aggression”.

Well said. The problem is, there is still a fair number of people (or governments) who think otherwise...

12 ^ | v · Share ›



Brock Nanson ➔ Federico Masini · 20 hours ago

Taking your thought a little further.... many of the human traits necessary to become the leader of a democratic state aren't good traits. And going even further... most of the traits necessary to lead in a non-democratic society definitely are NOT 'good' traits!!

7 ^ | v · Share ›



Dards ➔ Brock Nanson · 20 hours ago

Plato would agree

1 ^ | v · Share ›



Laura Weldon · 20 hours ago

Thank you Dr. Hawking.

Except for one small thing. "Cavemen" survived and evolved thanks to cooperation. According to anthropologist Douglas Fry, evidence shows that for 98 percent of human existence on earth we lived in small nomadic bands that thrived precisely because major acts of aggression were avoided. He presents

thrived precisely because major acts of aggression were avoided. He presents compelling proof in his book, Beyond War: The Human Potential for Peace along with the message that human beings have highly developed capacities to seek and maintain peace.

12 ^ | v · Share ›



daisybee9 → Laura Weldon · 19 hours ago

I think you missed this part in your characterization that Hawking was reducing early humans to some kind of pure aggressors.

“The quality I would most like to magnify is empathy. It brings us together in a peaceful, loving state,” he replied.

1 ^ | v · Share ›



daisybee9 → Laura Weldon · 20 hours ago

I think what he's saying is that violence and aggression was in the past a more successfully strategy than it is now. He is not saying it was the only strategy.

19 ^ | v · Share ›



Julian Weber → Laura Weldon · 20 hours ago

I think Hawking was talking about aggression between said groups. I fully agree that humans have capacities to seek and maintain peace, but we also have a huge greed in our minds, and the desire of greatness and power often negates every inch of our empathy.

4 ^ | v · Share ›



Gordon Dyck → Julian Weber · 19 hours ago

Greed is just another evolved instinct. While I am not religious person the "7 deadly sins" each have a place and reason as a survival adaptation and as an instinct. Most of the worlds population is control greatly by these and those who are not as controlled by them are usually great minds whom have overcome those chains. But at a cost they do not care about the same things the rest of people do thus governance/areas of power are of little to no interest to them. It simply does not make sense to them. To use the "L" word "it is not logical". That is not saying that people without as many controls imposed by instinct are vulcans but they see the world from a different perspective. I kinda count myself as ones of those in that group. Simply put as Dr. Hawking has indicated. We are our worst enemy.

2 ^ | v · Share ›



daisybee9 → Julian Weber · 20 hours ago

I don't think he's only referring to group to group violence. There's plenty of evidence that other primate groups have in-group aggression that is selected for.

1 ^ | v · Share ›

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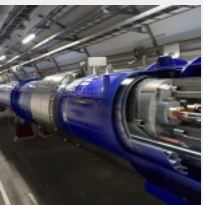
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