

Small Samples

I have begun reading Steven Pinker's *The Better Angels of Our Nature*. It's a bit of a rocky start. His premise is that we are, as a species, becoming less violent. He offers the idea that out of Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel, the murder rate was 25%. The scam here is that if you take a small enough sample any occurrence can be made to look huge. But the reality is that most Saturday nights in most USA large cities will match or multiply the murder rate of that primeval family. And how about the death rate stemming from legally operated automobiles? But I am keeping my mind open, perhaps Pinker will rehabilitate himself. Early in the book he has made several good points, but ridiculous ideas weigh disproportionately against the good. I want him to be correct. After all, I am hoping for a positive evolution of our species, too.

— Kilgore Forelle