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Ladies and Gentlemen, this evening it is my modest intention to tell you in the short time we have together . . . everything you will ever need to know about the human beast.

I take that term, the human beast, from my idol, Emile Zola, who published a novel entitled *The Human Beast* in 1888, just 29 years after Darwin's *The Origin of Species* broke the stunning news that *Homo sapiens*--or *Homo loquax*, as I call him--was not created by God in his own image but was precisely that, a beast, not different in any essential way from snakes with fangs or orangutangs . . . or kangaroos. . . or the fang-proof mongoose. Darwin's doctrine, Evolution, leapt from the pages of a scientific monograph into every level of society in Europe and America with sensational suddenness. It created a sheerly dividing line between the God-fearing bourgeoisie who were appalled, and those people of sweetness and light whose business it was to look down at the bourgeoisie from a great height. Today, of course, we call these superior people intellectuals, but intellectual didn't exist as a noun until Clemenceau applied it to Zola and Anatole France in 1896 during the Dreyfus Case. Zola's

LECTURE

The Human Beast

By Tom Wolfe

Jefferson Lecture speech as prepared for delivery



Andrew Proctor (left)

intellect was as sweetly enlightened as they made them. He was in with the in-crowd. Evenings he spent where the in-crowd went, namely, the Café Guerbois, along with Manet, Cezanne, Whistler, Nadar, and *le tout Paris bohème*. He took his cues from the in-crowd's views, namely, Academic art was bad, Impressionism was good, and *Homo sapiens* had descended from the monkeys in the trees. Human beasts? I'll give you human beasts! Zola's aforementioned novel of that name, *La Bête Humaine* in French, is a story of four murderers, a woman and three men, who work down at track level on the Paris-Le Havre railroad line, each closing in on a different victim, each with a different motive, including the case of a handsome young passenger train engineer with a compulsion . . . to make love to women and then kill them. With that, Zola crowned himself as the first scientific novelist, a "naturalist," to use his term, studying the human fauna.

I love my man Zola. He's my idol. But the whole business exudes irony so rich, you can taste it. It tastes like marzipan. Here we have Darwin and his doctrine that in 1859 rocks Western man's very conception of himself . . . We have the most popular writer in the world in 1888, Zola, who can't wait to bring the doctrine alive on the page . . . We have the next five generations of educated people who have believed and believe to this day that, at bottom, evolution's primal animal urges rule our lives . . . to the point where the fourth greatest pop music hit of 2001, "You and Me, Baby" by the Bloodhound Gang, proclaims, "You and me, baby, we ain't nothing but mammals. / So let's do it like they do on the Dis-cov-ery Channel"--it's rich! rich! rich beyond belief!

O. I love you, Emile, but by the time you and Darwin got hold of it, evolution had been irrelevant for 11,000 years. Why couldn't you two see it? Evolution came to an end when the human beast developed speech! As soon as he became not *Homo sapiens*, "man reasoning," but *Homo loquax*, "man talking"! Speech gave the human beast far more than an ingenious tool. Speech was a veritable nuclear weapon! It gave the human beast the powers of

reason, complex memory, and long-term planning, eventually in the form of print and engineering plans. Speech gave him the power to enlarge his food supply at will through an artifice called farming. Speech ended not only the evolution of man, by making it no longer necessary, but also the evolution of animals! Our animal friends--we're very sentimental about predators these days, aren't we--the lions, the tigers, the wolves, the rhinoceroses, the great apes, kangaroos, leopards, cheetahs, grizzly bears, polar bears, cougars--they're "endangered," meaning hanging on for dear life. Today the so-called animal kingdom exists only at the human beast's sufferance. The beast has dealt crippling blows even to the unseen empire of the microbes. Stunted adults from Third World countries with abysmal sanitation come to the United States and their offspring grow six or more inches taller, thanks to the wonders of hygiene. Cattle, sheep, pigs, chickens, turkeys would be extinct by now had not the human beasts hit upon the idea of animal husbandry. So far the human beast enjoys the luxury of crying sentimental tears over the deer because she's so pretty. But the day the human beast discovers deer in his cellar, fawns in his bedroom closet, bucks tangling horns in the attic at night above his very bedroom . . . those filthy oversized vermin, the deer, will be added to that big long list above. We're sentimental about the dolphins, because they're so smart. What about the tuna? It's okay to kill tunas by the ton because they're dimwits? It would take an evolutionary mystic (and there are such) to believe these animals will ever evolve their way out of the hole they're in thanks to man's power of speech.

No evolutionist has come up with even an interesting guess as to when speech began, but it was at least 11,000 years ago, which is to say, 9000 B.C. It seems to be the consensus . . . in the notoriously capricious field of evolutionary chronology . . . that 9000 B.C. was about when the human beast began farming, and the beast couldn't have farmed without speech, without being able to say to his son, "Son, this here's seeds. You best be putting 'em in the ground in rows ov'ere like I tell you if you wanna git any

ears a corn this summer."

Do forgive me, Emile, but here is the tastiest of all ironies. One of *Homo loquax's* first creations after he learned to talk was religion. Since *The Origin of Species* in 1859 the doctrine of Evolution has done more than anything else to put an end to religious faith among educated people in Europe and America; for *God is dead*. But it was religion, more than any other weapon in *Homo loquax's* nuclear arsenal, that killed evolution itself 11,000 years ago. To say that evolution explains the nature of modern man is like saying that the Bessemer process of adding carbons to pig iron to make steel explains the nature of the modern skyscraper.

Now shall we begin? Shall we take a look at the actual nature of the human beast--an artificial selection, 100% man-made?

To start with, I beg your indulgence in a scrap of personal history. In 1951 I graduated from Washington and Lee University, where I majored in English, and entered the Yale University graduate school seeking a Ph.D. in American Studies. American Studies was an interdisciplinary field, requiring the study of, among other disciplines, sociology. I recall having the standard literary attitude toward sociology, a pleasant assurance that the social sciences in general were undeserving arrivistes, nouveau admis, here in the realm of the higher things. That notion vanished the moment I came upon the work of the German sociologist Max Weber.

Weber was well known in academia for his essay "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism," written after he toured the United States in 1904. It was the origin of the unfortunately non-Protestant cliché, "the work ethic." He introduced the terms "charisma" and "charismatic" in their current usage; also "bureaucracy," which he characterized as "the routinization of charisma." He coined the term "style of life," which was converted into the compound noun "lifestyle" and put to work as the title of a thousand sections of newspapers across the United States. But

what caught my imagination was the single word "status." In a very short, very dense essay called "Class, Status, and Party" he introduced an entirely new concept.

I was by no means the first person to get excited over Weber's "status." The concept was well known within the field of sociology, although it was more often expressed in such terms as "social class," "social stratification," "prestige systems," and "mobility." Six years later Weber's terms "status-seeking" and "status symbols" began showing up in the press. Soon they were part of everyday language.

The great American sociologists of the 1950s, W. Lloyd Warner, the Lynns, August B. Hollingshead, E. Digby Baltzell, C. Wright Mills, David Riesman, were turning out studies of how Americans rated others and themselves, often unconsciously, according to race, ethnic group, address, occupation, vocabulary, shopping habits, bill-paying habits (personal checks in lump sums as opposed to installment payments in cash), bureaucratic status symbols (corner offices, fine wooden desks as opposed to metal ones, water carafes, sofas as well as chairs, speaker phones, etageres of brass and glass), education (the great divide existing between those who had bachelor's degrees from a respectable four-year college as opposed to those who didn't), even sexual practices. The upper orders made love with the lights on and no bed covers. The lower orders--in the 1950s--found this perverted. Sociologists never rejected Karl Marx's brilliant breakdown of society into classes. But his idea of an upper class--the owners of "the means of production"--and their satellites, the bourgeoisie, in a struggle with the masses, the working class, was too rigid to describe competition among human beast in the 20th century. Weber's entirely novel concept of "status groups" proved to be both more flexible and more penetrating psychologically.

Within the ranks of the rich, including the "owners of the means of production," there inevitably developed an inner circle known as

Society. Such groups always believed themselves to be graced with "status honor," as Weber called it. Status honor existed quite apart from such gross matters as raw wealth and power. Family background, education, manners, dress, cultivation, style of life--these, the ineffable things, were what granted you your exalted place in Society.

Military officer corps are rife with inner circles aloof from the official and all-too-political hierarchy of generals, admirals, and the rest. I went to work on a book called *The Right Stuff* thinking it would be a story of space exploration. In no time at all, I happened upon something far more fascinating. The astronauts were but part of an invisible, and deadly, competitive pyramid within an inner circle of American military fighter pilots and test pilots, and they were by no means at the apex. I characterized this pyramid as a ziggurat, because it consisted of innumerable and ever more deadly steps a fighter pilot had to climb to reach the top. The competition demanded an uncritical willingness to face danger, to face death, not once but daily, if required, not only in combat but also in the routine performance of his duties--without ever showing fear--in behalf of a noble cause, the protection of his nation. There were more ways to die in a routine takeoff of a supersonic jet fighter of the F-series than most mortals could possibly imagine. At the time, a Navy pilot flying for twenty years, an average career span, stood a 23 percent chance of dying in an accident and a 56 percent chance of having to eject at some point, which meant being shot out of the plane like a human rocket by a charge of dynamite under his seat, smashing into what was known as the "wall" of air outside, which could tear the flesh off your face, and descending by parachute. The figures did not include death or ejection in combat, since they were not considered accidental. According to Korean War lore, a Navy fighter pilot began shouting out over the combat radio network, "I've got a Mig at zero! A Mig at zero! I've got a Mig at zero!" A Mig at zero meant a Soviet supersonic fighter plane was squarely on his tail and could blow him out of the sky at any moment. Another

voice, according to legend, broke in and said, "Shut up and die like an aviator." Such "chatter," such useless talk on the radio during combat, was forbidden. The term "aviator" was the final, exquisite touch of status sensitivity. Navy pilots always called themselves aviators. Marine and Air Force fliers were merely pilots. The reward for reaching the top of the ziggurat was not money, not power, not even military rank. The reward was status honor, the reputation of being a warrior with ultimate skill and courage--a word, by the way, strictly taboo among the pilots themselves. The same notion of status honor motivates virtually every police and fire fighting force in the world.

Status groups, Weber contended, are the creators of all new styles of life. In his heyday, the turn of the 19th century, the most stylish new status sphere, no more than 30 years old, was known as *la vie boheme*, the bohemian life. The bohemians were artists plus the intellectuals and layabouts in their orbit. They did their best to stand bourgeois propriety on its head through rakish dishabille, louder music, more wine, great gouts of it, ostentatious cohabitation, and by flaunting their poverty as a virtue. And why? Because they all came from the bourgeoisie themselves originally and wanted nothing more desperately than to distinguish themselves from it. They seldom mentioned the upper class, Marx's owners of "the means of production." They seldom mentioned Marx's working class, except in sentimental appreciation of the workers' occasional show of rebelliousness. No, as the late Jean-Francois Revel said of mid-20th century French intellectuals, the bohemians' sole object was to separate themselves from the mob, the rabble, which today is known as the middle class.

I thought bohemia had been brought to its apogee in the 1960s, before my very eyes, by the hippies, originally known as acid heads, in reference to the drug LSD, with their Rapunzel hair down to the shoulder blades among the males and great tangled thickets of hair in the armpits of the women, all living in

communes. The communes inevitably turned religious thanks to the hallucinations hippies experienced while on LSD and a whole array of other hallucinogens whose names no one can remember. Some head--short for acid head--would end up in the middle of Broadway, one of San Francisco's main drags, sitting cross-legged in the Lotus position, looking about, wide eyes glistening with beatification, shouting, "I'm in the pudding and I've met the manager! I'm in the pudding and I've met the manager!" Seldom had so many gone so far to feel aloof from the middle class.

But I was wrong. They were not the ones who raised rejection of the middle class to its final, Olympian level. For what were the hippies and their communes compared to the great bohemians of our time in the status sphere known as Hip Hop, with its black rappers and "posses" and groupies, its hordes of hangers-on--and its millions of followers and believers among the youth of America, white and black? The Hip Hop style of life turns bourgeois propriety inside out. It celebrates the status system of the Street, which is to say, the standards of juvenile male street gangs, so-called gangbangers. What matters is masculinity to burn and a disdain of authority. The rappers themselves always put on looks of sullen hostility for photographs. The hippies' clothes of yore look like no more than clown costumes next to the voluminous Hip Hop jeans with the crotch at knee level and the pants legs cascading into great puddles of fabric at the ankles, the T-shirts hanging outside the pants and just short of knee level and as much as a foot below their leather jackets or windbreakers, and the black bandannas known as do-rags around their heads. What were the hippies' LSD routs known as acid tests . . . compared to the Hip Hop stars' status tests that require shooting and assassinating one another periodically? How cool is that? One of my favorite sights in New York is that of a 14- or 15-year-old boy who has just descended from his family's \$10 or \$12 million apartment and is emerging onto the sidewalks of Park Avenue dressed Hip-Hop head to crotch, walking through a brass-filigreed door held open by a doorman in a uniform that looks like an

Austrian army colonel's from 1870.

Not all status groups are either as competitive as capital-S Society's and the military's or as hostile as the bohemians'. Some are comprised of much broader populations from much larger geographic areas. My special favorites are the Good Ol' Boys, as I eventually called them. I happened upon them while working on an article about stock car racing. Good ol' boys are rural Southerners and Midwesterners seldom educated beyond high school or community college, sometimes owners of small farms but more likely working for wages in factories, warehouses, and service companies. They are mainly but by no means exclusively Scots-Irish Protestants in background and are *Born Fighting*, to use the title of a brilliant recent work of ethnography by James Webb. They have been the backbone of American combat forces ever since the Revolution, including, as it turns out, both armies during the Civil War. They love hunting, they love their guns, and they believe, probably correctly, that the only way to train a boy to kill *Homines loquaces* in battle someday is to take him hunting to learn to kill animals, starting with rabbits and squirrels and graduating to beasts as big or bigger than *Homo loquax*, such as the deer and the bear. Good ol' boys look down on social pretension of any sort. They place a premium on common sense and are skeptical of people with theories they don't put to the test themselves.

I offer an illustration provided to me by a gentleman who is in this audience tonight and who witnessed the following: It was the mid-1940s, during the second World War, and a bunch of good ol' boys too old for military service were sitting around in a general store in Scotland County, North Carolina, waiting for a representative of a cattleman's association. They fell to discussing the war.

One of them said, "Seems to me this whole war's on account of one man, Adolph Hitler. 'Stead a sending all these supply ships to

England and whatnot and getting'm sunk out in the Atlantic Ocean by U-boats, why don't we just go ov'ere and shoot him?"

"Whatcha mean, 'just go ov'ere and shoot him'?"

"Just go to where he lives and shoot the sonofabitch."

"I 'speck it ain't that easy. He's probably got a wall around his house."

"Maybe he does. But you git me a boat to git me ov'ere and I'll do it myself."

"How?"

"I'll wait'il it's night time . . . see . . . and then I'll go around to the back of the house and climb the wall and hide behind a tree. I'll stay there all night, and then in the morning, when he comes out in the yard to pee, I'll shoot him."

Quite in addition to the Good Ol' Boy's level of sophistication, that story reveals four things: a disdain for the futility of government and its cumbersome ways of approaching problems, a faith in common sense, reliance on the inner discipline of the individual--and guns.

Even before I left graduate school I had come to the conclusion that virtually all people live by what I think of as a "fiction-absolute." Each individual adopts a set of values which, if truly absolute in the world--so ordained by some almighty force--would make not that individual but his group . . . the best of all possible groups, the best of all inner circles. Politicians, the rich, the celebrated, become mere types. Does this apply to "the intellectuals" also? Oh, yes. . . perfectly, all too perfectly.

The human beast's belief in his own fiction-absolute accounts for one of the most puzzling and in many cases irrational phenomena of our time. I first noticed it when I read a book by Samuel Lubell called *The Future of American Politics*. Lubell was a political scientist and sociologist who had been as surprised as everybody else by the outcome of the 1948 presidential election. That was the election in which the Democratic incumbent, Harry Truman, was a president whose approval rating had fallen as low as 23 percent. Every survey, every poll, every pundit's prediction foresaw him buried by the Republican nominee, Thomas E. Dewey. Instead, Truman triumphed in one of the most startling upsets in American political history. Lubell was determined to find out why, and so he set out across the country. When he reached a small Midwestern town that had been founded before the turn of the 19th century by Germans, he was puzzled to learn that the town had gone solidly for Dewey despite the fact that by every rational turn of logic, every economic motivation, Truman would have been a more logical choice. By and by Lubell discovered that the town was still predominantly German. Nobody had ever gotten over the fact that in 1917, a Democrat, President Woodrow Wilson, had declared war on Germany. That had set off a wave of anti-German feeling, anti-German prejudice, and, in the eyes of the people of this town, besmirched their honor as people of German descent. And now, two World Wars later, their minds were fixed on the year 1917, because like all other human beasts, they tended to champion in an irrational way their own set of values, their own fiction absolute. The question Lubell asked was very much like the question that Thomas Frank asked after the election of 2004 in his book *What's the Matter with Kansas?* By all economic and political logic, the state of Kansas should have gone to John Kerry, the Democrat, in 2004. But it didn't. Had Frank only looked back to Samuel Lubell, he would have known why. The 2004 election came down to one state: the state of Ohio. Whoever won that state in the final hours would win the election. Northern Ohio, the big cities of Cleveland, Toledo on the Great Lakes, were solidly for Kerry. But in southern Ohio, from east to

west, and in the west was the city of Cincinnati, Ohio went solidly for George Bush. And the reason? That great swath of territory was largely inhabited by the Scots-Irish. And when the Democrats came out in favor of gun control, the Scots-Irish interpreted this as not merely an attack on the proliferation of weaponry in American life but as a denunciation, a besmirching, of their entire way of life, their entire fiction absolute. Guns were that important in their scheme of things.

More recently, I returned to Washington and Lee for a conference on the subject of Latin American writing in the United States. The conference soon became a general and much hotter discussion of the current immigration dispute. I had arrived believing that, for example, Mexicans who had gone to the trouble of coming to the United States legally, going through all the prescribed steps, would resent the fact that millions of Mexicans were now coming into the United States illegally across the desert border. I couldn't have been more mistaken. I discovered that everyone who thought of himself as Latin, even people who had been in this country for two and three generations, were wholeheartedly in favor of immediate amnesty and immediate citizenship for all Mexicans who happened now to be in the United States. And this feeling had nothing to do with immigration policy itself, nothing to do with law, nothing to do with politics, for that matter. To them, this was not a debate about immigration. The very existence of the debate itself was to them a besmirching of their fiction-absolute, of their conception of themselves as Latins. Somehow the debate, simply as a debate, cast an aspersion upon all Latins, implying doubt about their fitness to be within the border of such a superior nation.

The same phenomenon, championism, I believe, solves the mystery of something I had been unable to figure out for a very long time, namely, what is it that accounts for the extraordinary emotion of sports fans? What earthly connection do the citizens of New York City think they have to, say, the New York Yankees,

whose team includes not one person from the city of New York, which is, in fact, 40 percent Latin American, and an assortment of mercenaries who will play anywhere for the top dollar? How can such a team get such a strong grip on local emotions? Here we see championism in its most elemental form. As far back as the story of David and Goliath in the Bible, the human beast has become excited by those who represent them in what at that stage of history was known as single combat. Before a battle was fought each side would send forth its fighting champion. Goliath, a giant, protected by the most elaborate armor, was so awesome, that at first no one among the Israelites dared confront him. Finally, a young unknown named David volunteered. He turned down King Saul's offer of his own armor as protection and said he preferred to travel light and fast. He proceeded to slay Goliath with a slingshot. At this point, The Philistine army panicked. The defeat of its great champion was seen as a sign from the gods. They fled, the Israelites pursued and slaughtered them. This notion of a surrogate, a champion, who can represent an entire people and give them the exultation of victory when it triumphs and plunge them into depression of defeat when he loses, has persisted for millennia.

Single combat was never pursued as a substitute for actual battle; these contests were always held as an indication of which way the gods were leaning. Nevertheless, both the exultation and the depression were real emotions, curious emotions, on the face of it, entirely aroused by status concerns. The surprising insinuations of status concerns into every area of life must be understood if one is to understand the nature of the human beast. Consider the toxic power of humiliation. Humiliation is a wound inflicted upon the beast's status picture of himself, upon the validity of his standing within the boundaries of his own fiction absolute. Not long ago, in New York, a drug dealer named Pappy Mason was out of prison on parole standing on the sidewalk in front of a bar with a group of his buddies, drinking a beer. A police detective happened to be driving by in an unmarked car and recognized

him. He stopped, got out, and said "Mason, you know what stupid is? Stupid is what you're doing right now, drinking in public. You get your ass back in that building--or I'm taking your ass *in*." Now here was Mason, in front of his buddies. He had a terrible decision to make. Taking his ass *in* meant taking him to the precinct station and booking him. Drinking on the sidewalk was--a--Mickey Mouse--misdemeanor but it was enough to violate his parole and put him right back in prison. On the other hand, just caving in to some pig of a cop in front of his posse and slinking back into the bar was unthinkable . . . On the other hand, maybe it was thinkable . . . To go back to jail--so he did think . . . slinked back into the bar . . . You did what you had to do, Pappy--but the humiliation! the humiliation! A day passed, two days passed--the *humiliation*! Day after day it festered . . . festered . . . Eventually he found himself back in prison for an unrelated offense . . . and the same old humiliation . . . slinking back into the bar that night . . . festered . . . Finally, it became too much. He got a message out to one of his boys on the outside: "Go kill a cop." And the guy said, "What cop?" And Mason said, "Any cop." And so three members of his posse drove about . . . looking for a cop, any cop. They came upon a young patrolman alone in a police car in front of the house of an immigrant from Guinea who, as it turned out had been threatened by drug dealers. They had already tried to burn down his house because he had reported their activities to the police. The young cop, named Eddie Byrne, had been assigned to protect him. It was now late at night, quiet, and the three assailants came up behind the car and assassinated the young policeman. It became a cause of public outrage. It had taken the life of a young man, Eddie Byrne. Yes, but the cops . . . they had trashed Pappy Mason's status picture of himself.

That a wound to one's status, not to one's body, not to one's bank account, not to one's general fortunes in life, that such a wound to one's status could have such a severe effect upon the psyche of the human beast, is no minor matter. It means that we have come upon a form of anguish that is somehow primal. Even the most

trivial and the most unlikely circumstances can be colored by the beast's constant and unrelenting concern for his own status. Which is to say, his own standing, his own rank, in the eyes of others and in his own eyes.

It could be anything as minor and trivial as a man in New York in a taxi five, perhaps even ten blocks from his destination, agonizing over what tip he should give the driver. His status verdict would be in the hands of only one person, the driver, someone he would most likely never see again. And yet, the human beast is perfectly capable of devoting the most excruciating mental energy to such a trifling decision. When I was working on a novel about college life entitled *I Am Charlotte Simmons*, I kept coming upon situations in which I thought surely other emotions would rule, love, if not love, passion, or if not passion, at least lust. Instead, as elsewhere, status ruled. Undergraduate life today, involves a status system in which sexual activity can be summed up as "Our eyes met, our lips met, our bodies met, and then we were introduced." The attitude young women have toward their own sexual activity, as well as the impression others have of it, has turned 180 degrees in one generation. There was a time when the worst . . . slut . . . for want of a better term . . . maintained a virginal and chaste façade. Today, the most virginal and chaste undergraduate wants to create a façade of sexual experience. One night I was in a college lounge sitting on a sofa that was backed up against a narrow table. Another sofa was backed up likewise on the other side. All at once a voice from the sofa behind me, a boy's voice was saying, "What are you talking about? How could I? We've known each other since before Choate! It would be like incest!" And then I heard the girl say, "Please. Come on. I can't stand the thought of having to do it with somebody I hardly know and can't trust." It turned out that she was beseeching him, her old Platonic friend of years' standing, to please relieve her of her virginity, deflower her. That way she could honestly maintain the proper social stance as an experienced young woman in college.

Even before I had left graduate school I had begun to wonder if somewhere in the brain there might be a center that interpreted incoming data and gave the human beast the feeling he was improving its status, merely maintaining its status, or suffering the grave wound of humiliation.

I turned to the literature of the physiology of the brain for the answer, only to discover that Sigmund Freud had stopped the physical study of the brain cold for 40 years. Freud had been so persuasive, had so convinced the scientific community and the academic community in general that he had found the final answers to mental disturbance in his theories of the id, the ego, the superego, and the Oedipal drama within the family, that it was rather pointless to go through the tedious, laborious business of determining what synapses, what dendrites, what circuits in the brain accounted for what one already knew anyway. The physical study of the brain didn't resume until 1969, thanks to the work of a Spanish physician and brain physiologist named Jose Delgado. Delgado was somewhat well-known already because of a striking and very public experiment he had conducted in a bull ring in Madrid. Delgado was experimenting with stereotaxic needle implants and other painless ways to reach regions of the brains of animals and eventually, as it turned out, humans. He was so sure that he had found specific regions of the brain that created specific reactions within animals that he had come into the bull ring possessing only a small radio transmitter and had allowed himself to be charged by a one and a half ton bull tormented into a state of rage by picadors. The bull charged. Delgado stood there, motionless. The bull finally reached the critical point where it would be useless for anyone, even a toreador, to flee. Delgado pressed a button on the radio transmitter--and the bull came to a shuddering halt within feet of the scientist, and then turned and trotted off in the other direction. Delgado had also run tests of sensory deprivation on healthy young college students. He put them in sensory deprivation chambers that were absolutely soundless. The temperature was set so that the human body

would detect neither heat nor cold. The room was well-lit, but the subject wore translucent goggles and could perceive light but he could make out no details. The subject wore special gloves that reduced the tactile sense to a minimum. Within hours, not days, the subjects, these healthy young people, would begin hallucinating, losing their minds. To Delgado, this was proof of his proposition that the human mind is in fact not the possession of the individual but more of a town square into which anyone can come, into which any animal can come, into which even vegetation can come. And what the human beast thinks is his mind is in fact--and these were Delgado's words--a "transitory combination of elements borrowed from the environment."

Delgado's theory of the mind as totally dependent upon the environment perhaps explains some of the more bizarre anomalies of recent history. In what became known as the Stockholm Syndrome, and in the case of Patty Hearst, young women were abducted and put into an environment totally controlled by their captors and closed to any outside influences whatsoever. In both cases, the young women emerged as friends and comrades of their captors; and in Patty Hearst's case, as their confederate in a bank hold-up. Having no other basis upon which to base their own status, they adopted an entirely new one.

But even those cases seem straightforward compared to the case of Kyle Zirpolo and the McMartin Day Care Center scandal of 1984. Zirpolo was eight years old at the time and became one of a score of children claiming to have recovered repressed memories of the McMartins subjecting them to sexual molestation and the most fiendish and depraved abuse. Some of the testimony of these children seemed so utterly bizarre that the prosecution dared not introduce it at the McMartin's trial. After six years of trials and appeals, the McMartins were found not guilty. This started speculation that the children had been brainwashed by the clinicians who had summoned up the supposed memories. The truth proved to be more shocking. Last year, now 29 years old,

Kyle Zirpolo revealed that he and the others had known all along that the McMartins had not abused them in any way. Kyle Zirpolo had been put in a situation in which both the clinicians and his own parents insisted, with all the certainty of adults, that these things that happened, and he, Kyle, was too frightened to admit it. After repeatedly telling his parents that nothing had happened, he caved in to the mounting status pressure and testified to things he was quite aware of making up. Ever since then he had been tormented by the hell that he and the other children had put the McMartins through, destroying their reputations as well as their livelihood.

Delgado stressed the role of culture. Culture referred to those things in human life that could not exist without speech, whether culture in the sense of the arts or culture in the sense of the manners and mores of a society. Delgado insisted that the brain and its genetic history and evolution was simply the substratum upon which culture wrought its effects. He did not know the precise neural path. After all, he was re-opening a field that had been dormant for 40 years. But just last year, barely 6 months ago, three neurobiologists may very well have discovered the answer, in a study of African cichlid fish published in an article entitled, "Rapid behavioral and genomic responses to social opportunity" in the journal *PLoS Biology*. Russell Fernald of Stanford, his former associate Sabrina Burmeister, now at the University of North Carolina, and Erich Jarvis of Duke studied the behavior of the fish in a laboratory tank. In the tank was an obviously dominant male and his subjects, male and female. The others were gray in color but the dominant male had swelled up within a skin of lurid stripes and was the only male who had access to the females. They then removed the dominant male in the dark of night. When light returned, another male, just as gray as before, noticed the absence of the ruler, whereupon he swelled up with a skin of lurid colors, and his gonads immediately grew to eight times their previous size, and now he had exclusive access to the females. The three neurobiologists determined that a purely

social situation, a status situation, had caused changes in the brain of the newly-dominant male at the cellular and molecular level, set off by a gene, known as *egr-1*, located in the anterior preoptic area. They had established that a change in social status had caused a change in the brain. It was the opposite of the situation envisioned by Neo-Darwinists neuroscientists who assume is that the genetic inheritance triggers changes in status.

Only foolish writers make predictions instead of descriptions, but this fool feels certain that Fernald, Burmeister, and Jarvis are sure bets for a Nobel prize in biology, should such a social influence prove to be the case with human beasts. The Neo-Darwinists, who dominate neuroscience in America today, have not responded, but in the past they have always characterized human behavior as but an evolutionary echo of non-human beasts. On the subject of status rankings and status-seeking, they point out that not only chickens but innumerable other animals have pecking orders. As for status groups, if you put a flock of canaries in a large enough cage, they will separate into smaller groups, each dominated by the biggest and most aggressive male. When the dominant male of one group is forced to confront a dominant male from another, at the central feeding station, one will passively submit to domination by the other.

As recently as the year 1000, Neo-Darwinists might argue, the entire world was divided into warriors and slaves or virtual slaves, aside from a few highly skilled artisans organized into guilds. Not only that, when the warriors couldn't find a real war to fight, they fought each other with blunted swords and spears in tournaments. At the conclusion of a tournament, ordinary religious restrictions on sexual behavior were suspended long enough for the winners to help themselves to as many young women as they cared to. The young women were there expressly for that purpose. This reward, which is so similar to that of dominant males among the non-human beasts, endures symbolically to this day in the form of pretty little cheerleaders with short skirts and their underpants

showing.

But such comparisons collapse when the human beasts' third class is taken into account. This is the clergy, the priests and the prophets. Here in the 21st century, it is impossible to comprehend the power that the clergy had 1000 years ago. In the year 1082, Pope Urban II gave a speech on a platform in a field in France in which he exhorted all the knights of Europe--of Christendom--to go to the Middle East and take back Jerusalem and the Holy Land from the Saracens, referring to the ruling Arabic Muslims. Immediately the Crusades began. Later, cynics would maintain that the Crusaders had gone to the Middle East only to bring back the booty that was eventually theirs. In fact, the warriors hadn't the faintest idea of what they would find. They were obeying the command of their Holy Father, the Pope. Until well into the Middle Ages the German Empire continued to call itself the Holy Roman Empire.

Book One, first verse, of the Book of John in the New Testament says cryptically: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This has baffled Biblical scholars, but I interpret it as follows: Until there was speech, the human beast could have no religion, and consequently no God. In the beginning was the Word. Speech gave the beast its first ability to ask questions, and undoubtedly one of the first expressed his sudden but insatiable anxiety as to how he got here and what this agonizing struggle called life is all about. To this day, the beast needs, can't live without, some explanation as the basis of whatever status he may think he possesses. For that reason, extraordinary individuals have been able to change history with their words alone, without the assistance of followers, money, or politicians. Their names are Jesus, John Calvin, Mohammed, Marx, Freud--and Darwin. And this, rather than any theory, is what makes Darwin the monumental figure that he is. The human beast does not require that the explanation offer hope. He will believe whatever is convincing. Jesus offered great hope: The last shall

be first and the meek shall inherit the earth. Calvin offered less. Mohammed, more and less. Marx, even more than Jesus: The meek will take over the earth now! Freud offered more sex. Darwin offered nothing at all. Each, however, has left an enduring influence. Jesus is the underpinning of both Marxism and political correctness in American universities. There was a 72-year field experiment in Marxism, which failed badly. But Marx's idea of one class dominating another may remain with us forever. In medical terms, Freud is now considered a quack. But his notion of sex as an energy like the steam in a boiler, which must be released in an orderly fashion or the boiler will blow up, remains with us, too. At this very moment, as we gather here in the Warner Theatre, you can be sure that there are literally millions of loin spasms and hip-joint convulsions that are taking place at this very instant throughout the world that would not be occurring were it not for the power of the words of Sigmund Freud. Today, Charles Darwin still reigns, but his most fervent followers, American neuroscientists, are deeply concerned about this irritating matter of culture, the product of speech. Led by the British neuroscientist Richard Dawkins, they currently propose that culture is the product of "memes" or "culturegens", which operate like genes and produce culture. There is a problem, however. Genes exist, but memes don't. The concept of memes is like the concept of Jack Frost ten centuries ago. Jack Frost was believed to be an actual, living, albeit invisible, creature who went about in the winter freezing fingertips and making the ground too hard to plow. Noam Chomsky has presented another problem. He maintains that there is no sign that speech evolved from any form of life lower than man. It's not that there is a missing link, he says. It's that there is absolutely nothing in any other animal to link up with. It becomes difficult for Neo-Darwinists to continue to say that structures consisting only of words are not real and durable. What accounts for the fact, to choose but one example, that Islam has directed the lives and behavior of literally billions of people since the eighth century?

Princeton anthropologist Clifford Geertz has written, "There is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture. Men without culture would not even be the clever savages of *Lord of the Flies*."

Now, at last, may we begin the proper study of *homo loquax*?

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