

Twitter Thread by El Sandifer, Rationality Expert to the Stars



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@ElSandifer



I'm quoted in this, which does about as good a job overviewing the topic as a New York Times profile can be expected to.

Major oversights in it as I see.

First, It does not acknowledge the fact that Yudkowsky is, at heart, a complete crank. This remains, to my mind, crucial to understanding the rationalist community's influence on the world: they're sci-fi writers being mistaken for scientists.

You can't really understand the harmful effects of SSC until you realize that it's part of a larger movement of bullshit artists serving as cult leaders to the techbros.

Second, and more importantly, it never really explains the harm that's being done by Scott Siskind and his followers. It comes close, noting that "SJWs" were the only group not welcome in SSC, but it doesn't capture the harm of that because it doesn't unpack the term.

What is meant in practice when "SJWs" aren't welcome in a space is that marginalized people speaking of the harm they experience are silenced.

That's it. That's the meaning.

When Sam Altman complains that concerns about sexism and racism inhibit innovation, the point that really needs to be made, and that Cade should have asked for a response quote on, is that innovations unconcerned with sexism and racism hurt people.

Like, what are we talking about here in practice? We're talking about image identification algorithms that mistake black people for gorillas. And fixing that by just removing gorillas as a thing the algorithm can identify. <https://t.co/gyP3WZ4VSH>

We're talking about financial algorithms that bring back redlining. <https://t.co/dHHISoAjRJ>

We're talking about social media moderation that is trivially weaponized against women and trans women. (I'd link, but you're already on the site I'm talking about.)

And we're talking about shit like Boston Dynamics, where the use case for their cool robot videos is unmistakably police robots, being developed by fucking billionaires who think the Black Lives Matter movement oppresses them.

The message of SSC was that ignoring people who say "these things cause me harm" was virtuous, and that the people you really had to take seriously and think about were fucking nazis.

And the fact that the tech industry viewed that as an absolutely essential message to hear is horrifying on a scale that Cade's article ultimately only gestures at.

The real headline is "Silicon Valley would rather listen to nazis than feminists."

I focused on the macro level in this thread because it's what the NYT article focused on, but having read accounts of people's abuse within the "rationalist" community, it is just as toxic a cesspool on the micro level as the macro.

<https://t.co/e74k2bd13S>

I have so much I could say about this, having been on the peripheries of this world for many years now. But I will say from personal experience this world is rife with violence against women both in and out of the "rationalist" community, from online harassment to rape and DV. <https://t.co/fpG4tiX4Ms>

— Alexandra Walling (@chorizanthel) [February 13, 2021](#)

Anyway. If you like this thread, I have a whole book about the rationalist movement, white supremacists, and the fact that we are all fucked and the reasons why are very stupid. It is, if I may say so, pretty good. <https://t.co/DXtw6oLlyw>