

better angels of our nature book

Better Angels of Our Nature Book: An In-Depth Exploration

In an era often characterized by division, conflict, and societal upheaval, the quest to understand and foster human kindness has never been more crucial. **Better Angels of Our Nature Book** stands as a compelling testament to this endeavor. Authored by renowned psychologist and researcher Steven Pinker, the book delves into the remarkable decline of violence throughout human history and explores the psychological, cultural, and societal factors that have contributed to this positive transformation. This comprehensive analysis offers readers a nuanced understanding of how and why humanity is becoming inherently more peaceful and compassionate.

Overview of the Book

What Is Better Angels of Our Nature About?

Better Angels of Our Nature examines the long-term decline in violence, from prehistoric times to the modern age. Pinker presents a data-driven narrative that challenges the common perception that the world is becoming more dangerous. Instead, he argues that, despite recent conflicts and crises, overall violence has decreased significantly across the centuries.

The book covers a wide array of topics, including:

- The decline of war and homicide rates
- Advancements in human rights and justice
- The role of education, reason, and empathy in reducing violence
- The influence of societal institutions such as government, religion, and commerce

Core Thesis and Objectives

Pinker's central thesis is that human nature is not inherently violent but contains "better angels"—traits like empathy, self-control, and reason—that have historically been suppressed or challenged. Over time, these qualities have gained strength, leading to a decline in violence. His primary objectives include:

1. Providing empirical evidence for the decline of violence
2. Exploring the psychological and social mechanisms that foster peaceful behavior
3. Encouraging optimism about humanity's capacity for progress
4. Identifying pathways to further reduce violence in the future

Key Themes and Concepts in Better Angels of Our Nature

The Historical Decline of Violence

One of the most groundbreaking aspects of Pinker's work is his comprehensive analysis of historical data. He demonstrates that:

- Homicide rates in Western Europe and North America have dropped by over 80% since the Middle Ages.
- World wars and genocides, while devastating, are anomalies in the broader trend of decreasing violence.
- Violence has also declined at the micro-level, such as within families and communities.

This evidence challenges the popular narrative that violence is an inevitable part of human nature or that modern times are more violent than the past. Instead, Pinker highlights a consistent pattern of progress over centuries.

The "Better Angels" – Traits That Promote Peace

The title of the book alludes to Abraham Lincoln's phrase "the better angels of our nature," emphasizing the importance of compassion, empathy, and self-control. Pinker discusses key psychological traits that have contributed to societal peace:

- **Empathy:** The capacity to understand and share the feelings of others, which discourages harm.
- **Self-control:** The ability to regulate impulses, preventing violent reactions.
- **Reason:** The use of rational thought to resolve conflicts and challenge violence-supporting beliefs.

The Role of Institutions and Cultural Shifts

Pinker emphasizes that societal institutions have played an essential role in promoting peace:

1. **Government:** The rule of law and state monopoly on violence have curbed personal revenge and vigilante justice.
2. **Commerce:** Interdependence through trade creates mutual benefits that disincentivize conflict.
3. **Human Rights Movements:** Advocacy and legal frameworks have expanded protections for vulnerable populations.
4. **Education and Enlightenment:** The spread of literacy and scientific thinking foster rational attitudes towards violence.

Major Insights and Evidence

The Data Supporting Declines in Violence

Pinker's arguments are backed by extensive statistical data, including:

- Historical homicide rates showing a sharp decline since the Middle Ages.
- Comparative analyses of war casualties over centuries.
- Surveys indicating decreased acceptance of violence as a solution.
- Studies on the effects of societal reforms, such as abolition of slavery and expansion of civil rights.

Psychological and Cultural Drivers of Change

Pinker's exploration reveals that several psychological and cultural factors have driven the decline of violence:

- The expansion of empathy through storytelling, education, and media.
- The development of moral and legal norms that stigmatize violence.
- The rise of rational thinking, critical reasoning, and scientific understanding.
- Societal shifts towards individual rights and universal human dignity.

Implications for the Future

Optimism and Challenges

While Pinker's findings are optimistic, he also acknowledges ongoing challenges:

- Persistent violence in certain regions due to political, religious, or economic conflicts.
- Potential setbacks caused by climate change, resource scarcity, and social polarization.
- The importance of continuing to promote empathy, reason, and justice.

Strategies to Promote Further Peace

Based on his research, Pinker recommends several strategies to sustain and accelerate the decline of violence:

1. Strengthening education systems to foster critical thinking and empathy.
2. Supporting institutions that uphold human rights and the rule of law.
3. Encouraging dialogue and understanding across cultural and ideological divides.
4. Leveraging technology and media to spread messages of peace and cooperation.

Why Read Better Angels of Our Nature?

For Scholars and General Readers Alike

The book appeals to a diverse audience, from academics interested in history and psychology to general readers seeking hope and insight into human progress. Its data-driven approach provides a compelling argument that progress is possible and ongoing.

Enhancing Personal and Societal Perspectives

- Understanding the roots of violence can inspire personal growth and empathy.
- Recognizing societal progress can foster optimism and motivate civic engagement.
- Learning about the mechanisms of change can empower individuals and communities to contribute to peacebuilding efforts.

Conclusion: The Enduring Relevance of Better Angels of Our Nature

Better Angels of Our Nature Book stands as a powerful reminder that humanity's capacity for kindness, empathy, and reason has played a pivotal role in reducing violence over centuries. Pinker's meticulous research and optimistic outlook challenge nihilistic narratives and inspire hope for a more peaceful future. By understanding the psychological, cultural, and institutional factors that promote peace, readers are better equipped to contribute to ongoing progress. Whether you are a scholar, student, or simply a curious reader, this book offers invaluable insights into the enduring potential for human betterment.

Additional Resources and Recommendations

- Explore Steven Pinker's other works, such as *The Better Angels of Our Nature: The Decline of Violence in History and Its Causes*.
- Read related books on human psychology, history, and social change.
- Engage with organizations and initiatives promoting peace, human rights, and education.

By understanding the historical trends and psychological underpinnings outlined in **Better Angels of Our Nature**, individuals and societies can work together to sustain and accelerate the positive trajectory of human progress toward peace and compassion.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main thesis of Steven Pinker's book 'The Better Angels of Our Nature'?

The book argues that violence has declined over long stretches of history and that humanity is becoming progressively more peaceful due to various social, cultural, and institutional changes.

How does Pinker explain the decline in violence in

'The Better Angels of Our Nature'?

Pinker attributes the decline to factors such as the rise of the state and centralized authority, commerce, literacy, human rights, and empathy, which have collectively fostered more peaceful societies.

What are some key historical periods covered in 'The Better Angels of Our Nature'?

Pinker examines periods from ancient times through the modern era, including the decline of tribal warfare, the abolition of slavery, and reductions in war fatalities in the 20th and 21st centuries.

What role does psychology play in Pinker's analysis in 'The Better Angels of Our Nature'?

Pinker explores psychological factors like empathy, self-control, and moral reasoning, suggesting that these innate and cultivated traits have contributed to decreasing violence over time.

Has 'The Better Angels of Our Nature' faced any major criticisms?

Yes, some critics argue that Pinker overstates the decline of violence or neglects ongoing issues like systemic violence, structural inequality, and conflicts that persist in certain regions.

What is the significance of the book's title, 'The Better Angels of Our Nature'?

The title references Abraham Lincoln's phrase, emphasizing the idea that human nature contains compassionate, moral impulses ('better angels') that can guide us toward peace and kindness.

How does Pinker use data and statistics in 'The Better Angels of Our Nature'?

Pinker supports his arguments with extensive data showing declines in homicide rates, war deaths, and other forms of violence across different periods and regions.

What are some practical implications of Pinker's conclusions in 'The Better Angels of Our Nature'?

The book encourages fostering empathy, education, and social institutions that promote cooperation and understanding, reinforcing the idea that human progress is ongoing and achievable.

How does 'The Better Angels of Our Nature' compare to other works on human violence and peace?

Pinker's book is distinguished by its comprehensive historical scope and data-driven approach, contrasting with more philosophical or sociological analyses, and it has sparked widespread debate and discussion.

Is 'The Better Angels of Our Nature' relevant to current global conflicts?

Yes, the book's insights highlight how progress in reducing violence can inform current efforts toward peace, conflict resolution, and understanding in a complex, interconnected world.

Additional Resources

Better Angels of Our Nature: An In-Depth Exploration of Steven Pinker's Masterpiece

The phrase "Better Angels of Our Nature" has become synonymous with a compelling argument that humanity is, in fact, on a trajectory of moral and social improvement. Published in 2011 by cognitive psychologist and linguist Steven Pinker, this book challenges the common perception that violence and brutality are intrinsic to human nature. Instead, Pinker presents a comprehensive analysis, supported by a wealth of data, demonstrating that violence has declined over millennia and that modern societies are characterized by unprecedented levels of peace, empathy, and cooperation. This article aims to dissect the core themes, methodologies, and implications of Pinker's influential work, providing readers with an insightful overview of one of the most ambitious narratives of human progress in recent history.

The Central Thesis: Progress Through Rationality and Empathy

At its heart, *Better Angels of Our Nature* posits that the decline in violence is not accidental or purely cultural but stems from complex yet identifiable shifts in human cognition, social structures, and moral frameworks. Pinker argues that, contrary to the nihilistic view that violence is an inevitable aspect of human nature, we have collectively moved towards greater restraint and compassion—what he metaphorically refers to as the "better angels" of our nature.

Key points of Pinker's thesis include:

- **Historical Decline of Violence:** From prehistoric times through the Middle Ages and into the modern era, violence has diminished significantly across societies.

- Influential Factors: Societal changes—such as the rise of centralized states, commerce, literacy, and human rights—have played crucial roles in fostering peace.
- Psychological Evolution: Cognitive developments, including increased empathy and self-control, have contributed to reducing impulsive violence.
- Cultural and Institutional Shifts: The spread of Enlightenment ideals, democratic governance, and legal systems have institutionalized norms that discourage violence and promote cooperation.

Pinker supports these assertions with extensive empirical data, including archaeological findings, historical records, and modern crime statistics. His approach combines historical analysis with insights from psychology, neuroscience, and evolutionary biology.

The Four Major Forces Driving Human Progress

Pinker's analysis centers around four "horsemen" or forces that have contributed to the decline of violence:

1. The Leviathan: The Power of the State

The development of centralized governments and law enforcement has been instrumental in curbing violence. As Pinker notes, the state monopoly on the legitimate use of force has replaced personal vendettas and tribal conflicts with legal justice systems. This shift has led to:

- Increased security for individuals.
- Reduced cycles of revenge and retribution.
- The establishment of international institutions promoting peace.

2. Commerce: The Civilizing Effect of Trade

Trade and economic interdependence foster mutual interests that make violence less appealing. Pinker highlights:

- The "Diplomatic Revolution" of the 19th and 20th centuries, where nations prioritized diplomacy over war.
- The rise of international organizations like the United Nations.
- The idea that economic integration creates a web of mutual dependencies, reducing incentives for conflict.

3. Feminization: The Growing Role of Empathy and Compassion

Pinker emphasizes the importance of feminization—a metaphor for the increased value placed on empathy, nurturing, and cooperation in societies. This shift is reflected in:

- Greater gender equality.
- Increased recognition of human rights.

- A cultural emphasis on compassion over dominance.

4. The Human Rights Revolution

The post-World War II era saw the institutionalization of human rights, which has:

- Elevated the dignity of individuals across cultures.
- Led to the abolition of slavery and other oppressive practices.
- Fostered international norms condemning violence and discrimination.

The Psychological and Cultural Foundations of Decline in Violence

While structural and institutional factors are crucial, Pinker emphasizes the importance of psychological evolution—how humans think and feel. Several key concepts underpin this:

Empathy and Self-Control

- Empathy, the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, has expanded over time, reducing impulsive acts of violence.
- Self-control—the capacity to regulate impulses—has increased through education, social norms, and cognitive development.

Moral Progress and Enlightenment Values

- The Enlightenment introduced ideas of individual rights, equality, and rationality that have shaped modern morality.
- The gradual internalization of these values has led individuals to act less violently, even in the absence of external enforcement.

The Role of Fiction and Media

Pinker suggests that stories, literature, and media have fostered empathy by exposing individuals to diverse perspectives, thereby nurturing the "better angels" within us.

Empirical Evidence: Violence Through the Ages

One of Pinker's strengths is his rigorous presentation of data. He examines various forms of violence—interpersonal, political, and genocidal—and demonstrates a downward trend:

- Homicide rates: Data from different societies and eras show a dramatic decline in the prevalence of murder.
- War casualties: The frequency and scale of wars have decreased since the mid-20th century, especially with the decline of colonial wars and civil

conflicts.

- Torture and cruel treatment: Modern legal standards and human rights movements have led to a decline in torture and cruel punishments.

He also discusses the paradox of increased media coverage of violence, which can give the illusion of a more violent world, contrasting it with empirical trends.

Challenges and Criticisms

Despite Pinker's optimistic thesis, his work has faced various criticisms:

- Selective Data and Interpretation: Critics argue that Pinker's reliance on Western data and certain historical periods may overlook ongoing violence in other regions.
- Eurocentric Bias: Some suggest that the narrative emphasizes Western progress while underestimating violence elsewhere.
- Complexity of Violence: Critics contend that violence is not simply declining but changing form—e.g., terrorism, cyber warfare, and state-sponsored violence—requiring nuanced analysis.
- Potential for Regression: Pinker acknowledges that progress is fragile; setbacks like wars or authoritarian regimes could reverse gains.

Nevertheless, Pinker's overarching message remains that human progress is real and measurable, driven by rationality, empathy, and institutional reforms.

The Implications of Pinker's Thesis

Understanding the decline of violence has profound implications for policymakers, educators, and citizens:

- Promoting Empathy and Education: Cultivating empathy through arts, literature, and dialogue can continue the trend.
- Strengthening Institutions: Robust legal systems and international cooperation are vital.
- Addressing New Forms of Violence: Recognizing emerging threats like cybercrime and political extremism is essential to maintain progress.
- Optimism as a Force for Change: Pinker advocates for an optimistic outlook, emphasizing that awareness of progress can motivate further efforts toward peace.

Conclusion: A Hopeful Perspective on Humanity's Future

Better Angels of Our Nature offers a compelling narrative that humanity has

been steadily moving towards a more peaceful, just, and empathetic world. Pinker's meticulous research challenges pessimistic narratives and underscores the importance of rationality, compassion, and social institutions in shaping a better future.

While acknowledging ongoing challenges, Pinker encourages us to recognize the remarkable progress made and to harness the "better angels" within us. His work serves as both a testament to human resilience and a call to sustain and accelerate the forces that have reduced violence across history.

In a world often marred by conflict and division, Pinker's optimistic yet evidence-based perspective reminds us that change is possible—and that the best of human nature can indeed prevail when nurtured with wisdom, empathy, and resolve.

Better Angels Of Our Nature Book

better angels of our nature book: The Better Angels of Our Nature Steven Pinker, 2012-09-25 Faced with the ceaseless stream of news about war, crime, and terrorism, one could easily think this is the most violent age ever seen. Yet as bestselling author Pinker shows in this startling and engaging new work, just the opposite is true.

better angels of our nature book: The Better Angels of Our Nature Steven Pinker, 2011 Steven Pinker's riveting, myth-destroying new book reveals how, contrary to popular belief, humankind has become progressively less violent, over millenia and decades. Given the images of conflict we see daily on our screens, can violence really have declined? And wasn't the twentieth century the most devastatingly brutal in history? Extraordinarily, however, as Steven Pinker shows, violence within and between societies - both murder and warfare - really has declined from prehistory to today. We are much less likely to die at someone else's hands than ever before. Debunking both the idea of the 'noble savage' and a Hobbesian notion of a 'nasty, brutish and short' life, Steven Pinker argues that modernity and its cultural institutions are making us better people. He ranges over everything from art to religion, international trade to individual table manners, and shows how life has changed across the centuries and around the world - not simply through the huge benefits of organized government, but also because of the extraordinary power of progressive ideas. Why has this come about? And what does it tell us about ourselves? It takes one of the world's greatest psychologists to appreciate and explain this story, and to show us our very natures.

better angels of our nature book: An Analysis of Steven Pinker's The Better Angels of Our Nature Joulia Smortchkova, 2017-07-05 Reasoning is the critical thinking skill concerned with the production of arguments: making them coherent, consistent, and well-supported; and responding to opposing positions where necessary. The Better Angels of Our Nature offers a step-by-step class in precisely these skills. Author Steven Pinker's central thesis is simple: mankind has become increasingly less violent over the centuries, and will continue to do so. Pinker is aware, though, that many people instinctively believe the opposite, and Better Angels is devoted to marshalling data to support and illustrate this central argument, as well as a series of secondary arguments about how and why humanity has become less violent. Pinker's interpretative skills - understanding the meaning of the complex evidence from history - are also on display throughout, as he tackles the ambiguities of his data, the problems it presents, and the viable inferences one can draw from it.

better angels of our nature book: The Better Angels of Our Nature Michael A. Halleran, 2010-03-11 The first in-depth study of the Freemasons during the Civil War From first-person

accounts culled from regimental histories, diaries, and letters, Michael A. Halleran has constructed an overview of 19th-century American freemasonry. The author examines carefully the major Masonic stories from the Civil War, in particular the myth that Confederate Lewis A. Armistead made the Masonic sign of distress as he lay dying at the high-water mark of Pickett's charge at Gettysburg.

better angels of our nature book: The Better Angels of Our Nature Joulia Smortchkova, 2017-07-15 Reasoning is the critical thinking skill concerned with the production of arguments: making them coherent, consistent, and well-supported; and responding to opposing positions where necessary. The Better Angels of Our Nature offers a step-by-step class in precisely these skills. Author Steven Pinker's central thesis is simple: mankind has become increasingly less violent over the centuries, and will continue to do so. Pinker is aware, though, that many people instinctively believe the opposite, and Better Angels is devoted to marshalling data to support and illustrate this central argument, as well as a series of secondary arguments about how and why humanity has become less violent. Pinker's interpretative skills - understanding the meaning of the complex evidence from history - are also on display throughout, as he tackles the ambiguities of his data, the problems it presents, and the viable inferences one can draw from it.

better angels of our nature book: *SUMMARY* Edition Shortcut (author), 1901

better angels of our nature book: *An Analysis of Steven Pinker's The Better Angels of Our Nature* Joulia Smortchkova, 2017-07-05 Reasoning is the critical thinking skill concerned with the production of arguments: making them coherent, consistent, and well-supported; and responding to opposing positions where necessary. The Better Angels of Our Nature offers a step-by-step class in precisely these skills. Author Steven Pinker's central thesis is simple: mankind has become increasingly less violent over the centuries, and will continue to do so. Pinker is aware, though, that many people instinctively believe the opposite, and Better Angels is devoted to marshalling data to support and illustrate this central argument, as well as a series of secondary arguments about how and why humanity has become less violent. Pinker's interpretative skills - understanding the meaning of the complex evidence from history - are also on display throughout, as he tackles the ambiguities of his data, the problems it presents, and the viable inferences one can draw from it.

better angels of our nature book: Summary of Steven Pinker's The Better Angels of Our Nature by Milkyway Media Milkyway Media, 2018-09-11 Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker's *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (2012), is a robust tour of progress in human civilization across several centuries. Despite commonly held perceptions, influenced by a news media which incessantly dwells on the worst aspects of society, humanity has become less, not more violent over time... Purchase this in-depth summary to learn more.

better angels of our nature book: *The Darker Angels of Our Nature* Philip Dwyer, Mark Micale, 2021-08-12 In *The Better Angels of Our Nature* Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker argued that modern history has witnessed a dramatic decline in human violence of every kind, and that in the present we are experiencing the most peaceful time in human history. But what do top historians think about Pinker's reading of the past? Does his argument stand up to historical analysis? In *The Darker Angels of our Nature*, seventeen scholars of international stature evaluate Pinker's arguments and find them lacking. Studying the history of violence from Japan and Russia to Native America, Medieval England and the Imperial Middle East, these scholars debunk the myth of non-violent modernity. Asserting that the real story of human violence is richer, more interesting and incomparably more complex than Pinker's sweeping, simplified narrative, this book tests, and bests, 'fake history' with expert knowledge.

better angels of our nature book: *Summary, Analysis, and Review of Steven Pinker's The Better Angels of Our Nature* Start Publishing Notes, 2017-06-06 PLEASE NOTE: This is a key takeaways and analysis of the book and NOT the original book. Start Publishing Notes' Summary, Analysis, and Review of Steven Pinker's *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* includes: Summary of the book A Review Analysis & Key Takeaways A detailed About the Author section Preview: Steven Pinker's *The Better Angels of Our Nature* argues that violence has

been decreasing over most of human history. People have innate tendencies towards violence, but they also have innate tendencies towards peace. Historical developments, especially the consolidation of state power and the Enlightenment, have allowed humans to move away from violence, murder, and war, and move towards more peaceful ways of living. *The Better Angels of Our Nature* is a daring, provocative, and important book. As Pinker himself notes, journalists and pundits generally argue that the world is getting worse and that we live in uniquely dangerous or violent times. The September 11th attacks, the threat of terrorism, and the ongoing wars in the Middle East are presented as evidence of increasing violence, chaos, and instability. Pessimism is seen as realism, and policymakers declare that unprecedented effort is required to avert crises.

better angels of our nature book: *The Better Angels of Our Nature* S. C. Gylanders, 2006-11-14 On the eve of Shiloh, one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War, a mysterious visitor appears at General William Tecumseh Sherman's camp. Without family or home, with only a uniform and the name of Jesse, this prepossessing stranger is an intriguing mix of naiveté and wisdom, ignorant of the most basic conventions of warfare yet uncannily familiar with even the most intimate details of Sherman's personal life and career. Jesse, in turn, has only one desire: to remain by Sherman's side—for reasons only Jesse knows and isn't revealing. Initially unwilling to become a father figure to this beguiling visitor, Sherman is finally unable to resist such devotion and tenacity. He takes Jesse under his wing, determined to train this enigmatic creature in the art of war—and provide the strength and wisdom needed to survive its horrors. Resourceful and courageous, Jesse soon earns the respect of Sherman's men, especially the compassionate but plain-talking surgeon, Seth Cartwright, and Thomas Ransom, a noble and handsome young infantry officer. No matter their destiny neither man can divert Jesse's mission. But what is the truth? What is Jesse's purpose and why has this fascinating youth appeared at this most crucial time in Sherman's life and in the life of the bitterly divided nation? In the end we are forced to ask: Who is under whose wing? *The Better Angels of Our Nature* brilliantly re-creates the drama and brutality of America's Civil War. Set in the momentous fourteen-month period spanning Shiloh and Vicksburg—a time that turned the tide of war and determined the nation's fate—this harrowing, lyrically written novel is filled with unforgettable characters and wondrous twists that will give readers pause to reconsider events familiar to us all. Meticulously researched and movingly written, this masterwork will remain with readers long after the last page is savored.

better angels of our nature book: Summary of the Better Angels of Our Nature by Steven Pinker - Conversation Starters BookHabits, 2017-09-07 Summary of *The Better Angels of Our Nature* by Steven Pinker | Conversation Starters Though we are being assaulted by the media with scenes of violence all over the world, the total amount of violence has actually decreased over time. Despite the wars and conflicts happening around the world, author Steven Pinker has collated a large amount of data to underline the idea that violence is continuously decreasing. What started with the advent of agriculture has now culminated in the rights movement, focusing on the rights of the weaker sections of society. *The Better Angels of Our Nature* is a comprehensive work on the history of violence and is an attempt at analyzing trends in violence since prehistory. *The Better Angels of Our Nature* has been shortlisted to the Samuel Johnson Prize and the Royal Society Winton Prize for Science Books. It also made it to the list of Mark Zuckerberg book club selection and New York Times Notable Books of 2011 A Brief Look Inside: EVERY GOOD BOOK CONTAINS A WORLD FAR DEEPER than the surface of its pages. The characters and their world come alive, and the characters and its world still live on. Conversation Starters is peppered with questions designed to bring us beneath the surface of the page and invite us into the world that lives on. These questions can be used to... Create Hours of Conversation: * Promote an atmosphere of discussion for groups * Foster a deeper understanding of the book * Assist in the study of the book, either individually or corporately * Explore unseen realms of the book as never seen before Disclaimer: This book you are about to enjoy is an independent resource meant to supplement the original book. If you have not yet read the original book, we encourage to do before purchasing this unofficial Conversation Starters.

better angels of our nature book: Rationality Steven Pinker, 2022-09-27 NEW YORK TIMES

BESTSELLER "In our uncertain age, which can so often feel so dark and disturbing, Steven Pinker has distinguished himself as a voice of positivity." – New York Times Can reading a book make you more rational? Can it help us understand why there is so much irrationality in the world? Steven Pinker, author of *Enlightenment Now* (Bill Gates's new favorite book of all time") answers all the questions here Today humanity is reaching new heights of scientific understanding--and also appears to be losing its mind. How can a species that developed vaccines for Covid-19 in less than a year produce so much fake news, medical quackery, and conspiracy theorizing? Pinker rejects the cynical cliché that humans are simply irrational--cavemen out of time saddled with biases, fallacies, and illusions. After all, we discovered the laws of nature, lengthened and enriched our lives, and set out the benchmarks for rationality itself. We actually think in ways that are sensible in the low-tech contexts in which we spend most of our lives, but fail to take advantage of the powerful tools of reasoning we've discovered over the millennia: logic, critical thinking, probability, correlation and causation, and optimal ways to update beliefs and commit to choices individually and with others. These tools are not a standard part of our education, and have never been presented clearly and entertainingly in a single book--until now. Rationality also explores its opposite: how the rational pursuit of self-interest, sectarian solidarity, and uplifting mythology can add up to crippling irrationality in a society. Collective rationality depends on norms that are explicitly designed to promote objectivity and truth. Rationality matters. It leads to better choices in our lives and in the public sphere, and is the ultimate driver of social justice and moral progress. Brimming with Pinker's customary insight and humor, *Rationality* will enlighten, inspire, and empower.

better angels of our nature book: Faith in Democracy Mahmoud Masaeli, Nikolaos Asproulis, Rico Sneller, Timo Slootweg, 2020-01-02 This book explores the spiritual potential of faith, mysticism and transcendence in answer to the dangers of a mythologised state and the sacro-sanctification of (liberal) democracy and its rule of law. It searches for a curative for the pathological transformation of these institutions into – so called – political religions. Along this line, it explores the importance of spirituality and transcendence for political legitimacy, democratic participation and international cooperation, law and politics. There being no general agreed-upon definition of 'spirituality', the authors examine what may be seen as 'spiritual' dimensions of the political. These dimensions have in common a focus on transcendence as a vanishing point of rationality and rational justification. This vanishing point may become manifest, for example, in a primordial requisite of becoming an individual person; in responding – in freedom – to the call of theocracy; in the phenomenon of prophecy or political wisdom; in the remaining shards of formerly all-pervasive religious institutions; in tenacious hope for a democracy-to-come; in the courageous resilience and resistance of citizens of 'non-' or 'un-democratic' states; etc. The authors of this book, philosophers, theologians, psychologists, jurists and others, are more or less suspicious of the Modern theories of the social contract allegedly justifying democracy. It may turn out, however, that the inexhaustive and unfathomable dimension of 'faith' which comes up as an alternative is not so easy to handle as a 'rational argument'. This 'impracticality' of faith and transcendence might be the irreducible yet indispensable predicament of democracy.

better angels of our nature book: On Violence in History Philip Dwyer, Mark S. Micale, 2020-01-10 Is global violence on the decline? Scholars argue that Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker's proposal that violence has declined dramatically over time is flawed. This highly-publicized argument that human violence across the world has been dramatically abating continues to influence discourse among academics and the general public alike. In this provocative volume, a cast of eminent historians interrogate Pinker's thesis by exposing the realities of violence throughout human history. In doing so, they reveal the history of human violence to be richer, more thought-provoking, and considerably more complicated than Pinker claims. From the introduction: Not all of the scholars included in this volume agree on everything, but the overall verdict is that Pinker's thesis, for all the stimulus it may have given to discussions around violence, is seriously, if not fatally, flawed. The problems that come up time and again are the failure to genuinely engage with historical methodologies; the unquestioning use of dubious sources; the tendency to exaggerate

the violence of the past in order to contrast it with the supposed peacefulness of the modern era; the creation of a number of straw men, which Pinker then goes on to debunk; and its extraordinarily Western-centric, not to say Whiggish, view of the world. Complex historical questions, as the essays in this volume clearly demonstrate, cannot be answered with any degree of certainty, and certainly not in a simplistic way. Our goal here is not to offer a final, definitive verdict on Pinker's work; it is, rather, to initiate an ongoing process of assessment that in the future will incorporate as much of the history profession as possible.

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better angels of our nature book: Enlightenment Now Steven Pinker, 2019-01-15 INSTANT NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER A NEW YORK TIMES NOTABLE BOOK OF 2018 ONE OF THE ECONOMIST'S BOOKS OF THE YEAR My new favorite book of all time. --Bill Gates If you think the world is coming to an end, think again: people are living longer, healthier, freer, and happier lives, and while our problems are formidable, the solutions lie in the Enlightenment ideal of using reason and science. By the author of the new book, Rationality. Is the world really falling apart? Is the ideal of progress obsolete? In this elegant assessment of the human condition in the third millennium, cognitive scientist and public intellectual Steven Pinker urges us to step back from the gory headlines and prophecies of doom, which play to our psychological biases. Instead, follow the data: In seventy-five jaw-dropping graphs, Pinker shows that life, health, prosperity, safety, peace, knowledge, and happiness are on the rise, not just in the West, but worldwide. This progress is not the result of some cosmic force. It is a gift of the Enlightenment: the conviction that reason and science can enhance human flourishing. Far from being a naïve hope, the Enlightenment, we now know, has worked. But more than ever, it needs a vigorous defense. The Enlightenment project swims against currents of human nature--tribalism, authoritarianism, demonization, magical thinking--which demagogues are all too willing to exploit. Many commentators, committed to political, religious, or romantic ideologies, fight a rearguard action against it. The result is a corrosive fatalism and a willingness to wreck the precious institutions of liberal democracy and global cooperation. With intellectual depth and literary flair, Enlightenment Now makes the case for reason, science, and humanism: the ideals we need to confront our problems and continue our progress.

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