

PINKER, STEVEN, *Enlightenment Now. The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress*, New York: Viking, 2018, pp. xix + 556. Cf.:

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/317051/enlightenment-now-by-steven-pinker/9780525427575>

https://www.amazon.com/dp/0525427570/ref=rdr_ext_tmb

https://www.amazon.com/dp/0525427570/ref=rdr_ext_tmb#reader_0525427570

https://books.google.fr/books?id=J6grDwAAQBAJ&source=gbs_navlinks_s

https://books.google.fr/books?id=J6grDwAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

“Enlightenment Now”, *Wikipedia*, 24 December 2018. Cf.:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enlightenment_Now

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.

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.

DAVIES, William, “Enlightenment Now by Steven Pinker review – life is getting better”. Now is the best time to be alive claims this triumphalist defence of scientific rationality – if it matters, we’ll solve it, *The Guardian*, Wednesday 14 February 2018. Cf.: [Full text: “.html”]

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/feb/14/enlightenment-now-steven-pinker-review>

CHAPMAN, Kip, “Book Review: Enlightenment now: the case for reason, science, humanism and progress”, *ChemistryWorld*, 2 April 2018. Cf.: [Full text: “.html”]

<https://www.chemistryworld.com/review/enlightenment-now-the-case-for-reason-science-humanism-and-progress/3008832.article>

[...]

[...] He completely misunderstands the history of the Enlightenment (read Nick Spencer's review at *Theos*, which I read after forming my own opinion, for more). Perhaps most unforgivably, he takes an almost entirely white, Eurocentric view of the world.

This is not to say there isn't a lot of good stuff there, albeit most of it in quotes from other works. If you're interested in the case for humanism, some useful data sets to back up your arguments, or a big book to pose with pretentiously at your favourite hipster chai latte bar, this is your ticket. Beyond that die-hard crowd, however, it's a hard book to recommend.

FUENTES, Agustín, "Book Review: "Enlightment now and empathy later?", *Somatosphere*, March 19, 2018. Cf.: [Full text: ".html"]
<http://somatosphere.net/2018/enlightenment-now-and-empathy-later.html/>

Steven Pinker wrote *Enlightenment Now* thinking he was making the case for "reason, science, humanism, and progress." But instead produced a 556 page text filled with some interesting statistics, a few valid insights, a lot of naiveté, and a stunning lack of empathy.

SPENCER, Nick, "Enlightenment and Progress, or why Steven Pinker is wrong", *Theos*, 20 February 2018. Cf.: [Full text: ".html"]
<https://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/comment/2018/02/20/enlightenment-and-progress-or-why-steven-pinker-is-wrong>

[...]

I should begin this essay–review with the confession that I am temperamentally inclined towards Gray's view, so when I say Pinker does an outstanding job in his new book, I mean it. I should also say that I have just debated him for a programme that will go out later in the year and found him charming, thoughtful, reasonable and humane. He is a serious thinker and the book is a serious book, and so whatever else follows in this essay, including the criticism, should be read with that in mind.

[...]

The final result, therefore, is a book whose punctilious, readable and important attention to detail and data in one regard (progress) is marred by its casual, vague and sometimes lazy inattention in another.

What Pinker says deserves to be heard and *Enlightenment Now*, in spite of its historical and philosophical weaknesses, merits a wide audience. Sadly, I am not convinced that being better informed about how rich, comfortable, clever and safe we are compared to our grandparents' generation will make us happier and more grateful (Pinker is alert to the data on unhappiness and ingratitude and discusses them at length). Nor am I as sanguine as him that all this progress has improved the quality of our relationships.

However, Pinker does show that there is far more room for hope than we have in our current culture, and his take on some of the big issues that vex us, like terrorism, bio-hazards, AI, Armageddon, nuclear war, and other existential threats is a model of common sense, without slipping into complacency. *Enlightenment Now* deserves to be read and appreciated, but more for what it says about our future than what it does about our past.

By Alfonso Lizarzaburu, 2019/08/31