

A DISCUSSION OF STEVEN  
PINKER'S  
*ENLIGHTENMENT NOW: THE  
CASE FOR REASON, SCIENCE,  
HUMANISM, AND PROGRESS*

**Participants:**  
*Elliot Temple*  
*Justin Mallone*  
*Max Kaye*

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**Max Kaye:**

7:18 am

David Deutsch, Rebecca Newberger Goldstein, Kevin Kelly, John Mueller, Roslyn Pinker, Max Roser, and Bruce Schneier read a draft of the entire manuscript and offered invaluable advice. I also profited from

DD apparently reviewed the entirety of Pinker's new book.  
6 references to him by name in the main body of the text and 8 citations.  
Mentioning for curiosity's sake.

**Elliot Temple:**

DD is trying to suck up more to famous ppl  
i think there's a major cost involved in his method, involving being less critical and lowering standards

**Max Kaye:**

Yeah, have only read the first few pages and is already not close to the quality of Bol (unsurprisingly).

That said, I am glad Bol is getting more reach.

**Elliot Temple:**

what do u mean Bol getting more reach?  
u think ppl will read it b/c of the cites?  
how many? this doesn't sound that big to me.  
amazon review  
> to be authoritarianism, or, as Pinker puts it, "a strong leader who wrenches the country backward to make it 'great again'."  
he's taking shots at trump? jfc  
> "Seeing how journalistic habits and cognitive biases bring out the worst in each other, how can we soundly appraise the state of the world? The answer is to count."  
review quotes this. ANTI EXPLANATION. ANTI BO!!!!

PREFACE

The second half of the second decade of the third millennium would not seem to be an auspicious time to publish a book on the historical sweep of progress and its causes. At the time of this writing, my country is led by people with a dark vision of the current moment: "mothers and children trapped in poverty . . . an education system which leaves our young and beautiful students deprived of all knowledge . . . and the crime, and the gangs, and the drugs that have stolen too many lives." We are in an "outright war" that is "expanding and metastasizing." The blame for this nightmare may be placed on a "global power structure" that has eroded "the underlying spiritual and moral foundations of Christianity."<sup>1</sup>

nasty opener

**Max Kaye:**

Yeah, takes a shot at trump in the preface or first few pages.

**Elliot Temple:**

oh the next para names trump

so what we see here is DD swinging left, not DD bringing Pinker to the right

that or not much engagement

but DD's views have been deteriorating like this for years, with a noticeable agenda/bias (of becoming more similar to prestigious intellectuals) influencing the direction

**Max Kaye:**

Reach as in: there are Ppl searching for an island of rationality in the sea of irrationally and, even though the book isn't shaping up well, without it being at least \_talked\_ about its only going to stay hard to find. At the very least more Ppl will be aware of it, and hopefully a few will see there's something more substantial behind things like the principal of optimism and look into it. Granted not many, but still >0 I imagine.

**Elliot Temple:**

there are more effective means of outreach. e.g. DD could \*create more good work\* and \*stand up to people more controversially\*

i got more attention from Aubrey de Grey than DD did. why? b/c i was more willing to challenge him.

i think DD's blog had decent traffic b4 he abandoned it. and that was when he was correct about politics!

**Max Kaye:**

DDs blog: setting the world to rights?

I agree that there are more effective ways.

**Elliot Temple:**

yes

**Elliot Temple:**

Pinker is very dishonest

and moral foundations of Christianity.”<sup>1</sup>

In the pages that follow, I will show that this bleak assessment of the state of the world is wrong. And not just a little wrong—wrong wrong, flat-earth wrong, couldn't-be-more-wrong. But this book is not about the forty-fifth president of the United States and his advisors. It was conceived some years before Donald Trump announced his candidacy, and I hope it will outlast his administration by many more. The ideas that prepared the ground for his election are in fact widely shared among intellectuals and laypeople, on both the left and the right. They include pessimism about the way the world is heading, cynicism about the institutions of modernity, and an inability to conceive of a higher purpose in anything other than religion. I will present a different understanding of the world, grounded in fact and inspired by the ideals of the Enlightenment: reason, science, humanism, and progress. Enlightenment ideals, I hope to show, are timeless, but they have never been more relevant than they are right now.

Trump did not get elected by appealing to religion  
he's not very religious, and he beat more religious candidates  
this is both fact and voter perception  
Trump

Trump's biggest issue was immigration, which Pinker apparently doesn't want to talk about.

avoid discussing the actual disagreement, and call trump nasty names (pessimist, anti-modern cynic, religious)

**Justin Mallone:**

>TRUMP: We are the nation that dug out the Panama Canal, won two world wars, put a man on the moon, and brought communism to its knees.

(APPLAUSE)

TRUMP: As long as we have the courage of our convictions, and the strength to see them through, then there is no goal beyond our reach.

**Elliot Temple:**

ignoring his optimistic message that he could improve America, and his pro-modern attitudes towards e.g. industry backed up by tons and tons of energy.

Pinker is just straight up a lying scumbag.

and that's what he choose to open the book with

virtue signalling to bad ppl, and alienating everyone good

DD should not have allowed his name to be in the acknowledgements

**Justin Mallone:**

>Americans fill the world with art and music. They push the bounds of science and discovery. And they forever remind us of what we should never forget: The people dreamed this country. The people built this country. And it is the people who are making America great again.

As long as we are proud of who we are, and what we are fighting for, there is nothing we cannot achieve.

**Elliot Temple:**

Trump isn't a luddite but his opponents have elements of that!

**Justin Mallone:**

"optimistic Trump quotes" is an easy genre...

**Elliot Temple:**

The sociologist Robert Merton identified Communalism as a cardinal scientific virtue, together with Universalism, Disinterestedness, and Organized Skepticism: CUDOS.<sup>2</sup> Kudos indeed goes to the many

Pinker immediately proceeds to glorify COLLECTIVISM under a slightly modified name

**Justin Mallone:**

disgusting

no wonder he hates Trump!

**Elliot Temple:**

## PART I ENLIGHTENMENT

*The common sense of the eighteenth century, its grasp of the obvious facts of human suffering, and of the obvious demands of human nature, acted on the world like a bath of moral cleansing.*

—Alfred North Whitehead

this quote will be read as anti-capitalist by many, whether it is or not  
it's quite ambiguous out of context  
i also don't think it's very good

**I**n the course of several decades giving public lectures on language, mind, and human nature, I have been asked some mighty strange questions. Which is the best language? Are clams and oysters conscious? When will I be able to upload my mind to the Internet? Is obesity a form of violence?

why on earth would you purposely put that confusion about violence in your opening paragraph about the enlightenment?

the other questions, on the other hand, aren't strange. they are perfectly reasonable things for someone to ask



“Why should I live?”

The student’s ingenuous tone made it clear that she was neither suicidal nor sarcastic but genuinely curious about how to find meaning and purpose if traditional religious beliefs about an immortal soul are undermined by our best science. My policy is that there is no such thing as a stupid question, and to the surprise of the student, the audience, and most of all myself, I mustered a reasonably creditable answer. What I recall saying—embellished, to be sure, by the distortions of memory and *l’esprit de l’escalier*, the wit of the staircase—went something like this:

Pinker gives AD HOC answers to the most basic moral philosophy questions, b/c he is no expert on the matter, but a public faker. he admits this to open his book.

his answer is: 1) you can do stuff 2) you are responsible to others

jfc

but a “credible answer” he means he dressed it up in language that sounded appropriately clever

compare

In the very act of asking that question, you are seeking *reasons* for your convictions, and so you are committed to reason as the means to discover and justify what is important to you. And there are so many reasons to live!

As a sentient being, you have the potential to *flourish*. You can refine your faculty of reason itself by learning and debating. You can seek explanations of the natural world through science, and insight into the human condition through the arts and humanities. You can make the most of your capacity for pleasure and satisfaction, which allowed your ancestors to thrive and thereby allowed you to exist. You can appreciate the beauty and richness of the natural and cultural world. As the heir to billions of years of life perpetuating itself, you can perpetuate life in turn. You have been endowed with a sense of *sympathy*—the ability to like, love, respect, help, and show kindness—and you can enjoy the gift of mutual benevolence with friends, family, and colleagues.

And because reason tells you that none of this is particular to *you*, you have the responsibility to provide to others what you expect for yourself. You can foster the welfare of other sentient beings by enhancing life, health, knowledge, freedom, abundance, safety, beauty, and peace. History shows that when we sympathize with others and apply our ingenuity to improving the human condition, we can make progress in doing so, and you can help to continue that progress.

1) you can do stuff 2) you are responsible to others  
his is much more fancy sounding... :(  
which hides how bad it is  
hides it from most ppl, not from me :)

## CHAPTER 1

### DARE TO UNDERSTAND!

What is enlightenment? In a 1784 essay with that question as its title, Immanuel Kant answered that it consists of “humankind’s emergence from its self-incurred immaturity,” its “lazy and cowardly” submission to the “dogmas and formulas” of religious or political authority.<sup>1</sup> Enlightenment’s motto, he proclaimed, is “Dare to understand!” and its foundational demand is freedom of thought and speech. “One age cannot conclude a pact that would prevent succeeding ages from extending their insights, increasing their knowledge, and purging their errors. That would be a crime against human nature, whose proper destiny lies precisely in such progress.”<sup>2</sup>

A 21st-century statement of the same idea may be found in the physicist David Deutsch’s defense of enlightenment, *The Beginning of Infinity*. Deutsch argues that if we dare to understand, progress is possible in all fields, scientific, political, and moral:

Optimism (in the sense that I have advocated) is the theory that all failures—all evils—are due to insufficient knowledge. . . . Problems are inevitable, because our knowledge will always be infinitely far from complete. Some problems are hard, but it is a mistake to confuse hard problems with problems unlikely to be solved. Problems are soluble, and each particular evil is a problem that can be solved. An optimistic civilization is open and not afraid to innovate, and is based on traditions of criticism. Its institutions keep improving, and the most important knowledge that they embody is knowledge of how to detect and eliminate errors.<sup>3</sup>

What is *the* Enlightenment?<sup>4</sup> There is no official answer, because the era named by Kant’s essay was never demarcated by opening and closing ceremonies like the Olympics, nor are its tenets stipulated in

ch1 opens with KANT

as a representative of the enlightenment!

jfc

one of Kant’s big things was to defend religious authority

Pinker says DD’s book offers “the same idea” as Kant.

**Justin Mallone:**

Kant is part of DD’s intellectual lineage?

**Elliot Temple:**

DD is letting his name be put on this

**Justin Mallone:**

big if true!

**Elliot Temple:**

what a fool

he also has the wrong job description in front of his name

“physicist”— it’s a philosophy book

**Justin Mallone:**

whoa bro what’s DD’s degree in tho

**Elliot Temple:**

sucking up to ppl like Pinker?

**Justin Mallone:**

:(

**Elliot Temple:**

@max

## CHAPTER 3

# COUNTER-ENLIGHTENMENTS

Who could be against reason, science, humanism, or progress? The words seem saccharine, the ideals unexceptionable. They define the missions of all the institutions of modernity—schools, hospitals, charities, news agencies, democratic governments, international organizations. Do these ideals really need a defense?

They absolutely do. Since the 1960s, trust in the institutions of modernity has sunk, and the second decade of the 21st century saw the rise of populist movements that blatantly repudiate the ideals of the Enlightenment.<sup>1</sup> They are tribalist rather than cosmopolitan, authoritarian rather than democratic, contemptuous of experts rather than respectful of knowledge, and nostalgic for an idyllic past rather

Pinker is mad ppl are distrusting experts ... WHICH WAS IN FACT A THEME OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT  
experts like ... Pinker.



## PART II PROGRESS

*If you had to choose a moment in history to be born, and you did not know ahead of time who you would be—you didn't know whether you were going to be born into a wealthy family or a poor family, what country you'd be born in, whether you were going to be a man or a woman—if you had to choose blindly what moment you'd want to be born, you'd choose now.*

—Barack Obama, 2016

look who Pinker sucks up to.

is this something Trump doesn't believe?

maybe pre-election Trump would have said 2007 or something. not much earlier.

**Justin Mallone:**

Pinker: “why are these ppl so authoritarian that they disrespect expert authoritah?”

**Elliot Temple:**

Pinker quotes DD on optimism, then proceeds to use standard non-DD version after

wtf

i don't think DD was involved much.

**Justin Mallone:**

DD was just expressing same ideas as Kant and Barack Obama bro

np

**Elliot Temple:**

gone up is to be a know-nothing.

As for accusations of romanticism, I can reply with some confidence. I am also the author of the staunchly unromantic, anti-utopian *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature*, in which I argued that human beings are fitted by evolution with a number of destructive motives such as greed, lust, dominance, vengeance, and self-deception. But I believe that people are also fitted with a sense of sympathy, an ability to reflect on their predicament, and faculties to think up and share new ideas—the better angels of our nature, in the words of Abraham Lincoln. Only by looking at the facts can we tell to what extent our better angels have prevailed over our inner demons at a given time and place.

**Justin Mallone:**

can't expect Bol to stand out much philosophically since its a physics book after all  
**Elliot Temple:**

i may seem like a pessimist, but i make up for it with my belief ppl can be altruistic!  
a pessimist who is contradicting Bol on all those points.

Public opinion researchers call it the Optimism Gap.<sup>3</sup> For more than two decades, through good times and bad, when Europeans were asked by pollsters whether their *own* economic situation would get better or worse in the coming year, more of them said it would get better, but when they were asked about their *country's* economic situation, more of them said it would get worse.<sup>4</sup> A large majority of Britons think that immigration, teen pregnancy, litter, unemployment, crime, vandalism, and drugs are a problem in the United Kingdom as a whole, while few think they are problems in their area.<sup>5</sup> Environmental quality, too, is judged in most nations to

is that a "all problems are soluble with knowledge" gap?

no by optimism it just means how positive ur opinion is

ppl like this ARE WAHT'S WRONG WITH THE WORLD

to the extent Pinker may actually be smart, that'd only make him more guilty, like

Dr. Stadler

**Justin Mallone:**

bro he just wants people to like reason and obey experts what's the issue

**Elliot Temple:**

books like this are full of subtle and not so subtle biases and propaganda, using very effective appeals to reason/enlightenment/etc, to be very very pressuring to ppl who haven't given up on the mind. this is the sort of indoctrination which destroys our best men.

would advise NOT reading it. it is DANGEROUS.