

Better Angels of Our Nature: How Far We've Come, How Far We Have to Go



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Abstract

PDF

Steven Pinker's *Better Angels of Our Nature* defends Norbert Elias's "civilization thesis": the idea that violence has declined gradually in human societies over the millennia. As history, however, Pinker's defense is flawed. First, the data gathered by historians do not show long-term declines in individual or collective violence. Second, the historical forces that Pinker believes have suppressed violence can also increase violence, depending on historical conditions. And third, neurology, endocrinology, and primatology may contribute more in the long run than evolutionary psychology to the understanding of the history of human aggression.

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Neither does he take on the prison industrial complex, although he does acknowledge the importance of caging up of the maximum amount of people that are considered most likely to fight back and apparently thinks it a necessary evil if there are 'a few too many' (as deterrence). Apathy or depression is not even mentioned. I love optimistic books, and there is a lot of optimism in the almost 800 pages of "The better angels of our nature". At the same time, I find it impossible to give a single opinion about this behemoth of a book, because I found some of its elements truly excellent, some ok, and some absolutely scream-out-loud dreadful.