

ideals of the Enlightenment

are products of human reason, but they always struggle with other strands of human nature: loyalty to tribe, deference to authority, magical thinking, the blaming of misfortune on evildoers. S

Poetic naturalism

is a philosophy of freedom and responsibility. Poetic naturalism accepts the usefulness of each way of talking in its appropriate circumstances, and works to show how they can be reconciled with one another.

Enlightenemnt? It's a "humankind's emergence from its self-incurred immaturity,"

Kant, 1784 essay

The Enlightenment is sometimes called the *Humanitarian Revolution*, because it led to the abolition of barbaric practices that had been commonplace across civilizations for millennia.

"progress" unguided by humanism is not progress

The Enlightenment belief in progress should not be confused with the 19th-century Romantic belief in mystical forces, laws, dialectics, struggles, unfoldings, destinies, ages of man, and evolutionary forces that propel mankind ever upward toward utopia.

The ideal of progress also should not be confused with the 20th-century movement to re-engineer society for the convenience of technocrats and planners, which the political scientist James Scott calls *Authoritarian High Modernism*.

If you extol reason, then what matters is the integrity of the thoughts, not the personalities of the thinkers.

Further reading:



Optimism

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

the most important knowledge that they embody is knowledge of how to detect and eliminate errors.

2nd Law of Thermodynamics

Closed systems inexorably become less structured, less organized, less able to accomplish interesting and useful outcomes, until they slide into an equilibrium of gray, tepid, homogeneous monotony and stay there.

"Any jackass can kick down a barn, but it takes a carpenter to build one."

- harms are easier to inflict and have larger effects than benefits).

The brain's aesthetic response may be a receptiveness to the counter-entropic patterns that can spring forth from nature.

Against entropy

Organisms' use of energy to maintain their integrity against the press of entropy is a modern explanation of the principle of conatus (effort or striving), which Spinoza defined as "the endeavor to persist and flourish in one's own being."

Information may be thought of as a reduction in entropy - as the ingredient that distinguishes an orderly, structured system from the vast set of random, useless ones.

Some physicists enshrine information as one of the basic constituents of the universe, together with matter and energy.

Cybernetics

Cybernetics, feedback, or control. The idea explains how a physical system can appear to be teleological, that is, directed by purposes or goals. All it needs are a way of sensing the state of itself and its environment, a representation of a goal state (what it "wants," what it's "trying for"), an ability to compute the difference between the current state and the goal state, and a repertoire of actions that are tagged with their typical effects. If the system is wired so that it triggers actions that typically reduce the difference between the current state and the goal state, it can be said to pursue goals

Cognitive faculties

Evolution left us with another burden: our cognitive, emotional, and moral faculties are adapted to individual survival and reproduction in an archaic environment, not to universal thriving in a modern one.

Humans today rely on cognitive faculties that worked well enough in traditional societies, but which we now see are infested with bugs.

People demonize those they disagree with, attributing differences of opinion to stupidity and dishonesty.

Transcending features of cognition

Abstraction People can co-opt their concept of an object at a place and use it to conceptualize an entity in a circumstance.

Combinatorial, recursive power. The mind can entertain an explosive variety of ideas by assembling basic concepts

„With the right rules, a community of less than fully rational thinkers can cultivate rational thoughts“

Clash with Religion

Faith in the existence of supernatural entities clashes with reason. Religions also commonly clash with humanism whenever they elevate some moral good above the well-being of humans.

Religions can also clash with humanism by valuing souls above lives, which is not as uplifting as it sounds.

Agains decline

For almost two centuries, a diverse array of writers has proclaimed that modern civilization, far from enjoying progress, is in steady decline and on the verge of collapse. In The Idea of Decline in Western History, the historian Arthur Herman recounts two centuries of doomsayers.

In this absurd existence, people suffer from alienation, angst, anomie, apathy, bad faith, ennui, malaise, and nausea; they are "hollow men eating their naked lunches in the wasteland while waiting for Godot."

True liberation is to be found not in sterile rationality or effete humanism but in an authentic, heroic, holistic, organic, sacred, vital being-in-itself and will to power. In case you are wondering what this sacred heroism consists of, Friedrich Nietzsche, who coined the term will to power, recommends the aristocratic violence of the "blond Teuton beasts" and the samurai Vikings, and Homeric heroes.

Second Culture

The worldview of many literary intellectuals and cultural critics, as distinguished from the First Culture of science

"Enlightenment humanism, then, is far from being a crowd-pleaser. The idea that the ultimate good is to use knowledge to enhance human welfare leaves people cold"

...two hundred and fifty years after the Enlightenment, we're no better off than our ancestors in the Dark Ages, an appraisal of human progress is where the case must begin

Availability heuristic

The nature of news is likely to distort people's view of the world because of a mental bug that the psychologists Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman called the **Availability heuristic: people estimate the probability of an event or the frequency of a kind of thing by the ease with which instances come to mind.**

"The world has made spectacular progress in every single measure of human well-being. Here is a shocker: Almost no one knows about it."

Quantitative mindset

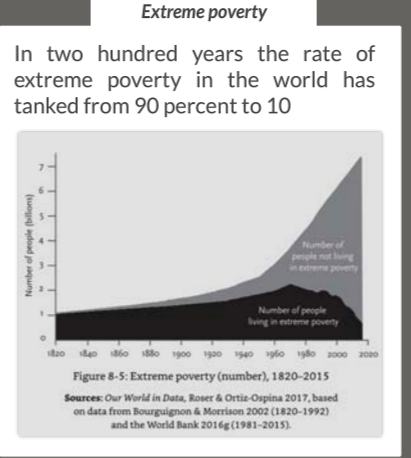
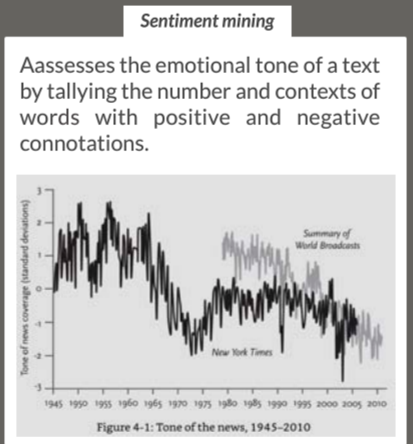
A quantitative mindset, despite its nerdy aura, is in fact the morally enlightened one, because it treats every human life as having equal value rather than privileging the people who are closest to us or most photogenic.

"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"

Fallaciously Pessimistic

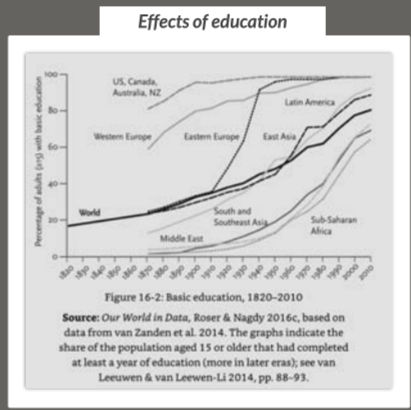
The Gross World Product today has grown almost a hundredfold since the Industrial Revolution was in place in 1820, and almost two hundredfold from the start of the Enlightenment in the 18th century.

"we're apt to mistake the harms around us for signs of how low the world has sunk rather than how high our standards have risen"

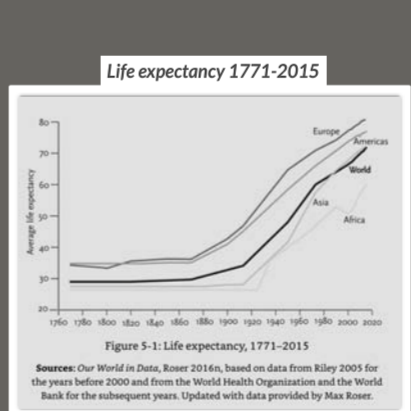


Effects of education
Studies of the effects of education confirm that educated people really are more enlightened. They are less racist, sexist, xenophobic, homophobic, and authoritarian. 10 They place a higher value on imagination, independence, and free speech. 11 They are more likely to vote, volunteer, express political views, and belong to civic associations such as unions, political parties, and religious and community organizations. 12 They are also likelier to trust their fellow citizens

At the more spiritual end of the range, education brings gifts that go well beyond practical know-how and economic growth: better education today makes a country more democratic and peaceful tomorrow. 8



Access to culture
We have, at our fingertips, virtually all the works of genius prior to our time, together with those of our own time, whereas the people who lived before our time had neither. Better still, the world's cultural patrimony is now available not just to the rich and well-located but to anyone who is connected to the vast web of knowledge, which means most of humanity and soon all of it



Development as Freedom

Positive freedom is related to the economist's notion of utility (what people want; what they spend their wealth on), and negative freedom to the political scientist's notions of democracy and human rights. As I mentioned, freedom (together with life and reason) is a prerequisite to the very act of evaluating what is good in life.

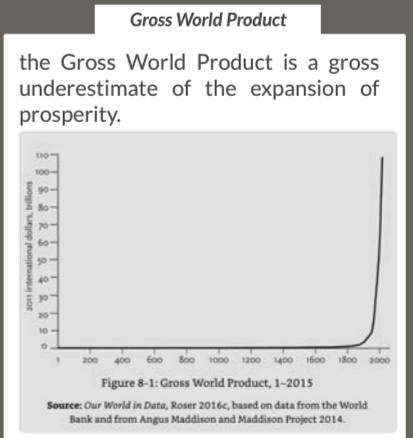
Age effect

People tend to get happier as they get older (presumably because they overcome the hurdles of embarking on adulthood and develop the wisdom to cope with setbacks and to put their lives in perspective. 38 (They may pass through a midlife crisis on the way, or take a final slide in the last years of old age)

„I can present this optimistic vision without blushing because it is not a naïve reverie or sunny aspiration. It's the view of the future that is most grounded in historical reality, the one with the cold, hard facts on its side“

- Stats and facts contained in the following chapters:
- Health
 - Sustenance
 - Wealth
 - Inequality
 - The Environment
 - Peace
 - Safety
 - Terrorizm
 - Democracy
 - Equal Rights
 - Knowledge
 - Quality of Life
 - Existential Threats
 - The Future of Progress

„improvements build on one another“



Counter-Enlightenment

movement called **populism**, more accurately, authoritarian populism. Populism calls for the direct sovereignty of a country's "people" (usually an ethnic group, sometimes a class), embodied in a strong leader who directly channels their authentic virtue and experience. Authoritarian populism can be seen as a pushback of elements of human nature—tribalism, authoritarianism, demonization, zero-sum thinking—against the Enlightenment institutions that were designed to circumvent them. By focusing on the tribe rather than the individual, it has no place for the protection of minority rights or the promotion of human welfare worldwide. By failing to acknowledge that hard-won knowledge is the key to societal improvement, it denigrates "elites" and "experts" and downplays the marketplace of ideas, including freedom of speech, diversity of opinion, and the fact-checking of self-serving claims. By valorizing a strong leader, populism overlooks the limitations in human nature, and disdains the rule-governed institutions and constitutional checks that constrain the power of flawed human actors.

Problems are seen not as challenges that are inevitable in an indifferent universe but as the malevolent designs of insidious elites, minorities, or foreigners.

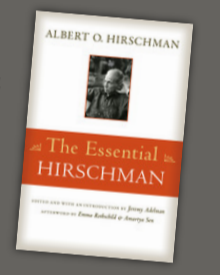
supporters of authoritarian populism are the losers not so much of economic competition as cultural competition.

The nature of progress
Pulling us forward are ingenuity, sympathy, and benign institutions. Pushing us back are the darker sides of human nature and the Second Law of Thermodynamics

Possibilist

"I am not an optimist I'm a very serious possibilist"

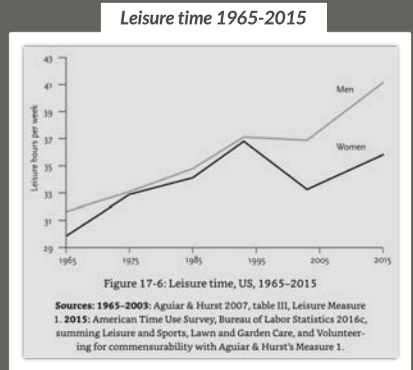
Term coined by Albert Hirschman



„On what principle is it, that when we see nothing but improvement behind us, we are to expect nothing but deterioration before us?“

Ideas matter

Thomas Nagel drives home the point that subjectivity and relativism regarding logic and reality are incoherent, because "one can't criticize something with nothing":



Sources: 1965-2009: Agarwal & Hurst 2007, table III; Leisure Measure 1. 2015: American Time Use Survey, Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016c, summing Leisure and Sports, Lawn and Garden Care, and Volunteering for commensurability with Agarwal & Hurst's Measure 1.