Review:

Philip Dwyer and Mark Micale, eds., *The Darker Angels of our Nature: Refuting the Pinker Theory of History & Violence* (London, New York, Oxford: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022)

MARIE-FRANÇOISE GUÉDON, PhD

Introduction

Why would a review of a book, *The Darker Angels of Our Nature,* edited by Philip Dwyer and Mark Micale (London, New York, Oxford: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), that is essentially a critique of another book by Steven Pinker on the history of violence in the world, be of interest to the readers of *Matrix*? More precisely, what could these readers gain from a short review by an anthropologist of comments by a group of professional noted historians about Steven Pinker's book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (London: Allen Lane, 2011), when neither of of these two books consider women *per se* as a main topic? It matters because social violence is an essential theme in women's lives and we need to know how violence is perceived, explained, and engaged in our world, especially when a popular scholar comes on the scene announcing the good news that violence is actually declining and has been declining for several centuries. Furthermore, *The Darker Angels of Our Nature* stands by itself as a solid historical study of violence that enlarges the debate about the history of violence in our world and provides much needed precision and context to the issue, thereby also

demonstrating what history, as a human science, is all about and what kind of knowledge it can achieve or produce.

Pinker's *The Better Angels of Our Nature* is a massive enterprise, revealing a wide-ranging vision and covering the history of the world in large syntheses made more concrete by a wealth of details, all presented in a witty and clear style. It appears extremely erudite and convincing. It is also controversial: the book received a highly polarized response, with immediate success among political leaders and celebrities, influencers and leaders of industry, finances and communication. It was endorsed by several scholars. It was also, however, considered with deep suspicion and strong criticism by other scholars, particularly historians, and by members of the public at large. Strongly worded opinions, including occasional insults and threats, were exchanged between critics. Having read Pinker's book myself, and while recognizing the seduction of both his style and his main thesis (who would object to the promise of a world getting better), I have to disclose the fact that I have no hesitation in ranging myself among the objectors.

Pinker's book is intended to confirm that when considering world history from prehistory to the present, social violence has followed a descending curve. While progress was slow in the beginning and due mainly to the invention of the State as a mode of governing, it sped up in later periods and more decisively with the European Enlightenment and the ensuing spread of its civilizing influence in the world. To be sure, Pinker notes that the path has not been smooth; violence has not disappeared and progress towards peace is not guaranteed to continue. Nevertheless, save for historical and political crises, humanity may now "be living in the most peaceable era off our species' existence" (Pinker, 2011: xxi).

In order to demonstrate this thesis, Pinker considers only the most obvious - and measurable - manifestation of violence, that is, 'intended violence' documented by official or legal records, which can therefore be presented as statistics and compared from one century to another. Pinker reiterates these two hypotheses (the decline of violence and the influence of the Enlightenment) in his follow-up book which focuses more directly on the British Enlightenment period : *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress* (2018). There, he furthers his demonstration that the Enlightenment (and more especially its views on, and practices of, reason, science, and humanism in the British world) have contributed directly to the rise of health, prosperity, safety, and peace in the rest of the world.

According to Pinker, the Enlightenment nurtured four human motivations – empathy, self-control, 'moral sense,' and reason – that is, the 'better angels of our nature' that, together, led us to control violence and to become socially and psychologically mature. Among the so-called historical forces responsible for this march toward a more peaceful world, Pinker emphasizes several processes:

- The invention and spread of the State as a mode of governing throughout different regions of the globe. This shifted violence from society as a whole, where it would roil unchecked, to a legitimized monopoly on the use of force controlled by governing bodies, along with the corresponding development of a justice system. Hobbes' *Leviathan i*s an important philosophical reference.
- The rise of technological progress, especially strong in Europe. This allowed the growth of 'benign commerce,' an exchange of goods, services, and knowledge across national and international boundaries through global capitalism and securing trading networks. Potential enemies became instead valuable commercial partners.
- Cosmopolitanism and education, where values developed during the Enlightenment encouraged literacy, mobility and the spread of ideas. We now refer to this as globalization.

Almost embarrassingly Eurocentric, Pinker's synthesis nevertheless takes the whole world into consideration. The present state of our planet, mired as we are in several horrific wars and unheeded warnings of severe climate change, does not bode well for the future of Pinker's thesis. He does note, though, that the progression toward a peaceful world might derail at any time.

I am not a historian, therefore I am not directly equipped to tackle a critique of an historical study of this importance and scale. But I am an anthropologist, and an anthropologist of the old school, raised according to the idea that as the science of the human, anthropology starts as a crossroad of human and social sciences. As a scientist and a scholar, I have been trained to assess scholarly enterprises and their scientific validity, and I can at least read archaeological records, historical accounts, ethnological description and statistical charts. So I can state that, in my opinion, in none of these modalities of research does Steven Pinker's book do justice to the data, and despite its disclaimers, is indeed promoting, defending, and, in the end, being supported by a strong ideological system that influences the selection and handling of the data presented and its conclusions.

Against Pinker's sweeping vision, several voices rose to testify to some disturbing assumptions made by the author. *The Darker Angels of our Nature*, subtitled *Refuting the Pinker Theory of History & Violence*, took ten years to write and was intended specifically as a challenge against Pinker's claim that his work was historical and therefore valid in its data and argumentation. Between 2011 and 2018, a series of scholarly meetings was organized by historians in response to the growing influence of Pinker's ideas. These meetings resulted first in the March 2018 publication of a special issue of *Historical Reflections / Réflexions historiques* (Vol. 44), edited by Mark Micale, Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Illinois, and Philip Dwyer, Professor of History at Newcastle

University. The text was then re-edited with new added contributions on related themes. Published in 2022, the resulting anthology, also edited by Dwyer and Micale, brought together some sixteen professional historians or historically-minded anthropologists and sociologists, and one archaeologist, whose contributions are divided between five sections: Interpretation, Periods, Places, Themes, and a Coda, allowing us to examine a wide range of the issues at stake.

Part One: Chapters 1-6, Introduction and Interpretation

The introduction to the volume (Chapter 1), 'Steven Pinker and the nature of violence in history' by Philip Dwyer and Mark S. Micale, first interrogates the concept of violence, or more precisely, the nature of violence as seen from historical perspectives. Pinker did not address this question, relying instead on the assumptions of his sources. After reviewing and summarizing the content of the critics' comments and book reviews for both *The Betterr Angels* and its follow-up book, *Enlightenment Now*, Dwyer and Micale introduce the contributions of their collaborators for this volume. A common thread that emerges from this general review is that Pinker did not produce a history of violence in the human world; he produced instead a description of the evolution of a certain type of violence revolving around what Pinker chose as his main indicator (or 'proxy'). That is, documented physical intended death: homicide.

Part I is entitled 'Interpretation,' and contains Chapters 2 through 6. It is dedicated to unveiling the basic assumptions underpinning Pinker's methodological choices. So doing, it also retraces the origins and evolution of the principles which rule the ideologies of the financial elite of our contemporary world and their disciplinary base.

In Chapter 2, 'The inner demons of *The Better Angels of Our Nature*,' Daniel Lord Smail explores both the underlying ideology that sustains Pinker's argument, and the ensuing selection and handling of data, thus exposing an important methodological weakness in research that is supposed to be objective. First of all, one would have to justify the selection of a 'proxy' or main indicator for measuring violence; since it is not possible to measure all the violence in the world, the next best thing is to follow a reliable indicator, that would vary in accordance with the variations of the total violence. As indicated before, Pinker chose violent death and, more precisely, official data on intended violent killing as a direct indicator that could then be subjected to statistical evaluation. For Smail, this 'semantic narrowing of 'violence''(34) leaves behind most of the violence that is not homicide registered in court and official warfare. Many scholars agree with this judgment. Reducing violence to official data on homicide silences everything else, from slavery to torture, from incarceration to domestic abuse, as well as politically motivated engineered famine, or even ethnocide. It leaves the accounting of violence in the hands of perpetrators.

Smail also accuses Pinker of selecting data. He reminds us of the enduring popularity of what he sees as a 'faith' in the decline of violence; this is not a recent idea, as evidenced by Hobbes' thesis of a brutish past evolving into an orderly state, or by the cultural evolutionists' vision of 'primitive tribes,' or by Raymond Dart's prehistoric hominids as 'Killer Apes,' among other popular theses. The complementary notion of an ineluctable social and scientific progress is equally powerful. Smail argues that this faith does not justify selecting anecdotal data to paint horrifying prehistorical times evolving toward the supposed peaceful present times.

[As an anthropologist, I had to teach repeatedly to my students that Hobbes's vision of life outside of so-called civilization as 'violent, brutish and short' had nothing to do with fact, neither with prehistorical populations nor with Indigenous people.]

In Chapter 3, 'Pinker and the use and abuse of statistics in writing the history of violence,' Dag Lindstrom's primary concern applies to the proper use of quantitative evidence. He denounces the fact that Pinker "often neglects the many problems associated with historical and prehistorical quantifications, he tends to ignore evidence pointing in other directions."(41) Lindstrom reminds us of the need for context when handling quantitative data:

> Most of the available quantitative evidence for a long-term decline in homicide rates is extracted from (Western and Northern) European sources. Pinker, however, places the rest of the world into the general Western European pacification narrative. Evidence derived from a specific context is used a a general model for a global trajectory. In doing this, Pinker seems to apply a rather outdated diffusion model: a civilizing process started in a Western European epicentre, then spread to other parts of the continent and later also to the rest of the world. What Pinker describes might of course be a general pattern in human history, but we do not know for sure, and the quantitative evidence he presents cannot prove it.(42)

Among unresolved or ignored issues, Lindstrom also cites the mishandling of archaeological data, and the simplistic dichotomy between state and non-state societies, leading to non-state societies being arbitrarily depicted as very violent and the shift from non-state to state society as a major step toward peaceful coexistence. This dichotomy is extended though time to the contemporary world between tribal or Indigenous people and nation-states.

[As an an anthropologist and ethnographer working mostly with Indigenous societies, I was outraged by the ignorance displayed by Pinker on those matters. I have seen violence both within and outside of the community rapidly increasing with the advent of state

organisation, even more when that violence was then sanctioned by the state and its internal institutions. Also, nation-states have existed in several Indigenous societies.]

In Chapter 4, 'Progress and its contradictions: Human rights, inequality and violence,' Eric D. Weitz provides an interesting approach to violence through the concept of human rights. The global progress in human rights, which we can all verify, is used by Pinker to bolster his thesis. Weitz brings two counterpoints to Pinker's argument, especially his views on the Enlightenment as a game-changer for human rights:

> The first [counterpoint] entails his honey-coated understanding of the Enlightenment as a philosophical movement. Human rights today certainly rest upon the Enlightenment's promotion of liberty and the rights of the individual. Yet the same Enlightenment figures who advocated liberty also limited its scope though their drive to categorize the human population based on racial and gender hierarchies.(58-9)

> The division of human beings into civilized and barbarian [lays] at the centre of Enlightenment thought and enabled human rights violations and outright violence against those deemed incapable of rational and progressive thought. (59)

If the Enlightenment is a complex period with a complex set of ideas, we cannot bypass the fact that the notion of race, with its support for the institution of slavery, the notion of biological or cultural inferiority of Indigenous people or members of stateless societies, and the reiteration of the implied opposition between a passive domestic female realm and an active public male realm, all contradict the progress of human rights. Furthermore, the progress toward a peaceful society has not been without violence:

> In his two books, Pinker offers an assemblage of trends that make for the decline in violence. [...] But trends do not make for an explanation. The causative factors for each is not clear, and we have little sense of who exactly is pushing forward these developments. It all seems like a natural unfolding from barbarism to civilization. If only it were so easy. Pinker soars over the hard political struggle that Blacks, slaves, women, Korean citizens and so many others engaged to *create* the realm of liberty - with all its limitations - in the real world. In those struggles, the incidence and intensity of violence was often huge, and those events do not appear in the statistical tables on murder rates or the number of wars that have been fought in the modern period.(59)

In Chapter 5, 'Pinker's technocratic neoliberalism, and why it matters,' David A. Bell examines the links between theoretical underpinning and ideological convictions. In Pinker's case, Bell analyses assumptions that are, in his view, ideological rather than

theoretical, and that compose what Bells calls a 'technocratic neoliberalism.' He then interrogates the influence of Pinker's overall political vision on his research as a neoliberal (a term admittedly slippery) and then as a technocrat.

According to Bell, Pinker's neoliberalism is the more obvious part of his political stance.

> Here I use it to mean, first a faith derived from older ('classical') liberal thought that free markets are the most efficient and economically productive way to distribute goods and and services. This faith is coupled with a readiness to accept high levels of inequality in exchange for maximum possible economic growth with a strong distrust for taxation, economic planning and nationalization, and with a distinct hostility to labour organisation. 'Neo-'liberalism distinguishes itself from its classical ancestor by its particular emphasis on freeing the financial sector of the economy from restraint, by its tolerance for so-called 'creative destruction,' and by its insistence that free trade operate on a global level, with goods and services freely circulating across the world at maximum possible speeds and volume.(76)

One of the questions raised by this ideological stance stems from its reluctance to engage into politics. Bell refers to Pierre Rosanvallon in describing the ideal neoliberal world as 'a world largely free from politics:'

> ... a world where self-regulating, self-organizing market mechanisms determine the most important social configurations and patterns of distribution, leaving ordinary citizens with little or no recourse to political action.(76)

The technocratic label has a similarly long history, and Bell questions why Pinker does not seem to recognize the contradictions between neoliberalism and technocracy. Bell quotes Sophia Rosenfield, who asserted in *Democracy and Truth: A Short History* (2019) that the thinkers of the Enlightenment period were most ambivalent about a democracy involving everyone. From Voltaire to Madison to the aristocracy, many Enlightenment thinkers would advocate what Rosenfield calls 'the social and political utility of a distinct cohort of the learned.' This cohort was intended to become, over the decades and centuries a class of technical experts, wise, moral, and habituated to governance. Empowered to govern according to principles of science and engineering, here again "the technocratic vision is a vision of government without politics."(78) Obviously Pinker himself does not trust the intelligence or rationality exhibited by ordinary people, while those qualities and others are assumed to be present in technocrats and experts.

In short, in both his neoliberal and technocratic guises, Pinker has little confidence that ordinary people can successfully choose forms of social and economic organization that

will further their well-being. Better to leave the common good to the impersonal action of growth-generating free-market, or alternately, to trained experts.

In conclusion, Bell notes that neither neoliberalism nor technocracy have proven as stable or functional as their advocates had hoped.(85) In addition to all the problems generated by enormous economic inequality, including a general precarity for workers and their families, history has shown that enormous wealth engenders massive political power that pushes society in the direction of oligarchy, while technocracy tends to petrify and cordon off the experts from the rest of the population.(85) In such systems, says Bell, denied their freedom, "...ordinary people will not always peacefully and quietly obey the dictates of the market or the precept of the experts, they will turn in frustration to the demagogues. Far from moving ever closer [...] toward enlightenment, ordinary citizens will turn back toward toward an all too familiar darkness."(86)

In concluding Part One with Chapter 6, Philip Dwyer joins Elizabeth Robert-Pedersen for a review of the notion of the *The Civilizing Process*, a notion at the intersection between history and psychology which informs a central theory in Pinker's argument. The concept was developed in the early twentieth century by Norbert Elias, a German sociologist in a book of the same title first published in 1939 (translated and published in English in 1994). Inspired partly by Freud, Elias' theory has been well studies by historians and much criticized both from a psychological view point and a historical view point. To summarize, the notion of a 'civilizing process' at work in the development of humanity draws a parallel, if not a direct link, between the development of an individual human being and that of society (if not humanity), uniting psychology and anthropology in a simple and grand synthesis.

However, this synthesis remains purely theoretical and bends both disciplines out of their scientific basis. Taking medieval European society as an unrestrained, uneducated, and violent toddler who discovers courtly manners and the rules of etiquette during the Renaissance and thereby turns into an educated man - as does a maturing adult - does not fit the facts. It may work as a metaphor, but not as a factual description. However, Elias' theory fits Pinker's scheme: he enlarges the model to correspond to the development of mankind from its beginning to its present maturity, from the unrestrained, childlike, and violent behaviour of the prehistoric and medieval periods through the Renaissance and the next centuries in a process that moves independently through the centuries. Altogether it is a grand model, but it is built on false conceptual foundations. As Dwyer and Robert-Pedersen conclude, Pinker's uncritical use of Norbert Elias' ideas and his extrapolation of Elias' theory into the last century weaken an argument already questionable.

[Unfortunately for Pinker, his argument is more than questionable: both Elias' model and Pinker's version of the model are fallacies fed by myths. Anthropologists have long since

debunked the idea as no more than a misleading figure of speech, together with similar ideas drawing parallels between a) individual physical development, b) the emergence of hominids leading to Homo sapiens, c) and cultural 'development' from tribal societies to industrialized, urbanized nations, with the corresponding religious hierarchy and organizational complexity. This scheme of unilinear cultural evolutionism was favoured by early proponents in the 1850s and it has been repeatedly refuted by anthropologists, including human paleontologists and prehistorians. At base, the problem is that it conflates technological complexity with culture and feeds on the feelings of superiority of the elite in a class society. Unfortunately, such a triumphalist perspective has strong roots in our culture.]

Part Two: Chapters 7-9 - Periods

Part Two, entitled Periods, is devoted to key temporal periods in Pinker's synthesis, and brings a revealing and contemporary historical context to the history of violence in the world, a context often missing from data presented in *The Better Angels*' sweeping saga.

In Chapter 7, 'Steven Pinker's 'prehistoric anarchy': A bioarchaeological critique,' human osteoarchaeologist Linda Fibiger examines how Pinker treats archaeological remains so as to deduce rates of violence in the prehistoric past, which he assumes from the start to be chaotic and brutal. Fibiger provides a blunt archaeological critique of both this primary assumption and Pinker's methodology. First, she denounces the lack of representativeness of his sample and his biased selection of sources, followed by denouncing his inability to react to prehistoric records, his ignorance of regional variability, the lack of coherence of his data set, and his misunderstanding of the complexity of the results in archaeological data, all mistakes due to a lack of competence in the discipline. She notes that hypotheses from Raymond Dart (1950s) and from Robert Ardrey (1961), presenting early man as 'the killer ape' and violence as the driving force behind human evolution, have long been discredited. Among significant gaps, she notes the absence of references to the neolithic period when, contrary to Pinker's claim, agriculture and permanent settlements did not result in a decline of violent death.

[Anthropological recent research has indeed confirmed that rates of violent death increased with the introduction of farming, while overall health and longevity markedly decreased.]

Referring to prehistory and bioarchaeology, Fibiger insists that the multiple aspects and manifestation of human activities result, of necessity, in a fragmented, incomplete and complex record. The record is sufficient, however, to demonstrates the range and multiple variations in these human activities, shifts in subsistence patterns and in social

organizations, including recourse to aggressive behaviour. This complexity is not recognized by Pinker:

> Pinker, on the other hand, presents 'prehistory' as a universal term, a unifying or global expression used to refer to non-state societies and the 'anarchy of the hunting, gathering and horticultural societies in which our species spent most of its evolutionary history....(110)

[Against Pinker's opinion, anthropologists see no simple universal transitions from one stage of development to another, from one subsistence pattern to another, or one mode of social organization to another. Instead, markers of transitions such as sedentary life, division of labour, agriculture, animal domestication, writing, institutionalized religious rituals, and state formation, etc, seem to have developed, and in several cases retreated, each in their own time and according to different factors.]

Contrary to Pinker's practice, Fibiger asserts that a single site cannot be taken as representative of whole region or period, and one should minimally include all sites of a given area. She further confirms that skeletal evidence for interpersonal violence goes back as far as the original of human themselves. But, she writes, the recognition of biological, cultural, and ecological factors contributing to violence requires an admission regarding the complexity of violence and the impossibility of isolating and identifying any single cause. Moreover, the further back in time researchers explore, the more difficult it becomes to disentangle the web of causative factors.(119)

Fibiger takes care to define both violence and war, and by doing so, underlines the problem incurred by Pinker when he conflates the two without considering the considerable variations in what we deem to be violent behaviour, and the further difficulties in identifying traces of violence or signs of warfare in archaeological remains. In a most interesting suggestion, prompted by Pinker's tendency to reduce violence to acts of violence, Fibiger proposes to consider violence as a process rather than an event.(123). This approach would prevent us from falling into the trap of reducing violence to a single moment in time as manifested by one debilitating or fatal injury (Pinker's fatality count) and [help us to] recognize it as a process with significant consequences for the individual [as well as] his/her social network.(124) This suggestion could extend the consequences and influence of violence from the individual victim and perpetrator to other members of the community. If we consider violence as a social process, we may also more easily recognize people from the distant past as not so different from us.

In Chapter 8, 'Getting medieval on Steven Pinker: Violence and medieval England,' Sara M. Butler, a historian specializing in Medieval England, marital violence, and family crises, questions whether medieval times in England were as deprived and cruel as Pinker describes them. She examines his sources, numbers, and historiography, and provides

alternative sources and corrections. In effect, she notes, Pinker needs the Middle Ages to be barbaric in order to establish a strong contrast between that period and a more peaceful contemporary world. To do so, he used suggestive references to grisly images of execution and torture instruments which he found in sources that are not exactly reliable. Butler does not soften her tone as she cites Arthurian romance treated as historical fact, bogus statistics, and flawed historical numbers. Unfortunately for Pinker, his sources (or illustrations) are not representative of the actual mores of the time:

> [Pinker] cannot maintain that violence has declined since the Middle Ages because we have no real evidence to prove that it has. Indeed, it is not at all clear just how violent the Middle Ages actually were.(136)

To further complicate the question, many of the court records and related documentation available to statisticians cannot be taken at face value - records have disappeared, population figures are imprecise, and, among other factors, medieval naming practices were not standardized. The authors of the Domesday Book - a form of census - counted only the heads of household, neglecting women, children, elderly and other dependants; neither did they count the people who lived and served in a castle, or the members of religious orders. These, among other factors, prevent a quick recourse to statistics or an easy comparison with present-day statistics.

In the conclusion to her chapter, Butler echoes her colleagues' complaint: While it is clear that Pinker misrepresents the Middle Ages in Great Britain, what rankles medievalists most about Pinkers's book is that he is not particularly interested in the period. Rather the era is simply a starting point from which to apply a well-worn historical theory while adding his own psychological twist.(141) As far as scholarly work is concerned, Pinker could not pass as a historian. But then, how many of his readers would be able to appreciate the research work accomplished by actual historians? History, as a scholarly discipline, needs its champions.

Chapter 9, 'History, violence and the Enlightenment,' sees Philip Dwyer, Professor of History and Founding Director fo the Centre for the Study of Violence at the University of Newcastle, add to the debate a counter-study of the Enlightenment period, which represents for Pinker the pivot around which the world will launch itself toward peaceful times. Pinker takes this short period as 'a coherent project,' if not a 'coherent philosophy,' or 'a set of ideals' centred on reason, science and humanism.(145) However, Dwyer takes this same period as a crossroad of ideas and trends, the influence and opinions of which were mixed, especially regarding wars and social inequalities; it was a complex and changing process including multiple perspectives issuing from national, regional, religious, and conceptual variations which are still analyzed today. The ideas that circulated through Enlightenment society did not necessarily develop *in situ*. The Enlightenment, writes Dwyer, is not defined by ideas, but by the fact that they were shared and debated.

Scholarship on that much-studied period has profoundly changed over the centuries, and especially the historiography of the past two decades. As Dwyer remarks : "Much of what we once took for granted about the Enlightenment has been overturned."(145) One cannot rely on outdated sources, nor consider Enlightenment as a single straightforward movement; today, historians speak of and study French, Austrian, Scottish, German, even Islamic and Catholic Enlightenments. Even when considering British Enlightenment, we are confronted to many themes still unresolved. Following his role of professional historian, Dwyer asks central methodological questions:

a) Historical causality: If we consider the Enlightenment as a set of ideas, can we assume that ideas drive history? This has been disproven, yet the topic brings us to the problem of causality in history, where few historians today would agree with Pinker.

b) The rational and irrational in history: Like some, Pinker assumes a dichotomy between science and religion: embracing one means rejecting the other. This assumption is linked to a parallel opposition of reason and emotion, an equation that permeates Pinker's thinking and sustains his definition of violence as irrational. This assumption, like all Pinker's other assumptions, is not a fact; Dwyer notes that violence serves a purpose and a function, no matter how 'irrational' or 'barbaric' or 'savage' an act might appear to the outside observer, and that this is as much the case today as it was in the past.(156)

As Dwyer writes:

> This [question] goes to the heart of Pinker's own personal world view. He rejects the powerful liberal current of Enlightenment thinking that includes, in the West at least, Jacobinism, Bolshevism and Nazism, all political ideologies that at their core believed humans and humans society could be improved through violent means. They all not only advocated but practiced violence in a methodical way to bring about revolutionary change in society. Pinker, on the other hand, cannot countenance the idea that there was a link between ideology, the 'invention of reason,' and 'reason' being used for violent ends, because for him violence is necessarily irrational.(156)

[Dwyer's chapter is enticing as a teaser on many question. As an anthropologist, I would have liked these questions to be explored further. For instance, violence as a tool of governance could be coupled with the variations in how societies define historical causalities. The Civilizing Process can be reframed within the idea of Progress, an idea that opens on various interpretations: from an initial golden age (Greece and China), to a glorious futuristic new planet in space, or to the second coming of Christ (USA). Science, another of these themes, coincides with the displacement of the Medieval in a purely

anthropocentric view of the world. Paradoxically this did not necessarily lead to a lessening of the collective hubris. Coupled with the idea of Progress, instead it gave rise to an idea developed during the Renaissance: the idea of the New Adam. According to this notion, God's creation was not fully completed by placing Adam and Eve on the earth. Instead, man is now endowed with the task of completing the work through the advancement of sciences and technology; through our intellectual advances, we can further man's control of the earth and its creatures. and make it into a better world, perhaps even conquer death itself.

One cannot underestimate the diversity of views emanating from the Enlightenment and the many different orientations that can be read among its thinkers. Thomas Hobbes was not its leading reference at the time, though he appeared to be a useful provider of justifications for the expansion of the British empire, capitalism, and government by a learned superior elite. As a philosopher imbued with the view of scientific knowledge as absolute truth based on principles that are, of course, reserved for great minds, Hobbes lived and thought in a hierarchical world. His model of kingship was partly inspired by Plato's rather undemocratic and hierarchical Republic; Plato himself explicitly described his ideal government as supported by a Great Lie. That is, everyone must believe they occupy the social status they were always destined to occupy.

But Hobbes had his opponents: Robert Boyle, for instance, saw scientific truth as an always evolving knowledge that was accessible to all, and he was not adverse to displaying his inventions and teaching sciences to workers and peasants. Boyle's sciences were opened to new perspectives, to the future, to the outside world, and to the common man, perspectives that were all compatible with his Christian faith. As a renowned chemist, a scientist credited for developing experimental sciences, and a founding member of the Royal Society, Boyle associated knowledge with the laws of nature; his democratic ideals were far removed from those entertained by Hobbes.]

Part Three: Chapters 10-12 - Places

In Part 3, *The Darker Angels of Our Nature* veers toward scholarship that opens onto the history of a larger world, bringing geographic alternatives to Pinker's perspective that is decidedly centred on Western Europe. Chapters 10, 11 and 12 are devoted respectively to Russia, Japan, and the Middle East. The editors apologize for the absence of intended chapters on China and other parts of the world, which were not available at time of publication for various reasons.

In Chapter 10, 'The complexity of history: Russia and Steven Pinker's thesis,' Nancy Shields Kollmann, a specialist of Eastern European History, takes Russian history to demonstrate the importance of historical regional variations. She focuses her analysis on the three

historical processes identified by Pinker as contributing to the rise of a peaceful and civilized society, that is, 1) the rise of a centralized state with a monopoly on violence and policing (see Hobbes' *Leviathan*), 2) the expansion of inter-regional commerce (global economy and capitalism), and, finally 3) the diffusion of civilized behaviour through the spread of etiquette and courtly culture (encouraging restraint and empathy).

Kollmann argues that the practice of criminal law in Russia, as defined and practiced by the Russian state, was less violent than its western European counterpart, with a reach kept intentionally narrow,(167) and the development of state power was more focused. Russia, being an autocracy, had a strong potential for despotic arbitrariness in its justice system. However, that was mitigated by the uniformity of its standard, the centrality of the tsar's position as the 'father' of his people, therefore capable of mercy, and the recourse to a pragmatic perspective. For instance, since the Russian State's foremost concern was the provision of human and material resources, it made sense on the one hand to preserve the serfdom system, but on the other hand to abolish the death penalty in favour of exile and forced labour. Against Pinker's explanations, Kollmann says:

> Russia's judicial practices into the nineteenth century, therefore, would seem to reflect an aversion to violence. But few of Pinker's driving forces for such a case were at play here... [...] The pacifying impulse of commerce hardly played a role: Russia was a resource-poor society with a serf-based autarkic economy where the state exerted as much control over productive resources and economic exchange as possible. [...] ... Russia relied on a more complicated relationship to violence than Pinker's smooth path of decline.(172)

Kollman notes, however, that Russia never fully embarked toward a decline of violence: instead, its emphasis on human resources, or rather a perception of human beings as resources toward production, went unchecked. The official violence of the justice system was dwarfed by the violence exerted by the serfdom system and the exile system, both of them brutal and often deadly.'

> "...and in the twentieth century Russia suffered under a utopian ideology that wrecked (*sic*) unimaginable pain on the Soviet people. The red thread uniting these disparate relationships to violence is the drive to mobilize resources. (174)

Kollmann writes in conclusion that this "suggest that different states assess the utility of violence differently and use or limit it as it suits them."(175)

[To Kolmann's remarks, I would add - as an anthropologist - that regional differences often correspond to cultural variations that engender divergences in worldviews, social expectations, social norms, values, and ethics, as well as in patterns of social organization.

Culture is not often mentioned in *The Darker Angels*, and cultural differences are openly ignored by Pinker, who professes instead a universalist point of view supported by his version of evolutionary psychology.]

In Chapter 11, 'The necrology of angels: Violence in Japanese history as a lens of critique,' Michael Wert presents a history of violence in Japan through which we uncover local and global facets of violence that would have to be considered an essential component of a world history of violence. His presentation begins with a scathing accusation: Pinker's book is not a work of scholarship but of polemics and ideology.(177)

Wert does not intend to offer "a case study of how Pinker's facts are wrong, […] or a positivistic critique."(177) Instead, he explores three themes or approaches that would seem at first to present parallels to those found by Pinker in Western Europe: first, the historical meta-narrative embodying the so-called Great Peace of the Tokugawa or Edo period. This was interpreted by the Japanese state as a civilizing process, focusing on elite culture and classical texts from 1603 to 1868. The second theme emerges once the Tokugawa period is replaced by the Meiji Restoration, which oversaw the development of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Japanese industrial capitalism. As a third theme and during the same period, between 1868 and 1912, the notion of the self-restrained individual continued to exert its influence. As depicted by Wert, the case of Japan its interesting because it unveils how national meta-narratives of peace and prosperity, claimed by Japanese rulers during most of their history, occult various types of systemic violence.

In questioning the Era of Great Peace, embodied as it was in a feudal class system led by a warrior regime (the Samurai) and focusing on the elite, Wert notes:

> On the surface, it seems like the title 'great peace' accurately describes the era. Nobody invaded Japan, warlords became 'lords', […] no lord revolted against the Tokugawa regime. […] But the domains located throughout Japan were relatively autonomous; some even drove diplomatic policy with close neighbours, especially the Korean kingdom. As long as the lords played into the ceremony of deference to the shogunate, a government with sympathetic lords as advisors, then they were left to their own devices, thus 'performing the great peace,' as one recent scholar described it.(184)

> By the end of the Tokugawa period, Ikegami asserts, "the direct connection between samurai honour and the exercise of violence gradually weakened, and a new ethic of the samurai as law-abiding "organizational men" had clearly emerged."(185)

This officially peaceful facade is still claimed to this day as part of the Japanese historical identity, and it may indeed correspond to a decrease in certain forms of violence. If so, it occurred before Japanese contact with Europeans and American civilizations, and it was not without its own violent outbreaks. As Wert notes:

> A pitfall of 'the era of peace' notion is that it usually referred to a peace among warriors through a lack of war; but what about everyone else?(187)

Gangs of unemployed samurai in the cities, retaliating gangs of commoners, armed youth groups whose activities increased with economic hardship, countless peasant uprisings, and even waves of infanticide marked a growing disaffection toward the collective, particularly as wealth was concentrated in the hands of merchants and greater insecurity led to violence among the poor.(189) In the end, the shogunate collapsed in 1868 under the concentrated weight of colonialist western powers led by the USA, the pressure to restore the imperial authority amid succession disputes, civil wars, and natural disasters. This led to the Meiji Restoration, a series of event that brought their own load of violence.

[As an anthropologist, I note that even as the samurai were undergoing a transformation of their identity from warrior to self-restrained and cultured leaders and men of power, the ideology of honour and violence endured, disseminated by heroic tales, public ceremonials, and ancestor rituals. Several indicators demonstrate that this ideology went unchecked in the collective memory, including the so-called 'children wars' of the early nineteenth century. This event featured children in Ido, numbering several hundred at a time, engaged in large scale mock wars with bamboo spears. This ideology persists in the contemporary world of comic books and films.]

The era of the Meiji restoration that followed, imperialistic and led by oligarchs, was marked by the opening of relations with the Western powers.(192) As Wert notes,

> The most significant change in what we might call 'modernity's violence' was its invisibility, masked by notions of scientific, bureaucratic, and economic progress. [...] The stakeholders who control the means of production constrain the leader and his government, preventing violence to their disruption of trade, but they support violence when seeking sources of raw material and cheap labor. [...] Thus, the early Meiji oligarchs, looking to the West as a model, understood the connection between capitalism and violence - 'rich nation, strong military' became another popular slogan.(192-3)

From the joint expansion of mutually supportive military might and industrial domination, there is only a very short distance to imperialistic reach beyond the nation borders toward subjugating neighbouring countries in order to provide the ever-increasing demands for resources and land base. While the toll of violence during warfare is partially accounted

for in Pinker's charts, he ignores the human cost of industrial development (loss of land, relocation, pollution, low wages or forced labor, and general impoverishment of the population with the resulting loss of life). The Japanese military empire will collapse in the aftermath of the Second World War, but the industrial global network created there evolves into the familiar landscape of the international industrial hub, where human interests fade into concerns about relentless financial domination.

The civilizing forces of statehood and 'peaceful trade' have a dark side in Japan and around the world. The essential characteristic of this dark side in Japan - its invisibility - is also repeated. That invisibility is, of course, deeply desirable to the perpetrators and the state, but it relies also on the public audience. In a telling aside, Wert goes back to Norbert Elias:

> What is often forgotten in Norbert Elias' account of the public disappearance of torture and punishment [is that it] is not due to people no longer supporting violence, but simply not wanting to see it. As Barry Vaughn eloquently states it: Elias 'does not associate the onset of civilization with the extinction of violence, merely its occlusion.(186)

[We might also note that with the dawn of social media and the age of communication, the great hope of the late twentieth century to end that invisibility was rapidly thwarted by the states' alliance with the global market and international financial interests in their respective quests for control of information and marketing data on individual lives.]

In Chapter 12, 'British imperial violence and the Middle East,' Caroline Elkins explores another aspect of that equally dark side of the supposedly shining benevolence of the civilizing European 'peaceful trade' advocated by *The Better Angels*, a trade often accompanied by military intervention. Colonization, from whatever nation it arises, and especially when it pretends to be a 'civilizing' and pacifying process is not, in fact, a peaceful process.

In a few terrifying pages, Elkins demonstrates how the whole picture of legitimized violence in the wake of European colonization is nothing but a screen hiding the very violence that is not recognized by Pinker's statistics. Not the official war, but the revolts; not the public accounts of victory, but the reprisals and genocidal punitive expeditions; not the extension of British administrative and military 'pacification,' but the take over of land, natural resources, and human labour, and, endlessly, the recourse to torture, maiming, killing and rape, led by – embarrassingly - the very men who Pinker identifies as embodying the peace-promoting virtues of the British-led Enlightenment. What is more, that violence, while not publicly recognized and often denied or hidden, was nevertheless sanctioned by the state and justified on the grounds of ideological claims of racial and cultural superiority; it quickly became systemic. Elkins mentions Jamal al-Husayni in

Palestine, the Kikuyu in Kenya, and Morant Bay in Jamaica, among multiple examples repeated *ad nauseam* in our recent common history. They may be alluded to in Pinker's text, but they do not mar his statistics. They, too, are invisible.

[I would like to add that these events and policies are not emblematic specifically of the British Empire. They can be found in any period and any state; they are the oft-forgotten, unidentified, and mislabelled underside of most celebrated ventures of economic development, military conquest, and successful colonization projects culminating in social order and political control. Coercion follows the rules of law supporting economic power.

Three related methodological points emerged for me from Part Three. Though they are not underlined in the conclusion, they should be useful when studying matricultural systems: First, the need to support any research in human sciences on the observation of the concrete world (Robert Boyle) rather than on preemptive principles (Thomas Hobbes), or actual documents versus theoretical or ideal laws, is still valid today. Second, seeing violence as process rather than a succession of single events could allow us to think contextually. Third, and most importantly, the invisibility of violence, and even more of systemic violence, should warn us that progress in social well-being depends on a large part on making violence visible.]

Part 4: Chapters 13-17 - Themes

Part Four of *The Darker Angels of Our Nature* addresses types of violence that do not fit the criteria set by Pinker to measure violence in our world, though they are on the front page of our news media: sexual violence, the situation of Indigenous peoples, racism, the militarization of policing, mass incarceration, and capital punishment, among other hot topics. Part Four also addresses our environmental history and our violent - if not suicidal - treatment of our planet and its non-human inhabitants. Can we then pretend that we have become rational beings over the last three or four centuries, as stated by Pinker? Or have we failed to understand our nature?

In Chapter 13, 'A history of violence and indigeneity: Pinker and the Native Americas,' Matthew Restall, a historian and Latin American scholar best known for his work with the Maya people, the Spanish conquest, and Central American history, shows that if Pinker seems to pay relatively little attention to Indigenous people in the world (most of it directed on the Aztecs, a Central American empire), Indigenous people, and particularly the first inhabitants of the Americas, play an important role in Pinker's argument.(223) That is to say, Pinker's thesis demands that the past, especially the prehistoric past, exhibit extreme violence. True to his early nineteenth century perspective on the world, Pinker considers Indigenous people as leftovers from the past and, therefore, equivalent to prehistoric humanity. As Restall remarks, the first line of Pinker's book is revealing;

"'Kennewick Man was shot.'" (Pinker 9) is the first seed of a link between violence and indigeneity that takes root and grows throughout the book.(224) Indigenous people, both as quasi-prehistoric people and as non-state societies, apparently had little opportunity to get their supposedly violent natures under control.[1]

More than suggestion, Pinker declares that men in non-state societies routinely engaged in unrestrained violence, most notably committing massacres of whole villages, as well as acts of torture, rape, mutilation and cannibalism. Over a five-page passage, references are made to Indigenous peoples in New Guinea, Australia, and New England, and to the Yanomami of the Amazonian Basin and Inuit [Arctic]. He gives an overwhelming three-fold impression: that Native Americans and non-state peoples are essentially the same category; that their societies were fundamentally and relentlessly violent; and that they existed overwhelmingly in the violent past, not the peaceful present. All three impressions are patently false.(224)

For Restall, Pinker's use of one Indigenous society, the pre-Columbian Aztecs, as the most representative sample of Indigeneity in America - one whom he blatantly misrepresents by using the most biased and shocking references to large scale human sacrifices and cannibalism, forgetting they were also a state society with an agricultural market economy and a sophisticated urban organisation - preempts the idea of their survival in modern times. This leads to what Restall calls a gross misrepresentation of Native American history and culture [or, I should add, cultures].(232) Entering the historical period, that of settler colonialism, writes Restall, Pinker could not avoid the cost in Indigenous lives of the European and Euro-American imperialism, but it is mentioned, mostly in table and chart entries. Restall objects specifically and most strongly to the cursory coverage of settler violence and the impact of colonization on Indigenous populations.

Restall further objects to Pinker's reduction of the violence during the early colonizing period to a 'civilizing process,' particularly the implication that while European settlement was a violent process, it was less violent than Native America before Europeans arrived. (230), This only serves Pinker's larger argument, leaving behind the deadliest period of the European conquest. Restall objections to Pinker's treatment of Native America has serious implications for the Indigenous perspective:

> My third objection is that Native American only appear in the passages of the book (ed. *The Better Angels*) that cover the modern era (by which I mean post-1900) as leftover hunter and gatherer groups on the margins of the civilized world – specifically Arctic Canada and the Amazon in the early- to mid-twentieth century - and then only as examples of the intrinsic violence of nonstate and Indigenous societies. Otherwise, after encountering the Civilizing

---

1 Kennewick Man is the name given to the nine-thousand-year-old skeleton of a paleo-American man found on the banks of the Colombia River.

Process, Native Americans disappear. In effect, they cease to exist. A reader who did not know otherwise would conclude that Native Americans contributed to humanity's violent past, but that they are entirely absent from the civilized and peaceful present.(230)

According to Restall, it is precisely the invisibility of Native Americans which allows Pinker to feed the belief that American native societies do not exist any more, and to ignore their survival, their contemporary cultural presence, and their counter-narrative of historical events; to ignore, also, the systemic and multi-faceted types of violence, including genocides, Indigenous people have encountered and still encounter in their struggle for surviving as a people [not as anonymous populations]; and to ignore the reality that this violence increased in the centuries after the European Enlightenment. While underlining the importance of the counter-narrative presented by the Indigenous people themselves - who have not only survived but also continue to speak with their own voices - Restall summarizes the gist of his argument with the following words:

> Pinker sets up his thesis from the opening paragraph of his books' [*sic*] preface as a happy surprise: 'Believe it not - and I know that most people do not - violence has declined over long stretches of time, and today we may be living the most peaceable era of our species' existence. [...] But behind that you-won't-believe-it-but set-up is a less benign one, more of a you-already-know-this foundation stone: The West is better than the non-West. Thus, it is the West's triumph over other cultures that has made the world a better place. [...] The slippage in Pinker's book between West/Other and present/past is nowhere made starker than in his treatment of the Native Americas.(234)

[Having spent the best part of my life working with Indigenous peoples and cultures, I was outraged, again, by Pinker's treatment of Indigenous people, a treatment that comes straight from the nineteenth century. Like Restall, and knowing how ubiquitous these theories still are in certain segments of my own society, I understand how Pinker would have simply followed the received ideas of his social milieu. These ideas are still entertained by such countries as China, where matrilineal societies are considered to be 'fossil people' and Tibetan people presented as the direct descendants of Neanderthal, Russia (with Siberia plundered by the Russian administration), India, certain parts of Africa, and many others. That does not weaken the outrage, nor the consequences of propagating these same and dangerous ideas in today's world. I find myself totally in agreement with Restall's counter-argument. I also appreciate his emphasis on the contemporary and active presence of Indigenous societies in North America and in the world.]

The following chapter, Chapter 14, 'The rise and rise of sexual violence' by Joanna Bourke, looks at the sexualization of violence. It offers us a direct opportunity to bring women to

the forefront of the discussion, together with other victims of sexual violence. It is a tightly argued, precisely detailed, and very critical report based on the same populations used as samples by Pinker, mostly the United States and the United Kingdom, but using different criteria. Sexual violence [note Bourke's emphasis on the sexual rather than on women, which enlarges the debate] is treated by Pinker as a sideline in the grand scheme of things. But to do that, Pinker has to minimize the fact that 'violent practices, technologies and symbols increasingly permeate our everyday lives,'(236). and the fact that much of that violence is sexualized. Bourke directly confronts Pinker with five serious shortcomings or 'traps:'

1. Selectively choosing his data: Pinker relies mainly on the US Bureau of Justice Statistics' National Crime Victimization Survey, thus excluding "some groups of people that are most at risk of sexual assault, including people living on military bases, and in institutional settings (such as correctional or hospital facilities) and people who are homeless. […] The increase in prisoners is particularly telling since Pinker reports positively on increased incarceration rate in the United States, stating that one of the reasons for the decline of rape is that more 'first-time rapists' have been put behind bars [not mentioning that the levels of sexual assaults in prisons have increase dramatically.

2. A narrow definitions of violence: Pinker's definition of violence was drawn from legal precepts relying on a) the presence of a victim of a cruel act, b) a perpetrator and c) hurtful consequences. This prevents us from paying attention to the fact that most violence today does not conform to this model; rather, it is structural and institutional. It is about pervasive insecurity, poverty, disease, and inequality, and affects the whole social environment. This kind of violence is powerful precisely because it had become naturalized: It is a fact of life that seems impossible to challenge.(238)

3. Minimizing certain harms and repeating long-standing prejudices: Pinker ignores the historical record of victims of violence because the terms were different; this does not mean that harm was not done. Bourke notes that Pinker also believes that, contrary to the past, women who report being sexually abused are now treated with care and respect, […] thus conflating regulations with implementation.(241-2) Further, sexual violence is difficult to address when many form of sexual violence are supported by the rest of society, such as hazing practices, abuse in the military or police forces, or sexual abuse including sexualized forms of torture in military prisons.(234) And what about modern slavery, international sex trade industry, forced marriages?

4. Minimizing contemporary forms of violence assisted by technology: According to readily available evidence, the sexualization of violence and the violent treatment of genders and sexualities have been on a fast rising curve, affected and fortified by the new technologies. These forms of violence are not included in official statistics, but well documented image-based sexual abuse (including revenge-

pornography) and online sexual harassment are now common forms of violence. (245) Users of video gaming and virtual space are now exposed to virtual rape by other characters and "technology-based sexually coercive behaviours" are available to players in several computer games. Contrary to Pinker's opinion, they are increasing in popularity. and we should regard them as violent, because they have real-life consequences.

5. The last trap is an evolutionary psychology model: Bourke's analysis shows that Pinker's view of sexual violence is framed in terms of self-interested competitors, a 'genetic calculus' and a 'reproductive spreadsheet' which presents sexual violence as a fact of nature, women as predisposed to be choosy and coy, and men to be indiscriminate. Pinker believes that 'the prevalence of rape in human history' and the 'invisibility of the victim in the legal treatment of rape' are "all too comprehensible from the vantage point of the genetic interest that shaped human desires and sentiments over the course of evolution, before our sensibilities were shaped by Enlightenment humanism."(245)

The idea that males are biologically and genetically predisposed to sexual violence used to be fashionable. It is no longer defensible; it twists Darwin's theories by ignoring recent research by biologists and primatologists which, for instance, demonstrate the essential role of the group in the selection of genitors rather than limiting one's perspective to an individual contest of physical strength and individual self interest. research is also calling into question the efficiency of choosing a sexual partner on the basis of physical strength alone, rather than intelligence, or ability to form collaborative strategies, or the ability to care for the young and their mothers.

Bourke concludes her remarks by pointing out that Pinker failed to recognize the neoliberal ideological underpinnings of his research and the political consequences of his work. Specifically, accepting that sexual violence has a biological basis has normative consequences for our response to sexual violence. She notes that "... by failing to acknowledge and then control for his own ideological bias, Pinker has missed an opportunity to convincingly explain the changing nature of violence in our societies."(251)

Robert T. Chase, a specialist in the history of prisons, prison reform, and state violence, offers a critical synthesis of the conjunction of the state violence and racism in Chapter 15, 'Where angels fear to tread: Racialised policing, mass incarceration and executions as state violence in the post-civil rights era.' So doing, he demonstrates with major contemporary examples that the benefits supposedly derived from a state monopoly on violence can quickly convert into extreme violence and disparity of power. Unsurprisingly, according to Pinker, the post civil-rights era in the United States (after 1965) saw a shift from systemic racism and racial violence to isolated racist incidents.

Chase uses a three-pronged move to challenge Pinker's view: 1) a historical analysis of the connection between racialized policing (discriminatory police brutality) and urban uprising, together with the rapid development of SWAT units in the post-Vietnam era and the transformation of the police into a militarized force; 2) a review of the rapid development in the American context of mass incarceration and the use of prisons as punitive racial discipline; and 3) a recontextualization of the death penalty as state violence. Each prong corresponds to a major blind spot in Pinker's narrative:

> Of course, this history of anti-Blackness and state violence does not exist in Stevens Pinker's *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, nor does any mention of state violence directed at Black Americans. Instead, Pinker takes a 'colour-blind' narrative as critically integral to his claim of a post-civil rights era that represent a 'New Peace' symbolic of a less violent post-1965 Western civilization.(255)

For instance, Pinker dismisses urban uprisings as evidences of Black criminality rather than a function of state violence against its Black and Brown population.(262) Starting with a historical review of riots and protests in US cities, and unveiling the political games supporting racialized policing on the one hand and the militarization of police on the other, Chase demonstrates the direct synchronicity between police brutalities sanctioned by the state and directed at people of colour, and the ensuing mass protests.(265-6) According to Chase, it is critical to note that none of these acts of brutality are random, rare or committed in isolation by solitary 'bad apple' cops, On the contrary, they are part of a sustained and systematic anti-Black and anti- Brown violence that has been historically consistent as a expression of carceral state power.(255) In order to contest Pinker's focus on criminality as an individual process, Chase uses Keeanga-Yamatha Taylor's argument that

> ...the focus on "state violence" strategically pivots away from a conventional analysis that would reduce racism to the intentions and actions of the individuals involved. The declaration of "state violence" legitimizes the corollary demand for state action.(257)

The scale of incarceration in the USA is staggering:

> Mass incarceration is the post-1965 increase of the US prison population from 200,000 people to the modern-day prison population of 2.3 million and over 6.1 million under auspices of the carceral state through prisons, jails, probation and parole. To control that immense population, the carceral state in America comprises 1,719 state prisons, 102 federal prisons. 2,259 juvenile correctional facilities, 3,283 local jails , 79 Indian Country jails, and over 200 immigration detention facilities.(264)

The historical context, as Heather Thompson makes clear in her seminal article 'Why Mass Incarceration Matters', is that from the Great Depression to the Great Society the number of people in federal and state prisons increased by 52,249 (1935-70), while in the post-civil rights era (1970-2005) the number of incarcerated people in US prisons and jails increased by 1.2 million.(265).

Reviewing the official statistics and the political accounts of the history of death penalty in the US demonstrates that death penalty is indeed part and parcel of endemic state violence directed against Black and Brown people in the American criminal justice system. According to a 2015 study by Frank R. Baumgartner and colleagues, quoted by Chase:

Between 1976 and 2013, only seventeen white people were executed for killing a Black person while 230 Black people were executed for killing a white person; black people were put top death more than twice as often for killing a white person (230 executions), than for killing a black person (108 executions). (271)

Although Steven Pinker never acknowledges policing and prisons as sites of well-documented racial violence, it seems indeed that some violence and some lives matter more than others.

[What an anthropologist could emphasize in light of this chapter, is that racism is not really caused by individuals enmeshed in a older belief system, nor is it simply an added ingredient to an already violent society. Instead, it seems to be generated by the state itself in order to establish the domination demanded by the exercise of power. Because the exercise of power is a spectacle, the horrifying display of terror, suffering, and degradation emerging from recent historical studies is not senseless: it has a logic of its own that generates the same tired scenarios, century after century, for a staged demonstration of power that is physically acted out on individuals, becoming more brutal as the state's real authority seems challenged. The state needs enemies, while its power demands demonstration.

Anthropologists would also add that there are many forms of power (see Anthony Giddens, for example); power built on the spectacle of crushing people to nothingness and irrelevancy is not the most constructive, efficient or stable. The reasons why terror suit the power sought by many state societies is a matter of debate. Or could we define types of state societies according to the type of power they choose to exercise? We may, however, surmise that in any given society the dominant metaphors of power found at the political level, and therefore the dominant forms of violence, are repeated throughout the cultural system - at the family level as well as the religious level, or within economic structures. One usually finds. as demonstrated by Anthony Hobbes and Steven Pinker, the

lowest members of a patriarchal class society treated as women or as cattle, or women treated as children, or the earth itself treated - like cattle or women - as simply a resource for exploitation.]

Chapter 16, 'The better angels of which nature? Violence and environmental history in the modern world' by Corey Ross, considers our plundering of our planet and its non-human inhabitants as a form of violence. Whether we consider our treatment of the natural environment itself as a violent enterprise or whether we limit ourselves to the consequences on human beings of entire swaths of land and water rendered useless, we have to cope with the same end result. Pinker's grand vision is out of date even as a utopia.

Instead of limiting himself to a descriptive summary of violence, Ross seeks to suggest some the ways in which we can enrich our understanding of the history of violence when we extend our attention to the non-human world. From his perspective, this expanded focus also provides insight into how the treatment of people, environment and resources were interlinked. Social and ecological systems are always entangled.(274)

In so doing, Ross brings out certain traits that are common to both violence against human beings, and our treatment of non human beings: First, he describes problems that used to be local processes and have grown to a massive scale, noting that the changes that allow us our present standards and modes of living are not obvious, in part because the beneficiaries of progress are not the ones who bear the immediate consequences.

> [These changes] entailed considerable costs, which the people have grown increasingly adept at shifting on to other things - whether to those less wealthy or powerful than themselves, or to the physical environment (or both). Insofar as human have become masters of nature, they have done so by also becoming masters in the art of displacement.(275)

Such displacements were facilitated by one aspect common to many destructive interventions: the slow unfolding of their consequences. It may take years, if not several life times, for the crisis to reveal itself in what Rob Nixon calls 'slow violence.'(275) That is, slow moving crises and gradual deterioration that are easily ignored, as in, for instance, the case of agriculture modernization and the use of herbicides, of polluting mining practices, industrialization of the fishing industry, or, most obviously, of global warming, a slow moving - though now clearly accelerating – process. The creeping insidious consequences of biodiversity loss, soil deterioration, global warming and toxic pollution are far more serious to humans and other organisms than the level of attention they attract.(275) As predictable, poor people and poor countries are directly affected by these changes and pay the cost with their health and their lives.

We are blind to another aspect of the violence in our relationship with the environment: the faster and faster replacement of wild life by domestic animals raised for the cheapest and fastest meat. The routine slaughter of terrestrial animals leads us to think it is a normal behaviour, but this too has a cost. When we realize that the combined biomass of humans and their domesticated animals is now greater than that of all wild terrestrial vertebrates, and that the bulk of these domesticates are killed as soon as their feed-to-meat ratio has reached optimum levels, we get a rather different impression of human-animal relations than the story of animal rights suggest.(282)

Marine life does not fare any better. The industrialization of the fishing industry and the pollution in the ocean are located mostly out of sight and in an alien environment, which facilitates its exploitation and degradation. The destruction of land and water brought by the expansion of human living space and the simultaneous expansion of resource extraction by and for human activities not only amounts to killing animal and plant life on a massive scale, they also make every resource, including food, more difficult and costly to produce.

One of the most important links between violence, from a human perspective, and the environment is also one of the least known: the direct connection between human warfare and the development of human control over nature. Chemical weapons have killed more people than nuclear weapons, and the link between the development of chemical weapons and the needs of modern pest control grew into a mutually beneficial arrangement. DDT began as a chemical weapon in the hands of the American army, first against malaria, and soon after as a miracle weapon against man's insect 'enemy.' Its production then led to another fight - against insect resistance to pesticides. The consideration of such devices as incendiary substances, crop contaminants, incapacitating gasses, defoliants, climate control, pest and bio-invaders, extended the logic of 'total war' to the biophysical world as a whole in a rather suicidal cycle.(291)

[As an anthropologist exposed to a relatively wide cultural horizon and to a diversity of worldviews, I would take neither the Northern American attitude toward nature nor the corporate world view of the world as universal. However, I was expecting Corey Ross to further discuss the relationship between humans and their environment in terms of the basic principles supporting their definitions of themselves and their world. I would mention three principles that seem to be shared by societies most involved in a violent relationship with their environment.

First of all, these societies have developed anthropocentric perspectives that tend to organize the world in a hierarchy that positions human beings as above the rest of the living world, and the earth as a human planet, rather than a living planet. For further discussion, see Robert Redfield (1955) for an early iteration of the differences between cultures dominated by domestication and industrialization, where other-than-human

living beings, as well as land and water, are resources to be owned and exploited (necessarily anthropocentric), and cultures where the notion of domestication is ignored (biocentric). Second, they establish a fundamental difference between humanity and other living beings. The biblical cosmos is a good example of that separation, reflected in the Judeo-Christian and Islamic religions. This exploitative perspective is supported by representations of God as having given dominion over the earth and its inhabitants to Adam and his descendants (see Linnéa Rowlatt, *Weathering the Reformation* (2024), for an exploration of explicit articulations of this idea by early Protestants). The Chinese ethnocentric cosmos is another example of this principle.

To obfuscate the plundering of natural resources and our lethal habit of considering ourselves - whether as humans, as rational beings, or as men - as apart from and above nature, we call it 'development' or 'natural resource exploitation.' Given the present political, economic, and climatic state of the world and the level of violence it generates and promises to further generate, Stevens Pinker's optimism, his embrace of capitalist development, and his easy dismissal of the consequences of global climate changes are no longer possible options.]

Chapter 17, 'On cool reason and hot-blooded impulses: Violence and the history of emotion' by Susan K. Morissey, approaches the history of violence from a new and contemporary perspective, the history of emotion being a rich but relatively new field. In her words: "This chapter draws on the research in the history of emotions to interrogate some of [Pinker's] foundational categories and to suggest some alternative perspectives."(294) Those foundational categories include a binary system where the realm of emotions is understood as standing in opposite to the 'hard-boiled faculties' (reason, control, and fairness).

> In positing the faculty of reason as the single most important driver of the alleged decline of violence in the West since the Enlightenment, [Pinker] also attributes much of the underlying source of violence to untamed emotions, which he locates within the structures, systems and circuits of the brain and describes in terms of instincts, drives, urges and impulses. [...] A binary opposition thus shadows [Pinker's] historical narrative, in which reasoned self-control progressively displaces emotional anarchy, first among western Elites and then 'trickling down' unevenly to plebeians and the non-Western World. (293)

Apart from most readers' negative reactions to an explicit statement denying primary access to reason to most of the people in the world, Morrissey points out that Pinker's synthesis relies on at least three very shaky foundations, if not more: First, the idea that violence is irrational is founded on a simplistic dichotomy between emotions and reason, which, though popular in some circles, does not seem to have taken into consideration

any recent scholarship on the history, anthropology, or psychology of emotions. Second, even though binary models are easily constructed and popular in their simplicity, they may not, and in this case do not correspond to any concrete process. The third shaky foundation in Pinker's grand vision is Norbert Elias' notion of a 'civilizing process,' mentioned above, supported by Sigmund Freud, and borrowed by Pinker to interpret the individual experience of emotions as similar to the social experience of emotions.

Since Pinker assumes that all people thinks in the same ways and share the same mental patterns, cultural differences are not even mentioned as a possibility in this ahistorical model of universal human nature. By taking emotions as a biological substrata, cultural differences are superficial irrelevancies to him and both for an individual and for a society, emotions vary in accordance with a mental age that depends on one's capacity for maturity. The corollary of this grand narrative is, of course, that one can now oppose the mature West to the childish Other.

Morissey brings together three main humanistic disciplines to offer alternative perspectives: psychology, history and anthropology. A growing body of research among them reveals major variations in emotional life and expression across time and space, with many languages possessing distinctive emotion concepts that do not translate easily and change over time. Even the English term 'emotion' only dates to the seventeenth century, when it was introduced from the French.(296) For instance, she mentions that we can now perceive how emotion has functioned as a discursive category, one that Western culture has persistently relegated to the lower element in a series of hierarchical and interconnected binary opposition: reason/emotion, rational/irrational, mind/body, masculine/feminine, culture/nature, civilized/savage. It is worth stressing that these binaries are neither innate nor unchanging, but they are important here precisely because of their centrality in Pinker's thesis.(297)

[These binaries are also important because Pinker did not invent them; they belong to his own society and his own culture and are part of his scholarly heritage, and they are still reiterated from time to time, mostly to justify violence against the lower element of the binary. Many cultures adopted a form of dualism as a root principle of their world view, and the Western world is not alone in relying on a form of hierarchical dualism as a basic principle. The Russian and the Chinese civilizations, as well as some African kingdoms, are built on similar ideas that support their hierarchical sociopolitical systems as well as their dominant philosophies.]

Morrissey reminds the reader of Pinker's assertion that the logical development of reason is sufficient in itself to insure the eventual end of violence; empathy is not enough and too constrained. Reason is not constrained. As follows:

Once it is programmed with a basic self-interest and an ability to communicate with others, its own logic will impel it, in the fullness of time, to respect the interest of ever-increasing numbers of others.(304)

Note here the emphasis on gradual advance of peace, which Morissey describes as 'quietism.' Indeed Pinker explicitly rejects political demonstrations, public actions, and mass protests as 'de-civilizing' events that may derail the advance of reason. Moreover, since in Pinker's view, reason is decoupled from emotion, it can never be associated with violence. Morrissey tests this neat delimitation by inquiring about the scientists involved in the making of war weapons or tools of environmental destruction. The impossibility of justifying rational and logical acts of violence short of minimizing these cases as accidental or isolated incidents is obvious.

Morissey then examines Pinker's views on revenge, one of the 'inner demons' opposed to his better angels and responsible, according to him, for countless conflicts as well as serving as a major cause for violence. Pinker, of course, finds revenge to be amenable to the intervention of reason. Morissey identifies a major lacuna in Pinker's approach, however: his failure to theorize the social, that is, the ways supposedly individual psychological urges and drives are also somehow 'shared' by collectives and change over time.(311)

Morissey addresses the same critique to much of Pinker's approach to emotions, to reason, and to his brand of evolutionary psychology. Together with a universalist perspective that blurs differences of all kinds and cannot even consider the effect of context, she concludes that it fits with a reductive, ahistorical definition of violence.

[Morissey's work provides an elegant and informative survey of the sciences focusing on emotion. Whether history, anthropology, psychology or biology, these new sciences, ignored by Pinker, deserve attention. They also offer Morissey the opportunity to mention the cultural context as an important factor in the process and form of violence to which one is confronted. And most importantly, it allows Morissey to talks about violence as a social phenomenon.

A similar set of ideas is at work when dealing with the world of emotion, their definitions, viewed as processes, in their social, historical and cultural context, rather than as the almost archetypal ideas presented by Pinker. Finally, to bring emotions, as Morissey does, in the larger context of the series of the binaries that are so commonplace in our world, gives the reader a glimpse of the emotional power of these oppositions as figures of speech, as political agendas, as ways of speaking, and as reasons for acting.]

Part 5: Chapter 18 - Coda

Part Five (Chapter 18) contains the volume's conclusion; it is entitled 'Pinker and contemporary historical consciousness,' and written by Mark S. Micale, Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign. He begins his Coda by reiterating the methodological principles on which history is built as a discipline and moves into a list of twelve significant deficiencies that beset Pinker's grand synthesis. In the end, says Micale. "His work does violence to history."(321)

Then, instead of querying how historians as a community of professionals have responded to Pinker's philosophy of human betterment, an issue already addressed by his colleagues and one that could be addressed simply with a recitation of recent events, Micale asks, "Why study history at all?"(323) Assessing the various answers to this question from different historical periods (since history as a discipline has a history of its own), Micale locates Pinker's 'History' within a paradigm that belongs to the past, not to our century. Indeed, the responses generated from this question have changed with Western culture: from chronicling the lives and deeds of famous individual men (starting in the Classical period and lasting more than a millennia) to uncovering the unfolding of God's purpose (emerging from major texts of the so-called Great Religious Traditions) to the spectacle of virtuous, powerful, or learned men engaged in the grand work of world maintenance (during the Enlightenment) to a new vision enmeshed in the notion of progress:

> The nineteenth century, particularly in the British Isles during the long Victorian/Edwardian period (1837-1914), produced a fourth paradigm of historical meaning. This model has, since the 1930s, been labelled Whig history writing. In the Whig outlook, history represents first and foremost a steady advance towards a future quasi-utopia in which the principal traits being chronicled will reach their fullest possible realization. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, sweeping moral narratives of this sort focused on a variety of themes: freedom, happiness, enlightenment, constitutional monarchy, parliamentary democracy, science and technology, and civilization itself. These stories tended to divide people and events into good and bad. There might be challenges and setbacks along the way, but eventual triumph was a matter of historical destiny.(323)

Obviously, Steven Pinker's understanding of the steady advance towards the end of violence fits nicely with this list of Whiggish historiography. Today, however, few people adopt any of these paradigms and most historians stay away from the Whig historiographical tradition.

> This sea change was prompted by a simple realization: that all the earlier paradigms had excluded the experience of the vast majority of human beings

who lived in the past. Among those omitted were such numerically massive segments of people as women, peasants, workers, and the poor. Earlier modes of writing history also excluded entire categories of people who - by dint of their national, ethnic or racial identity - constituted minority populations in the societies under study. Geographically speaking, these past accounts left out much, ifs not all, of the world outside the author's own civilizational orbit. (324)

Recent historiography is much different due to this realization, and historians today are working steadily to recover previously ignored or excluded people and topics, including becoming aware of the unavoidable ideological implications of methodological decisions that are part of scholarly work.(324) This paradigmatic change is well represented by the authors of the chapters composing *The Darker Angels of Our Nature*. Ignoring the nature and reach of this shift may partly explain Pinker's shortcomings, but it does not excuse them. By all indications, Steven Pinker remains oblivious to the growing shift of historical consciousness.

As far as the history of violence is concerned, contemporary scholarship has profoundly modified its context. Unavoidably, it is uncovering 'the good, the bad, and the ugly.' Detention camps, prisons, hospitals, hidden sites and far away places, even slave ships, or the American transcontinental railroad are all now the locus of scholarly inquiry. While history used to be written by the victors, it now strives to include the perspective of the losers. Military historians, for example, are now likely to spend as much time discussing the experience of civilians, including women, children, prisoners and refugees, as presenting the achievement of male combatants and their leaders.(326).

> Events of mass mortality, which previously received little attention outside of local or regional news, are now for the first time being integrated into global history. The Taiping rebellion in Southern China (1850-64), which resulted in 20 to 30 millions deaths; the Paraguayan war of the 1860s, which did away with 70 per cent of Paraguay's adult males; the so-called Holodomor of the early 1930s which starved to death millions of ethnic Ukrainians; and the Hindu-Muslim massacres following the partitioning of India and Pakistan in 1947 are examples of this phenomenon.(327)

Indigenous history and colonial/postcolonial studies are now reshaped by new narratives. Genocides like the Mendocino Indian Wars (1846-73), that saw a initial population of 310,000 in 1769 reduced to 16,277 people in 1880, are being painfully analyzed and the fact that support for the the massacres spanned the entire colonial social hierarchy, from settlers to governors, is unveiled. Such historical work has consequences: For instance, based on the publication of the research undertaken by Carolin Elkins (this volume) on the events surrounding the British decolonization from what is now Kenya and the genocidal

treatment of the Kikuyu people, the British government was brought to court in 2009 and now acknowledges its responsibility. Elkins' book likens the Kenyan penal network to Soviet repression and gulags in Siberia.(330) This British government was brought to court in 2009 and finally acknowledged its responsibility, issuing an official apology and agreeing to compensate 5228 Kenyan survivors who were imprisoned and tortured, as well as subsidizing a monument to the victims of torture under British rule.(331)

But whether studying mass killings in such places as "Turkish-controlled Armenia, Nazi-occupied Central and Western Europe, Stalin's Soviet Union, Mao's China, and Khmer Rouge Cambodia,"(332) or retracing the genesis or militarization of police work, contemporary historians cannot remain unaware of the political aspects of a contemporary history of violence. That reinforces the necessity for rigorous methodologies and transparent ideological positioning.

Conclusions

Dwyer and Micale's edited volume *The Darker Angels of Our Nature* is an important book. The informed corrections brought to Pinker's *The Better Angels of Our Nature* are only one of the reasons for my opinion. *The Darker Angels* also acts as a guide to Pinker's readers in identifying the source of their disquiet and sometimes outrage, as well as the loci of agreement or even enthusiastic approval for some of his statements. It gives access to the processes at work in Pinker's argumentation, provides a critical analysis of Pinker's sources, and a context for Pinker's affirmations. More importantly though, for those interested in the history of violence in the human world, *The Darker Angels* offers a better alternative to Pinker's books by providing a wealth of reliable data covering a much wider reach, with an awareness of the ideologies at play.

For readers looking for a gendered perspective on violence, which is not one the goals of this book, several aspects of this history of violence are nevertheless interesting. Having noted that women *per se*, and gender in general, did not generate much focus in Pinker's *Better Angels*, they can can still find several aspects of gendered violence brought to light in *The Darker Angels* that directly and specifically address this issue.

First of all, we can take it for given that women as active individual historical figures are practically absent in Pinker's account. In Dwyer and Micale's *The Darker Angels*, however, two chapters (Chapter 8 on domestic violence in medieval times by Sarah M. Butler and Chapter 14 on sexual violence by Johanna Bourke) treat women like all other victims of violence usually generated by men. That is, women are only considered as such as far as they are involved in violent processes, on par with the other actors. This is an interesting standpoint because it leads us to place violence against women within its larger context, which is that women are not always victims of violence because they are women, but also and perhaps more generally because they live in a context of violence. It has been

demonstrated by Peggy Reeves Sanday, among other anthropologists, that societies with a strong matricultural systems, including most of the matrilineal societies, maintain a social context where violence against women is markedly less tolerated (and children better treated), and that even males members of such societies tend to exhibit much less aggressive behaviour toward each other.

Invisibility surfaces in one modality or another in every chapter of *The Darker Angels* and especially in Chapters 11 and 18, without, however, being singled out as a particularly potent quality of modern violence. I would like to make several remarks about invisibility here.

A)   This invisibility is reinforced with the increase of the size of the population being assessed. The invisibility of violence is mentioned repeatedly, especially when dealing with the official nature of Pinker's proxy for measuring violence (homicide). While court cases of murders and military battle deaths are counted, instances of wife abuse, civilian deaths from bombing a city, or deaths resulting from policies leading, among other consequences, to poverty, incarceration, and malnutrition are not counted. But invisibility also results from a culture of silence practiced by the victims as well as the surrounding community (shaming the victims of rape and spousal abuse, for instance). It is also a direct goal of state policies enacted in agreement with a cultural context that does not mind violence as long as it is not seen.

B)   Indeed, the invisibility of violence is not just a question of being or not being counted in statistics. It is a systemic social quality of a hierarchical or class society where wealth means having a recognizable name, status, or identity. Anonymity has its consequences; what happens to anonymous members of a group does not matter in societies like this, and what happens to members of a group considered as socially inferior is not perceived at all.

C)   For women and people not considered as social actors, but as passive victims or side-casualties, this invisibility is an invitation to forced obedience. It is easy to dehumanize migrants, poor people, slaves, workers, children, strangers, and other so-called lower forms of life, including women. (See L*'enfant et la raison d'état*, or *The Child and the State: The intervention of the State in Family Life* by Philippe Meyer for a chilling demonstration of this process.)

D)   Last, but not least, invisibility is acknowledged as frequently resulting from the story of events – their history - being written by the winner of any conflict.

From an anthropological perspective, invisibility often results in neglect, but neglect, in the right circumstances, can lead to a certain freedom. For instance, among the North African Kabyle (who are a branch of the Berber group and consequently enjoyed a strong

matricultural system), following the Arab conquest, the Muslim state brought all its power to bear on men and boys, with the goal of bringing them socially and culturally into the Islamic community. Kabyle women, being of negligible value, were left to themselves and, consequently, were able to continue Berber traditions, rituals, and values within their villages. For another example, in Korea, shamanic practices were forbidden by the Confucian philosophy introduced by China, which placed men and their sons in charge of public life. Men and rich families had to follow the rules, but poor women remained invisible in the most miserable parts of the cities, as in remote rural communities. These marginalized women kept the healing practices alive until they could re-emerge in the twentieth century as the embodiment of Korean cultural identity.

It must be noted that one central process to Pinker's theory remains partly unchallenged. In direct contrast to the rather quick deductions by Pinker and Norbert Elias about the effects of 'enlightened' education, there emerges from the scholarly analysis of Pinker the disturbing shadow of a blueprint for the inculcation of violence into the young of Western society, especially young males, who, in the course of their becoming 'civilized,' are fed a systematic but implicit - and therefore invisible - set of violent principles for social life until these principles are embedded in their psyche as unquestioned. These principles are not innocent. Among the most disturbing of these principles are the following ones, which are actually easier to spot because they correspond to those explicitly stated by Pinker himself the course of his argument:

- First, assume it is a bad world out there.
- Then. divide the work into civilized and barbaric. The barbarians are nasty, violent and emotional; the civilized are polite, restrained, and able to reason.
- Above all, consider that 'we' are the ones who are civilized beings, while most, if not all, the Others are barbarians, at least until we can (if possible) teach them or make them be like us by integrating them into our world from the bottom up. The Others include servants, the poor, strangers, animals, or any unexpected kind of Others, including most women.
- Add to this the notion that, with a few exceptions, emotions are bad.
- Define children as barbarians and, therefore, without reason or self-restraint, who have to be shaped (by force if necessary) into civilized adulthood.
- At the same time, consider the barbarians identified above as children who have to be managed. The qualities that will make civilized beings and, therefore, a peaceful society have to be imposed from the outside by adults, and elite, or colonizers.
- Violence is acceptable, if not necessary, as long as it is legal or allowed by the State.
- An individual and a society are built on the same model and grow in the same manner: They both need a restraining and organizing structure (reason/a state), efficient and productive access to resources (exchange/commerce) according to

one's capacity in an evolutionary competitive system (Wealth is a measure of man).
- Culture, collective memory, and community ties are by-products of human activities that matter less than economic or technological productivity.

From an anthropological perspective, these principles are actually strong indicators for a society led by an elite cut off from their own social context, from their own emotions, and even from the natural environment, leading to a rather dystopian future for our world. They also make for a rather sad education system.

The new international communication networks, with all their promise as well as their dark side, and the new realities brought by global climate changes are going to profoundly modify the world as we know it, bring countless opportunities for old and new forms of violence. We already know that people on the move, whether immigrants, refugees, or victims of climatic catastrophes, are direct targets for abuse and exploitation when they are not abandoned to their own meagre resources. Global solidarity does not fit well in the workings of the happy capitalist world announced by Stevens Pinker. However, Pinker's world could itself be only an illusion. *The Darker Angels of Our Nature* provides us with better tools for approaching the future.

<div align="right">

Marie-Françoise Guédon
Ste-Étienne-de-Bolton
May 2024

</div>