

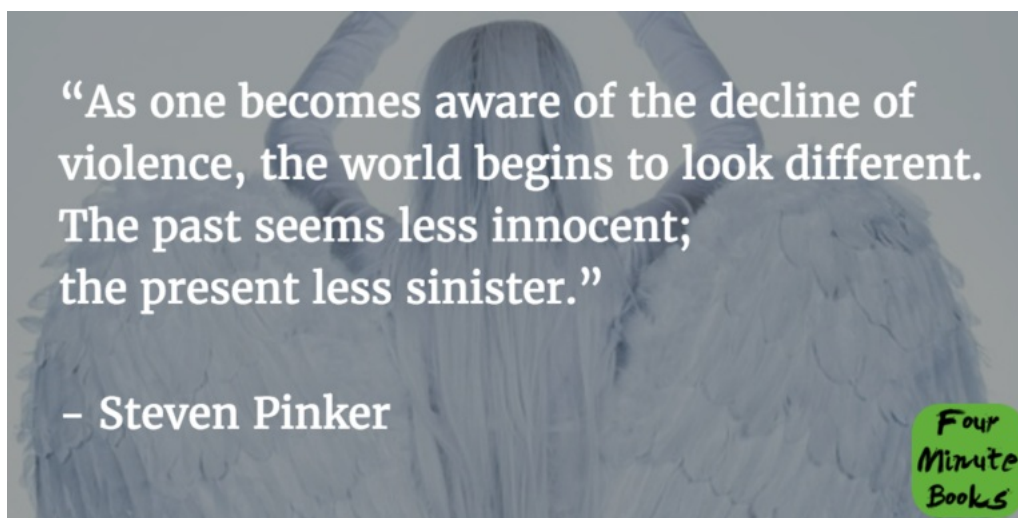
# The Better Angels Of Our Nature Summary

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**1-Sentence-Summary:** *The Better Angels Of Our Nature* illustrates why we live in the most peaceful time ever in history, by looking at what motivates us to behave violently, how these motivators are outweighed by our tendencies towards a peaceful life and which major shifts in history caused this global reduction in crime.

**Read in:** 4 minutes

**Favorite quote from the author:**



Steven Pinker is a professor of psychology at Harvard, specializing in cognitive science. He's done a lot of research about visual perception and the development as well as usage of human language, especially in children.

The books he's written cover a variety of topics, among the above are also writing and, in the case of *The Better Angels Of Our Nature*, violence. In spite of what the media are telling you, today the world is a safer place than it ever was at any time in history.

Steven Pinker explains why violence has been on a continuous decline for the past 5,000 years. To do so, he tells us about the five big motivators of violence, the four "better angels of our nature" that counter-act these forces and six major historical shifts which have allowed one to dominate the other.

Here's one of each of these three categories in detail:

1. Ideologies always start out with good intentions, but can quickly deteriorate into horrific proponents of violence.
2. The Flynn effect increases our ability to reason over time, which makes us less violent.
3. With the invention of the printing press, humanitarian philosophy could spread and further decrease violence across the board.

Would you like to get an objective look at how violent (or not) the world truly is today? You're in for a surprise!

## Lesson 1: Even the most well-meaning ideologies can go extreme and turn very violent.

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One thing that Tai Lopez kept beating on in his 67 Steps was to avoid extreme ideologies. It's something Charlie Munger (the billionaire partner of Warren Buffett) talked about in his 2007 USC Law commencement address and it's stuck with me ever since.

Examples of ideologies gone extreme and violent are the Christian crusades between the 11th and 15th century, the nazi regime and the Jihad war. The reason ideologies have a bigger propensity towards violence than all of the other factors Pinker describes is that **they target huge groups of people and are aimed at the greater good.**

However, acting as or in the name of a group and for a cause that transcends selfish motives makes it a lot easier to justify using violence to as a means to an end. So what could get us to fall into an extreme ideologist way of thinking?

Pinker says four things in particular make us prone to such violent ideologies:

1. We think of ourselves in terms of *ingroups* and *outgroups*, groups we belong to or not and it feels natural to antagonize other those who we consider to be in outgroups.
2. In those groups people with similar ideas and values are huddled together, reinforcing those and *polarizing* them, until they become more extreme. This is also known as confirmation bias.
3. We avoid saying what we really think to not upset anyone in the group and go with the *groupthinking*. This is called herd behavior.
4. For the sake of *social conformity* we tend to punish those outside of our own ideology, in hopes of converting them.

That's how some of history's worst incidences of genocide started. One person shared an extreme ideologist view with their ingroup, they all conformed and then spread the idea, punishing, intimidating, threatening and silencing all non-conformers, until the majority of society was part of the group.

## Lesson 2: We've been getting smarter thanks to the Flynn effect, which makes us less violent.

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One thing that nips extreme ideologies in the bud is reasoning. Using your rational thinking powers can quickly debunk extreme and violent ideas and luckily, these powers have been increasing across the globe for the past 100 years and more.

Named after researcher James R. Flynn, the Flynn effect describes **the continuous rise in IQ scores – 3 points per decade, on average**. You might think that's not a lot, but if you took one of today's teenagers and dumped them in the year 1910, they'd instantly be smarter than 98% of their peers.

At least some of this increase can be attributed to the improvements in education and stronger emphasis on teaching children to think critically. Also, kids have to navigate a much more complex environment today, requiring them to learn more and faster.

How exactly does this increase in reason translate to less violence?

1. Modern politicians usually peacefully reason their way to a solution together, as opposed to going to war for glory, like kings in the Middle Ages did, for example.
2. Reason debunks superstitious justifications for using violence, like the witch hunts by European inquisitions.
3. It allows us to think impartially about things and do what's best for the common good, instead of just ourselves.

## Lesson 3: When the printing press was invented, humanitarian philosophy started to spread and greatly decrease violence.

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Here's someone you wouldn't have thought of as a fighter against violence: Johannes Gutenberg. The inventor of the printing press gave us a tool that allowed for humanitarian philosophy to spread, **a world view that values human life and happiness above all else, using reasoning and empirical evidence to form its institutions**.

As this philosophy started seeping into the design of states and governments between the 16th and 18th century, it reduced superstitious and religious killings, like those from the above mentioned witch-hunts and crusades or other religious wars.

Humanism also condemned slavery, which was over time abolished by all countries, the Europe and US being mostly slavery-free by the end of the 19th century.

Lastly, in a humanitarian world even criminals are treated with dignity, mostly eradicating violence from the world of crime, law and order too.

## The Better Angels Of Our Nature Review

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As you can see, despite the drama in the news, the world isn't as bad a place as you might think. It's very interesting to discover why we would use violence in the first place and how this transition to peace has given most of us a great life of opportunity. *The Better Angels Of Our Nature* is a well-researched, thorough and comprehensive read!

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## **What else can you learn from the blinks?**

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- When being a predator lost stopped being useful
- How hierarchies reduced violence
- The questionable role of revenge and sadism in our survival
- What up- and downsides empathy has
- Why willpower is an important antidote to violence
- Four kinds of morality that make us strive for peace
- How the formation of states helped make life more peaceful
- When and why hard work started to trump violence as a means for success
- How violence has kept decreasing in the most recent periods after WWII and the Cold War

## **Who would I recommend The Better Angels Of Our Nature summary to?**

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The 31 year old young parent, who's worried about his son often kicking other kids, the 57 year old political party member, who thinks immigration is a problem, and anyone who thinks it might have been better to be alive 100 years ago.