

Civilization: Progress or Regress?

In "The Complexities of Being Civilized," Ken Fuchsman reviews evidence contradicting many of the claims made by Steven Pinker in *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (2011) by citing data provided by several authors relied upon by Pinker himself. Fuchsman also draws attention to the Eurocentric focus of Pinker's work, as well as his neglect of the data concerning suicide and destruction of other species. To my mind all this amounts to a strong critique of Pinker's optimistic thesis.

As Paul Elovitz points out in "Reflections of Why Humans are Better Off, More Civilized, and Possibly More Anxious," civilization has brought us many advantages, at least in the West. But in recent years it has also brought increasing inequality as wealth has come to be concentrated in the hands of an ever smaller proportion of the population. This has resulted in a deterioration of a once viable democracy into a kind of oligarchy in which politicians are bought and paid for by the financial and corporate elites. If civilization is measured by democratic development, ours is surely in a regressive decline.

Although a significant proportion of the general public are still in denial, in recent years a widespread consensus has emerged among scientists regarding the egregious environmental costs of the "progress" of civilization. Many experts now believe a sixth major extinction, this one man-made (anthropogenic climate disruption or ACD), is immanent (see Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction*, 2014). Fuchsman calls civilization a mixed blessing. It brought us a great deal, but it also seems to have hastened our impending collective demise.

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