

# The Delusions of Modern People

by [Nolo Segundo](#) (July 2025)



Prehistoric cave painting in Lascaux, depicting a bull and a horse.

**Modern societies in general and** especially it seems those in the West suffer under the widespread delusion that people today are 'better' than their ancestors who lived long ago—not just better off in a material sense but smarter, more sophisticated, and far better educated. After all, we have cars and jet planes and air conditioning and TV and the Internet and soon there will be space travel (for those who can afford it). I'm in my late 70's and recall my beloved Nana

telling me how my grandparents courted in a horse and buggy—and I thought that so quaint. What I did not think on is what they experienced in their nine decades of life: the Industrial revolution, the Spanish Flu epidemic that killed 50 to 100 million people around the world (targeting especially those in their prime, like my great-uncle at 26 and my great-aunt Julia at 22), two world wars, and a Great Depression that bankrupted my grandfather's business, leaving him to work as a foreman for the rest of his working life.

It struck me some years ago when I saw cave paintings in France from 40,000 years ago that people then were just as intelligent as we are. And I've learned from decades of reading history that human nature has not changed at all. The greatest proof of that, of course, is war. Look at today: the largest country in the world invades its much smaller, peaceful, non-threatening neighbor—for what? More land? If we cannot fully know ourselves as individuals [as honest, reflective folks will admit], then we don't know ourselves as a species either.

Now I am old, and I expect my nephews and nieces see me as 'quaint,' or maybe just out of touch. They seem to find it amusing that I don't fully trust their beloved digital world, and so like some Luddite own a printer to make copies of what I think are important papers. And should I dare to speak to them of God and the soul and eternity? I could tell them about the NDE [near-death experience] I had over half a century ago which destroyed my own youthful faith in secular materialism, the belief that only matter has reality in this vast universe—so, logically speaking, only chance and extinction are real, the Universe itself was an accident, and we humans, the only sentient animal to have evolved in millions of years, are just flukes. Absurdities really—we know we are mortal, aware of time and space, and so the fear of death hangs over us like an endless cover, making everything we do—if we are honest, as an atheist friend pointed out to me—meaningless.

What does it matter if I make a fortune: I'll die and someone else will use it, until of course they die? What does it matter if I create a symphony or write a profound book or paint the essence of life itself onto a canvas if I'm just going to become extinct someday? After all, why would it matter what we leave behind if someday civilization itself is destroyed? Perhaps by a plague with a 100% lethality or more likely we'll be done in by ourselves—a thermonuclear war, even a relatively limited one of a 100 or so nukes going off would do the trick, and our beautiful planet would become as desolate as the moon.

Of course, we are the only species even bothered by this possibility. I don't suspect any animal fears death—yes, of course they fear being attacked and eaten by a predator, but to fear dying I think you really have to know you're alive and that you are mortal. One of the hardest things I've done in my life was to take Sam, our beloved Great Dane, to be put down at 11 to end her incurable suffering. The only consolation I had was that she did not know why we were going to the vet, and so had no fear at all.

The other side of the coin of sentience is that if I had ever asked Sam if she believed in God or the immortal soul, she would have just looked at me with those big beautiful eyes and smile her doggy smile, which is not really a smile. Again we are unique amongst all animals in that we can even ask such questions.

But today there is a mindset that finds asking such questions (or even postulating about an Intelligence vastly greater than ours) to be—well, dumb, stupid, the vaping of ignorant minds. Now there have always been those who do not, cannot, or will not see any reality beyond that we can perceive with our limited senses of sight and hearing and smell. We humans can only see a limited part of the light spectrum, hear a limited range of sound waves, and my Sam could smell 10,000 times better than I could. And as large mammals, we are pretty weak,

yet we have strengths tigers and bears and our genetic cousins, the great apes, would envy—if they could envy.

We are sentient beings, and so have awareness of time and space, and of our feelings, our hopes, our longings, our pleasures, our interests, our fears, our loves and our hates. We have reason and logic, and reading and art, and cooking and the enjoyment of food that seems myriad in the range of different tastes, each unique to one's palette. But I think the most vital and unique 'attribute' we humans have evolved—or are blessed with in my estimation—is IMAGINATION! Without it we would never have developed 'civilization,' because logic tells me before the pyramids were built, some smart ancient Egyptian had to imagine them. And everything we have in the past 5,000 years is because it was first imagined—right down to the poems I am somehow able to create.

Of course, if I try to 'force' myself to write a poem, it won't work (I know, I've tried it!) To me it seems that imagination is somehow like a bridge, one spanning perhaps the conscious mind with the unconscious. Creativity has to come from more than just the conscious mind, otherwise I could just sit down and 'think' a workable poem into existence. Perhaps some folks can, but I'm skeptical. For one thing, why are the great, or even pretty good writers, artists, scientists, composers, architects, chefs, and so on pretty rare, numbering in maybe the thousands throughout history while 70 or 80 or 100 billion people have walked this earth at one time or another? And far, far fewer are the number of great religious-philosophical teachers who continue to influence the lives of billions of people: Jesus, Moses, the Prophet, Buddha.

The world has many problems, and we humans are all deeply flawed, but try to imagine a world without their teachings, as well as the Karmic teaching of the world's oldest great religion, Hinduism. As bad as things are now, what would the world be like without the 'pause' that all the great faiths give to us when our baser, selfish natures shriek into our

conscious minds?

Of course since Marx there have been atheistic regimes, notably communism and national socialism that maintain control through fear and repression. Today, sadly, they still flourish, in nations both large like Russia and China and small, too many to name here. And even in the democracies there is a split that seems to grow ever bitter between the Left and the Right, with advocates on either side unwilling or perhaps unable to see any merit in the thinking of those on the other side of the cultural fence. This is not new: history is bitterly adorned with examples of humans killing humans because of differences in nationality, race, language, politics, class, and perhaps saddest of all, religion. Today it's cancel culture and storming the capitol: will tomorrow be a return to the guillotine or lynching?

Is there a greater delusion than thinking we humans are the apex of the Universe?

## [Table of Contents](#)

**Nolo Segundo** is the pen name of a retired teacher (America, Japan, Taiwan, the war zone of Cambodia, 1973-74) who became a published poet in his 70s in over 240 literary journals in 21 countries. Cyberwit.net has published 3 collections in paperback, the latest titled *Soul Songs*.

Follow NER on Twitter [@NERIconoclast](#)