

John Gray: Steven Pinker is Wrong About Violence and War

John Gray disputes Steven Pinker's notion that the world is becoming less violent.

For an influential group of advanced thinkers, violence is a type of backwardness. In the most modern parts of the world, these thinkers tell us, war has practically disappeared. The world's great powers are neither internally divided nor inclined to go to war with one another, and with the spread of democracy, the increase of wealth and the diffusion of enlightened values these states preside over an era of improvement the like of which has never been known. For those who lived through it, the last century may have seemed peculiarly violent, but that, it is argued, is mere subjective experience and not much more than anecdote. Scientifically assessed, the number of those killed in violent conflicts was steadily dropping. The numbers are still falling, and there is reason to think they will fall further. A shift is under way, not strictly inevitable but enormously powerful. After millennia of slaughter, humankind is entering the Long Peace.