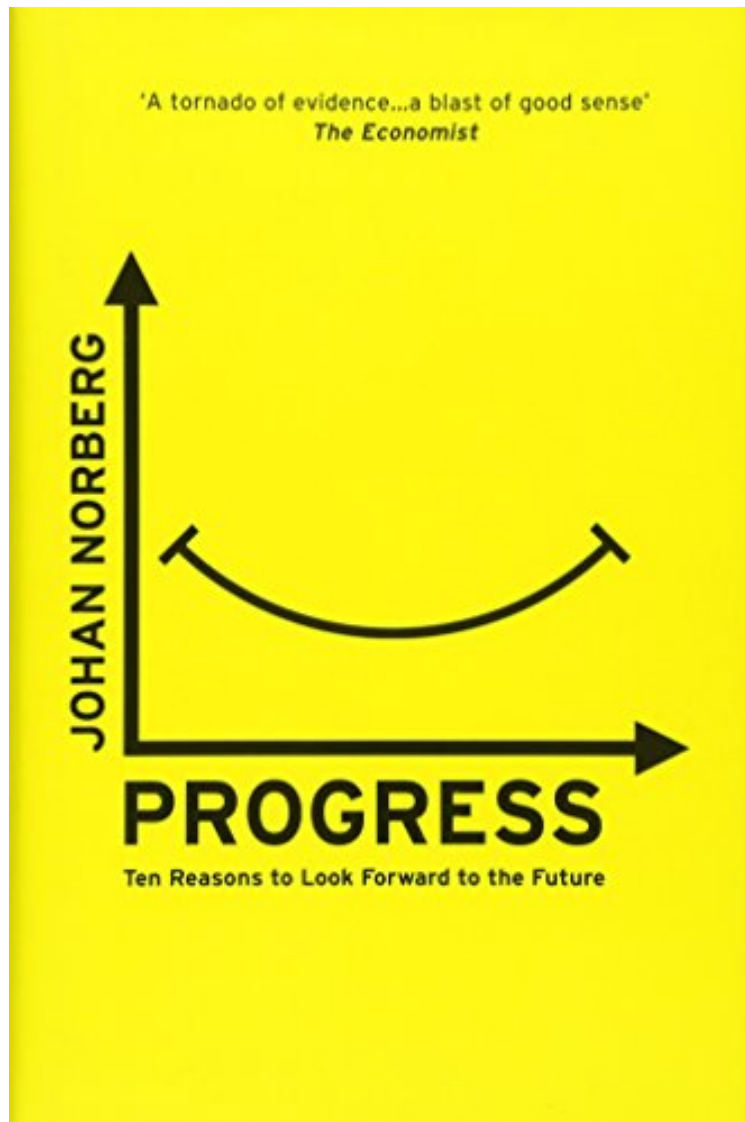


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## Progress: Ten Reasons to Look Forward to the Future

*Johan Norberg*

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**Johan Norberg : Progress: Ten Reasons to Look Forward to the Future** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Progress: Ten Reasons to Look Forward to the Future:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. 58% of those who voted for Britain to leave the EU said that life is worse today than it was thirty years agoBy Ian MannThe headline of a Financial Times article ahead of new year 2015 read: Battered, bruised and jumpy the whole world is on edge.58% of those who voted for Britain to leave the EU said that life is worse today than it was thirty years ago.General Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff,

testified to the US Congress: I will personally attest to the fact that . . . [the world] is more dangerous than it has ever been. How are we to deal with this? Is this the worst of times, or was Franklin Pierce Adams right when he said, Nothing is more responsible for the good old days than a bad memory. When we look at the facts it is difficult to romanticize the good old days: the truth is that the good old days were awful. The great story of our era is that we are witnessing the greatest improvement in global living standards ever. This book is about humanity's triumphs over ten scourges including poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy, child labour, infant mortality and violence. Nobel winning economist, Angus Deaton, the world-leading expert on health and development, explains that in 18th and early 19th century Britain, the lack of calories led to people not being able to work hard enough to produce enough food to be able to work hard. As a result, they were stunted, skinny and short, which required fewer calories and made it possible to work with less food. Getting enough food for the body and the brain to function properly is the most basic human need, but throughout history most people have not been able to achieve this. The French and English in the eighteenth century consumed fewer calories than the current average in sub-Saharan Africa, the region most tormented by undernourishment. Famine was believed to be the lot of humanity. This has not happened, and here are some reasons why. The 20th century invention of artificial, cheap and abundant fertilizer was one of the most powerful weapons against hunger. It was soon used all over the world and resulted in the world population rising from 1.6 billion people in 1900 to 6 billion today. Norman Borlaug, developed a high-yield hybrid wheat that was parasite resistant and wasn't sensitive to daylight, so it could be grown in varying climates. It was quickly introduced all over Mexico, and in 1963, the harvest was six times that of 1944. Overnight, Mexico became a net exporter of wheat. Similarly, India and Pakistan became self-sufficient in the production of cereals and today produce seven times more wheat than they did in 1965. Colleagues of Borlaug developed high-yield rice varieties that quickly spread around Asia. Borlaug is credited with saving over a billion lives and received the Nobel Peace prize for his Green Revolution, which has given poor countries better crops and bigger yields, and has alleviated rural poverty. According to the Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN, in 1947 about 50% of the world's population was chronically malnourished. By 1970 they estimated that 37% of the developing world population was undernourished, and today the figure is about 13%. In the first decade of the 21st century, 1.7 million children died because of malnutrition (a shockingly high number!) but it is a 60% reduction since the 1950s, despite a doubling of the world population. To put this in a wider perspective, from 1900 to 1909, 27 million people died in famines, and more than fifteen million died every decade from the 1920s to the 1960s. Strange as it sounds, the author Johan Norberg points out, democracy is one of our most potent weapons against famine. There have been famines in communist states, absolute monarchies, colonial states and tribal societies, but never in a democracy. This is probably because rulers who are dependent on voters do everything to avoid starvation, and a free press makes the public aware of the problems. However, food is not enough to sustain life: we also require safe ways getting rid of refuse and waste. Without sanitation life is just as miserable, and potentially as dangerous. The concentration of people in cities makes sanitary problems acute. In 1900 the horses in New York City fouled the streets with more than 2.5 million pounds of manure and 60,000 gallons of urine daily! In response, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, many cities built modern water and sewer systems and began garbage collection. With this advance came the effective filtering and chlorination of water supplies, with the acceptance of the germ theory of disease. Since 1990, 2.6 billion people have gained access to an improved water source, which means that 285,000 more people got safe water every day for twenty-five years, Norberg explains. Asking why some people are poor, is the wrong question. We do not need an explanation for poverty, because that is the starting point for everybody. Poverty is what you have until you create wealth. The definition of poverty in France used to be the inability to buy bread to survive another day. In the richest countries in Europe in 1820, the per capita GDP was the equivalent of around \$1,500 to \$2,000. This is less than in present-day Mozambique and Pakistan. The average world citizen was as poor as the average person in Haiti, Liberia and Zimbabwe today. With violent crime making the headlines every day, and the tragedies of 9/11, Syria, the horrors of Islamic State and terror attacks on major European cities, it is easy to think our era is especially plagued by violence. Cognitive scientist, Steven Pinker, has done exhaustive research on the history of violence. He concluded that the dramatic reduction in violence in our times may be the most important thing that has ever happened in human history. The 19th century folktales popular with children were filled with murder, cannibalism, mutilation and sexual abuse. Many nursery rhymes include the same themes. A study comparing violence on British television before 9 p.m., and nursery rhymes, concluded that nursery rhymes are eleven times less safe for children. Torture and mutilation was normative in all great civilizations. The best minds in the medieval period were occupied with coming up with ways of inflicting as much pain as possible on people before they confessed or died. According to Steven Pinker's sources, the average annual rate of violent death for non-state societies from hunter-gatherer tribes to gold rush societies in California was 524 per 100,000. The homicide rate in the US, which is much more violent than Europe, is now lower than 5 per 100,000. With the rise of more humanitarian attitudes, a sharp mind and tongue is now valued more than a sharp sword. The fitness and readiness to strike out is now being replaced by a readiness to control one's emotions. With families having fewer children, the perceived value of each human life has increased. There are still those who gladly inflict pain on their victims, but now even sadists and psychopaths have the right to a fair trial. The number of fatalities from terrorist activity has increased five-fold since

2000, according to the Global Terrorism Index. Terrorism is spectacular, dramatic and frightening which is the whole point. But it kills very few. Since 2000, around 400 people have died from terrorism in the OECD countries annually, and mostly in Turkey and Israel. More Europeans drown in their own bathtubs, and ten times more die falling down the stairs. When we don't see the progress we have made, says Norberg, we begin to search for scapegoats for the problems that remain. This book is not only an intellectual pick-me-up, but was also written as a warning - it would be a terrible mistake to take the progress we have made for granted. Readability Light ---+ Serious Insights High +---- Low Practical High ----+ Low\* Ian Mann of Gateways consults internationally on leadership and strategy and is the author of the recently released *The Executive Update*. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. *Things Can Only Get Worse?* By Thomas M. Loarie A story in the *GUARDIAN* noted that a recent survey suggested that 71% of people think that the world is going to the dogs. Are things actually that bad? Swedish author Johann Norberg responds with a robust NO in *Progress*. In it, he dispels any notion that the world is headed in the wrong direction. He maintains that the good old days are now and validates this by examining the global progress that has been made over the past 200 years in food, sanitation, life expectancy, poverty, violence, the environment, literacy, freedom and equality. The author notes that many people do not appreciate the real progress that has been made. They have been influenced heavily by the media which mostly report on the holes in the cheese problems and conflicts but rarely about the cheese itself. The press reinforces a certain point-of-view and focuses on the one-off events, those that are bad, dramatic and surprising, like murders, kidnappings, natural disasters, corruption, and more. It makes for better copy, drama and greater interest. And it sells! Unfortunately, the approach taken by the mainstream media reinforces a particular way of looking at the world, a tendency to focus on the dramatic and surprising, which is almost all bad news, like war, murder and natural disasters. Norberg says research shows that the more people watch TV news, the more they will exaggerate the extent of crime. Norberg tested his hypothesis that most people DO NOT appreciate the progress that has been made globally by commissioning a study in which a thousand Swedes were asked questions about global development. Their lack of knowledge was stunning they were wrong on all eight questions. They thought the world was bad and getting worse, and consistently under-estimated the progress that had been made. Hunger and extreme poverty were believed to have increased by 73% and 76% respectively of those polled during a period when they had both been reduced faster than at any other point in history. Norberg points out that we are witnessing the greatest improvement in global living standards ever to take place poverty malnutrition, illiteracy, child labor and in mortality are falling faster than any other time in human history. Consider the improvement in literacy. The ability to read and write texts is one of the most important skills, since it is the capacity to acquire even more capacity. Only 12% of the world population could read and write 200 years ago. Today it is at 86%. Since 1990, primary school enrollment in low- and middle-income countries has increased from 80-90%. And then there is the improvement in life expectancy - Life expectancy at birth has increased more than twice as much in the last century as it did in the previous 200,000 years. At the start of the 20th century the average life expectancy globally was 31 years. Today it is 71. Technology has played a role too. The Industrial Revolution and now the digital revolution have liberated humanity from harsh living conditions and have enabled rapid communication. A parallel revolution in agriculture has increased the global food supply and has reduced famine in parts of the world where malnutrition and starvation had long seemed inevitable. Will this continue? The author seems to believe it will. But there is no guarantee. Improving the state of humanity is not easy to do. This requires a mix of enlightened public policy and enterprising human capital, as well as social and political stability and ability to adapt to new ideas. Future threats, not covered, loom the growing global dissatisfaction of big government (see John Micklethwait's *The Fourth Revolution*), rising demand and cost of healthcare, falling birth rates, breakup of the family and more. But if history is any guide, progress will continue. It does not depend on the whims of any one emperor nor does it remain the province of any one country. If it is blocked in one place, others will continue humanity's journey. 17 of 19 people found the following review helpful. This book is a revelation! By Reynold Feldman Norberg cites chapter and verse, facts and trustworthy research results, to prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that progress across the board has been achieved for humankind. Every literate person should read this book, which goes against our common belief that the world is going to hell in a hand basket. The highest possible praise for this book. Reynold Feldman, Ph.D.

Its on the televisions, in the papers and in our minds. Every day were bludgeoned by news of how bad everything is financial collapse, unemployment, growing poverty, environmental disasters, disease, hunger, war. But the rarely acknowledged reality is that our progress over the past few decades has been unprecedented. By almost any index you care to identify, things are markedly better now than they have ever been for almost everyone alive. Examining official data from the United Nations, the World Bank and the World Health Organization, political commentator Johan Norberg traces just how far we have come in tackling the issues that define our species. While it's true that not every problem has been solved, we do now have a good idea of the solutions and we know what it will take to see this progress continue. Dramatic, uplifting and counter-intuitive, *Progress* is a call for optimism in our pessimistic, doom-laden world.

Named one of the best books of the year by The Economist "Persuasive." The Wall Street Journal "In this brightly written, upbeat book, Johan Norberg blends facts, anecdotes, and official statistics to describe 'humanity's triumph' in achieving the present unparalleled level of global living standards. By virtually every measure—food, sanitation, life expectancy, poverty, violence, the environment, literacy, freedom, equality, the conditions of childhood—life has improved for most people, writes the author. .... While acknowledging the mayhem, hunger, and poverty still facing much of the world, Norberg remains optimistic that human ingenuity will prevail in shaping the future. A refreshingly rosy assessment of how far many of us have come from the days when life was uniformly nasty, brutish, and short.

"Kirkus s" His unfailing optimism and well-argued points generate powerful good-news vibes." Esquire(UK) "Norberg has a strong case and he makes it with energy and charm. A pertinent book for grumpy times." Sunday Times (UK) "Johan Norberg chronicles the still largely unknown fact that humanity is now healthier, happier, cleaner, cleverer, freer and more peaceful than ever before. He also explains why in this superb book." Matt Ridley, author of The Evolution of Everything "At a time of profound pessimism, Johan Norberg is refreshingly, but not glibly, optimistic. His excellent book documents the dramatic improvements in peoples lives and reminds us of the huge potential for further progress provided we are open to it." Philippe Legrain, author of European Spring "An exhilarating book. With the combination of arresting stories and striking data, Progress will change your understanding about where weve come from and where we may be heading." Steven Pinker, author of The Better Angels of Our Nature