

Why Anthropology Matters Most

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Introduction

Steven Pinker in *Enlightenment Now*¹ and David C. Rose in *Why Culture Matters Most*² both aim to identify and to strengthen the cultural fabric that has allowed Westerners for two and a half centuries and people worldwide for the past half century to enjoy freedom and a cornucopia of material wealth. In this they follow Adam Smith in making inquiries into the “nature and causes of the wealth of nations.” But Pinker and Rose have a sense of urgency not found in Smith. To use George J. Stigler’s phrase (*The Economist as Preacher*), in Pinker we have the psychologist as preacher and in Rose the economist as preacher.³ Pinker is a revivalist for Enlightenment values of reason, science, and humanism, in an effort to sustain intellectual and moral progress (EN, pp. 8-11). He is concerned that counter-Enlightenment forces threaten future progress and the fruits of past progress. Counter-Enlightenment ideas spread from pessimist intellectuals who shaped the twentieth-century intellectual culture, such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Michel Foucault to today’s crisis-mongering news journalists; and finally to a sufficient number of Americans to elect President Donald Trump. Trump campaigned on an image of America “being pulled into a hellish dystopia by malign factions that can be resisted only by a strong leader who wrenches the country backward to make it ‘great again’” (EN, p. 5). The Trump Administration threatens to undermine progress in life and health, wealth, equality, environmental quality, safety, peace, and democracy (EN, pp. 334-35). Pinker’s mission in *Enlightenment Now* is to spread good news (“The world has made spectacular progress in every single measure of human well-being. ... Almost no one knows about it” (EN, p. 52)); to persuade readers that the 18th century Enlightenment was the most

¹ New York: Viking, 2018.

² New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.

³ Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

important revolution in human history; and to persuade them to keep up the good fight – to embrace the Enlightenment values of reason, science, and humanism.

David Rose's *Why Culture Matters Most* is predominately analysis rather than preaching. He is in search of the key that in the 18th century unlocked potential for widespread economic well-being and democracy. The advent of regular economic growth and spread of democracy coincided with the Enlightenment, celebrated by Pinker. Rose finds the key to human flourishing from market democracy not in natural resources, not in science, and not in technology. It is not even in reason, as important as these may be. The key is building and sustaining a culture of trust. In contradistinction to conventional thinking among his fellow economists and political scientists, Rose argues that economic and political well-being fundamentally are not technical, but cultural and moral in substance. "Culture transmits moral beliefs in a way that makes commitment to them so credible and widespread that individuals can automatically depend upon nearly everyone else abiding by them. In a high-trust society this results in being able to presume nearly everyone else will be trustworthy in nearly every circumstance, even in large-group contexts involving diverse peoples" (WC, pp. 2-3). This leads to economic bounty and healthy functioning democracy. The key to economic and political flourishing is *trust-producing moral beliefs*.

But a culture of trust is a non-equilibrium state for a society of rational calculators of benefit and cost. A culture of trust is undermined by the free rider problem; because for self-interested individuals, breaking trust is more rational than maintaining trust. The fruits of an individual's chiseling however, depend on everyone else maintaining trust. So forming and maintaining a culture of trust is analogous to forming and maintaining an economic cartel. Rational people can see the joint benefit of mutual trust, just as they see the joint benefit of forming a cartel. But they also see that there is greater individual benefit in violating trust within the culture of trust. "In large-group contexts in particular, dishonesty often pays off handsomely while causing imperceptible harm because harm is often spread over so many people that no other individual can even notice" (WC, p. 4). The fruits of trust, like monopoly rents of a cartel, tend to be dissipated.

It is from this point that Rose becomes the preacher. He asks, What should we do? His answer is that we should preach (my word, not his) to our children by word and deed. We perhaps can gradually overcome myopic self-interest by inculcating in children the moral requisites of a culture of trust. We have to teach pre-rational children “duty-based moral restraint” to not engage in behavior that directly harms others or depletes the common-property resource of trust. If we can instill this in children as a duty, their trustworthiness will not be vulnerable to cost-benefit situation ethics. Why not reason with children to persuade them of the benefits of trust? According to Rose, moral restraint goes against what children “learn” from the small-group genes inherited from their parents, and to no small extent goes against their rational self-interest. As cost-benefit calculators, children will see the irrationality of moral restraint. They must learn moral restraint pre-rationally so that it becomes a deeply furrowed habit. Moral restraint needs to be the equivalent of a taste in demand analysis.

Duty-based moral restraint is derived from a created neural architecture built up through learning, because there has been very little time for genetic traits to evolve to support it. So if we are to have a prevailing ethic of duty-based moral restraint, it will have to come from the transmission of moral beliefs, generation after generation, that effectuate such a way of thinking. The *cultural* transmission of such beliefs early in childhood has the effect of making them exquisitely reliable by encoding the required behavior as tastes (WC, p. 151, italics in original).

Pinker and Rose share more than their concern over the fragility of wealth and democracy. They share an anthropology that is taken for granted in much of contemporary social science. This is what I want to address. Social sciences and social institutions are sciences and institutions of *human* society. To deal with any social or institutional problem, or answer any question about humans, we must begin by asking and answering the question, What is man? We either confront this question head on, or we proceed to do our psychology or economics without addressing it directly. If we take the latter route, we are trusting those who preceded us in our field to have answered it correctly. Either way, we must begin with an answer to the question, What is man? If we

get this right, we have a foundation from which to build a solid human science. If we get it wrong, our scientific efforts are at best barren, and at worst provide justification for great harm. Rationality, indeed sanity, requires that we see things as they are. The anthropology in Pinker's and Rose's books is naturalist, materialist, and evolutionary. In this view of humans there is no God-creator and there is no realm of the supernatural. There are no spirits. Humans are bodies without souls. Humans evolved to be what they are without design, through random mutations. Herein Pinker and Rose are representative of most social science. This conventional social science anthropology binds the human subjects of social science and blinds the social scientist. I will suggest that Catholic Christian anthropology is a better alternative. I will contend that this largely out-of-fashion alternative is more credible and more attractive than the materialist anthropology. It is also more hopeful.

Catholic Christian Anthropology

Frank Sheed (1897-1981) was one of the best Christian apologists of the twentieth century. His writings provide a statement of Catholic anthropology that is clear and concise, and faithful to the Catholic Church's teaching. In the sketch of Catholic Christian anthropology that follows I will draw from Sheed's *Theology and Sanity*⁴ and *Society and Sanity: Understanding How to Live Well Together*.⁵ Sheed distinguishes between what man is essentially and what man is existentially. Essentially man is a creature of God, i.e., created by God. As God's creation, man is like everything else in the universe, for the entire universe was created by God. But unlike God's other creations, He created man to be like Himself. Humans are created *Imago Dei*, in the image of God. The image of God is not in man's body; it is in his soul. A human body comprises material parts. It eventually wears out or becomes diseased or injured, and dies. But the soul does not die, for it is not physical, but spiritual. The soul is simple, having no parts, occupying no space. So it cannot wear out. By its nature the soul is immortal. While the human soul and human body are not the same, the soul is not contained in the body. It would be more correct to say that the body is contained in the

⁴ San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1946, 1993.

⁵ San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1953, 2013.

soul. Man's capacity to know, to will, and to love are in his soul. This is the sense in which individual human beings, like God, are persons. Human persons share with God their capacity to *know*, to act from the *will*, and to *love*.⁶

God's will is for man, for every man and woman, to be in eternal union with Him, as Adam was before the Fall. But Adam, the representative man, rebelled and lost union with God. In his rebellion Adam damaged himself and his progeny. Man's total eudaimonia in union with God was lost in Adam's rebellion. But God did not abandon us. In the fullness of time God took on human flesh, was born to a human mother, and lived as a man -- Jesus of Nazareth. This God-man Jesus died sacrificially to atone for man's sin and to restore for us access to union with God -- to the fullness of humanity and life.⁷ So in summary, what is man? Man is God's creation, made in His image with an immortal soul. Man has a telos, which is to know and love God. Man is fallen -- injured by original sin -- but redeemed by Christ's sacrificial death on Calvary.

Because our human nature is intimately related to God's nature, we cannot know man -- know ourselves -- without knowledge of God. Through our history, as Pinker and Rose note, humans have had many different gods. Many of these gods were projections of aspects of the human condition. They were gods made in the image of man. What do we know of the true God? *First*, we know by virtue of our reason that everything in the universe, including the human species and individual human persons, has contingent existence. Were it not for a set of prior beings, conditions, and events, nothing that does exist would exist. Nothing that is, except for God, whose existence is not contingent. God *is* existence; God *is* being. Everything else *has* being; God alone *is* being. *Second*, man as a species had a beginning, and each individual man and woman has a beginning at their conception.⁸ God has no beginning. Thus the question posed by some atheists, What was before God? is without meaning. Their question is like asking, what is water when it is not H₂O. There was no "before God." He exists outside time. *Third*, as spirit, God's

⁶ To avoid confusion, although there are emotions associated with human love, love itself is not an emotion. Love is self-giving without expectation of any return. It is willing the good of the other for the sake of the other.

⁷ The fullness of humanity and life is in *supernatural* life. In his *natural* life man is not able to live the life of heaven in full union with God.

⁸ The beginning of the human species may have involved evolution. That is not an issue here.

existence is not within space. The question, Where is God? or Where is God not? also has no meaning. Finite beings occupy space; God is infinite. *Fourth*, the question, From what did God create the universe? has a straightforward answer. He created everything there is from nothing. God is all-powerful and all-knowing. Because he is all-powerful and all-knowing, God *could* create the universe from nothing. *Fifth*, why would God create the universe? He is perfection. Nothing is lacking in God, so the creation fills no need that God might have. So why did He make us? He made us for our happiness in our existence. He made us for our eudaimonia. God is infinitely good “and it is of the nature of goodness that it wants to spread outward, to confer itself” (T&S, 100). Which brings us to a *sixth* feature of God – His love. God is all-loving. As all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving, God has absolute freedom in His vital activity.

So returning to man as *Imago Dei*, we see that humans share God’s attributes in having power, reason, freedom, and capacity to love. Man’s telos is to be in full union with God. When a human person is in union with God, however, the person does not lose his or her own identity. Full union with God is not absorption into God. Sheed describes the nature of man’s union with God:

Man was made by God for union with Himself. The finite spirit is to come to a total union with the infinite spirit, in which man’s knowing-power will be in immediate, never-to-be-broken contact with infinite truth, and man’s loving-power in a contact as close with infinite goodness. And in this contact it will remain itself, not losing its identity in the mightier reality, but conscious of God and conscious of itself as now at last His perfect image (S&S, 19-20).

In earthly life man is subject to God’s law in both the physical realm and spiritual realm. Knowing that there are physical laws of our existence is easy, just by living in the physical world. No scientific education is needed to know that fire will keep you warm but can also burn you, water will quench your thirst but can also drown you, and a breeze will cool you off, but a wind might topple a tree on you. No sane person tries to defy the physical laws of nature. Rather, we use them to our benefit, warming and cooling our homes, nourishing our bodies. Moral law cannot be known so directly. There appears to be more room to evade consequences of violating or even denying moral law. God gave

man freedom of will, so we can choose to live within the spiritual laws of God's design or choose to live outside them. Just as we can choose, for a much shorter time perhaps, to defy the physical laws of nature. Nonetheless our real advantage is living in harmony with moral law, which is living in harmony with our design. Choosing otherwise puts our well-being and life at risk. God gave man freedom of will, but with this freedom comes responsibility. At the end of the day, so to speak, we have freedom to turn away from God and his moral law. In so doing we choose to have our well-being diminished, and potentially our immortal souls eternally separated from God.

God revealed Himself and his moral law to humans gradually through His chosen people the Israelites. We find the moral law on how we are to live in relationship with God and with our neighbors in the Decalogue, in chapter 20 of *Exodus* and chapter 5 of *Deuteronomy*. Jesus summarized God's commandments in answer to a Pharisee's question: "*Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?*" And he said to him, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets*" (Matthew 22: 36-40, Catholic Revised Standard Version). So the entire moral law boils down to a single action of the human will – to love God and neighbor.

In turning from man as he is essentially to as he is existentially, we find bewildering variety across human populations and even within a given person's life. Man is essentially a rational animal. But the same men and women who make exquisite use of their reason, as mathematicians or logicians, may act irrationally. They make unreasonable choices and refuse to make what they know are reasonable choices. Humans are both spiritual and physical, and thereby both free and confined. Men and women are able to rise above their physical appetites, even above their will to live, in making sublime sacrifices. Yet they can also become slaves of their appetites. Humans love, but they often love the wrong things. Though humans are essentially made for union with God, we are existentially is damaged. The name of this damage, our proclivity to love the wrong things, is original sin. Humanity is a straight stick gone crooked by its

own choice. Only God in his grace can make the crooked stick of humanity straight again.

Frank Sheed points out that the Christian view of man is the only view that truly makes humans objects of respect. The Christian view actually demands more than respect. It demands reverence for other persons. This imperative comes from man's spiritual nature, with an immortal soul made in the image of God. Respect and reverence for God implies respect and reverence for man. There are no exceptions. Respect is required for each and every human person, without regard to race, sex, creed, intelligence, physical ability or any other trait that varies from one human to another. Respect and reverence is required even for enemies of man and enemies of God.

The inequalities among men are so very visible: the great spiritual realities that go to the making of every man are hidden, save to the intellect that is prepared to think about them, concentrate its whole gaze on them – till they become not simply ideas known and accepted as true so that it can advert to them when necessary, but part of the very life of the mind, abiding facts of consciousness, things that it literally cannot help being at all times aware of as essential (S&S, 38).

In summary, to know what man is requires a balanced view of man as he is essentially and as he is existentially. Just as the physical law is more easily recognized than the moral law, so are the existential differences between humans more easily seen than their essential commonality. But what every human person has in common with every other is absolutely critical.

From where does our knowledge of God and of man come? It comes from reason and from revelation. Endowed by their maker with the power of reason, humans can reason their way to knowledge of themselves and of God. For example, our knowing that there is reason is itself a step toward knowledge of ourselves and God. But the Fall damaged human reason. So our capacity to know ourselves through reason is limited and our capacity to know God is still more limited. In His goodness God provided another way for us to learn about ourselves and God. This is Divine Revelation. Knowledge from Revelation is knowledge of what God has told us. He told us about Himself and ourselves

first through His chosen people the Israelites and the inspired human authors of Jewish Sacred Scripture, the Old Testament. Second, he showed us Himself and ourselves in Jesus's self-revelation in Judea in the first century. The deposit of revelation was preserved by the Church, orally and in written form as the New Testament.

Pinker's Anthropology

How does Steven Pinker answer the question, What is man? He does not give a direct answer. But he provides enough in both negative and positive claims for us to infer an answer. Man is not a creature of God. He cannot be, for God does not exist. Pinker endorses *scientific naturalism* as defined in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*⁹ as commitment to belief "that reality is exhausted by nature, containing nothing 'supernatural', and that the scientific method should be used to investigate all areas of reality, including the 'human spirit'" (EN, 392).¹⁰ Furthermore, Pinker contends that "science, in the modern conception, is of a piece with philosophy and with reason itself" (EN, 392). Science progresses by conjecture and refutation. Empirical observation and hypothesis testing are key elements of the process. But he says it is a misconception to think of science as a restrictive "scientific method." "Scientists use whichever methods help them understand the world. ... All the methods are pressed into the service of two ideals" (EN, 392). These ideals are that "the world is intelligible" and that "we must allow the world to tell us whether our ideas are correct."

How do we let the world tell us whether our ideas are correct? Pinker suggests a Bayesian version of Karl Popper's conjecture and refutation.

A theory is granted a prior degree of credence, based on its consistency with everything else we know. That level of credence is then incremented or decremented according to how likely an empirical observation would be

⁹ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/naturalism/>

¹⁰ One might say of Pinker what George Stigler said of Ricardo's labor theory of value, that scientific materialism is 97% of Pinker's metaphysics. He admits that "perhaps there are universals of beauty and meaning that transcend cultures and would resonate with any intelligence – I like to think there are – but it is devilishly difficult to know" (EN, p. 385). Likewise, perhaps, for moral standards and mathematics. From *The Blank Slate* – "Morality has an internal logic, and possibly even an external reality, that a community of reflective thinkers may elucidate, just as a community of mathematicians can elucidate truths about number and shape" (BS, 270).

if the theory is true, compared with how likely it would be if the theory is false ... A scientist's degree of belief in a theory depends on its consistency with empirical evidence (EN, 393).

Pinker's scientific naturalism does not rule out non-material components of nature, such as information. But it does rule out anything other than nature. It rules out any supernatural being or force outside nature and any supernatural or spiritual element in man. He reminds us of how scientific reason has replaced the need for appeals to the supernatural. "But before the concepts of information and computation were elucidated, it was reasonable for someone to be a mind-body dualist and attribute mental life to an immaterial soul (just as before the concept of evolution was elucidated, it was reasonable to be a creationist and attribute design in nature to a cosmic designer)" (EN, 22). Information exists, but not spirit. Man is matter containing and using information. But man is without a soul and on his own in a cold universe.

Whatever we make of the hard problem of consciousness, positing an immaterial soul is of no help at all. For one thing, it tries to solve a mystery with an even bigger mystery. For another, it falsely predicts the existence of paranormal phenomena. Most damningly, a divinely granted consciousness does not meet the design specs for a locus of just desserts.... Why would God have endowed a mobster with the ability to enjoy his ill-gotten gains, or a sexual predator with carnal pleasure? ... Why would a merciful God be dissatisfied with robbing years of life from a cancer patient and add the gratuitous punishment of agonizing pain? Like the phenomena of physics, the phenomena of consciousness look exactly as you would expect if the laws of nature applied without regard to human welfare. If we want to enhance that welfare, we have to figure out how to do it ourselves (EN, 428).¹¹

How and from where did man come to be? Pinker tells us that man is the product of blind forces of evolution through natural selection. Entropy, evolution, and

¹¹ Here Pinker appears to presume universal standards of justice.

information are for Pinker the keys to all creation and progress. How can entropy relate to creation, since entropy is growing disorder? Since its inception at the Big Bang the universe has become increasingly disordered with energy from the Big Bang more and more diffused. “Closed systems inexorably become less structured, less organized, less able to accomplish interesting and useful outcomes, until they slide into an equilibrium of gray, tepid, homogeneous monotony and stay there” (EN, 15). This would be the fate of everything that is, except that within the growing disorder there emerge counter-forces of self-organization. These produce pockets of beauty and function in non-living physical nature, for instance in crystals and whirlpools, and in living nature, such as the design of the eye and ear. In Pinker’s account, cosmological history is the story of a contest between disorder and order. Though disorder will ultimately prevail, there are transitory victories for order. The Enlightenment was the greatest victory yet.

Entropy has two important implications for humans. First, it means that we and everything we value are fragile and temporary. Second, it means that preservation of pockets of order in a disintegrating universe depends on us. And despite our best-laid plans, there are more ways for things to go wrong than to go right. So it is only by diligent human effort can we hope for stasis, much less progress.

The second piece in Pinker’s triplet is evolution. Everything that exists other than human creations is the result of the blind, purposeless force of evolution – survival of the fittest. Many of these objects, including ourselves, inspire wonder. But we would be foolish to let our wonder lead us to imagine a creative designer of nature or ourselves. “Organisms are replete with improbable configurations of flesh like eyes, ears, hearts, and stomachs which cry out for an explanation. Before Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace provided one in 1859, it was reasonable to think they were the handiwork of a divine designer. ... Darwin and Wallace made the designer unnecessary” (EN, 18). Pinker regards the insight that the universe is without purpose as a major breakthrough, perhaps the most important, of the Scientific Revolution. There is no telos for man or anything else.

But there is information, the third element of Pinker’s triplet. Organisms pass down genetic information for their replication. But entropy ensures there are coding

errors. From coding errors come mutations. The mutations that are most fit for survival in their environments replicate themselves, once again less than perfectly. This produces another set of mutations, and replication of the fittest of the mutations, and on and on. “As copying errors that enhance stability and replication accumulate over the generations, the replicating system – we call it an organism – will appear to have been engineered for survival and reproduction in the future, though it only preserved the copying errors that led to survival and reproduction in the past” (EN, 19). Thus there emerge without actual design seemingly designed counter-entropic forces in nature.

This tug-of-war between order and disorder in natural and human history is the basis of the urgency of Pinker’s Enlightenment preaching. The Enlightenment was the greatest counter-entropic endeavor in human history. Through the long span of human existence only in the eighteenth century did we step out of the darkness of dogma and superstition into the light of reason, science, humanism, and progress. Just as entropy may be delayed but not defeated, the Enlightenment was an unstable intellectual, moral, and political equilibrium. Pinker’s project is to restore and stabilize the equilibrium. “No sooner did people step into the light than they were advised that darkness wasn’t so bad after all, that they should stop daring to understand so much, that dogmas and formulas deserved another chance, and that human nature’s destiny was not progress but decline” (EN 30). So despite what we might expect from his emphasis on entropy, Pinker is an optimist. He urges his readers to embrace the Enlightenment. This may be heroic but apparently he believes it is not futile. Having the light go out later in human history is better than having it go out sooner.

Pinker is not a moral subjectivist. His objective moral creed is that of the 2003 *Humanist Manifesto III*, which he and its authors take to be the product of reason. Among the precepts are that:

Ethical values are derived from human need and interest as tested by experience. Humanists ground values in human welfare shaped by human circumstances, interests, and concerns and extended to the global ecosystem and beyond. ...

Life's fulfillment emerges from individual participation in the service of humane ideals. We ... animate our lives with a deep sense of purpose, finding wonder and awe in the joys and beauties of human existence, its challenges and tragedies, and even in the inevitability and finality of death. ...

Humans are social by nature and find meaning in relationships. Humanists ... strive toward a world of mutual care and concern, free of cruelty and its consequences, where differences are resolved cooperatively without resorting to violence. ...

Working to benefit society maximizes individual happiness. Progressive cultures have worked to free humanity from the brutalities of mere survival and to reduce suffering, improve society, and develop global community. ... (EN, 411, emphasis in original).

The unifying thread of these humanist principles is impartiality –

the realization that there's nothing magic about the pronouns *I* and *me* that could justify privileging my interests over yours or anyone else's. ...

Impartiality underlies many attempts to construct morality on rational grounds: Spinoza's viewpoint of eternity, Hobbes's social contract, Kant's categorical imperative, Rawls's veil of ignorance, Nagel's view from nowhere, Locke and Jefferson's self-evident truth that all people are created equal, and of course the Golden Rule and its precious-metallic variants, rediscovered in hundreds of moral traditions (EN, 412, italics in original).

Neither impartiality nor the Humanist principles, however, provide an escape-proof morality. Pinker acknowledges that people can respond: "equality is not evident to me." It is in fact evident that humans are unequal in many more ways than equal. Or the response might be: "I didn't sign a social contract." With escapes such as these available to reasonable people, Pinker attempts to shore up social contract morality through the framework of entropy and evolution. His argument goes like this. Reason is required as

the grounding of morality, for divine revelation is ruled out. There is no God to reveal what we are and how we should live. For there to be reason, which Pinker takes for granted, there have to be reasoners. We know that we have reason and we know that making the most of our reason requires we communicate with other reasoners. So we know through reason that we are social beings. We also know that we evolved to be what we are. We all are the products of this evolution, and in this sense we are equal. Thus we have the impartiality principle as first principle of morality, grounded in our equality as evolved social beings.

What are the moral goods over which we are to regard others impartially? And how did they come to be moral goods? Just as our capacity for reason is a product of evolution, so are moral goods.

On average, and in the kind of environment in which our species was shaped, pleasurable experiences allowed our ancestors to survive and have viable children, and painful ones led to a dead end. That means that food, comfort, curiosity, beauty, stimulation, love, sex, and camaraderie are not shallow indulgences or hedonistic distractions. They are links in the causal chain that allowed minds to come into being” (EN 414).

These then are our desires given to us by evolution, and as such they are our moral goods. Pinker’s prescription for living a moral life is to balance our desires for food, comfort, curiosity, beauty, etc., and respect and support others’ attempts to fulfill their desires.

Rose’s Anthropology

David Rose’s concern is similar to Pinker’s. He wants to sustain free market democracy – the set of political and economic institutions that Pinker credits to the Enlightenment. These institutions provide prosperity and freedom, which have grown since the dawn of the Enlightenment and expanded across the globe. To aid in protecting free market democracy Rose develops a theory of how it arose. The first step is to acknowledge that free markets, democracy, and their fruits require extensive cooperation with strangers. Cooperation with strangers requires that trust extend well beyond family and friends.

This in turn requires that people be trustworthy. Rose argues that culture is the key to developing people who are trustworthy. This is “why culture matters most.”

Rose defines culture as “knowledge transmitted across generations through imitation and teaching rather than through genes” (WC, 3). Building and maintaining a culture of trust requires that a moral belief in trustworthiness be cultivated and passed down from generation to generation. The problem is that this moral belief is unnatural. In following his explanation of how trustworthiness is unnatural, we will see that Rose answers the question, What is man? in much the same way as Pinker.

Rose’s anthropology is roughly equal parts Adam Smith and Charles Darwin.¹² His definition of man is *homo economicus*. Humans are self-interested rational maximizers of material comforts and freedom. These are the substance of a good life individually and collectively. Man has no telos. Even in their rationality humans are not made in the image and likeness of God. They cannot be because they were not made *by* God. Nor were human desires, or indeed anything else made by God. While Rose, unlike Pinker, is not explicitly atheist or antitheist in his book, his anthropology is implicitly atheistic. God only appears in his account alongside man as a product of evolution, for man’s religious nature is a product of evolution. Gods are human creations in service of human purposes, two of which are reducing anxiety and providing social cohesion. So how did humans come to be what we are?

In the evolved natural order, humans stand relatively alone as rational beings. This is because we evolved to have larger brains than other species. We have more computing power and storage capacity than other species. One might say that man was made *Imago Altum Caeruleum*.¹³

As humans started to enjoy greater success relative to all other species, a number of evolutionary feedback processes began to unfold. The more humans dominated all other species, the truer it became that competition

¹² It is not easy to disentangle the two because Darwin was influenced by Smith. See <https://www.learnliberty.org/blog/what-charles-darwin-owes-adam-smith/>

¹³ Deep Blue was the first computer to defeat a world-champion grandmaster in chess. A product of IBM engineers, Deep Blue defeated Gary Kasparov in a match held in New York City in May 1997. Kasparov won their initial match the previous year.

with other humans affected survival more than competition with other species. This likely contributed to an intraspecies cognitive arms race that explains why our intelligence is so far beyond all other existing species today (WC, 6).

We also evolved our capacity to store and transmit knowledge:

As humans increased their stock of knowledge, they undertook more complex behaviors and therefore had more complex things to teach their children. This naturally selected for traits that made us better storytellers. As better storytellers, we were able to build more effectively on prior accumulated knowledge. This created even more content and therefore additional evolutionary return to reinforcing traits that supported storytelling.

With the rise of language, each successive generation had a richer base of such ideas to work from. This increased the evolutionary return to having more memory capacity to store ideas and more processing power to understand increasingly abstract, complex, and subtle ideas. This process fed on itself to produce even bigger brains (WC, 31).

With humans' evolved capacity to communicate within the community and across generations, the evolutionary "cognitive arms race" gave way to a cultural arms race. Winners in this arms race were communities with cultures most fit for survival in their environments. Rose suggests ancient Athens as an example of a more fit and Sparta as a less fit culture.

Through evolution humans also developed their capacity for morals. Some morals were common across communities, and are thus regarded by evolutionary psychologists as innate. Others varied. Trust is among the morals regarded as innate. But because human evolution occurred within small communities, trust extends naturally only to near relations and neighbors, not to people in other communities. This limits the extension of cooperative behavior. Humans also evolved an aversion to feelings of guilt associated with harm to others from their actions. The intensity of feelings of guilt are in rough

proportion to the perceived harm. These two products of small community evolution, trust and harm-induced guilt, are the basis for flourishing within small communities. They are also the barrier to flourishing across communities in large societies. The further out from one's local community is the actual harm, the smaller is the perceived harm, and the weaker the feelings of guilt. Thus there is little brake on trust-breaking.

At this point in Rose's analysis, the economist takes over from the evolutionist. Trustworthiness is instilled naturally within small communities because harm from breaking trust is easily seen and feelings of guilt naturally follow. Rational utility maximizers keep trust when the unpleasant feelings of guilt would outweigh the benefit of breaking trust – breaking a promise or stealing from your neighbor for example. In large groups, however, the effects of one person's breaking trust with the group are imperceptible. So breaking trust with the larger group produces no feelings of guilt. It is entirely rational to decide to break trust. No harm; no foul. If a single person breaks trust there is no problem for society. But since it is rational for each member of society to break trust with large society, the virtue of trustworthiness remains locked in small communities. With trustworthiness as the necessary foundation for extensive division of labor and market exchange, for rule of law and democratic government, division of labor and economies of scale remain untapped resources. This, of course, is the public goods problem. And it is a more serious public goods problem than the classic example, national defense. The large community for which national defense is a need cannot exist without trust. Without trust there is no national community to defend. Furthermore, the public goods problem of trust cannot be solved by taxation and government provision of trust. Trustworthiness is a social good that inheres in human persons themselves.

Rose suggests that the way to release the brake on the spread of trust beyond the local community is to circumvent the opportunity for rational trust breaking by teaching the virtue of trustworthiness as a duty. This has to be taught to children pre-rationally. You cannot reasonably persuade someone to be trustworthy, because consistent trustworthiness is irrational. Being a thoroughly trustworthy person means foregoing "golden opportunities." *Homo economicus* will not do this. You cannot make a rational case for irrational behavior. So to build an extensive culture of trust, parents need to teach

their young children by word and by example that they have a *duty* to be trustworthy. As the children in whom this duty has been instilled mature, the virtue of being trustworthy will be for them what economists refer to as a “taste.” Tastes are the principal for which reason is the agent. A person’s reasoning powers are not applied to their tastes; they only work in service of their tastes. Rational calculation is not brought to bear on duties; it is only brought into service of duties.

Conclusion

On a basic level, Steven Pinker and David Rose have the same desire for themselves and fellow humans as Jesus of Nazareth – that they will have abundance in living good lives. “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (Gospel of John 10:10). That which we desire to have in abundance is, however, tied up with the meaning of a good life, and that in turn with the meaning of being human. Herein we come to the radical difference between Pinker’s and Rose’s, along with most social scientists’ anthropology, and Christian anthropology. Christian anthropology is summed as *Imago Dei*. Humans are designed and created by an all knowing, all powerful, and all loving God, who brought them, and everything else that is, into being for their happiness. Humans share in God’s divine nature in their reason, their power to create, and their ability to love. God’s intention was for humans to have eternal eudaimonia living fully in His presence, experiencing the Beatific Vision. But Adam rebelled, bringing sin and death to the human race. Though humans abandoned God, God did not abandon humans. In the fullness of time the loving Creator took on human flesh, lived as a poor man on the fringe of the Roman Empire, and took upon Himself all of human sin and suffering. This He did for the sake of mankind. By Christ’s suffering, death, and resurrection – by His sacrifice -- to man was restored the possibility of eternal eudaimonia.

The core of the anthropology we find in *Enlightenment Now* and *Why Culture Matters Most* is unguided evolution. This means that humans are what they are for no particular reason. Moreover, we really cannot say what they are, and whatever they are today, they will be something else in the future. For evolution is a continuing process of “creation” and “destruction.” The materialist evolutionary anthropology might be summed up as *Imago Roulette*, except that there are order and limits in the game of

roulette. There is no order, nor are there limits, in materialist Darwinian evolution. By an unguided historical process humans developed from lower forms of life, and life somehow came to be from matter that was without life.¹⁴ There is nothing in this evolutionary framework to mark humans as special in comparison with other species, or for that matter to mark living things as special relative to non-living things. Therefore there is no basis for reverence or even respect toward other humans. For while humans build skyscrapers, birds build nests. Humans draw maps and distribute directions and distances via the internet, but butterflies, geese, and ducks migrate without maps. Humans build submarines, but fish have no need for submarines. Humans are physically beautiful at points in their lives, but are they more beautiful than a bluebird, an orchid, or the sun setting behind mountains? Why should we give greater moral weight to humans than to non-humans? Might not Pinker's humanist theory of ethical values derived from human needs and interests be a violation of the humanist principle of impartiality?

Pinker and Rose are in agreement with Christians that humans are the only species with capacity for reason, but they attribute this to random evolution of large human brains rather than to humans sharing an attribute of their Creator. For Rose, as the economist, reason is largely the ability to conceive of and compare costs and benefits of actions. For the most part Pinker shares this economic consequentialist-utilitarian view of reason. This is the foundation of his ethics – balancing desires for material pleasures. But Pinker recognizes that reason must be more than the cramped economic definition. He admits of universals in mathematics and perhaps in beauty.¹⁵ For there to be reason beyond satisfaction of appetites there must be something to reason from. That is to say human ability “to reason” (the verb) implies that there be “reason” (the noun) that exists apart from the human reasoner. This would seem to be assumed in Pinker's statements such as, “Since the world is the way it is regardless of what people believe about it, there is a strong selection pressure for an ability to develop explanations that are true” (EN, 353). The selection pressure would come from order in the world that is independent of human desires. In *The Blank Slate* Pinker suggests that “morality has an internal logic,

¹⁴ Perhaps hydrogen cyanide, hydrogen sulfide, and ultraviolet light. (Robert F. Service, *Science*, March 16, 2015).

¹⁵ Not that Rose would deny this, but his project is narrower than Pinker's and he doesn't address universals.

and possibly even an external reality, that a community of reflective thinkers may elucidate, just as a community of mathematicians can elucidate truths about number and shape” (BS, 270). And of course Pinker has no problem with scientific “laws of the universe.” For example, “The first step toward wisdom is the realization that the laws of the universe don’t care about you. The next is the realization that this does not imply that life is meaningless, because *people* care about you, and vice versa. You care about yourself, and you have a responsibility to respect the laws of the universe that keep you alive, so you don’t squander your existence” (EN, 434-35). His acknowledgement of universals is why I suggested that he is a 97% materialist. It is very difficult for a human person to consistently hold a materialist metaphysics!

I will conclude by suggesting that Christian anthropology is more attractive and more reasonable than the materialist evolutionary anthropology on which Pinker’s and Rose’s books and much of contemporary social science is based. That Christian anthropology is the more attractive is, I believe, evident in what we have seen in the comparison. For example, consider the basic human need for love. We have a deep need to know that others give of themselves to us for our good without expectation of anything in return. But there is no place for this type of love in a materialist anthropology that rules out the human soul, the seat of the human will. Love is an act of the will. It is not an emotion. “Love, sex, and comradeship” are in Pinker’s list of moral goods. He says that life is meaningful because “people care about you and vice versa” (EN, 434). But he does not inquire into what love is. Love is of so little consequence in his conception of Enlightenment values that it does not appear in the *Enlightenment Now* index.¹⁶ Christians believe that we were created from God’s love; that all of His creation was and is for us. When we go astray from His plan for our eudaimonia, like the prodigal father in *Luke* chapter 15, He waits for us to return to His loving embrace. He gives us freedom to choose to love Him or not. He does not force us. If we choose to return God’s love our eternal destiny will be with Him.

¹⁶ Along the same lines, Pinker implicitly acknowledges a basic need for beauty and suggests that there *may* be universal principles of beauty. But this is as far as he goes toward defining or inquiring into the source of beauty.

The Christian anthropology is also more reasonable than the materialist evolutionary alternative. Pinker's implicit epistemology is empiricism – the philosophical claim that our sense experience is the ultimate source of all our knowledge; that reason alone does not provide knowledge. “Internal representations that reliably correlate with states of the world, and that participate in inferences that tend to derive true implications from true premises, may be called knowledge” (EN, 21) This is the contemporary empirical scientist's epistemology. The ultimate test of ideas is in their implications for empirical evidence. “A scientist's degree of belief in a theory depends on its consistency with empirical evidence” (EN, 393). He quotes Thomas Paine on the Enlightenment project of unification of knowledge in science.

Science, the partisan of no country, but the beneficent patroness of all, has liberally opened a temple where all may meet. Her influence on the mind, like the sun on the chilled earth, has long been preparing it for higher cultivation and further improvement. The philosopher of one country sees not an enemy in the philosophy of another: he takes his seat in the temple of science, and asks not who sits beside him (EN, 409).

Yet Pinker does not give evidence in support of his account of the origin of humans and development of human institutions and cultures. Nor does Rose. Pinker and Rose both use “just so stories” to tell the story of human history. Having accepted the premise that all appearances of design, apart from what humans have designed, are products of random variations, everything – human reason, moral goods, moral evils – in short, everything that makes us human, has this explanation. The science and history of humans are thus unified in a tautology.

What is the basis of the belief that humans are what they are because of random mutations and survival of the fittest? Ironically, it appears to be small-r revelation. We have been told so -- proximately by Pinker in his text, and secondarily by the numerous authors whom he cites without commentary or evidence in support of his and their claims. This is indeed revelation, though human rather than Divine – knowledge passed from an authoritative human source to the human recipient. This is not surprising, for we all depend on revelation. We can demonstrate the truth of only a tiny fraction of what we

believe. So Christians are not in this respect different from Steven Pinker and David Rose. The key difference is that Christians are open to revelation from their Creator, whom they regard as the most authoritative source of revelation. Which brings us to why I believe Christian anthropology is the more reasonable anthropology.

Human evolution is thought by experts to have occurred over a period stretching from six million to two-hundred thousand years ago.¹⁷ No written or oral records were left to inform us of the details of this vast period of evolutionary history. We can only piece together stories from fragmentary fossil remains. Unlike the theory of materialist evolution, Christianity is based on historical records of relatively recent events. The reported events took place *only* two thousand years ago. These are the events in the life of a first century Jewish man and his followers. Records of the events were passed down by eye-witnesses and their immediate successors in oral and written form. They tell us that Jesus of Nazareth was born to a young Jewish woman; that around the age thirty he began a three-year ministry as a traveling rabbi; and that he was crucified by the Romans under Pontius Pilate. They tell us that he rose from the dead and afterward appeared to his followers. These reported facts are either true facts or they are false. Thus, the Christian account of God and man stands or falls on the basis of empirical claims. The most crucial of the claims is the Resurrection. If the account we have that Jesus rose from the dead is false, it is eminently reasonable for us to seek other explanations of what it means to be human. But, if the factual account is true, this means that the European Enlightenment intellectuals who led us away from Christianity were actually leading us into the shadows. It means that contemporary social sciences are facing *away* from the light. It means that on a fundamental level we social scientists do not know our subject.

¹⁷ Smithsonian Museum of Natural History: <http://humanorigins.si.edu/education/introduction-human-evolution>.