

*To ask other readers questions about Voltaire's Bastards, please sign up. Be the first to ask a question about Voltaire's Bastards I was impressed by the introduction to this highly touted book. His central point, that the 'reason' of the Enlightenment age, and to which we modern westerners pay lip.*

Seas of Promethium permalink May 29, I think Saul was being a bit coy in attributing it all to an overemphasis on reason per se. Never do I recall any article told from the worker point of view. I went to University, worked summer jobs, most in construction with a large contingent of East Enders and Irish around London, and finally graduated. I believed and believe to this day, all the people I worked with worked hard, diligently, and were agreeable. I still had no view and no opinion of manager-worker relations. As my first job after graduate, I worker at a computer bureau, learned programming, and was assigned to a high priority payroll system, the basis of a service the owning Bank National Westminster or NatWest was selling to its customers. The system was incomplete, it was January, and our two person team task was tax reporting, which did not exist, and had to be completed by April 5th, because that was tax reporting day in the UK. Machine time for testing was sparse, so we did some testing and coding in the week, and at the weekends worked from Friday Morning to Sunday night continuously. A 40 Hour work week , followed by 48 hour work weekend. At first we were paid 48 hours overtime. The next week we were told that comp time could only be take while the project was current, and our project ended March 31st. Effectively we were now working for 48 hours over the weekend and being paid for At that announcement, I had an epiphany. I wondered what management had done to the make the worker in the UK difficult and strike prone. Now to the point: John Ralston Saul may write well or may not, has a different perspective from myself, but I doubt that he uses and objective measures for his book. Measurement is the key. EmilianoZ permalink May 29, I would say the technocrats do have a purpose. If you pursue your individual goal, the invisible hand will guide the outcome to be the greatest freedom for all. It is not organizations, government, and parliaments that have forgotten their purpose, but the elites who run them who have. Also their forgetting is deliberate, self-serving, and self-enriching. They are tools to enact purposes decided other ways. Our elites treat the economy as if it were the engines of the sun: A case can be made that things started going wrong around That is over the course of the last 46 years there has been a And this is only a partial picture because a lot of income of the. Also this is income. These make the level of inequality much, much worse. That is not even intelligence. It is just machine. IIRC, he says something like: One example he gives from ancient history is the mathematical sects of the Pythagoreans. I think he did say they were elitists and pro-oligarchs Plato as well I think. In the end, science has to describe reality. Rationality can be completely unmoored from reality. Rationality is just a method for logical and coherent speculation. Once you accept a set of premises however ridiculous you can have a rational discussion just about everything, even religion. In our current times, the archetype of a discipline that is rational but unscientific is Economics. I wonder if Quigley would say that economics is an example of rationality used to confuse people. There is really a purpose. But that purpose cannot be stated. It must be disguised as the rational theory of the Markets. Economics is just a giant fig leave with a thick patina of rationality. I think that deep down they do know. Rationalizations provide them a fig leave to hide their greed not from themselves but from us. Jill permalink May 29, I agree with EmilianoZ. The oligarchy has a purpose. It just has a bad purpose. If there was no purpose, their actions and the actions of their appointed minions would be a lot more random. The outcome of their decisions would not always go in the same direction. Yet their actions only tend towards one direction at all times. There is a very good example of just such a phenomena described by Bruce Dixon in Black Agenda Report. Take the Democratic party platform of , the year Bill Clinton was elected. It promised targeted jobs programs to reduce inner city unemployment, the building of affordable housing, funding of urban mass transit, measures to begin weaning the economy off fossil fuels. It promised a peace dividend, the investment of some of the former Cold War military budget into the civilian economy to create jobs and opportunities. It pledged new environmental protections and committed Democrats to rolling back carbon dioxide emissions to levels by Every bit of this was garbage. On the other hand, the one percent were promised the end of welfare,

so that millions would be thrown out onto the low wage labor market, and NAFTA. Those were among the promises that were kept. Real meaning and having a good purpose expose the shallow and false replacements we have been given by our propagandizers. The more we fight for true meaning and living a good life, the less control the powerful can exert. Not to mention that these are goods in themselves! However all the talk of Courtiers and Courtesans left me somewhat dumbfounded later at the sight of Saul sitting on a velvet throne as the spouse of the Governor General of Canada in all the regal aplomb. I never had the same opinion of him and certainly would never read his book a second time. [Some Guy permalink May 31](#), [A good summary Ian](#). Hospitals become Health Centres, gyms become fitness centres, offices become workplaces etc. Always specificity, historical meaning and brevity are sacrificed for verbosity and empty generic terms. Anything local, anything historic, anything specific must be flattened in the name of reason, and on it goes. [May 31](#), [Wonderful review and great comments!](#) I will have to read the book. More of us need to ask ourselves, our bosses, our politicians what the point of our hard work, constant restructuring of organizations and pursuit of ECON ideals is. We have become too caught up in jiggling and rejigging the process rather than producing better outcomes, whatever that takes. Here, economists come in for more criticism. They turn a debate about outcomes into a debate about process or mechanisms: Instead, we should tell them the society we want to see and they should give us the options for getting there. Like engineers, they should just respond to our desire to get there from here. But as it stands, they tell us that we are wrong to want to go there and that only one road is even possible.

### Chapter 2 : Voltaire's Bastards Quotes by John Ralston Saul

*This, in brief, is the central argument of Voltaire's Bastards. Saul has a very sharp mind, a knack for bon mots, and a keen understanding of our democratic malaise in the West. Saul has a very sharp mind, a knack for bon mots, and a keen understanding of our democratic malaise in the West.*

The title caught my eye. Is franchising an empire built on brand-induced self-delusion? If it is, then it appears to be just one in our post-modern world where any means justify the economic ends. So says a Pulitzer Prize winner, anyway. The first chapter The Illusion of Literacy starts off with a bang. I especially like his contrary opinions about expertise: Franchise law is an example of the hollowed-out perfection of the expert literate man. The Dictatorship of Reason in the West: Now the death of God combined with the perfection of the image has brought us to a whole new state of expectation. We are the image. We are the viewer and the viewed. There is no other distracting presence. And that image has all the Godly powers. It kills at will. The electronic image is man as God and the ritual involved leads us not to a mysterious Holy Trinity but back to ourselves. In the absence of a clear understanding that we are now the only source, these images cannot help but return to the expression of magic and fear proper to idolatrous societies. This in turn facilitates the use of the electronic image as propaganda by whoever can control some part of it. Nothing says sincere, honest and authentic in both a visual and journalist sense, as the two words together: Is this a too cynical interpretation of this type of modern myth-making? I wonder what the majority of mom-and-pop franchise investors would like to say to Mr. Is he their champion of the underdog? An inspiring story on a marketing and franchising level. And personally, to me anyways.

*John Ralston Saul, CC OOnt (born June 19, ) is a Canadian writer, Voltaire's Bastards, The Doubter's Companion and The Unconscious Civilization.*

Polanyi, Winner of the Nobel Prize for Chemistry, John Ralston Saul takes his readers on a passionate and personal tour of the follies of our age. The banner of Reason, he claims, can as easily lead to disaster as to victory. Scientists are only one of the groups that can readily identify with this argument. Reviews by Country The new Age of Reason is illusion and lies " Andrei Navrozov The European, October One of the best things about this book, and perhaps the most unexpected, is that it has been published at all. The paradox of a constricting intellectual universe is that a writer who wants to anatomise the very process of constriction is usually crushed before he can produce a page tome. Like a physician during the plague, he dies of the disease while struggling to find the cure. The cultural malaise diagnosed here became epidemic when the intellectual, social and ethical values of the Age of Reason, of which the American Declaration of Independence is a textbook example, were rendered obsolete by the changing relationship between the individual and the political institutions of democracy. Mass communications and modern weapons of mass coercion, the uncontrolled growth of corporate institutions and the diminished importance of the individual, have conspired to render the innovations of the Protestant Reformation and the French Enlightenment less and less applicable to 20th-century reality. Instead of keeping pace with science, Western social thought has been dragging these innovations along, virtually unreformed, ever since the American Revolution. Today even a political innocent is aware of the chasm separating the expectations of the electorate and the actual policies of the state, and of the cynicism with which unelected government or bureaucratic or corporate elites view the principle of accountability. The social forms that Saul outlines are in many ways as bleak and in some ways more frightening than the ones sketched by Solzhenitsyn in The Gulag Archipelago. What remains is self-satisfaction, illusions and lies. The reason before which the incompetent rationalist technocrats prostrate themselves is a perversion of the reason of the Enlightenment. What the technocrats mean by reason is the objective application of expertise and analysis to the facts and to the future. Such a definition has certain implications: Furthermore, this reason is anti-democratic: For Saul this is almost precisely the opposite of what Voltaire and Jefferson meant by reason. Their reason was explicitly soaked in values and, in the cast of Jefferson, entirely founded upon a faith in the will of the people. Similarly, modern technocracy has turned the Enlightenment concept of happiness on its head. Jefferson meant the pursuit of basic material comfort in a prosperous, well-organised society. We, however, mean an isolated, hyper-individualistic state in which we have access to a vast superfluity of gratifications " nothing to do with society and nothing to do with basics. He covers politics, diplomacy, the military, the arts, literature, painting and almost everything else, in each case providing a grim, though lucid and entertaining, anatomy of perversion. Inevitably in such a huge catalogue, there are moments when one pauses in stunned disagreement. But, in reality, his own prejudices are everywhere. He takes it for granted, for example, that his reader endorses freer abortions as a progressive development. But, before the overwhelming rightness of what Saul is attempting here, these are trivialities. The broad outline of his thesis " that we live in an era of corrupted Enlightenment ideals " is, for me and, increasingly, for many others, unarguable. Something fundamental has gone wrong and Saul has found a large and engrossing way of expressing that failure. Equally, the application of his thesis is generally convincing. Affairs such as Third World debt do demonstrate the way collective insanity can be disguised as reasonable behaviour. Honourable men like McNamara took logical decisions within a system, but did not have the perspective to see that the system itself was crazy. Similarly, the system of the worldwide arms bazaar runs perfectly rationally within its own terms, but it is out of control. Nobody can stop making weapons and nobody can stop buying them and everybody has perfectly sound reasons. In the absence of any real perspective and with the imposed necessity of amorality, the system becomes the only good. Defending and serving the system " whether it be the financial markets, the civil service or the business methods taught at Harvard " becomes the standard by which people judge their effectiveness. They fail to notice that not one

of these systems is working. Saul has a perfectly good reason for not providing the answer to all this. He believes in the damaging futility of our modern demand for answers, so he would be justified in writing an onslaught and no more. But he does, in his conclusion, outline a few positives. He wants, for example, doubt to be welcomed rather than excluded from debate. He wants us to search for questions not answers. The greatest virtue of this book is its over-ambition. Saul has been many things, including a historian and novelist; but he is not an academic and refuses to be a specialist. So he wanders into any specialist domain he likes and hurls amiable abuse. This is fun, true and necessary. In place of individual freedom, we have conformity, and instead of governments embodying morality or common sense, we have power structures bound to even more abstract concepts. Saul dissects the cynical manipulations of our power elites and rails about the disappearance of individual responsibility, moral vision and common decency. Surveying the way we live now, and anatomizing the disappointments and disillusionments of modern life, he has decided to take the axe to the root and to challenge the assumption that our method is one of rational choice. They think that they have weighed and calibrated and analyzed everything, according to value-free and scientific procedures, but they bring us war and meltdown and pollution and famine. The most that calamities such as these accomplish is the firing of one lot of experts and the hiring of another set, which is why, as Saul mordantly notes, a man such as Robert McNamara can only be promoted after each successive managerial techno-failure. Voltaire, of course, would not have recognized this depraved version of rationalism. His entire style and methodology consisted of doubting all forms of power and authority, whether secular, spiritual or intellectual. Such self-deception did not, alas, evaporate with Nuremberg. Millions of skilled workers and salesmen in the civilized world are, as Saul points out in a lengthy passage, absorbed full time in the manufacture and distribution of armaments, all of them destined to end up in the parts of the world where they are least needed and will do the most harm. What do these educated and sensitive people tell themselves they are doing all day? Does the question even come up? Or do the comforting accoutrements of flow diagrams, technological spin-offs and hard currency expert earnings succeed in keeping awkward questions in a separate compartment? Technocracy and specialization supply ready alibis for those who are just doing their jobs. And again, the misfit always seems, or can be made to seem, irrational. Nothing is more logical, when you think about it, than Catch As Saul puts it: Until recently very little was considered improper to know. Today the restricted lists are endless. Still, the adaptation of that exclusive mentality to technological streamlining no more counts as progress than teaching a cannibal to operate a food processor. The rise of experts brought the decline of reason – Ron Grossman Chicago Tribune , 28 October For years, says John Ralston Saul, Western civilization has been going downhill, head first. By misinterpreting the teachings of the great minds of the Enlightenment, we have become their illegitimate offspring. In the process we so crippled ourselves that we no longer have a clear vision of our political problems, let alone a chance of solving them. Just before the French and American Revolutions, Western thought underwent a profound change. Thinkers like Voltaire and Rousseau taught that the key to reforming the outdate society of their day was to subject all political questions to the scrutiny of reason, a proposal that quickly became the hallmark of modern thought. Unfortunately, subsequent generations twisted that methodology, generating thereby the intellectual straitjacket that now cripples us. For in contemporary society, knowledge has become the means by which cadres of experts and technocrats dominate everybody else. The triumph of expertise has made democracy virtually irrelevant, Saul claims. Public officials no longer debate the right or wrong of a proposal. Instead, they send for the experts, to whose presumed special knowledge they defer. For Saul, the perfect symbol of this shift is Robert McNamara, secretary of defense under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson and a technocrat par excellence. For McNamara, all questions could be reduced to data entries in a computer program. In fact, McNamara was no more successful at the latter than the former task, but no matter. Modern experts no longer hold themselves to the standard of success: By their understanding, their special knowledge gives them a right to rule that they refuse to subject to external criticism. Thus corporations executives pay themselves large salaries, even as profits shrink, and generals get more medals even as their Star Wars weapon systems fail the test of battlefield reality. To prevent criticism, the experts wrap themselves in a veil of jargon only they can understand. His practical experience has been extensive: There are innumerable brilliant insights. Even when he gets his facts wrong

â€” as sometimes happens in his rushed survey of literary and artistic history â€” Saul is suggestive and stimulating. Saul argues that democracy is subverted by the dominance of rational systems of control that are essentially unreformable. The modern science of administration is king. Capitalism has been transformed; it is not the owners, the stockholders, but their amoral, faceless hirelings, the managers, who have unbalanced and bled the marketplace at no risk to themselves. The West is obsessed with a frenzied, sterile quest for ultimate efficiency: His account of the origins and influence of the Harvard Business School is fascinating: The economic transition from manufacturing to a top-heavy service sector has exacerbated social problems. Nearly three-quarters of business-school graduates go on to cushy nonmanufacturing jobs like consulting and banking. Saul thinks this steering of top managerial talent away from nuts and bolts experience is a major cause of our industrial decline. In some of the most startling material of his book, Saul argues that the modern, discreet, ruthless administrative style was created by Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuit order, who was wounded by a cannonball passing between his legs. He makes clever connections: Descartes, pillar of the Age of Reason, was educated by the Jesuits. But Saul tries too hard to build a case against the last five centuries, when in fact the trends he identifies are also discernible in antiquity. The book also lacks sustained attention to the Greco-Roman origins of Western logic as well as to the complex status of reason in medieval theology. Even the presentation of post-Enlightenment culture suffers from a curious blankness about Romanticism, which Saul rarely mentions but which powerfully critiqued Western institutions and ideology from within. Saul is superb, however, on military history, which is glaringly absent from the overliterary world-view of poststructuralism.

### Chapter 4 : Voltaire's Bastards Summary - [www.nxgvision.com](http://www.nxgvision.com)

*"Voltaire's Bastards is a hand grenade disguised as a book. The pages explode with insight, style, and intellectual rigor [This book] will leave you challenged, intrigued, and at times troubled."--Jim Hoagland, The Washington Post.*

Voltaire and his contemporaries believed that reason was the best defense against the arbitrary power of monarchs and the superstitions of religious dogma. It was the key not only to challenging the powers of kings and aristocracies but also to creating a more just and humane civilization. Our ruling elites justify themselves in the name of reason, but all too often their power and their methodology is based on specialized knowledge and the manipulation of rational "structures" rather than reason. Today the link between reason and justice has been severed and our decision-makers, bereft of a viable ethical framework, have turned rational calculation into something short-sighted and self-serving. The result, Saul observes, is that we live in a society fixated on rational solutions, management, expertise, and professionalism in almost all areas, from politics and economics to education and cultural affairs. It has also resulted in a fracturing of society into smaller and smaller and increasingly insulated professional groups. While the emergence of professionalism has paralleled the rise of individualism over the last two centuries, the result has not been greater individual autonomy and self-determination, as was once hoped, but isolation and alienation. By fostering expertise, they believed they were laying the foundations for a new civilization of Renaissance individuals. He goes on to explore what he takes to be the fundamental incompatibility between democracy and contemporary rational governments. Because rationalism has been reduced to a system of management and administration it is at bottom incapable of guiding human affairs, he insists. One is organized and reflective. The other is linear and structured. One attempts to waste time usefully in order to understand and to build consensus. The other aims at speed and delivery. One is done of the people. The other is done for the people. Nor do they believe in the existence of a public moral code. That this often succeeds reinforces their contempt for a public apparently capable of nothing better. Saul has a very sharp mind, a knack for bon mots, and a keen understanding of our democratic malaise in the West. It is therefore something of a disappointment to finally reach the end of this book and discover that he has very little in the way of practical solutions to offer for our current troubles. There is a role for people who ask tough questions and make us uncomfortable. On the other hand, the Socratic tradition is one aimed at self-reflection and the pursuit of wisdom. It is a constructive endeavor aimed at realizing our highest capacities as individuals and, by extension, as a community. I would be prepared to dismiss intellectual arrogance and historical inaccuracies as unimportant if I felt the overall purpose of this book were a more constructive one. Copyright by Scott London.

**Chapter 5 : Be a Voltaire Bastard.**

*Teachout's diatribe against "Voltaire's Bastards" was missing any admission of motivation. Yet few readers will know his name or know that he is a minor hanger-on of the neoconservative movement.*

When his father found out, he sent Voltaire to study law, this time in Caen , Normandy. But the young man continued to write, producing essays and historical studies. From early on, Voltaire had trouble with the authorities for critiques of the government. As a result, he was twice sentenced to prison and once to temporary exile to England. Its origin is unclear. In a letter to Jean-Baptiste Rousseau in March , Voltaire concludes by asking that, if Rousseau wishes to send him a return letter, he do so by addressing it to Monsieur de Voltaire. Voltaire is known also to have used at least separate pen names during his lifetime. It was a flop and only fragments of the text survive. On the journey, he was accompanied by his mistress, Marie-Marguerite de Rupelmonde, a young widow. A publisher was eventually secured in The Hague. He was now indisputably rich. Again, a main source of inspiration for Voltaire were the years of his British exile, during which he had been strongly influenced by the works of Sir Isaac Newton. Voltaire and the Marquise analyzed the Bible and concluded that much of its content was dubious. In August , Frederick the Great , then Crown Prince of Prussia and a great admirer of Voltaire, initiated a correspondence with him. On a visit to Paris that year, he found a new love—his niece. At first, his attraction to Marie Louise Mignot was clearly sexual, as evidenced by his letters to her only discovered in . Meanwhile, the Marquise also took a lover, the Marquis de Saint-Lambert. This greatly angered Frederick, who ordered all copies of the document burned. Marie Louise joined him on 9 June. He would stay in Ferney for most of the remaining 20 years of his life, frequently entertaining distinguished guests, such as James Boswell , Adam Smith , Giacomo Casanova , and Edward Gibbon. His possessions were confiscated and his two daughters were taken from his widow and were forced into Catholic convents. Voltaire, seeing this as a clear case of religious persecution, managed to overturn the conviction in . According to some sources, "Benjamin Franklin The accounts of his deathbed have been numerous and varying, and it has not been possible to establish the details of what precisely occurred. His enemies related that he repented and accepted the last rites given by a Catholic priest, or that he died under great torment, while his adherents told how he was defiant to his last breath. Guillaume de Syon argues: Voltaire recast historiography in both factual and analytical terms. Not only did he reject traditional biographies and accounts that claim the work of supernatural forces, but he went so far as to suggest that earlier historiography was rife with falsified evidence and required new investigations at the source. Such an outlook was not unique in that the scientific spirit that 18th-century intellectuals perceived themselves as invested with. A rationalistic approach was key to rewriting history. He broke from the tradition of narrating diplomatic and military events, and emphasized customs, social history and achievements in the arts and sciences. The Essay on Customs traced the progress of world civilization in a universal context, thereby rejecting both nationalism and the traditional Christian frame of reference. He treated Europe as a whole, rather than a collection of nations. He was the first to emphasize the debt of medieval culture to Middle Eastern civilization, but otherwise was weak on the Middle Ages. Although he repeatedly warned against political bias on the part of the historian, he did not miss many opportunities to expose the intolerance and frauds of the church over the ages. Voltaire advised scholars that anything contradicting the normal course of nature was not to be believed. Although he found evil in the historical record, he fervently believed reason and educating the illiterate masses would lead to progress. He wrote two book-long epic poems, including the first ever written in French, the *Henriade* , and later, *The Maid of Orleans* , besides many other smaller pieces. The epic poem transformed French King Henry IV into a national hero for his attempts at instituting tolerance with his Edict of Nantes. *La Pucelle* , on the other hand, is a burlesque on the legend of Joan of Arc. Please help improve this article by adding citations to reliable sources. Unsourced material may be challenged and removed. May Learn how and when to remove this template message Frontispiece and first page of an early English translation by T. Almost all of his more substantive works, whether in verse or prose, are preceded by prefaces of one sort or another, which are models of his caustic yet conversational tone. In a vast variety of

nondescript pamphlets and writings, he displays his skills at journalism. He is incorrectly credited with writing, "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it. Tallentyre in her biographical book *The Friends of Voltaire*. Then, in his *Dictionnaire philosophique*, containing such articles as "Abraham", "Genesis", "Church Council", he wrote about what he perceived as the human origins of dogmas and beliefs, as well as inhuman behavior of religious and political institutions in shedding blood over the quarrels of competing sects. Letters[ edit ] Voltaire also engaged in an enormous amount of private correspondence during his life, totalling over 20, letters. He wrote, "Almost nothing great has ever been done in the world except by the genius and firmness of a single man combating the prejudices of the multitude.

**Chapter 6 : Candide and "Voltaire's Bastards" | Bear Skin Digital**

*Voltaire's Bastards ends with what might seem a surprising eulogy to doubt "our ability to live with uncertainty as a creative force. You could call this an expression of consciousness. If we can bring ourselves to live consciously then we will be able to embrace both stability and change, which means we may do better at dealing with crises.*

Buy from another retailer: You could call this an expression of consciousness. If we can bring ourselves to live consciously then we will be able to embrace both stability and change, which means we may do better at dealing with crises. That eulogy to doubt included descriptions of what I have seen over the years in both the Arctic and the Sahara. Existing in doubt is a strength of people who live in extreme conditions. They must be conscious or they will die. We, flowers of the temperate zones, can float half awake through a padded world. We have our dramas and our suffering. But most of that we impose upon ourselves. The greatest drama we have imposed on ourselves is our willful misinterpretation of consciousness. The Socratic conviction was that virtues were forms of knowledge and therefore no man willingly does wrong. Now they justify doing wrong because they do know. This rational sophistication makes them passive, terrified of uncertainty, unable to change when faced by reality, ready to accept the worst. You might call this profound cynicism: In any case, they believe themselves to be immobilized by what they know. This, they think, is professional behaviour. To be precise, they know so much that they believe it would be amateurish or emotive to do anything much about the environment, global warming, poverty, debt, to mention just a few problems. This passive or fearful mind-set, tied to expertise and power, has steadily worsened over the last twenty years as the power of managerial leadership has grown. Theirs is a mind-set obsessed by systems and by control over systems as the essence of power. It is the opposite of leadership. It is all about form over content; a mind-set in which continuity and mediocrity are the same thing. Today their power is such that they feel comfortable manacled the citizenry with debts transferred to them from corporate bodies. They take pleasure in weighing job creation against planetary warming, as if these were opposites. It is as if they, being experts, had cleverly negotiated a deal with the planet itself. As simple as that. This is what you might call the self-destructive nature of the overly sophisticated. Twenty years later this also is increasingly true: We have an elite pessimistic not only about its own ability to do things but, thanks to an astonishing transfer of responsibility, pessimistic about the citizenry. In the early s it seemed to me that we were trapped in a social crisis, only one part of which was an economic depression. But this was a rare sort of depression, broad and deep-seated; a tailspin downwards brought on by the worship of uninteresting methods. We seemed unable to ask ourselves serious questions about our civilizations and about where they were headed. All of this is dependent on how we imagine ourselves, as well as how we imagine all those other people we simply do not know. Can we imagine the other? Are we capable of empathy? For those who carried the most influence in the nineties, this was not a central question. And for many, the idea that we were caught in a long-term tailspin was outrageous. They were immersed in their proofs of progress. And of course, looked at selectively, they were right. There had been continual breakthroughs "technological, digital, medical. Just as there are today. But then the second half of the eighteenth century was also one of continual breakthroughs in science, in technology, in agriculture, in philosophy, in understanding how the planet functions. These breakthroughs were perhaps more revolutionary than those of the late twentieth century. After all, they carried the West clearly out of the Middle Ages. The elites of the eighteenth century did not understand or respond to the instability that all these changes brought on. They saw social and political methods and the structure that protected their role as inviolable. Doubt in any of this might bring it all tumbling down. Doubt was therefore banished. And then it did all come tumbling down. What followed was an era of revolution, violence and dictatorships. And there was a surprising focus on race; that is, a surprising focus on the scientific, free-market, nation-state application of racism. From there the triumph of reason moved on to produce a world dominated by a handful of empires. These in turn were characterized by those same elements of revolution wherever they set up shop: Well, we see what passes for political, administrative and intellectual leadership still hanging on desperately to old-fashioned concepts of trade and growth, to name but a few of their favourite things. They seem to believe

in the sanctity of the commercial contract, but see no equivalent sanctity attached to the well-being of the citizenry. In fact, they have become increasingly religious about their utilitarianism, turning poor Adam Smith into their saint without reading him or, worse still, after reading a few extracts. And their still-growing obsession with method rather than purpose strikes me as psychotic. You can see this in the energy with which much of our education is being pushed towards the utilitarian. Twenty years ago, optimism was high that these old ways could become the new way. Few people were trying to identify the broader shape of the era. The West was driven by its desire for specifics and certainty. Now, in far more difficult times, we blunder on, still obsessed by certainty and our failed rational methodology and its curious reliance on simplistic economic theories. All of this must be true or disaster will fall upon us. But disaster has fallen upon us. So it seems they are not true. Unfortunately there is no need to change a word. With absolute certainty, we are simply applying to ourselves the debt theory we earlier used to destroy Africa. Any African could have explained that this theory would undermine the confidence of citizens in their own democratic system, destroy public programs aimed at broad inclusion, lead to the expulsion of homeowners and the further exaggeration of the rich-poor divide. Interestingly enough, the experts are applying their debt theories to Western democracies without a single reference—“as far as I can see”—to their African failure. One of the characteristics of a civilization which promotes form over content is that memory evaporates. This methodology is the source of the widespread feeling that we are suffering from a breakdown in leadership. You might also say that this methodology has been used as a replacement for humanism and citizen-based democracy. It has punished creativity at leadership levels. Such a critique was thought to be fresh or scandalous at the time, although perhaps also a bit romantic. As they have gained strength over the decades, these non-leaders have also tied our hands and made it increasingly difficult for us to change what we are doing. The intricate relationship between public, private and NGO structures has steadily grown over the last two decades, tying us up to the point that we are in a virtual stall. It is as if we have abandoned the possibility that healthy societies evolve through ideas. And therefore through doubt and the possibility of change. Instead we have a hypnotic obsession with efficiency and methodology. Now a growing number of people actually do see the last half-century as one of steady decline for the West. It is as if they can now make out a pattern which links what we do as societies and individuals with real events. The result is clear. There has not been so little confidence in elected leaders and expert administration since the early s and the rise of fascist regimes. At the same time there has not been such distrust of the business sector since the same early thirties. This in particular is fascinating because the great truth of the last half-century has been economic leadership. We have all worked very hard to see things their way. We have been surprisingly obedient to their most peculiar whims. Asia is gaining back the large percentage of global wealth and wealth creation it had less than three centuries ago. The West is shrinking from the global centre of wealth creation into a troubled regional phenomenon. And those marvelous, modern and so-impressive truths we embraced over the last half-century have lost us much of our infrastructure for wealth creation, recreated the old destructive rich-poor divides in our societies and produced growing pessimism. Yet we press on as if our serious doubts cannot be linked to serious change. This is a sign of just how managerial and technocratic we have become; so much so that mediocre utilitarianism confuses itself with professionalism. And all of this is in place of what could be called humanism. The curious thing is that the true believers in a borderless world are now, as quietly as possible, attempting to re-create as many of the old national tools of control as they can. These anti-globalist efforts are all carried on without admission of error or appearance of doubt or debate of ideas. Every new anti-terror strategy at a border point, every new visa program and reform of immigration and migration rules, every clever new tariff wall, regulation, financial control or ownership criteria is dressed up in the familiar sort of dispassionate, obscure, administrative language, as if it were a simple continuation of their modern ways. In fact it is a chaotic and panicked reaction to failure. Perhaps most importantly, this failure and the confused response to it by those in charge is a reminder that the glory of the West does not lie in economic ideologies or utilitarian inevitabilities or linear process. What is admirable about Western civilizations is the minority school of humanism. Humanism is always the minority school.

Chapter 7 : Voltaires Bastards - John Ralston Saul - Google Books

*Voltaire's Bastards Twenty Years On The ability to embrace doubt in the middle of a crisis is a sign of strength. Voltaire's Bastards ends with what might seem a surprising eulogy to doubt "our ability to live with uncertainty as a creative force.*

Historian, John Ralston Saul rails against the arbitrary use of power, absent the moderating influence of ethical structures. We have produced "an unparalleled and permanent institutionalization of state violence" and it is as "Hitleresque" as the Gulf Tonkin Crisis, the false flag the Johnson administration engineered to justify what President John F. Kennedy clearly resisted -the commitment of American ground troops to the Vietnam war. Voltaire had a profound impact on his time. Politicians have ignored John Ralston Saul and the continued imposition of arbitrary power in the name of reason is currently the biggest danger facing our planet. Bill Clinton was President in when Professor Saul wrote; "A civilization unable to differentiate between illusion and reality is usually believed to be at the tail end of its existence. Today, it is rather impossible to dispute Professor Saul, who said that we think we are reasonable but in fact, "while not blind, we see without being able to perceive the differences between illusion and reality. Think about what you know about history and you will probably grow the merit of his argument with record speed. In particular, this brief passage from his groundbreaking book should illustrate the point rather handily: The original easy conviction that reason was a moral force was gradually converted into a desperate, protective assumption. The twentieth century, which has seen the final victory of pure reason in power, has also seen unprecedented unleashing of violence and of power deformed. It is hard, for example, to avoid that the murder of six million Jews was a perfectly rational act. And yet our civilisation has been constructed precisely in order to avoid such conclusions. We carefully -rationally in fact - assign blame for our crimes to the irrational impulse. In this way we merely shut our eyes to the central and fundamental misunderstanding: And structure is most easily controlled by those who feel themselves to be free of the cumbersome weight represented by common sense and humanism. Structure suits best those whose talents lie in manipulation and who have a taste for power in its purer forms. Thus the Age of Reason has turned out to be the Age of Structure; a time when, in the absence of purpose the drive for power as a value in itself has become the principle indicator of social approval. And the winning of power has become the measure of social merit. The old civilization of class was replaced by one of castes - a highly sophisticated version of corporatism. Knowledge became the currency of power and as such was retained. This civilisation of secretive experts was quite naturally obsessed not by the encouragement of understanding but by the providing of answers. Why the public has clearly rejected the answers that Sigmund Freud provided.

**Chapter 8 : Voltaire's Bastards | Peter Leithart**

*Voltaire's Bastards, Saul's first published work of nonfiction, is an ambitious page meditation on modern culture, tracing the roots of our troubled political, economic and intellectual systems back to the rationalism of the Enlightenment.*

Biography[ edit ] Saul is the son of William Saul, an army officer, and a British mother whose family had a long tradition of military service. Born in Ottawa, and christened in Calgary, he spent his infancy in Alberta and much of his childhood in Manitoba, but graduated from high school in Oakville, Ontario. At a young age he became fluent in both national languages, French and English. He supported himself by running the French subsidiary of a British investment company. After helping to set up the national oil company Petro-Canada in , as assistant to its first chair, Maurice F. Strong , Saul published his first novel, *The Birds of Prey*, in Strong described Saul as "an invaluable, though unconventional, member of my personal staff. Out of this time came his novels, *The Field Trilogy*. It was during those extended periods in Northwest Africa and Southeast Asia where he witnessed fellow writers there suffering government suppression of freedom of expression, which caused him to become interested in the work of PEN International. Between and Saul then published *The Field Trilogy*, which deals with the crisis of modern power and its clash with the individual. He argues that this leads to deformations of thought such as ideology promoted as truth ; the rational but anti-democratic structures of corporatism , by which he means the worship of small groups; and the use of language and expertise to mask a practical understanding of the harm caused by this, and what else our society might do. He argues that the rise of individualism with no regard for the role of society has not created greater individual autonomy and self-determination, as was once hoped, but isolation and alienation. He calls for a pursuit of a more humanist ideal in which reason is balanced with other human mental capacities such as common sense , ethics , intuition , creativity, and memory, for the sake of the common good, and he discusses the importance of unfettered language and practical democracy. These attributes are elaborated upon in his book *On Equilibrium. Reflections of a Siamese Twin*[ edit ] He expanded on these themes as they relate to Canada and its history and culture in *Reflections of a Siamese Twin* In this book, he proposed the idea of Canada being a "soft" country, meaning not that the nation is weak, but that it has a flexible and complex identity, as opposed to the unyielding or monolithic identities of other states. First Peoples , francophones , and anglophones. He emphasizes the willingness of these Canadian nations to compromise with one another, as opposed to resorting to open confrontations. In the same vein, he criticizes both those in the Quebec separatist Montreal School for emphasizing the conflicts in Canadian history and the Orange Order and the Clear Grits traditionally seeking clear definitions of Canadian-ness and loyalty. He identifies six qualities as common to all people: He describes how these inner forces can be used to balance each other, and what happens when they are unbalanced, for example in the case of a "Dictatorship of Reason". Saul rethought and developed this argument in *The Collapse of Globalism and the Reinvention of the World* Far from being an inevitable force, Saul argued that globalization is already breaking up into contradictory pieces and that citizens are reasserting their national interests in both positive and destructive ways. Following the economic collapse he had predicted, *The Collapse of Globalism* was re-issued in with a new epilogue that addressed the current crisis. It is organized into four subsections. Drawing on the work of scholars like Harold Innis and Gerald Friesen, [7] Saul argues that contemporary Canada has been deeply influenced and shaped by Aboriginal ideas and the experience of both Francophone and Anglophone immigrants over the years, from on, during which Aboriginals were either the dominant force in Canada, or equal partners. He argues that Aboriginals are making a rapid "comeback", and that their fundamental influence needs to be recognized in order for non-Aboriginal Canadians to understand themselves. Saul suggests that the ensuing emphasis on "order" has not truly represented Canadian origins. He also suggests that while current Canadian elites reflect a "disturbing mediocrity" this was not always the case. In it, he argues that Canada did not begin in , but that in fact its foundations were laid by LaFontaine and Baldwin much earlier. The two leaders of Lower and Upper Canada , respectively, worked together after the Union to lead a reformist movement for responsible government run by elected citizens instead of a colonial governor. But it was during the "Great Ministry" of 1851 that the two

politicians implemented laws that Saul argues created a more equitable country. They revamped judicial institutions, created a public education system, made bilingualism official, designed a network of public roads, began a public postal system, and reformed municipal governance. Faced with opposition, and even violence, Saul contends that the two men united behind a set of principles and programs that formed modern Canada. The Comeback[ edit ] His most recent work, *The Comeback*: As recently as seventy years ago it was widely assumed that Indians were disappearing, the victims of disease, starvation and their own ineptitude for modern civilization. We are far more used to hearing about the dismal lives of Aboriginal peopleâ€”their family dysfunction, their crime rates, their impoverished communitiesâ€”than we are to being told they are a success story. He is also founder and honorary chair of French for the Future, which encourages bilingual French-English education, chair of the advisory board for the LaFontaine-Baldwin Symposium lecture series, and a patron of Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network. During this period he devoted much of his time to issues of freedom of expression, poverty, public education and bilingualism. He put a specific emphasis on endangered indigenous languages. He called for a further decentralization of PEN, which has centres in countries. He argues that literature and freedom of expression are the same thing; that you cannot have one without the other. Saul has testified before the European Parliament Human Rights Commission on the loss of freedom of expression in Tunisia, has spoken before European Council on Refugees in Exile, and has published an essay on writers in exile, which has been translated into several languages. While its focus is on encouraging new citizens to take their rightful place in Canada, the ICC aims to encourage all citizens â€” new or not â€” to embrace active citizenship in their daily life. Speaking[ edit ] In addition to his selection as the Massey lecturer, Saul has delivered other notable lectures. He gave the Harold Innis Lecture in Saul delivered the J. How do we fix it? Please help by adding reliable sources. Contentious material about living people that is unsourced or poorly sourced must be removed immediately.

## Chapter 9 : Voltaire's Bastards by John Ralston Saul :: A Book Review by Scott London

*Since the Renaissance, and particularly the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, reason has been exalted in Western culture. It has been cited both as the driving force and as the.*