

Starting up

- Intellectuals are people who spend time thinking about complicated ideas and discussing them.
Name some well-known intellectuals and say why they are famous.
- Read through the whole article. Then do the exercises below.

Reading 1

Read the article again to find:

- a) an international conference for political and business leaders, and where it takes place
- b) a US television channel
- c) one of its presenters
- d) a book
- e) a second world war event in the UK
- f) a Dutch word for 'priest'
- g) two scientific journals

Meet Rutger Bregman — outspoken historian and scourge of Davos

Rutger Bregman is best known for upsetting participants' cordiality at last year's World Economic Forum in Davos. In an onstage outburst of Dutch frankness that went viral on social media, he said, "I hear people talk in the language of participation and justice and equality and transparency, but then almost no one raises the real issue: tax avoidance, right? . . . It feels like I'm at a firefighters' conference and no one's allowed to speak about water." Dismissing "stupid philanthropy schemes", he said, "Taxes, taxes, taxes. All the rest is bullshit, in my opinion." His complaint about attendees flying in on private jets to discuss climate change earned him an interview with Tucker Carlson of Fox News. Bregman told Carlson he was "a millionaire funded by billionaires". Carlson swore at him and terminated the interview, not realising Bregman was recording it. That clip went viral, too.

His new book, *Humankind*, displays his gift for synthesising libraries full of academic research into spellbinding reads. I whizzed through *Humankind*'s 480 pages, engrossed by his accounts of soldiers who didn't shoot, the Dutch school without lessons and the Norwegian jail-cum-holiday camp that reforms criminals. It all feeds into his thesis: most people (except the ones who become leaders) are altruistic, at least to those whom they see as members of their in-group (so they might be cruel to migrants, for instance). The claim at times feels too grand, and the book overambitious, but Bregman says this central finding reflects a growing consensus in fields from biology to psychology to anthropology.

I remark that the global lockdowns have mostly backed up his point. The general compliance and kindness to neighbours recall his description of the calm decency in London during the Blitz, when British officials had expected mass disorder. "Afterwards they thought, 'This must be typical British culture,'" Bregman says. "No, it's human nature. Sociologists of disasters have shown that crises tend to create explosions of co-operation and altruism. Now, though, we're going from crisis to more like an occupation. It's as if we're occupied by the virus. That puts us in another era."

Humankind ends by imagining a society that gives people more freedom to learn, work and govern themselves, instead of treating them as selfish, aggressive profit-maximisers who require surveillance by teachers, managers and rulers. I compliment him on his pastor's gift for speckling a sermon with well-chosen metaphors and stories. He replies, "Sometimes people say, 'We've discovered that his father is a dominee [pastor], that explains everything.' Some critics tell me, 'You're such a dominee.' I say: that's exactly what I'm trying to be."

Bregman's spoken Dutch is full of neo-Anglicisms like *gedisrupt* ("disrupted") and *gedebunked* ("debunked"). Past Dutch thinkers could not have lambasted Davos in English with the fluency required for virality. He claims to have been a lazy schoolboy. After he joined a Christian fraternity at Utrecht university, his new friends dragged him to lectures. Suddenly he fell for ideas. "I had such a hunger for knowledge. I still do, but not as strong as then. If I hadn't read at least one or two books in a week, it could make me unhappy."



Vocabulary – matching definitions

Match these definitions with correct forms of words and expressions in the article. (The number of letters is given in brackets. The answer may have or contain a different grammatical function to the original word or expression.)

Paragraph 1

- 1 when people are pleasant and friendly towards each other (10)
- 2 something that someone says that expresses anger (8)
- 3 when information is not hidden (12)
- 4 when rich people give money for particular projects (12)

Paragraph 2

- 5 to combine ideas from different sources (10)
- 6 describing something that holds your attention completely (12)
- 7 to go very fast (5)
- 8 describing someone who helps others (10)
- 9 when many people agree about something (9)

Paragraph 3

- 10 when people do what they are told to do (10)
- 11 when people behave in uncontrolled ways (8)
- 12 when soldiers from one country control another (10)
- 13 describing people who behave well towards each other (6)

Paragraph 4

- 14 the act of watching what people are doing, usually in order to control them (12)
- 15 describing people who are violent, attack others etc (10)
- 16 to tell someone something positive about them (10)

Paragraph 5

- 17 when some things do not continue as they did before (10)
- 18 to prove that someone's ideas are wrong (6)
- 19 to criticise strongly (7)
- 20 when ideas spread very fast on the internet (8)

Grammar – past modals

Rewrite these sentences (some are grammatically incorrect) using the correct past form of the modals in brackets and making any other necessary changes.

- 1 Past Dutch thinkers did not lambast Davos participants with such fluency. (could)
Past Dutch thinkers could not have lambasted Davos participants in English with such fluency.
- 2 Bregman argues that instead of philanthropy, billionaires must pay more taxes over the last 30 years. (Two possibilities – should, ought to)
- 3 Some say that Bregman must not criticise his hosts at Davos last year. (Two possibilities – should, ought to)
- 4 From the beginning, social scientists ought to be more sure that they are able to replicate results. (Two possibilities – should, ought to)
- 5 It's possible that Bregman's earlier conclusions are not shared by everyone. (might)
- 6 In the 1970 experiments, some of the findings must be untrue, as they don't all agree. (Two possibilities – must, have to)
- 7 Just after the Blitz, politicians must reach the conclusion that decency is universal, but instead they saw it as uniquely British. (Two possibilities – could, might)
- 8 It's probable that Bregman read enormous numbers of books at university. (must)

Reading 2

Which are the correct 'takeaways' from the article?

Rutger Bregman...

- a) is not reluctant to say what he really thinks.
- b) thinks that British behaviour in the Blitz was unusual.
- c) considers that people are less co-operative than generally thought.
- d) became interested in ideas at university.
- e) thinks that the results of previous social science experiments can be easily repeated.

Further discussion / Group work

- 1 Is it always a good thing when people say exactly what they think? Give your reasons and some examples.
- 2 Do you agree that people are basically cooperative and altruistic? Discuss your reasoning.

ANSWER KEY

Reading 1

- a) World Economic Forum, Davos
- b) Fox News
- c) Tucker Carlson
- d) *Humankind*
- e) the Blitz
- f) dominee
- g) Nature, Science

Vocabulary

1 cordiality	6 spellbinding	11 disorder	16 compliment
2 outburst	7 whizz	12 occupation	17 disruption
3 transparency	8 altruistic	13 decent	18 debunk
4 philanthropy	9 consensus	14 surveillance	19 lambast
5 synthesise	10 compliance	15 aggressive	20 virality

Grammar

2 Bregman argues that instead of philanthropy, billionaires should have paid more taxes over the last 30 years.

Bregman argues that instead of philanthropy, billionaires ought to have paid more taxes over the last 30 years.

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4 From the beginning, social scientists should have been more sure that they were able to replicate results.

From the beginning, social scientists ought to have been more sure that they were able to replicate results.

5 Bregman's earlier conclusions might not have been shared by everyone.

6 In the 1970 experiments, some of the findings must have been untrue, as they didn't all agree.

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7 Just after the Blitz, politicians could have reached the conclusion that decency is universal, but instead they saw it as uniquely British.

Just after the Blitz, politicians might have reached the conclusion that decency is universal, but instead they saw it as uniquely British.

8 Bregman must have read enormous numbers of books at university.

Reading 2

a) and d)

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