



We Have Met the Enemy: Self-Control in an Age of Excess

Daniel Akst

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From Reader Review We Have Met the Enemy: Self-Control in an Age of Excess for online ebook

Travis Timmons says

I picked up this book on recommendation from Tyler Cowen's writing.

Really important subject matter, reanimated for the 21st century and given new urgency. Oddly, self-control and self-discipline don't seem more popular as virtues to explore and rehabilitate for the 21st century. Akst's book begins the conversation at least.

Akst draws upon fantastic sources (literary, scientific, philosophical, personal), but seems to struggle to pull it all together in a coherent non-fiction narrative in the way a Malcolm Gladwell might. Thus, the book is an uneven read from chapter-to-chapter and from section-to-section within chapters. Many morsels, but not a meal!

Erin says

This book is an exploration of the concept of self-control from all angles. Daniel Akst discusses the definition of self-control, pulls in the thoughts of philosophers on the subject from ancient Greece to the modern day, and looks at recent neuroscience. He looks at current issues such as addictions, the increase in obesity in America, and the role of government in individuals' lives. He maintains a well-rounded view of the topic through most of the book, waiting until the last few chapters to give his recommendations about how people and society should support individuals' abilities to follow through on their stated goals.

Akst's humor (sometimes a bit contrived) infuses the writing from the first paragraph. He assumes his readers are well-read, peppering the book with references to history, philosophy, literature, and pop culture alike. Within this framework, he walks readers through the central theme of self-control from the basics through the complexities of philosophy and brain research without leaving them stranded along the way.

I found the book thought-provoking and engaging, and even jotted down a few tips to help fortify myself against temptation the next time it presents itself.

Disclaimer: I received a copy of this book for free through the GoodReads First Reads program.

Jennifer says

A goodreads First reads win! The book "We Have Met the Enemy... Self Control in an Age of Excess" was an interesting study.

The author keeps the reader interested with all sorts of fascinating tales of out-of-control stories that range in finance, weight gain, time, etc. He even explains that he is not exempt. From the opening about the size weight scales are being made for people... and the fact that in their showroom is a display of doughnuts for customers... to help them browse! From that point on, I enjoyed the book.

This is not my typical book... but I enjoyed some of the scientific studies... and comparisons. I would be

remiss to say that there were parts I got lost in. That and I read a lot while I was working out. I think I enjoyed the last chapter which summed everything up and pointed out ways that we possibly could gain better self control... although as the author points out... that can even be as subjective as the person who is trying to control himself!

Skylar Burris says

Technological development and “weapons of mass consumption,” says Akst, have made it too easy for us to overindulge in everything from food, sex, and drugs to credit, television, and the internet. We have become a nation of Madame Bovarys, over-indulgent, bored, listless, and killing ourselves. For the full review, click [here](#).

Michael says

<http://www.boston.com/ae/books/article...>

Les says

Because it seems appropriate to have at least 6 "currently reading" books fired up while reading about excess. I'm hoping to learn how to lose a good 500 pounds, stop having all the sex, and reign in my gambling habit. Wish me luck. After reading a few pages of this, maybe I am not all that excessive in my habits.

Janet says

I was very surprised that I ended up giving this book five stars, especially since there were a couple of sections I skimmed, but overall it was both fun and insightful.

While not denying the physical/chemical realities of addiction and disease, never stooping to preachiness or being holier-than-thou, Akst makes a strong case for the lack of self control as one of the deadliest conditions of modern life.

His hero is Odysseus, who - being both self-aware and cognizant of the threats in his environment during the trip home from Troy - managed to enjoy the delights that presented themselves without falling prey to them.

Akst discusses the banking crash, Freud and Maslow, the Puritans and the 1960's, consumerism, social controls (and the lack thereof), all with an entertaining, breezy style that still delivers a convincing case for developing better self awareness, better self control and -- consequently -- a better, healthier life.

Michael Huang says

If you feel that all kinds of addictions appear to be proliferating, you are right and it is because technology has vastly improved the production capability of seductive pleasures and both practical and cultural barriers to short-term pleasures are lower than they used to be. At such a time, we need more self control, but that is a tall order. The result is about a quarter million people in the US undergo weight loss operations (on operating tables that are 4 feet wide instead of the normal 3); and in about 25 years, type 2 diabetes quadrupled to 24M today. This book touches on many aspects of self control: its relation to education, cultural norm, physiology, philosophy, politics ... Here is a sample list of nuggets:

- * Suicide is impulsive. When a barrier is added to a bridge in Washington, suicide rate from the bridge drops to zero without driving perspective "customers" to a nearby bridge as some argued would happen.
- * Crime is not so much as committed more by male than female as being committed by people with low self control (who tend to be male).
- * Simon Patten helped to turn the social norm by arguing "restraint, denial, and negation" are old hat.
- * We have possibly a lot less free will than we would like to believe. Case in point: we are easy targets of a technique called priming. Spinoza even argues that men are deceived into thinking themselves free merely because they are conscious of their action but "ignorant of the causes by which they are determined".

This is a rather long-winded treatment on self-control. There isn't really a cohesive point or rigorous effort to cull studies on the subject. It is just a number of loosely related chapters germane to the subject and studies are cited more like anecdotes (so some findings may have already been modified). Nevertheless, I found it to be interesting on the balance and makes you a bit more informed on the subject of self control.

Tanya says

I just won this book through Goodreads (yes, sisters, I reviewed the silly highland hunk book last night, and won this one hours later), and it sounds like a great one to start off the year. It's subtitled "Self Control in the Age of Excess" and will fit right in with some of my New Year's Resolutions!

This one gets a 3 1/2 from me, but I'm rounding up to counter some early low ratings by people who probably weren't the intended audience of this book. I, as others probably did, initially thought this would be a sort of self-help book, "ten steps to conquering the enemy within" or some such thing. In truth it takes a much more academic approach, delving into historical developments in the psychology of self-restraint. I can't help but think that it would be off the charts on the SRI (scholastic reading inventory) comprehension index; I had to reread many sentences multiple times just to assimilate the vocabulary and context. This is not to say, however, that the book was dry, because humor was continually interspersed.

As someone who has always been extremely self-disciplined, I don't know that I was inspired to greater heights of control by "We Have Met the Enemy," but I enjoyed learning what Akst had to share.

Krista says

I was intrigued by the subtitle of this book: Self-Control in an Age of Excess and entered to win it from Goodreads First Reads. Although I just finished it today, I have been thinking about how I would review this all week. I will begin by saying that I hate the cover of this book. It is ridiculous. But I am glad that I opened the book and read it. I didn't know what to expect but assumed that it would probably be a fatphobic diatribe. I was impressed that it was actually more of an academic evaluation of self-control in our modern society. And really, I feel like this book explores self-discipline more than anything. Ever since a college English professor told me he thought I was "brilliant, but undisciplined," I have been wrestling with the notion of self-discipline and how and when to wield it in this modern day society. I can procrastinate with the best of them...I am prone to addictive behaviors...I definitely do not exert discipline in many areas of my life. And yet in other areas of my life, I exhibit a huge amount of discipline that helps me to accomplish quite a bit. After reading *We Have Met the Enemy*, I feel like I have a few more tools in terms of understanding what makes me tick and perhaps how to be more successful in setting and establishing goals that have eluded me in the past. I enjoyed the many examples, the intense research and the conversational tone of this book. I did not like some aspects to it...like I would constantly find myself asking...is this person conservative and cloaking it? In the end, capitalism was questioned as much as anything and I feel like really Akst is probably some type of libertarian. He did make some gross generalizations that I don't agree with about working-class/poor people and at one point he was talking about the messed up book, *The Bell Curve*, in a way that made me think that he agreed with its racist tenants. And he also made some inaccurate comments in the chapter about crimes of passion in terms of gender equality under the law. But...I do feel like even if we do not share the same viewpoints of this world, Akst is somebody that I could sit at the table with and have a great conversation or debate. And I am yearning for that these days...so I would recommend that anybody interested in history, a good read, or truly learning more about the concept of self-discipline.

Carly says

We Have Met the Enemy is a rather in-depth analysis of the excesses in our modern society and how we got to this point. I was intrigued by this book as soon as I heard about it. For the most part, this was an interesting book, but it was a little dry at times. The in-depth study of our excessive lifestyle was much more than I was expecting. There was a great deal of interesting information, but at the same time there was a bit too much and I found myself skimming parts to get to the more interesting parts.

I did like the author's sarcastic and humorous writing style. I was nervous about some of the content, especially when I saw on the inside book flap the sentence stating that "Freedom is dangerous". I found that statements like that in this book are just part of the author's sarcastic ways. If you ask me, freedom is only dangerous to those who don't know how to handle it, which is pretty much what this book is about. I had some trepidation while venturing into the chapter called Government and Self-Government. But, I liked when the author said, "One way the government might protect us, paradoxically, is to expose us fully to the consequences of our actions, no matter how terrible." That is pretty much my stance on this society we are living in. I have chosen to eat right and not spend tons of money I don't have. I didn't need the government to tell me that. The author does proceed to say some things that I don't entirely agree with, but I just don't want to fill this review with all of that.

Overall, this book is pretty good. It's not quite what I was expecting, but I did learn a few things and I did learn that I am grateful to have some amount of self control and firm values that really do seem to be missing

these days.

David Glasgow says

Akst begins this book by complaining about what an arduous task it is to write a book.

This may seem a poor welcome for one's "reader-clients," but it works. Before I'd turned the first page I recognized already that *We Have Met the Enemy* would not only require me to look unflinchingly at the dread and shame that so often accompany self-improvement efforts, but also would (through humor and self-deprecating sympathy) help me to reframe these efforts (weight management, long-term projects, and even avoiding bad moods, to name a few) as fully achievable goals.

It's not quite a "self-help" book, as one of the fundamental lessons of the book is that we humans can't control ourselves nearly as well as we think we can. But the literary examples and research Akst cites all offer optimism: we may be lousy at resisting temptation *now*, but we are better than we think at avoiding temptation *tomorrow*. By securing networks of accountability, controlling our environment, and nurturing good habits, we can "meet the enemy," and discover that we really can triumph over ourselves and be proud of the results.

Even if it's not always fun.

Faith says

Eh.

I won this book as a Goodreads giveaway.

I tried to like this, but I really just can't understand why I would want to read an entire book about lack of self control in modern society and how our society has changed in a bad way.

It was actually quite depressing, and I couldn't even finish it.

To be fair, this is not my kind of book and not something I would have picked up had I not received it as a giveaway book.

Rachael says

A fun, accessible book Akst does a fine job of exploring the issue of agency in a world of plenty. He argues that the fact that we face these choices is a positive thing, it means that we have enough security and prosperity to worry about getting fat, however the greatest threat to our own wellbeing has become our ability to control ourselves. No longer will scarcity reign us in, for the first time in history we have to depend on the strength of our will alone to stay in shape, not to cheat, and so forth. He offers what he thinks is a method for dealing with the Herculean challenge via moderation as was explicated by Aristotle. He also rightly castigates Freud and his legacy and includes fascinating material about the harmfulness of emotional

venting.

Overall I liked his book, and taken for what it is, a light, popular exploration of a variety of topics about self control in the contemporary age, it is thought provoking. However I did think Akst made a couple of mistakes. One is that he seems to advocate for some kind of physicalist position on mind-body dualism yet advocates very clearly for libertarian free will. Good luck with that. The second is that he seems to assume that people vote for their own self interest. This is important because he seems to advocate for a mild paternalism in policy making. But in actuality the problem isn't that we vote for our self interest, it is that people consistently vote for what they perceive to be in the best interests of the nation and often our views are rather confused on that level.

Jadewolf says

A very interesting read that explores the question of how much responsibility should we take for our actions in an age of excess!

I found the author's writing style a little different than what I'm used to and I was tripping over & misreading sentences throughout the book. Not an addictive page turner, but once I read the entire book, I was thinking about different topics and arguments from it every day!

I found the author explored the different viewpoints about self-discipline well, with a little humour added in! I enjoyed the last few chapters of the book the most; about the role of self-discipline in our everyday lives.

Best suited to those who have an interest in the subject, or those studying psychology and self-control.
