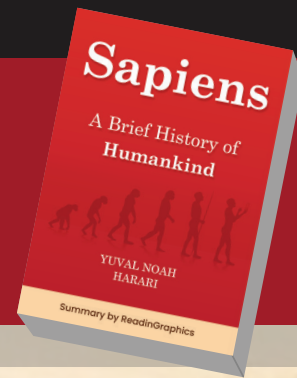


SAPIENS

A BRIEF HISTORY OF HUMANKIND

Yuval Noah Harari



Billions of years of evolution



THE 3 KEY HUMAN REVOLUTIONS

There are 3 key revolutions in human history that shaped our lives and hold implications for our future.



The Cognitive Revolution

Sapiens existed since 200,000 years ago. However, we only evolved fictive language and left Africa around 70,000 yrs ago. Within another 40,000 yrs, we had caused mass extinction (including that of all other Homo species) in several continents.



LANGUAGE & IMAGINATION



Animals can only cooperate using info in their DNA or via close interaction. This limits their **scale & flexibility** of cooperation.



Sapiens are unique in our ability to imagine & communicate things that don't exist. Thru' **myths & common beliefs** (e.g. religion, human rights), we can get large numbers of strangers to cooperate flexibly.



Religions, corporations, and stock markets are all **imagined realities**. Yet, they enable us to rapidly transform our social structures & environment.



HUNTER-GATHERERS



For the bulk of our existence, Sapiens were hunter-gatherers. This shaped much of our **biological, psychological & social traits**.



Hunter-gatherers lived in small intimate bands and **roamed freely** in search of food. They consumed a wide range of foods, and probably had more leisure time.



They were **animists** who believed in sharing the land with other beings, e.g. plants, animals, rivers & rocks.



CONQUERING THE PLANET



About 100,000 yrs ago, there were **≥6 Homo species** on earth. They became extinct after *Homo sapiens* arrived.



About 45,000 yrs ago, we started to settle in other continents outside Africa. Each time, we **changed the ecosystem** & drove many species to extinction.



We **amplified the impact** of climate change, using fire to destroy stretches of ecology and killing large animals faster than they could breed/evolve.



Sapiens changed the ecosystem so fast that we drove many other species to extinction. We're no doubt the most destructive species on earth.



The Agricultural Revolution

About 10,000 years ago, we finished transiting from foraging to farming. Agriculture supposedly brought a better lifestyle for mankind, but this is questionable in reality.



THE MYTH OF A BETTER LIFE



Farming increased the food per unit area & **humans multiplied quickly**. As large villages/cities emerged, farmers became attached to their physical homes, and 90% of the people became peasants slogging for the 10% elites. New myths of gods & empires emerged.



Farming led to growth, but also diseases, poor nutrition, long working hours for man & misery for our livestock. Yet, each new generation brought more changes to our environment & imagined realities until **we could no longer turn back the clock**.



STORIES MADE REAL



While biology brings possibilities, culture brings restrictions. To justify **rules & hierarchies**, each imagined order creates its own stories/fictions.



To be stable, imagined orders must:

- Exist in our material world (e.g. rituals & symbols);
- Be linked to our individual desires (e.g. safety & security); and
- Be built on inter-subjective beliefs (i.e. held by masses of people). Such beliefs are usually indoctrinated from childhood.



KEEPING RECORDS



Unlike other animals, our imagined systems (e.g. taxes, ownership, laws) can't be encoded in DNA. **Numbers & writing** made it possible for us to pass on huge amounts of such data.



As the amount of data increased, we created ways to **file & retrieve** info, leading to bureaucracy and compartmentalized thinking. Today, we increasingly rely on computers, which can store, process & retrieve data much better than we can.



Sapiens' population grew, but so did our workload & pace of life. We created new stories and imagined orders to justify our new realities.



The Scientific Revolution

Science (coupled with imperialism and capitalism) has transformed our world in the last few centuries. How we direct our scientific efforts today could very well shape the future of *Homo sapiens* and other species.

A LEAP IN PROGRESS



Unlike religions (which claim to be the full and absolute truths), science assumes that anything can be proven wrong. It uses observations, data and tests to disprove myths & uncover solutions, bringing **massive progress**.



However, science is still funded and driven by **economic, political, and religious interests**. In fact, our explosive progress has been largely due to the marriage of science, empire and capital.



SCIENCE + EMPIRE



In the 18th century, Western nations conquered many distant lands. They didn't become powerful colonial masters due to better technology; they simply had a bigger desire for **knowledge and profits**.



Western imperialists killed & enslaved entire populations. Yet, they could **justify their rule ideologically** thru claims of superior genes as well as the scientific progress & modern systems they brought to the colonies.



SCIENCE + CAPITALISM



Growth is the real driver of our modern economy. Credit is given on the belief of bigger returns in future, creating real growth & more credit. Without **infinite growth**, the system will collapse.



To **sustain growth**, we find better ways to tap new/existing energy sources and mass-produce animals for food. The rich must invest more (Capitalism) while the rest of us must buy more (Consumerism).



Today, we're caught in an endless growth cycle, with an ever-increasing rate of change. What other irreversible changes will this revolution bring?

LESSONS FROM HISTORY



The 3 Key Unifiers

Over the years, small fragmented cultures have gradually converged into larger, more complex cultures due to 3 unifying factors.



Money

Money has value only because we trust that others will accept it in exchange for what we want. It enables strangers and even rivals to cooperate and transact. Unfortunately, we also tend to lose trust in people if they run out of money.



Empire

Empires were the most common political system in the last 2500 yrs. After each conquest, locals were killed & oppressed. Yet, over time, they forget their origins and adopt common cultures that're hybrids of their own and the ruling elites'.



Religion

Over time, we've embraced animism, polytheism & monotheism. Today, most of us are Syncretic, adopting a mix of ideas & practices. Humanism (the belief that humans are superior) is the main ideology, coexisting with other religions.



A Permanent Revolution

Each revolution brought Sapiens more growth and evolutionary success. But are we truly happier? How may our choices now affect us in the future?



Intelligent Design

Scientific progress in biological engineering, cyborg engineering and inorganic lifeforms are likely to affect Sapiens' evolution and may even bring an end to our species.



Irreversible Changes

Many of the changes we're making to our ecosystem, biology and social structures can't be reversed. Our collective choices today will determine the future of mankind and the planet.



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