

Notes on
Sapiens
A Brief History of Humankind
Book by Yuval Harari
Notes by William Gasarch

1 I. The Cognitive Revolution

1.1 An Animal of No Significance

NOT clear that a bigger brain, being smarter, is worth the effort in terms of evolution. Brain is 2-3% of our body but consumes 25% of our food.

Big head- harder to give birth, which is why we come out in nine months and need lots of help. Other animals have longer in the Womb and need less help. So mothers stuck raising kids instead of hunting and gathering (though some did both- my other book)

Standing Upright not necc good- backaches and stiff necks.

We had big brains and walked upright for a long time but were still NOT top of the food chain for a long time. What changed? Fire helped but was not the key.

1.2 Tree of knowledge

So how did Sapiens get to be tops? Language! 3ways:

1. HEY- there's a lion there, avoid it!
2. Gossip about other humans so learn who to avoid, who is naughty and nice,
3. (most important) Sapiens could reason about abstractions: Myths that hold us together and allow us to cooperate in large groups. Examples: Businesses, countries, religions, Money, legal system, human rights, Trust (and hence Trade). These myths can change rapidly- Monarchy is clearly the best form of gov! Democracy is best form of gov! French revolution.

Author says these are all Myths but later in the book seems to support Human rights and democracy.

Neanderthals were stronger than Sapiens but we could organize and defeat them through language.

1.3 A Day in the life of Adam and Eve

Hunter-Gatherer had immense differences. Some had poly-sex -needed many men to have sex with a women to get her pregnant. Other monogamy. All were nomadic. Could meet very few from another tribe. When tribes met- sometimes good, sometimes bad. People had to have many skills: *Each individual had to make stone knives, mend torn cloth, lay rabbit traps, deal w avalanche, snakebites, lions.* Their brains BIGGER than ours since in our age imbeciles can survive and pass on their genes.

Hunter-Gatherer's worked 35-40 hours a week on more interesting work than many today, and had a healthier diet. High infant mortality drove down avg life span, but if you lived past 20, you could live a long time. Varied diet so a blight on one crop not a disaster (contrast- Irish Potato Famine). BUT- bad medicine, and old and injured people often abandoned. Those disliked and expelled just died.

1.4 The Flood

Sapiens getting to Australia by boats very impressive. Once there they wiped out most species. This is common for people to do.

2 The Agriculture Revolution

2.1 History's biggest fraud

The Agriculture Revolution happened in the Middle East, China, Cent Am, but not in Australia, Alaska, South Africa because needs domesticated animals. Farm life WORSE than Hunter-Gather life. Less healthier lifestyle, more work hours. But more humans-per-acre could be supported. Better for the species, worse for you. Bad deal for animals also. Also non-nomadic, for good or ill.

Similar to current Luxury trap- Want to retire early and enjoy life, but get too used to having nice things so have to keep working. Luxuries become

necessities and create new obligations-like to check your email (Tell both stories- email and class webpages.)

2.2 Building Pyramids

Hunter-Gatherer didn't think or care about the future since they lived day-to-day. Farmers had to think about the future- when will it rain? When to plant? Uncertainty. Once more people could live in a place needed government to settle disputes and carry out other functions (Later in the book they say that many disputes were handled locally and only later did government deal with that. Not sure of the timing. Myths needed to give Gov authority. E.g Code of Hammurabi handed down by the Gods (He says Code of H no better or worse than Dec of Ind- rights endowed by our creator. later in book he seems to disagree with that.)

The imagined order has to be maintained. The people, even the elites truly believe in it. And it is reinforced. Example: Individualism and a child having his own room decorated his own way.

2.3 Memory Overload

Agriculture implies need gov implies need taxes implies need written records. At first numbers. Spoken and written lang originally disjoint. As they wanted to write down more, the lang got bigger. Reading, Writing, Organizing, Calendars all came to be.

2.4 There is no justice in history

Imagined hierarchies form. Bad since arbitrary. Good since people know how to treat each other. These hierarchies are based on accidentally hist dev, nothing real. But treated as real. Diff ones- wealth, family breeding, race, religion, other things, have been used. Circle- Disc Laws -¿ Poverty and lack of ed-¿ Cultural pred-¿ Disc laws.

Why have women been considered inferior for so long? Muscle power- no-many jobs even long ago did not need strength Men more aggressive-but why is that better? Diff Survival skills? But women who are dep can goto other women. NO ANSWER . Darn.

3 The Unification of Mankind

3.1 The Arrow of History

Cultures have contradictions. Medieval Europe- Christianity and chivalry/Christianity-nonviolence Chivalry- defend our honor with blood.

America: Equitable society (Dems), Maximal Freedom (Reps)

World over time getting much more connected. Everything influences everything else. Example: Auth culture myth. Italy spaghetti uses stuff that been in Italy recently. Trade.

3.2 The Scent of Money

When Society got to big could not use barter so had to have money. Money is whatever people have trust in (In Prison its Cigarettes). Gold came to be the main thing since when there was a price diff people would speculate until it equalized.

3.3 Imperial Visions

An Empire rules over many diff peoples AND has flexible and expanding borders. They homogenize people so creates a lack of diversity. Empires can last a very long time (so they work) and need not be bad. His argument here I dont find convincing. He says that the empire gives the people a common culture and influences them later but does not way why they are good. I try: Order, protection, and better than what they had before or after. Often ended up merging with the conquered.

Often empires thought they were doing the conquered a favor. Often this was not true. Spread your true faith, give them culture, and now USA wants to export democracy w guns.

Good Example: Britain and India. Brutal but left it with Democracy and trains.

Today- world empire? All countries are linked.

3.4 The law of religion

Religion a divider but also a uniter as it gives authorities a supernatural authority.

Hunter-Gatherer has very local spirit religions- animism. Then polytheism in the Ag Rev since many gods offered many solutions to problems like lack of rain. Polytheists did not try to convert or fight wars over gods - you have your local gods, I have mine, Its all good.

Romans didn't like Christians only because didn't bow down to the emperor. Only 1000 ever killed, as opposed to St Bartholomew day massacre 1572 where between 5000 and 10000 protestants were slaughtered by Catholics. Pope was delighted and had a Fresco of the scene drawn. More generally many 100's of thoughts were killed in these wars.

Some monotheist religions never caught on since they were still really local. Judaism was never quite universal since it puts the Jews in a special place. mono and tribal.

Christianity the first truly universal faith. But still shades of polytheism-saints.

Misc- some faiths have good and bad equal, some faiths are not about God (Buddhism)

Modern creeds- communism, liberalism, capitalism. Humanism is three categories: whats important, the individual, the family, the state or all of humanity. Shades inbetween

3.5 The Secret of Success

NOT-deterministic. History is often arbitrary and NOT for the benefit of humanity. (Later says why things today ARE better- less wars.)

4 The Scientific Revolution

4.1 The Discovery of Ignorance

Science biggest jump: people admitting there are things that (a) they DON'T know, and (b) ARE important. Prior to 1500 if it wasn't in the bible then it was not important. (IF we don't have it, you don't want it.) Then realizing need measurements and math, then realizing can get new tech. Important that science still admits ignorance: Popper's theory, String th vs ID. Needed also the believe that progress was possible. *The poor will always be with us*— we now HAVE the means to stop that, though we don't- so J was right(?) Admitting ignorance- Having maps with blanks on it, admitting don't know.

Actuarial science started by widows fund for ministers wives- The preachers DID NOT pray to God for the answer, but instead found a mathematicians.

Early on new INVENTIONS were not by scientists but by craftsmen. WW I brought science and tech together(?). Book unclear on this point. Military Technology- in old days better army was better organized, had better training, military tech not thought of as a thing.

Human mortality much better now- That queen who had 15 dead kids. Gilgamesh proj to make people immortal- I am more skeptical than author is.

4.2 The marriage of Science and Empire

Naval Expeditions would have scientists on it to collect data to help later wars, and how to conquer. Also scientists gave *proofs* that white man is superior, hence justifying the conquests. White man's burden. To be fair sometimes the conquests brought good, but mostly not. Can't explore alt time.

Why did Europe become empires and not China: *They lacked the values, myths, judicial app*, Mainly Science and Capitalism. (Guns, Germs, and Steel would say this came from their geography- this is NOT a contradiction.) ALSO- When Europe conquered they LEARNED FROM the people they conquered, whereas Islam and China did not (Agrees with Lewis's *What went wrong*)

How could Europe conquered Aztecs and such. Aztecs could not communicate and warn other peoples of whats up. Better Technology, desire to conquer, Cute thought- not like now where *liberal's at home would decry the massacres*.

Non-Europeans cultures have NOW adapted Europe ways- like demanding democracy.

4.3 The Capitalist Creed

Credit more important than natural resources. Dutch example- they had good credit rating while Spain did not. Need Ind. Judiciary, and good reputation.

Adam Smith- Economics can be a win-win. This was revolutionary (still not believed by anti-immigration folks today.)

Funding science and technology- what innovations will help my business. More important to get cows to produce more milk then to make cows happy.

Actual companies were mini-empires, conquering nations economically. Indonesia-VOC, Greece-bonds. Gov gets involved. *Indian subcontinent conquering not by Britain but by the mercenary army of the British East India company* Only in 1838 did England take over.

Mississippi bubble lost France credibility and they lost in long run.

Cult of free market. It can do no wrong. But it has (slavery) and there are some things that the market does not work no (Equifax). Adam Smith assumed profits reinvested and create more jobs. But can be spend on Luxuries. Monopolies may drive down wages and up prices. (Odd- Amazon is NOT raising prices and prob won't.)

Christianity and Nazism killed millions from hatred. Economics killed millions from indifference.

4.4 The wheels of industry

A Key to modern tech is converting energies- Steam engine heat->movement.

Slavery (Animal cruelty) caused Not be hatred (for slaves that came later) but from economics.

Consumerism- convincing people they need stuff. Reversal: in older times the rich had luxuries and the poor did not. Now the Rich take great care managing their money while the poor spend more than they have.

4.5 A Perm Revolution

We are now TIME-dep and have much less family ties. *We are gaining efficiency but at the cost of connectivity* is not new its the tale of human history.

Mixed Bag- local disputes settled by cops more fair than by family. No Honor killings. Better Justice. But less community. (Example not given: mom and pop grocery stores were MUCH more expensive then current super markets). But alienation, suicide.

Imagined communities- Colbert Nation, Dead-heads, Madonna-fans, on-line communities, Iraq and many mid east countries are arb borders.

We are NOW in constant revolution, constant change.

Our era is one of the most peaceful. Some wars are just unthinkable (e.g. England and France). Why? No longer profitable- old days you cold steal

resources and land, but stealing no-how is impossible. (Jews were doctors since when the pogroms came they can take your land but not your knowledge.) Exception that TESTS the rule: Iraq invaded Kuwait for oil. ALSO- atom bomb makes war more expensive. So do conventional more advanced weapons (Ramsey- History article). ALSO- peace - trade- more lucrative. We owe China too much money for them to want to fight us. And if we fight them we lose borrowing. ALSO- War seen as bad. World too inter-dependent.

Governments help keep local-murders down. Lack of motivation keeps state vs state wars down. Gov against its own people still a problem.

Soviet Union collapsed without war. England gave up many of its territories without war.

4.6 And the lived happily ever after

Are we happier now than earlier? Happiness depends on external things? Prozac? Expectations vs experience? Life having meaning?

4.7 The End of Homo Sapien

Will technology make ID a reality?