

A history of humankind distorted by evolutionary thinking

Sapiens: A brief history of humankind

Yuval Noah Harari

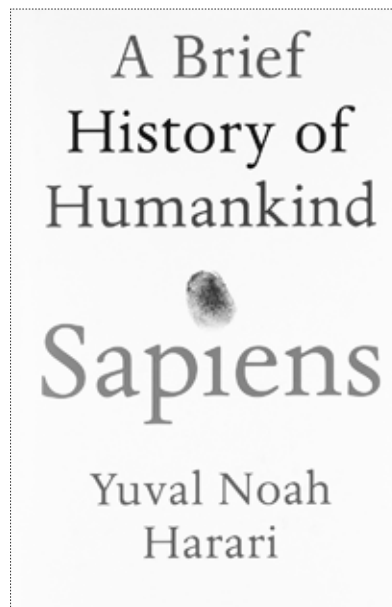
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The book *Sapiens: A brief history of humankind* is written by Yuval Noah Harari, an Israeli historian who lectures at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. From his book Harari makes clear his belief that: “As far as we can tell, from a purely scientific viewpoint, human life has absolutely no meaning. Humans are the outcome of blind evolutionary processes that operate without goal or purpose” (p. 438). Hence, as his view of history is based on a blind acceptance of atheistic evolution, it is no surprise that Harari’s adherence to this materialistic dogma greatly influences his view of history.

The book does not attempt to argue the case for evolution, rather it just assumes it to be true, and then conveniently selects tales, from the evolutionary just-so stories approved menu list, that suit the narrative of history being espoused. As such, if evolution is false, then a lot of the events described in the book never happened, particularly regarding prehistory, or are misinterpreted by being viewed through the distorted lens of evolution.

The book is lengthy (466 pages excluding notes and index), covering a lot of ground, with a tendency to discuss topics superficially, moving



quickly from one subject to another. This necessitates this review being very selective in items looked at, focusing mostly on the first part of the book, as that is where evolution is most heavily relied upon to interpret history.

Big assumptions

The opening sentence of the book makes it clear that the big bang theory of the origin of the universe 13.5 Ga ago is accepted as fact (p. 3). Also assumed is that life on Earth began 3.8 Ga ago, when “certain molecules combined to form particularly large and intricate structures called organisms” (p. 3). However, the big bang theory is beset with numerous insurmountable problems,¹ and naturalistic origin of life scenarios are essentially discredited,² and so the blind acceptance of these events is not a good start. The reader is informed

that three important revolutions shaped the course of history—the Cognitive, Agricultural, and Scientific revolutions—and the book is said to tell “the story of how these three revolutions have affected humans and their fellow organisms” (p. 3).

The usual ‘ape-man’ story

We are told: “Just 6 million years ago, a single female ape had two daughters. One became the ancestor of all chimpanzees, the other is our grandmother” (p. 5). The author also clarifies that he uses the term ‘Sapiens’ to refer to members of the species *Homo sapiens*, with the term ‘human’ referring “to all extant members of the genus *Homo*” (p. 6). It is said that “Humans first evolved in East Africa about 2.5 million years ago from an earlier genus of apes called *Australopithecus*”, and that about 2 Ma ago some of these ‘archaic’ humans migrated to North Africa, Asia and Europe (p. 6) (figure 1). Neandertals and *Homo erectus* are said to have evolved from these migrating humans, the latter supposedly having survived for close to 2 Ma (p. 7). The dwarfing of some of these archaic humans on the island of Flores is the tale put forward to explain the emergence of the tiny human known as *Homo floresiensis* (also humans known as ‘hobbits’) (pp. 7–8). The mystery species *Homo denisova* is briefly discussed, as is the alleged continuous evolution in Africa, producing species such as *Homo rudolfensis*, *Homo ergaster*, and eventually *Homo sapiens* (p. 8). This is all standard evolutionary talking point stuff which is again, like with the big bang and naturalistic origin of life, blindly accepted as fact. Creationists dispute the evolutionary origins of *Homo sapiens*, with alternative assessment of the so-called ‘ape-man’ fossils available.³



Figure 1. A replica skeleton of the *Homo erectus* Nariokotome Boy (KNM-WT 15000) from West Turkana, Kenya, displayed at the American Museum of Natural History, New York. It is also known as Turkana Boy. Some refer to it as a member of *Homo ergaster*. It is dated by evolutionists to 1.6 Ma ago.

Large brains and upright walking

There is of course the obligatory evolutionary ‘junkie’ stories about what drove the increase in size of the large human brain (Harari admits to not knowing) and what led to upright walking, with stiff necks, backaches, and difficulties for women in childbirth the prices supposedly paid (pp. 9–11). It is said that only in the last 100,000 years (“with the rise of *Homo sapiens*”) did man do a “spectacular leap from the middle to the top” of the food chain (p. 12). The author then makes the following unjustifiable claim:

“Having so recently been one of the underdogs of the savannah, we are full of fears and anxieties over our position, which makes us doubly cruel and dangerous. Many historical calamities, from deadly wars to ecological catastrophes,

have resulted from this over-hasty jump” (p. 13).

Based on God’s Word, Christians believe that man’s problem is his sin nature, not some savannah hangover. Harari brings up the idea that “there is a direct link between the advent of cooking, the shortening of the human intestinal track”, and the growth of the “jumbo brains of Neandertals and Sapiens” (pp. 13–14). The decrease in energy consumption of the intestines supposedly paves the way for the growth of energy-guzzling large brains. I remember visiting the David H. Koch Hall of Human Origins at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, Washington, DC, in 2013, and witnessing some museum guide deliver a similar tale to visitors. My opinion on the story has not changed, it was and remains an evolutionary fairy tale.

Out of Africa confusion

The author states that “most scientists agree that by 150,000 years ago, East Africa was populated by Sapiens that looked just like us”, and that “Scientists also agree that about 70,000 years ago, Sapiens from East Africa spread into the Arabian peninsula, and from there they quickly overran the entire Eurasian landmass” (p. 15). According to the Out of Africa theory, these Sapiens were then confronted by humans (e.g. Neandertals) that were already settled in most of Eurasia (p. 15). Two theories, the Interbreeding Theory and Replacement Theory, are then discussed in relation to the fate of these other humans, with the author seeming to prefer a Replacement Theory where “Neanderthals and Denisovans contributed only a small amount of DNA to our present-day genome” (p. 17).

Even from a strictly evolutionary viewpoint the above scenario appears obsolete based on recent studies. For

example, consider the finding of ‘early modern human’ (‘ancient *H. sapiens*’) mitochondrial DNA in a Neandertal bone (a femur) from Germany, dated by evolutionists to 124,000 years ago.⁴ According to them, it was the result of interbreeding with locals and ‘modern human ancestors’ who entered Europe more than 219,000 years ago. Hence, this is much earlier than the 70,000 years ago migration date suggested by Harari. Also, a *Homo sapiens* fossil skull from Jebel Irhoud, Morocco (figure 2) was recently re-dated by evolutionists from about 160,000 years ago to a much older 315,000 years ago,⁵ and so, from purely an evolutionary point of view, humans appeared much earlier in Africa than first thought, and it may not have been in East Africa that they first appeared. The above also indicates that the preferred Out of Africa theory of modern human origins is a chaotic mess.

Tree of Knowledge mutation

We are told that the “appearance of new ways of thinking and communicating, between 70,000 and 30,000 years ago, constitutes the



Figure 2: A cast of the Irhoud 1 *Homo sapiens* skull from Jebel Irhoud, Morocco, displayed at the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, Washington, DC. It was recently re-dated by evolutionists from about 160,000 years ago to a much older 315,000 years ago.

Cognitive Revolution” (p. 23). As to what caused this, the author admits to not being sure, but states:

“The most commonly believed theory argues that accidental genetic mutations changed the inner wiring of the brains of Sapiens, enabling them to think in unprecedented ways and to communicate using an altogether new type of language. We might call it the Tree of Knowledge mutation. Why did it occur in Sapiens DNA rather than in that of Neanderthals? It was a matter of pure chance, as far as we can tell” (pp. 23–24).

It is said that this “was not the first language”, nor was it “the first vocal language”, and that the most common answer as to what makes it special

“... is that our language is amazingly supple. We can connect a limited number of sounds and signs to produce an infinite number of sentences, each with a distinct meaning. We can thereby ingest, store and communicate a prodigious amount of information about the surrounding world” (p. 24).

The author sees the above theory, and the notion that “Our language evolved as a way of gossiping” (p. 25), as both valid, but believes the truly unique feature of our language is “the ability to transmit information about things that do not exist at all” (p. 27).

The cognitive revolution that never happened

Our language certainly is an amazing thing, making it even harder to believe it resulted from an accidental ‘Tree of Knowledge’ mutation. No mention is made of where the mutation (or mutations) occurred in the genome, or how many were involved. Of course, this is because the author does not have a clue, nor does anyone else for that matter, as this mutation event never occurred. One reason that makes it essentially impossible to occur is the waiting time problem, meaning that it takes

too long for specified DNA mutations to become fixed within a so-called hominin population.⁶ For example, to generate the anatomical changes necessary to make an australopithecine walk and run like a human would require a lot of precisely co-ordinated genetic mutations. In looking at the odds of it happening, Ann Gauger, an expert in developmental biology, concluded: “Given these numbers, it is extremely improbable, if not absolutely impossible, for us to have evolved from hominin ancestors by a gradual, unguided process.”⁷

The problem is even worse, as the genome has been deteriorating (due to accumulation of genetic mutations) ever since its origin, with the proposed evolutionary mechanism of natural selection sorting random mutations powerless to stop it.⁸ It has been conservatively estimated that in human reproductive cells the accumulation of mutations is at least 100 point mutations per person per generation.⁹ At this rate, in addition to evolution not being able to explain the arrival of information, it cannot explain the preservation of information over timespans of millions of years.

Regarding ‘archaic humans’ the author believes that “the invention of new technologies and the settlement of alien habitats resulted from genetic mutations and environmental pressures more than cultural initiatives” (p. 37). He states that “Two million years ago, genetic mutations resulted in the appearance of a new species called *Homo erectus*”, whose “emergence was accompanied by the development of a new stone technology”, but as “long as *Homo erectus* did not undergo further genetic alterations, its stone tools remained roughly the same—for close to 2 million years” (p. 37). The author then contrasts this with events since the Cognitive Revolution, brought about by the “Tree of Knowledge mutation” in *Homo sapiens* mentioned earlier, where

“Sapiens have been able to change their behaviour quickly, transmitting new behaviours to future generations without any need of genetic or environmental change” (p. 37). Whatever this supposed Tree of Knowledge mutation was, it seems to have given humans special powers, but as explained above, such mutations, including ones said to have given rise to *Homo erectus*, are essentially impossible. As such, the Cognitive Revolution, said to be “the point when history declared its independence from biology” (p. 41), never happened.

Evolutionary psychology

Harari pushes the idea of evolutionary psychologists, that to understand ourselves better, “we must get inside the heads of our hunter-gatherer ancestors” and “we need to delve into the hunter-gatherer world that shaped us, the world that we subconsciously still inhabit” (p. 45). He states, “Today we may be living in high-rise apartments with overstuffed refrigerators, but our DNA still thinks we are in the savannah” (p. 46), and then mentions an evolutionary psychology theory that problems in modern marriages “all result from forcing humans to live in nuclear families and monogamous relationships that are incompatible with our biological software” (p. 47). However, he does mention that “Many scholars vehemently reject this theory” (p. 47). Of course, if human evolution never happened, then the assertions of evolutionary psychologists are little more than foolish psychobabble.

Into America dating problem

The author spends time discussing the hunter-gatherer way of life, and states that “Though they lived better lives than most people in agricultural and industrial societies, their world could still be harsh and unforgiving”

(p. 58). He mentions that the extinction of the Australian megafauna (more than 90% said to have disappeared 45,000 years ago) (p. 73) “was probably the first significant mark *Homo sapiens* left on our planet. It was followed by an even larger ecological disaster, this time in America. *Homo sapiens* was the first and only human species to reach the western hemisphere landmass, arriving about 16,000 years ago” (pp. 76–77). A recent study reported evidence of human activity in California about 130,000 years ago,¹⁰ and so if you accept evolutionary age dating methods, which I presume Harari does, then his date for human arrival in the Americas appears totally wrong.

Agricultural revolution

According to Harari “The transition to agriculture began around 9500–8500 BC in the hill country of south-eastern Turkey, western Iran and the Levant” (p. 87). He views the Agricultural Revolution as “history’s biggest fraud”, stating that it “left farmers with lives generally more difficult and less satisfying than those of foragers” (p. 90). The body of *Homo sapiens* is said to not have evolved for farming tasks, such as “clearing rocks and carrying water buckets”, but rather “was adapted to climbing apple trees and running after gazelles” (p. 91). However, from an evolutionary point of view, whose currency is said to be “neither hunger nor pain, but rather copies of DNA helices”, the Agricultural Revolution was a success, as it kept “more people alive under worse conditions” (p. 94).

Again, the above claim can only plausibly be correct if evolution happened, which I believe is an impossibility for reasons mentioned above. As a creationist, I would dispute the early dates for the appearance of agriculture mentioned above, believing it was more recent, and would also

dispute the idea that hunter-gatherers existed for thousands of years before agriculture. Rather, I believe that as humans re-populated the earth after the Flood, in particular after the Babel dispersion, then out of necessity many of them had to adapt to a foraging lifestyle to survive until they settled down in some region. Some migrating people groups would have settled earlier than others, whilst some never settled at all. Books have been written on the dispersion of people across the earth after the Tower of Babel event.¹¹

Evolved differently

Harari admits that “Americans got the idea of equality from Christianity, which argues that every person has a divinely created soul, and that all souls are equal before God”, but rejecting Christianity, he asks “if we do not believe in the Christian myths about God, creation and souls, what does it mean that all people are ‘equal’?” (p. 122). Harari states that “There is only a blind evolutionary process, devoid of any purpose, leading to the birth of individuals” (p. 123), and his rejection of the Christian worldview is also evident in his discussion of the “most famous line of the American Declaration of Independence” (p. 122), which he translates into biological terms, as follows:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men evolved differently, that they are born with certain mutable characteristics, and that among these are life and the pursuit of pleasure” (p. 123).

He notes that:

“Advocates of equality and human rights may be outraged by this line of reasoning. Their response is likely to be ‘We know that people are not equal biologically! But if we believe that we are all equal in essence, it will enable us to create a stable and prosperous society.’ I have no argument with that. This is exactly what I mean by ‘imagined order’.

We believe in a particular order not because it is objectively true, but because believing in it enables us to cooperate effectively and forge a better society” (pp. 123–124).

The reasoning seems to be that, even though a certain view is wrong, it may be best for society if we nevertheless hold on to this belief (‘imagined order’). Christianity, as well as democracy and capitalism, are said by the author to be examples of imagined orders (ones that exist only in our minds) (pp. 126–127). Perhaps he should consider the possibility that belief in evolution is an ‘imagined order’—one detrimental to society.

The idea that “Evolution is based on difference, not equality” (p. 122), “that all men evolved differently” (p. 123), seems to open the door to beliefs that some people are superior than others, although the author denies there is evidence for this, later stating: “Between blacks and whites there are some objective biological differences, such as skin colour and hair type, but there is no evidence that the differences extend to intelligence or morality” (p. 152). Elsewhere he says that “the biological distinctions between different groups of *Homo sapiens* are, in fact, negligible” (p. 161). Such statements, regarding negligible biological differences between people groups, agree with the creationist position, but it seems a bit odd that this would be the case if indeed “all men evolved differently” (p. 123).

Evolutionary morality

Christian theology is blamed by the author for getting the concepts of ‘natural’ and ‘unnatural’ wrong, as “The theological meaning of ‘natural’ is ‘in accordance with the intentions of the God who created nature’” (p. 165). In Harari’s ideology God does not exist; there is only evolution without purpose (p. 165), and so to him “from a biological perspective, nothing is unnatural. Whatever is

possible is by definition also natural” (p. 164). He later states: “There is little sense, then, in arguing that the natural function of women is to give birth, or that homosexuality is unnatural. Most of the laws, norms, rights and obligations that define manhood and womanhood reflect human imagination more than biological reality” (p. 166). Earlier in the book the author calls “the biblical creation story, the Dreamtime myths of Australian Aboriginals, and the nationalist myths of modern states” common myths that we weave (p. 27). In discussing myths Harari states: “There are no gods in the universe, no nations, no money, no human rights, no laws and no justice outside the common imagination of human beings” (p. 31).

If you deny God exists, then the above is pretty much what you are left with, a universe void of moral absolutes. With evolutionary atheism, any moral code can only ever be relative, just a reflection of human imagination. In the end, any such moral code is meaningless anyhow, as evolution does not care about right and wrong, good and evil, natural and unnatural, there being no purpose to life, nor a higher authority who cares, or to whom we must give account. The good news is that God does exist, and instead the biggest so-called common myth woven is the evolutionary story.

Conclusion

A considerable portion of the book is spent superficially discussing a multitude of things, such as Buddhism, money, empires, humanism, capitalism, etc., that in terms of the creation vs evolution issue are arguably less relevant, and so were selectively left out to keep the review down to a reasonable length. In conclusion, as a Christian, I could not in good conscience recommend this book to anyone, as it is saturated in evolutionary and atheistic philosophy, and as a result gets many things wrong.

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