

Just 6 million years ago, a single female ape had two daughters. One became the ancestor of all chimpanzees, the other is our own grandmother.

It is doubtful whether Homo sapiens will still be around a thousand years from now

From about 2 million years ago until around 10,000 years ago, the world was home, at one and the same time, to several human species

Most scientists agree that by 150,000 years ago, East Africa was populated by Sapiens that looked just like us. If one of them turned up in a modern morgue, the local pathologist would notice nothing peculiar.

Homo sapiens conquered the world thanks above all to its unique language. [...] the truly unique feature of our language is not its ability to transmit information about men and lions. Rather, it's the ability to transmit information about things that do not exist at all.

Sapiens can cooperate in extremely flexible ways with countless numbers of strangers. That's why Sapiens rule the world, whereas ants eat our leftovers and chimps are locked up in zoos and research laboratories.

Large numbers of strangers can cooperate successfully by believing in common myths.

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.

Before the Agricultural Revolution, the human population of the entire planet was smaller than that of today's Cairo

We have the dubious distinction of being the deadliest species in the annals of biology

Even today, with all our advanced technologies, more than 90 per cent of the calories that feed humanity come from the handful of plants that our ancestors domesticated between 9500 and 3500 BC – wheat, rice, maize (called 'corn' in the US), potatoes, millet and barley. No noteworthy plant or animal has been domesticated in the last 2,000 years.

Rather than heralding a new era of easy living, the Agricultural Revolution left farmers with lives generally more difficult and less satisfying than those of foragers. Hunter-gatherers spent their time in more stimulating and varied ways, and were less in danger of starvation and disease. The Agricultural Revolution certainly enlarged the sum total of food at the disposal of humankind, but the extra food did not translate into a better diet or more leisure. Rather, it translated into population explosions and pampered elites. The average farmer worked harder than the average forager, and got a worse diet in return. The Agricultural Revolution was history's biggest fraud.

This is the essence of the Agricultural Revolution: the ability to keep more people alive under worse conditions.

How do you cause people to believe in an imagined order such as Christianity, democracy or capitalism? First, you never admit that the order is imagined. You always insist that the order sustaining society is an objective reality created by the great gods or by the laws of nature.

The human brain is not a good storage device for empire-sized databases, for three main reasons: 1) its capacity is limited 2) humans die, and their brains die with them 3) the human brain has been adapted to store and process only particular types of information.

The most important impact of script on human history is precisely this: it has gradually changed the way humans think and view the world. Free association and holistic thought have given way to compartmentalisation and bureaucracy.

"The sum total of money in the world is about \$60 trillion, yet the sum total of coins and banknotes is less than \$6 trillion. 7 More than 90 per cent of all money – more than \$50 trillion appearing in our accounts – exists only on computer servers."

"Money is more open-minded than language, state laws, cultural codes, religious beliefs and social habits. Money is the only trust system created by humans that can bridge almost any cultural gap, and that does not discriminate on the basis of religion, gender, race, age or sexual orientation. Thanks to money, even people who don't know each other and don't trust each other can nevertheless cooperate effectively."

"Today's debate between today's religions, ideologies, nations and classes will in all likelihood disappear along with Homo sapiens . If our successors indeed function on a different level of consciousness (or perhaps possess something beyond consciousness that we cannot even conceive), it seems doubtful that Christianity or Islam will be of interest to them, that their social organisation could be Communist or capitalist, or that their genders could be male or female."

As the twenty-first century unfolds, nationalism is fast losing ground. More and more people believe that all of humankind is the legitimate source of political authority, rather than the members of a particular nationality, and that safeguarding human rights and protecting the interests of the entire human species should be the guiding light of politics.

Immensely powerful currents of capital, labour and information turn and shape the world, with a growing disregard for the borders and opinions of states.

The global empire being forged before our eyes is not governed by any particular state or ethnic group. Much like the Late Roman Empire, it is ruled by a multi-ethnic elite, and is held together by a common culture and common interests. Throughout the world, more and more entrepreneurs, engineers, experts, scholars, lawyers and managers are called to join the empire. They must ponder whether to answer the imperial call or to remain loyal to their state and their people. More and more choose the empire.

Religion has been the third great unifier of humankind, alongside money and empires.

Since all social orders and hierarchies are imagined, they are all fragile, and the larger the society, the more fragile it is. The crucial historical role of religion has been to give superhuman legitimacy to these fragile structures.

The only reason to approach the supreme power of the universe would be to renounce all desires and embrace the bad along with the good – to embrace even defeat, poverty, sickness and death.

In the 300 years from the crucifixion of Christ to the conversion of Emperor Constantine, polytheistic Roman emperors initiated no more than four general persecutions of Christians. Local administrators and governors incited some anti-Christian violence of their own. Still, if we combine all the victims of all these persecutions, it turns out that in these three centuries, the polytheistic Romans killed no more than a few thousand Christians.¹ In contrast, over the course of the next 1,500 years, Christians slaughtered Christians by the millions to defend slightly different interpretations of the religion of love and compassion.

Belief in heaven (the realm of the good god) and hell (the realm of the evil god) was also dualist in origin. There is no trace of this belief in the Old Testament, which also never claims that the souls of people continue to live after the death of the body.

The modern age has witnessed the rise of a number of new natural-law religions, such as liberalism, Communism, capitalism, nationalism and Nazism. [...] These creeds do not like to be called religions, and refer to themselves as ideologies. But this is just a semantic exercise.

The willingness to admit ignorance has made modern science more dynamic, supple and inquisitive than any previous tradition of knowledge.

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, fewer than 5,000 British officials, about 40,000–70,000 British soldiers, and perhaps another 100,000 British business people, hangers-on, wives and children were sufficient to conquer and rule up to 300 million Indians.

Capitalism gradually became far more than just an economic doctrine. It now encompasses an ethic – a set of teachings about how people should behave, educate their children and even think. Its principal tenet is that economic growth is the supreme good, or at least a proxy for the supreme good, because justice, freedom and even happiness all depend on economic growth. [...] Capitalism's belief in perpetual economic growth flies in the face of almost everything we know about the universe. A society of wolves would be extremely foolish to believe that the supply of sheep would keep on growing indefinitely. The human economy has nevertheless managed to keep on growing throughout the modern era, thanks only to the fact that scientists come up with another discovery or gadget every few years – such as the continent of America, the internal combustion engine, or genetically engineered sheep. Banks and governments print money, but ultimately, it is the scientists who foot the bill. [...] This is the fly in the ointment of free-market capitalism. It cannot ensure that profits are gained in a fair way, or distributed in a fair manner.

Some religions, such as Christianity and Nazism, have killed millions out of burning hatred. Capitalism has killed millions out of cold indifference coupled with greed. [...] Each year the US

population spends more money on diets than the amount needed to feed all the hungry people in the rest of the world. [...] (Capitalism) is the first religion in history whose followers actually do what they are asked to do.

Money, social status, plastic surgery, beautiful houses, powerful positions – none of these will bring you happiness. Lasting happiness comes only from serotonin, dopamine and oxytocin.

It is like a man standing for decades on the seashore, embracing certain 'good' waves and trying to prevent them from disintegrating, while simultaneously pushing back 'bad' waves to prevent them from getting near him. Day in, day out, the man stands on the beach, driving himself crazy with this fruitless exercise. Eventually, he sits down on the sand and just allows the waves to come and go as they please. How peaceful!

Tinkering with our genes won't necessarily kill us. But we might fiddle with Homo sapiens to such an extent that we would no longer be Homo sapiens.

What we should take seriously is the idea that the next stage of history will include not only technological and organisational transformations, but also fundamental transformations in human consciousness and identity.

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