

# THE SOCIAL SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE

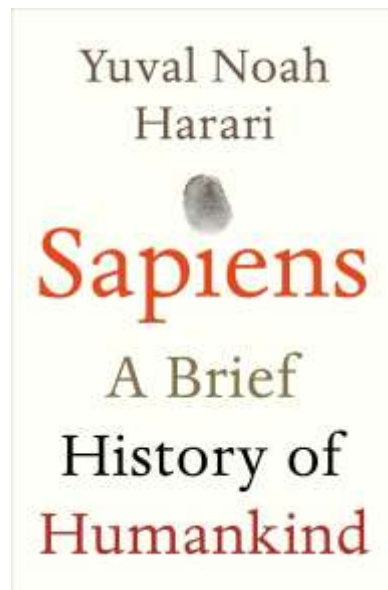
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## **BOOK REVIEW**



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**Humankind: Diverting Energy from Biceps to Neurons**

## **Book Review: “Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind”, by Yuval Noah Harari**

*Sapiens* is a popular science book that was first published in 2011 in the Hebrew language and was later published in English in 2014. The time from then has simply added more gravitas to this magnificent work of art. Harari makes an empirical approach to tracing the history of ‘humankind’. Spread across four parts, the book provides a sound understanding of the transition from cognitive to agricultural to religious to the scientific revolution. The elaborate discourse on the historiography of the evolution of humankind is immensely multi and interdisciplinary.

### **The Cognitive Revolution**

Foraging in new spaces, humans began their journey from being the lowest in the food chain. The ability to use and transform language for the purposes of communication and memories, humans have become unique in their physical and biological structure, which has catapulted them in only close to 2.5 million years to becoming the apex predator in the food chain. We have modified ourselves greatly as different regions and seasons demanded. We then created ‘culture’ and credited ourselves with ethics and morality.

### **The Agricultural Revolution**

The time and efforts that the sapiens invested in manipulating the lives of a few animals and plant species changed the course of human events that were to follow. The very act of one’s capability to grow varieties of grains and rear selected animals for meat truly became a revolution in the way humans lived. Harari refers to this juncture as “History’s Biggest Fraud”, for agriculture required a lot more commitment and hard work from people, yet today, it has become one of the significant aspects in terms of building blocks of any nation. This was the beginning of the barter system, which eventually metamorphosed into ‘money’. It is imperative for one to also notice how the ‘trap’ of agriculture paved way for ‘private property’ and appropriation of materialistic wealth.

### **The Religious Revolution**

The birth of the nation of ‘unification’ of humankind began with a shared system of myths and beliefs that someone superior is present and is always watching our actions. The laws of religion assert that the result of human caprice is ordained by an absolute and indisputable authority. The agricultural needs in a manner paved way for the Gods to be created in humans’ minds. Much of

mythology is in fact a legal contract in which humans make a bargain with the imagined deity and make promises of devotion in exchange for mastery over plants and animals. The discourse of *Sapiens* also traces the history of how ‘polytheistic’ religions gradually got erased and how monotheistic religions started to prevail in the guise of civilisation.

### **The Scientific Revolution**

The current phase of humankind is the attempt to achieve success in the Gilgamesh Project, a quest towards attaining immortality. The many expeditions into faraway lands and many conquests led the empty maps to be filled with not just the coordinates of latitudes and longitudes but also with ‘knowledge’ of the lands and environment. Science and Empires grew together. Today, science has progressed farther than humans could have imagined, and this has fueled capitalism to rise to the brim. In order for this to come to realisation, humans digitised data. Now, we speak in the language of 0 and 1, the binary coordinates.

Overall, the discourse provides a deeper insight into not just understanding the growth of humankind on this planet but also what human beings have made of themselves. Harari’s *Sapiens* is a profound and a gripping narrative. It invites a variety of readers belonging to different disciplines of study such as anthropology, history, humanities, and sciences. The book makes a really good read, especially given the pandemic situation, it offers different perspectives to see ourselves in a better light, and mull over the imaginary constraints that we have built for ourselves over centuries.