

soup of refuse, sewage, and train oil. People usually just threw their trash on the riverbanks, hoping the water would take it away, but by August, when the water got low, the stench was overwhelming. (48)

The Cold Millions is a unique novel because the author is so concerned with the historical accuracy for his fictional characters. Walter includes several pages of “bibliography” – a novel with a bibliography? – of the books and microfilm he read, and separates real people from his fictional ones and he almost apologizes when he states: “Kids, this is made up. *The Cold Millions* is fiction.” (339)

Fact, fiction, a combination – this is a wonderful and exciting novel about our movement, and one that I urge you to read twice: the first time to get the whole narrative, and the second to appreciate the separate pieces and the design. This novel goes in so many wonderful directions, with compelling characters, but it is always focused on the struggle of the IWW.

Challenges for Anarchist Sapiens

REVIEW ESSAY BY BRIAN MARTIN

Yuval Noah Harari is an historian who has written several best-selling books. He says nothing about anarchism, yet anarchists have much to learn from his writings.

Harari’s first book, *Sapiens* (HarperCollins, 2015) was published in Israel, in Hebrew, in 2011. It was such a success that it was published in English, and soon had a large readership. It seems an unlikely best-seller: the subtitle is *A Brief History of Humankind*. Part of the book’s appeal is that it is delightfully written, with stories, examples and pictures. Here I will first outline several key ideas in *Sapiens* and, to a lesser extent, Harari’s following books, and then note some implications for the anarchist project.

In *Sapiens*, Harari provides a wonderfully expansive, insightful and thought-provoking overview of human evolution and history. He attributes the rise of Homo sapiens to several seminal changes in thought and behavior. This is reminiscent of the film *2001* in which interventions by an alien intelligence trigger big steps forward in evolution, for example the use of tools. But no aliens are involved in Harari’s account, which is based on research by prehistorians and historians. On his website, Harari gives many more references than those in the book.

Harari notes that there have been at least six species of Homo. Aside from sapiens, the most well-known is Homo neanderthalensis (Neanderthals), but there are several others – and perhaps more yet to be discovered. The question then becomes, why did Homo sapiens survive and the others die out? Neanderthals, for example, had larger brains and more impressive physical development. Harari suggests that sapiens had superior capacity to coordinate their activities, and that sapiens may have been responsible, directly or indirectly, for the extinction of other Homo species.

A key step, about 70,000 years ago, was the “cognitive revolution.” Sapiens developed the capacity to create abstract concepts: shared ideas about things that aren’t there. Harari calls them myths. These include concepts of gods and, more recently, nations and money. Sharing these concepts enables humans to coordinate ever larger communities in which members do not know each other. Today’s businesspeople (and others) are in effect powerful sorcerers, creating strange constructs, just as earlier Sapiens invoked spirits. In each case, the concepts, when shared, enable coordination of

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activities and provide an explanation of how the world works. This is a version of Benedict Anderson’s idea of states as imagined communities (*Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, 1991, revised edition), applied to good effect on a much broader canvas.

Ever since the Cognitive Revolution, Sapiens have thus been living in a dual reality. On the one hand, the objective reality of rivers, trees and lions; and on the other hand, the imagined reality of gods, nations and corporations. As time went by, the imagined reality became ever more powerful, so that today the very survival of rivers, trees and lions depends on the grace of imagined entities such as the United States and Google. (*Sapiens*, p. 32)

Another key step was the advent of settled agriculture, roughly 12,000 years ago. Harari suggests that life for farmers was more difficult than for forager predecessors, but farming enabled a larger population. Once this population existed, there was no easy way back to the former lifestyle. This might be thought of as going down an appealing tunnel that turned out to be a one-way passage to a less pleasant future.

The scientific revolution gathered force about 500 years ago. Harari argues that the concept of ignorance played a key role in enabling the development of science. With certainty about the nature of the world, there is no need to explore or to experiment. Recognition of ignorance about geography enabled exploration.

Then there was the industrial revolution, which depended on particular ways of thinking as well as circumstances. By this time, Sapiens had long outgrown biological evolution as the driving force behind change: social evolution completely took over.

Sapiens have populated the entire world. Harari tells of their spread, for example to Australia and the Americas. Everywhere sapiens arrived, the fossil record shows that major mammals became rare or extinct. Though they were much smaller and weaker, sapiens’ superior organizational capacity enabled them to wipe out other apex species. Sapiens in this picture are an ecological destroyer, simplifying ecosystems and making them subordinate to human purposes.

Harari points to humans’ enslavement of other species – chickens, cattle, sheep and others. These slave species have become much more numerous, but mostly live short miserable lives. This is a good way to view animal liberation, namely as a challenge to massive suffering by other species.

All in all, Harari’s way of looking at history draws together insights from a range of fields to portray a species that has smashed everything in its way but may be wrecking its own prospects for happiness and survival. Along the way, Harari addresses diverse topics including religion, ideology, sex and gender, imperialism, capitalism and happiness.

Harari has a point of view, but it is hard to pigeonhole him in the usual political spectrum. He aims to get people thinking. The spectrum he’s operating on is not different ways of organizing within today’s societies, but a long view of the characteristics of Sapiens that have led the species being where it is today and which might lead to various futures. Rather than looking at policies within societies, he draws attention to processes of thinking (concepts or myths) and behavior (agriculture, science, empires).

From a social-change point of view, *Sapiens* is rather depressing.

Harari depicts an aggressive, all-conquering species that has either wiped out or better survived other human species, wiped out major fauna wherever it spreads, and through a set of one-way transitions (agriculture, scientific revolution, money, empires) become dominant on earth, enslaving other species for its own benefit and endangering the entire ecosphere. What does the future portend?

Harari addresses this in his second book, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (Vintage, 2017). His positive view is that famines, infectious diseases and war are in decline, and that key issues for the future will be immortality and happiness, within the wider possibility of humans becoming gods, taking control of their own evolution (which may go beyond sapiens). His analysis of the quest for immortality or at least extended longevity suggests that a new era of inequality may emerge. This will certainly be the case if sapiens are superseded by cyborgs or AI.

On social change

Most people think things are either subjective or objective, and assume anything that isn't subjective, such as money, God and states, must be objective. But there's another option: intersubjective realities, which are shared realities that are not objective in the sense that they aren't independent of humans.

Sapiens rule the world because only they can weave an intersubjective web of meaning: a web of laws, forces, entities and places that exist purely in their common imagination. This web allows humans alone to organise crusades, social revolutions and human rights movements. (*Homo Deus*, p. 175]

There is one strange omission in Harari's treatment of the future: he assumes key social arrangements – based on an “intersubjective web of meaning” – will remain unchanged. But if things we take for granted – including corporations, militaries and states – have no reality beyond shared agreement about them, the implication is fundamental: these intersubjective realities can and do change.

Imagined orders are always susceptible to collapse if people stop believing in them, so continual efforts are needed to encourage the belief that they are objective truths. Social orders maintained by force are precarious because soldiers might stop believing in the system.

One of Harari's concerns is that artificial intelligence (AI) will continue to develop, to such an extent that many of today's jobs, including highly skilled ones such as doctors, will become obsolete. An AI-dominated future could create mass unemployment. But wait. Doesn't this assume the idea of a “job” remains unchanged? The idea of a job is a shared subjective reality, a myth in Harari's terminology, and could be changed.

For an alternative conception, one option relates to the long-standing socialist slogan, “From each according to their abilities and to each according to their needs.” The trouble with the idea of a job is that it packages two processes, production and allocation, in other words giving and receiving, into one. If we separate these processes, there are two goals for a social system: offering satisfying work to everyone who wants it, and providing for people's needs.

Harari assumes the continuation of liberal values and institutions: “As of 2016 there is no serious alternative to the liberal package of individualism, human rights, democracy and a free market.” (*Homo Deus*, p. 312) By “democracy,” Harari is referring to representative government. He does not discuss the widespread dissatisfaction with electoral politics nor the many initiatives promoting deliberative democracy and worker self-management. If we accept his idea that social systems are intersubjective realities and subject to change, there is no guarantee that governments as we know them will continue for the indefinite future.

Harari, in *Sapiens*, suggests that we have become the world's most dangerous parasite, threatening ourselves and all others, while elites draw on cooperative impulses to maintain inequality and exploitation. Harari points to future dangers, including the rise of a class of semi-immortal sapiens.

Yet it is possible to think of alternative futures. The great capacity of Sapiens for cooperation could be used to move towards more egalitarian and participatory social arrangements, as anarchists and many others with anarchist sensibilities have pursued for centuries. Harari's perspective offers a useful pointer to a crucial challenge. In many ways, the biggest obstacles to change are the intersubjective realities – the myths – by which sapiens understand the social world and by which they cooperate. (For one useful approach, see Dana Williams, “Why revolution ain't easy: violating norms, re-socializing society,” *Contemporary Justice Review* 14:2, June 2011, 167–187.)

In one sense, it is very easy to change intersubjective realities: just start thinking differently and relating to others differently. In another sense, it is extremely difficult to change them, because education systems, media and economic and political systems continually reinforce them. However, this points to a potential weakness. If intersubjective realities were really secure, it would not be necessary to bolster them. For example, if conceptions of foreign enemies were deeply entrenched, it would not be necessary to drum up war fever, build military machines, or coerce or entice young people to become soldiers.

Anarchism is an alternative way of conceiving the world, including how it could be, and is thus a challenge to the dominant intersubjective realities. The ideological attacks on anarchism are signs of its great potential as an alternative way of thinking and being.

Harari argues that sapiens' capacity to create elaborate schemes of shared meaning has enabled the species to become dominant – and dangerous. The anarchist project involves criticizing domination-related systems such as states and capitalism, and building alternative concepts and practices. Harari's perspective shows the enormous challenges in doing this, along with its historical possibility.

Resisting Capital

REVIEW BY MARTIN COMACK

Dan Gallin, **Resistance: Selected Essays**. LabourStart, 2021, 92 pp.

Dan Gallin was general secretary of the International Union of Food Workers. This short collection of essays, written from the late 1980s to the present, includes his experiences in the international labor movement along with wide-ranging observations on union activity around the globe.

He takes particular note of the attempted co-optation of Western labor organizations in the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions for use against the Soviet bloc in the political maneuvering of the Cold War era. This was a contest in which the AFL-CIO – under the strict control of George Meany, Lane Kirkland and other Cold Warriors – allied themselves with the CIA and maintained close relationships with transnational corporations. The result was what Gallin calls “some particularly crass instances of class collaboration.” The so-called American Institute for Free Labor Development, for example, active in Latin America, received both CIA subsidies and hefty corporate donations. With the aim of opposing Communist influence south of the border, AIFLD also managed to suppress any attempts at independent unionism and aligned South American labor “with the agenda of US business and the US government.” (10)