



# THE CONJUREMENT OF YUVAL NOAH HARARI

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To understand Harari's work, it is essential to understand the myths on which it is based. By this, we do not mean the myths to which the author alludes in his texts, in the form of stories that men tell to other men to "organize cooperation" ([Harari, 2015](#)) collectively, but the myths that Harari himself constructs with his arguments and perhaps those that he uses as pillars of his theses and conclusions.

In this sense, we should begin by saying that the author himself is a myth in himself. To a large extent, this mythologization of his figure would explain in part both his work and its very wide dissemination among certain social groups. The Harari myth, his character in the intellectual drama woven by his books, conferences, presentations and various interviews, embodies a sort of intellectual ascetic who lives far from the worldly noise, apart from everything, and contemplating the world from a metaphysical distance that apparently allows him access to the ultimate arcana of our reality.

This is at least what is believed about him, as described, for example, in a [BBC report](#) which notes the following:

Yuval Noah Harari does not use a cell phone and spends much of his days away from the incessant flow of information that through the Internet overflows to billions of people around the world. Despite this, this philosopher and professor of history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem has become a sort of guru admired by the elites of Silicon Valley.

Alongside this myth that is the "persona" of Yuval Noah Harari, there are other kinds of myths that are woven into his work. We refer to those that his work and thought construct, perhaps without the intention of being considered myths as such, because of the treatment that this author gives them in his writings, in magazines and conferences. That is to say, to the mention of very complex philosophical ideas, which Harari uses in some of their meanings, as if they were supposedly incontestable truths.

In relation to the first type of these myths, those that the author himself considers as such, we would find, for example, human language itself. About this Harari tells us that it constitutes a myth or narrative construction created by men (the Sapiens) to transmit their ideas and catalog their surrounding world. For Harari, this myth becomes the form of articulation of other multiple narrative constructions, also mythological and entirely artificial, such as religions, money, wealth, government structures, as well as all those ideologies that sustain all these myths. In this sense and according to this author, language would be the mechanism that gives Homo Sapiens an exceptional ability to convey information about

everything, even "about things that do not exist at all" (Harari, 2015, p. 37).

The second type of myths that permeate Harari's work, are those that support the author's arguments, part of some labels or ideas that he uses in his theses, but that he rarely explains, problematizes or shows their possible analogies. In this sense, we must agree with him when he recognizes that "each person, group or nation has its own myths and stories" ([Harari, 2017](#), p. 15), since he himself is not the exception, with which his own theory already exempts us from responsibilities to analyze what he himself cultivates and on which he structures his philosophy.

Harari's myths correspond to what Gustavo Bueno calls "obscurantist or confusing myths" ([2016a](#)), as ideological constructions that obscure, confuse or camouflage the material reality of things.

Although these myths can be, and in fact are, false or of dubious veracity and empirical contrastability, it is important to note that their mere denunciation, however well-founded it may appear, does not imply the deactivation of that idea ([Bueno, 2005](#)). Hence, the practical functions that myths, even obscurantist ones, perform cannot be satisfied by other alternative ideas. In this sense, and as Gustavo Bueno points out, the action and the mythical or illusory structure, hidden in an idea endowed with supreme prestige, will maintain its influence as long as a given social and historical context offers the appropriate conditions for it to do so ([Bueno, 2005](#)).

In this sense, Harari's mythology is doubly false. In the first place, because he considers that his myths, those narrative constructions that he recognizes as mythological, are purely equivocal rationalizations with no other rationality, or capacity, than that of deceiving groups of Sapiens, more or less numerous, to act in favor of other specific similar groups. Seen in this way, false or obscurantist myths are perfectly de-activable with the sole clarification of reason. That is to say, through the illuminating resource of truth, perhaps proclaimed by one of the certified prophets of science, philosophy or politics. Here, Harari aims to help us demystify, or exorcise, the spirits of ignorance that haunt us, a task for which he is widely revered by diverse social groups, many of whom see themselves as enlightening entities and bearers of the flame of truth ([Glancy, 2016](#)).

On the other hand, Harari's myths, in the second sense in which we understand them, as the myths employed by Harari in his theories, are also false. This is so because they represent ideas that are completely abstract and lacking in morphologies or explanatory capacity in the specifics. Harari is a master in the art of using ideas (not concepts) and taking them for granted in ways that are indisputably

attractive, especially in a hyper-connected present time that lacks a critical sense or the capacity to assimilate the complex dialectics of the reality that surrounds it. Harari, employs his ideas as given truths, presupposing that the public to whom these are addressed knows what he is talking about when he mentions them, since they constitute precisely the force ideas of our time, or the socially rooted myths ([Bueno, 2016b](#), p. 36) that articulate much of contemporary social and material life.

In Harari's work, among many other mythologized ideas, we find those that allude to Nature, Evolution, Humanity, History, Science, Culture, "the Global" or "Globalization," and Homo Sapiens; all of these treated in an absolutely mythological way. Along with these myths, classics, so to speak, in his literature, we can lately find the very new myth of Artificial Intelligence, on which Harari has been lecturing throughout 2022, using his very characteristic apocalyptic and pastoral discursiveness.

At present, we do not have space to analyze all of them, so we will be content with only outlining three of these myths, in some of their most problematic theses. We refer to Evolution, Nature and Happiness, as ideas mythologized by Harari. Without going too deeply into any of these myths, our aim is, at least, to alert the possible reader, or those interested in the work, of this neo-prophet of our time to their existence. In the same way, we seek to outline some of the possible logical directions that these, and many other obscure and confusing ideas proposed by Harari, could take in reality, taken to their ultimate consequences.

## **Evolution**

As a first myth, let us briefly analyze the idea of Evolution that Harari handles in his works. He says that it constitutes a natural mechanism of adaptation and perfection based on genetic algorithms. For Harari, it constitutes a sort of natural or cosmic mechanism, in charge of perfecting the adaptive tools of the species. According to his perspective, the genes of living beings contain certain information, predefined "algorithms," which allow them to perform certain tasks or functions ([Harari, 2018](#)). These predetermined reactions appear and are transformed in response to the environment that surrounds living beings on the planet, allowing species to adapt to the environmental changes that surround them. These mechanisms are what ensure the survival and perhaps subsequent hereditary genetic transmission of the "victorious genes" ([Harari, 2018](#)).

So far, apparently, there is real no difficulty. However, Harari's interpretation of this process presents certain problems. It seems that, according to Harari, the winning genes, those that possess the

appropriate algorithm for the survival of the species in its environment, appear or emerge out of nowhere. It is never made clear to Harari how or why this happens. Nor is it understood, or at least not explained, what role is played by the conditions of that same environment that constantly challenges living beings and the species that compose them, in their struggle for survival. Similarly, Harari does not clearly distinguish between the genetic load, or "algorithmic" in his terms, and the behaviors acquired through life practice and transmitted by learning and culture, whether human or animal.

This theory, presented as it is, is extremely dangerous since it opens the door to believe that there could exist modes of behavior in some living beings, including humans, that would be conditioned by inherited genetic algorithms whose transformation, modification or neutralization may not be possible. Taken to its ultimate consequences, it might be thought that behavior conditioned by these genetically inherited algorithms can only be suppressed by eliminating their carriers, or at least by hindering their reproduction over time.

This view seems to suggest that, when speaking of certain animal species in general, we would actually be referring to the members of these that are at the forefront of adaptation to life and not to the "genetic garbage" that must inevitably be left behind, in order for the species to survive in the best version of itself.

Inadvertently, we suppose, Harari provides philosophical content to extremely dangerous beliefs that could lead to the conception that certain behaviors in specific human groups, for whatever historical/biological reasons, are genetically determined. This would lead to incompatibilities with other genetically conditioned behaviors of different individuals or groups of the same species. The implicit idea that Harari seems to suggest here is that "Nature" will eventually eliminate these carriers, whose genetic/algorithmic load is incompatible with the long-term life of the whole, and that the best of the possible genetic worlds will always prevail in the end.

## **Nature**

Regarding "Nature" of which Harari also speaks, it would have the same creative, organizational and volitional attributes as the gods of traditional religions. Although Harari never explicitly alludes to God and, in fact, refutes His existence, calling it a cultural construction, a "myth," his analyses frequently insinuate the notion of "intelligent design," similar to that defended by those who argue for the existence of a Creative Entity. Although in Harari the divinity is more conceptual than anthropomorphic

or zoomorphic, his idea of "Nature" constitutes a sort of deified entity, which moves away from the merciful and compassionate God of Christianity, to resemble the uncompromising and punitive God of the Old Testament. This theologized Nature not only creates, but destroys at will, and participates omnipotently in the design and construction of the universe.

In this regard, we may quote Harari's words during a recent debate with Slavoj Žižek, when he states:

Two things to say about nature, one is that nature doesn't care about us in any particular way. I mean, if an asteroid hit the planet tomorrow morning and all life on Earth was destroyed, nature wouldn't care. It would go on as usual ([Žižek & Harari, 2022](#)).

Here, Harari makes no distinction between a Nature, in the ecological sense of a general concept that groups together all the non-cultural elements of the surrounding world, and "Natures," in the plural, which would correspond to the different essences of things, in the manner of "the nature of a table, of a weapon, or of a given behavior." We might suggest that Harari operates with a totalizing conception of Nature, of Aristotelian origin, which understands the Natural as a finite, yet eternal, whole, encompassing "the set of all things that move" ([Boeri, 2016](#), bk. Physics, 8.5, 34ff), which are distinct from the first immobile mover. In Harari, this distinction is not obvious and again he assumes that it is understood what he means when he alludes to this idea.

In this regard, the question becomes even more confusing because in many parts of his work, Harari also speaks of the other Natures, in the essential sense, without the slightest mention of the differences between one or the other. In such a sense, he does not speak of "the nature of disease," "the nature of war," referring to a certain origin or principle, or in the sense of a first essence as in "the true nature of humanity," "the nature of Christ," or "the nature of Sapiens" ([Harari, 2018](#)). The problem with the use of these ideas is, once again, that no distinction is made between the multiple manifestations throughout history and the various gnoseological fields in which they are applied. Nature, as a philosophical idea, is present both in the sciences, the arts, religions, politics, philosophies, and so on; without us ever knowing from Harari's mouth to which of these he refers when he uses it.

## **Happiness**

As for happiness, Harari does not say that "Science" holds that it "is not achieved by getting a promotion,

winning the lottery or even finding true love." For Harari, people become happy for only one reason: "for the pleasurable sensations in their body." This suggests that by simply ingesting some pill or some chemical, we could become happy ([Harari, 2017](#)).

In other words, according to Harari, one is happy because of the result of a complex cocktail of hormones, pheromones, chemical and electrochemical reactions that occur in our biological body, producing in this a certain state that we have culturally denominated as "Happiness." This idea leads us to logically conclude that, if we could synthetically reproduce these same sensations, we could affirm that we have finally reached the formula of Happiness ([Harari, 2017](#)).

The problem here is that Happiness—an obscure and confusing idea (Bueno, 2005)—those states of physical well-being or discomfort, is reduced to the abundance or lack of biochemical substances in individual bodies. Harari argues that human physical pleasure is the key to subjective fulfillment, and that all effort ultimately seeks to produce and extend as much as possible the pleasurable sensations generated in our body by certain states of mind.

According to Harari, the primordial causes of human happiness, up to the present moment of evolution, have been random, external, casual and, unfortunately, contingent. However, he argues that mankind is now prepared to synthesize these reactions and reproduce them permanently in individual bodies. Hence, in his *Homo Deus*, Harari tells us of the biochemical solution to Happiness. If science is right, Harari tells us,

"and our happiness is determined by our biochemical system, then the only way to guarantee lasting satisfaction is to rig this system. And this is exactly what we have started to do in the last few decades. Fifty years ago, psychiatric drugs were highly stigmatized. Today, that stigma has been broken" ([Harari, 2017](#), p. 39).

This path contrasts with the philosophical and ideological solutions offered throughout history by religious, priests, artists, philosophers and other exponents of human thought.

The main criticism we can make of this conception lies in its reductionism. The 'biochemistry of happiness' proposed by Harari does not take into account the multiple human interactions with reality, which in principle create the material framework in which the particular chemical cocktails mentioned

by Harari take place. If these interactions produce specific biochemical sensations, it is because certain sociohistorical, dialectical and contingent conditions have imbued some experiences with a particular significance and not others.

In this sense, the complexity and subtleties are so many that in our opinion it would be practically impossible to categorize or even to synthesize. To cite just one example, the cultural act of whipping a person with a whip in a social context could generate biochemical reactions of both pleasure and displeasure—if the institution of whipping in the framework of past master-slave relations was based on the displeasure that this act produced; that is to say, on the unhappiness of the whipped. On the contrary, if this same institution is used in the framework of certain sexual games, being formally the same institution, the material result in terms of Happiness, as understood by Harari, would be very different.

What we seek to point out with this reflection is that it is not the bodily chemical cocktails that produce a certain pleasure, but the phenomena of external reality to which they are indisputably associated. But even supposing that indeed some pharmaceutical company or laboratory manages to synthesize specific chemical cocktails, associated with well-known "happy" experiences, such as a sunset, a parent's hug, a child's laughter, etc., the question we could ask Harari is why should we think that we have evolutionarily reached the final number of "happy" experiences, and therefore of possible biochemical cocktails? If we choose to "be happy chemically," why stop at the biochemistry experienced so far and not open up to broader psychedelic universes?

Harari's theory overlooks the material relations that exist beyond the principle of individual pleasure. Many human acts, such as a father's sacrifice for his children or a laborer's effort in physically strenuous work, occur because of material needs and not because of the pursuit of immediate biochemical gratification. The "Happiness" Harari describes seems to be the selfish, rogue happiness of the idiot (Greek, *idiōtēs*) who cares only for himself. Harari suggests that the subjective well-being of the individual should be the ultimate goal of all political and social action. This ideal ignores the fact that happiness is not a scarce or exclusive good, but a state to be collectively sought and cultivated.

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