

CILIPS COVID-19 Book Reviews – Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind

Reviewer name: Scott Main

Book title: Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind

Author name: Yuval Noah Harari

Genre: Human evolution and history

Overall Rating: Excellent

Brief summary: 100,000 years ago, at least six species of humanoid inhabited the earth. Today there is just one. Homo Sapiens. How did our species survive and prosper up to the position we hold today? Why did our foraging ancestors come together to create cities and kingdoms? How did we come to believe in gods, nations, and human rights; to trust money, books, and laws; and to be enslaved by bureaucracy, timetables, and consumerism? And what will our world be like in the millennia to come? In 'Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind', Dr. Yuval Noah Harari (<http://www.ynharari.com/> and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yuval_Harari) spans the whole of human history, from the very first humans to walk the earth to the radical – and sometimes devastating – breakthroughs of the Cognitive, Agricultural, and Scientific Revolutions. Drawing on insights from biology, anthropology, palaeontology, and economics, he explores how the currents of history have shaped our human societies, the animals and plants around us, and even our personalities. Have we become happier as history has unfolded? Can we ever free our behaviour from the heritage of our ancestors? And what, if anything, can we do to influence the course of the centuries to come? This is a bold, wide-ranging and provocative work. 'Sapiens' challenges many of our self-regarding prejudices about being human: our thoughts, our actions, our power...and our future. It thoroughly deserves to be read.

What you liked?: The breath-taking sweep of the analysis, showing the whole human story between two covers.

Who should read this book?: Anyone looking for a comprehensive account of the human story.

Any additional comments?: Read this alongside Jared Diamond's 'The World Until Yesterday' (<http://sbr.lanark.co.uk/?p=4011>) , Cyril Aydon's 'A Brief History of Mankind' (<http://sbr.lanark.co.uk/?p=2199>) , Andrew Marr's 'A History of the World' (http://www.amazon.co.uk/History-World-Andrew-Marr/dp/023075595X/ref=tmm_hrd_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&sr=1-1&qid=1410367409) and J.M. Roberts's 'The Penguin History of the World' (6th edition, paperback, 30 Jan 2014) (http://www.amazon.co.uk/The-Penguin-History-World-6th/dp/1846144434/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1410424135&sr=8-2&keywords=roberts+history+world). This quartet will afford you a rich understanding of human origins.

As a warm up to this excellent book, listen to the Radio 4 'In Our Time' 45 minute episode on human evolution available at the link <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p003hyfl> With Steve Jones, Professor of Genetics in the Galton Laboratory at University College London; Fred Spoor, Professor of Evolutionary Anatomy at University College London; Margaret Clegg, Honorary Research Fellow in the Department of Biological Anthropology at University College London.

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