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Yuval Noah Harari

Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow

London, Vintage, 2017

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Introduction

"Homo Deus" by Yuval Noah Harari explores the transition from Homo sapiens to a futuristic form using artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance mental, emotional, and physical abilities. It discusses genetic engineering and nanotechnology, ethical issues, and spirituality including techno-religions and dataism. Harari predicts that humans will acquire divine powers of creation and destruction to upgrade into Homo deus from Homo sapiens. Harari's work has been criticized for oversimplifying privacy, autonomy, and inequality, lacking practicality and potential risks. I believe that although there are yet many superficial predictions which need to be viewed objectively, the book delves deeply with examples into artificial intelligence and human advancement, incorporating history, biology, philosophy, and technology making it commendable.

Critique's perspectives

Critical analyses of Harari's work explore themes such as technology's role, AI's growth, biotechnologies, ecological concerns, religion, soul, and humanism. Consumerist humanism could be the name given to Harari's version of humanism according to Al-Amoudi (2017). Harari suggests that we are the center of everything, with feelings having final say. However, contemporary humanist philosophers disagree with this perspective. Human morality and capacity for imagination, which Harari fails to take into consideration, has the potential to spark a new age of future thinking. Garvey (2018) explores Harari's predictions of who will become a god on Earth and who will be dehumanized, highlighting the incompatibility of these ideologies in addressing the question of godhood. In line with Harari, Lanier stresses the need to recognize the power of networks and technology on society. Lanier (2014) warns that technology can lead to ignorance of our own consciousness, distorting intuition, empathy, and creativity, and potentially undermining

societal morals by associating robots with genuine consciousness. Ferguson (2020) discusses the impact of digital technologies on people, communities, and cultures, highlighting opportunities and challenges in politics, entertainment, business, and communication. Harari's also predicts a world where technology renders people obsolete.

Enriquez (2017) critiques Harari's naivety about technology's potential revolutionary consequences, highlighting advancements in science and genetic engineering that could enhance human abilities and well-being. Vernon (2019) challenges Harari's claim, arguing that the soul remains an unanswered question in science and philosophy, offering a more nuanced and open-minded perspective. Bostrom (2014) in his book, "Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies" explores the risks of AI surpassing human intelligence and provides practical solutions while Harari's work delves into historical and philosophical contexts emphasizing monitoring of technological development for human benefit. Tegmark (2017) addresses societal issues like migration, poverty, unemployment, terrorism, and war in his book *Life 3.0* while Harari stresses on the ethical implications of AI, including the loss of human touch and talent.

Bill Gates (2017) praises Harari's book but criticizes his unseemly claims, including the potential for people to feel unfulfilled as technology replaces human labor. Runciman (2016) praises "Homo Deus" for its examination of how AI could elevate humans to godlike status. Nithesh (2019) is captivated by Harari's vision of a future where superhumans with superior technology surpass regular humans, leading to the creation of a new social category called "useless." Collisteru (2021) points out that Harari's interpretation seems to mirror convenient narratives, with dystopian undertones. Similarly, Atal (2022) delves into thoughts on how technology could elevate humans to godlike status and the fallout from social stratification into "useless class" ordinary people. Leo (2019) acknowledges Harari's talent for synthesizing diverse topics and writing engagingly about them. He explores Harari's prophecies about the growth of a new religion called "dataism"; his ideas regarding the dwindling influence of established religions; the potential rise of a "useless class"; and the elevation of humans to the status of "deities" due to technological progress. Leo agrees to the viewpoints of Atal, Collisteru and Nithesh, in criticizing the forecasts by Harari as being overly certain and deterministic without enough proof. They claim that Harari bases his predictions on "just-so stories" pointing where the arguments appear to be speculative.

Critical Analysis

The book 'Homo Deus' commences with an authorial appeal to scrutinize established norms and build connections between historical events in order to comprehend our present destiny. I concur with Harari's opinion as AI and biotechnology are being used to enhance communication, problem-solving, and information retrieval in various aspects of human life. AI-powered language models like ChatGPT, BERT, and RoBERT improve human capabilities and streamline workflows. Human brain nanochips are a revolutionary advancement in biotechnology, allowing accurate monitoring of brain activity and understanding neurological disorders. Human brain chips have already been implanted by Elon Musk's Neuralink. AI has also been used to create art, pictures, films, and music. Harari's concerns about the consequences of these technologies are being validated, prompting ethical and societal debates.

However, Harari's utopian vision of a future dominated by Homo deus, involving genetic manipulation and computational control, is a subject of debate. I agree with the critiques who challenge Harari's vision which overlooks ecological challenges and ethical dilemmas when authority is concentrated in a technocratic ruling class. Harari's concerns about the decline of human connection and skills due to technological progress are deeply troubling. While his vision is attractive, it requires a thorough evaluation of its feasibility, sustainability, ethical implications, and centralized authority. Harari seems skeptical of humans' adaptability to survive the existential sense of Homo sapiens. As revolutions have been conducted to showcase the value and power of Homo sapiens and address their complexities, it wouldn't be rational to simply state that humans would easily give up their meaning and power in the hands of technology in the name of growth.

Harari's work raises valid queries about how with advanced AI and modified humans our future interactions and attitude towards animals could be influenced. He emphasizes the importance of ethical consciousness in our interactions with animals and suggests that we should be prepared to face the wrath of superhumans and AI-driven technologies. I believe that humans require awareness to deal with such issues. Given the current awareness and moral sense, I think humans can ensure the preservation of existence without harm. In the future, humans may assimilate human qualities, draw lessons from history, and use technologies to improve their quality of life. If humans recognize the threat of AI and biotechnologies, they will take appropriate measures to manage and eliminate this risk, similar to minimizing the threat of nuclear weapons. Currently, activists play a crucial role in raising awareness and facilitating constructive transformation in the field of ecology.

I do not agree with overemphasis on determinism by Harari. Though algorithms can make predictions and use their influence, I believe that it will never be able to completely eliminate free will. Individual experiences, emotions, and social interactions impact human behavior, which algorithms may not fully foresee. Harari fails to look into the ethical and social impacts of dataism and algorithmic control, particularly how communities might regulate and manage algorithm use to protect individual privacy and data.

In line with some critics, I acknowledge that humanity will exhibit new circumstances, new religious beliefs, and tolerance towards existing and future uncertainties. However, it is likely that some sort of inequity, which is already prevalent in society, will still persist. Some of Harari's predictions are wild guesses, as he lacks evidence to support them. How humans learn, reject, and manipulate algorithms is an underexplored area of study. Harari's theory lacks coherence and disregards people's adaptability. Our ancestors have always taken advantage of new technologies in ways that let us be more self-reliant. Historically, humans have adapted to incorporating technologies into various aspects of employment, such as computers replacing human duties and transforming work processes. However, this has also generated numerous employment opportunities and pathways for exploration and growth. Similarly, I feel that individuals will continue to seek alternative pursuits and meaning in their lives to create a more promising future. Humans will adapt and discover new activities to engage in, even as technologies take control over most jobs. The arguments in the book fail to provide practical remedies, making it a topic of debate.

Conclusion

"Homo Deus" by Yuval Noah Harari delves into the relationship between human civilization and technological advancements, highlighting the ethical implications, and revolutionizing effects of AI and biotechnology. However, it fails to adequately discuss on issues like socioeconomic disparity and invasion of personal freedoms. The viewpoints in the book challenges assumptions and encourage critical thinking. Critics argue that the book's utopian vision and western-centric perspective oversimplify debates. Although some of the arguments are not practical and lack examples of how the stated issues and challenges can be addressed in future, "Homo Deus" is captivating and intellectually stimulating. I appreciate Harari's aptitude for synthesizing various fields of study, addressing intricate and contentious subjects, and offering a persuasive outlook on the future that stimulates critical analysis of concepts.

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