

Yuval Noah Harari: Audiences, myths and ideas

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Recibido: 08/03/2025

Aceptado: 29/05/2025

Abstract

Yuval Noah Harari is arguably one of Western society's most influential public intellectuals. This paper examines Harari's work through the lens of cultural sociology with the primary objective of analyzing his positions on various topics. My working hypothesis suggests that Harari employs performative projection and mythological discourse in his analyses, transforming complex phenomena which is often rooted in specific scientific fields, into socially compelling narratives. This procedure is posited as a key to understanding Harari's extensive audience connection.

The paper also analyzes Harari's ideas on Evolution, Nature, Happiness, Humanity, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) as reflective of the cultural frameworks encompassing a significant portion of his audience. The analysis connects these ideas to the cultural backgrounds of those who follow Harari as an intellectual figure. Additionally, the paper argues that Harari's analyses are received as credible, not only due to his analytical approach, but because of his ability to group and integrate complex phenomena into cohesive and socially engaging narratives.

Keywords: cultural sociology, Yuval Noah Harari, dramatic intellectual, social narratives, myths.

Resumen

Yuval Noah Harari es, posiblemente, uno de los intelectuales públicos más influyentes de la sociedad occidental. Este artículo examina la obra de Harari a través del lente de la sociología cultural, con el objetivo principal de analizar

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Publicaciones: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/autor?codigo=3202221>

sus posturas sobre diversos temas. Mi hipótesis de trabajo sugiere que Harari emplea la proyección performativa y el discurso mitológico en sus análisis, transformando fenómenos complejos, que a menudo tienen sus raíces en campos científicos específicos, en narrativas socialmente atractivas. Se plantea que este procedimiento es clave para comprender la amplia conexión de Harari con su audiencia.

El artículo también analiza las ideas de Harari sobre evolución, naturaleza, felicidad, humanidad e inteligencia artificial (IA) como reflejo de los marcos culturales que abarcan a una parte significativa de su audiencia. El análisis conecta estas ideas con los antecedentes culturales de quienes siguen a Harari como figura intelectual. Además, el artículo sostiene que los análisis de Harari son recibidos como creíbles no solo por su enfoque analítico, sino también por su capacidad para agrupar e integrar fenómenos complejos en narrativas socialmente unificadoras y atractivas.

Palabras-clave: sociología cultural, Yuval Noah Harari, intelectual dramático, narrativas sociales, mitos.

Introduction

In the contemporary landscape of Western popular cultures, Yuval Noah Harari stands out as one of the most followed and publicized intellectuals of recent years. His meteoric rise over the past decade has become a noteworthy social phenomenon. Looking beyond the merits of his written work alone, it is plausible to hypothesize about the reasons behind Harari's success. For example, elements related to his public persona and social character render him particularly appealing to specific social groups within certain cultural environments. Furthermore, his works reveal a unique interconnection among topics and ideas that resonate well with audiences who follow his theories.

This paper critically analyses some of Harari's ideas through the lens of cultural sociology, considering the social factors surrounding his influence and acknowledging the cultural autonomy inherent in many of the topics he addresses. Based on these premises, the paper explores the hypothesis that Harari's success may be partly due to a blend of personal characteristics and projection, the performative nature of his presentations, and the fabled structure of his ideas. These elements allow for combinations and interconnections among topics that may not always be clearly linked in reality, but which Harari interweaves into a coherent structure that resonates within certain social strata in today's historical and cultural context.

In this sense, Harari may be considered a "dramatic intellectual" in Jeffrey Alexander's terms (Alexander, 2016). His performative style, use of symbolic

narrative structures with binary codes, and ability to evoke the emotional triggers (Pérez-Jara, 2025) and cultural symbols widely recognized in many Western societies may be some of the key factors in his remarkable appeal. These themes, combined with his clarity of argument, have resulted in Harari's analyses and opinions being widely disseminated by modern information technologies, serving as a platform that addresses the concerns and anxieties of thousands—if not millions—of social actors.

Yet, beyond the clarity or ambiguity of the theories and ideas embedded in his work, what truly defines Yuval Noah Harari's career is his rapid ascent to fame. There is clear sociological interest in how this relatively unknown history professor from the University of Jerusalem became a “Rock Star of Thought”² (Blinkist 2017) and a quasi-existential guru for Silicon Valley (Redacción 2018). From a sociological standpoint, this phenomenon itself, more than the content of Harari's works, is particularly compelling.

A cultural sociology perspective may offer the appropriate tools from which to examine how and why Harari's work—and even more so, his public persona—has succeeded in resonating with such extensive audiences within such a short period. Categories such as “dramatic intellectual” and “binary codes,” as developed within cultural sociology (Andreotti et al., 2015; Pérez-Jara & Rudas, 2025), provide relevant analytical frameworks for the exploration of Harari's public impact.

This paper draws on cultural sociology's central assumption that symbolic structures—such as narratives, allegories, and performances—possess relative autonomy and actively shape social meaning (Alexander & Smith, 2018; Pérez-Jara, 2025). This theoretical perspective maintains a balance between symbolic dimensions of life and those aspects traditionally regarded in philosophical thought as material or structural. In this light, rather than reducing ideas to ideology or function—and distancing itself from dichotomies such as structure vs. superstructure—this perspective considers certain cultural forms as socially effective in their own right (Alexander, 2016; Eyerman, 2019).

In this regard, this paper addresses Harari's role as a public intellectual as well as his connection with a broad audience, examining the interplay between his ideas and the social, cultural, and power dynamics that intertwine his discourse with his audience. Therefore, my approach is to explore how Harari's ideas, the theses he defends, and the formats he employs all contribute collectively to his success. The working hypothesis is that Harari's appeal lies not solely in the conclusions he proposes, but also in the dramatic construction and delivery of his narratives.

Given the broad range of subjects on which Harari comments in his

² According to this interview, it was none other than Barack Obama who coined the term ‘Rock Star of Thought’ to refer to Harari.

publications and public appearances, a comprehensive analysis would be beyond the scope of this paper. I do, however, address what I consider to be the core themes underpinning Harari's most popular work. These have been identified by the emphasis he places on these ideas in his books and the interest they garner from the public and media. In particular, I address the themes of Evolution and Nature, Happiness, Humanity, and Artificial Intelligence, as these receive the most frequent mention in Harari's publications and public engagements. I approach each theme by connecting Harari's treatment of the subject to his intended audience, with special attention given to the mythological structures he employs which are grounded fundamentally in the binaries associated with historical conceptions of these ideas.

Yuval Noah Harari, his Persona, intellectual performance, and social resonance

To understand Harari's work and its extensive influence, it is crucial to explore the foundational myths he constructs in his arguments. Central to this exploration is the performative character he embodies as a public intellectual, which significantly contributes to the reach and impact of his ideas on his audiences. This section examines the mythological dimensions of Harari's persona, his performative approach, and the specific audience dynamics that allow his work to resonate powerfully across diverse social groups, shaping in turn how these audiences interpret and relate to the world. These elements will be analyzed in the form of a working framework before delving into the specific ideas in Harari's work that are central to this study.

Harari's persona, performance and myth

Harari's persona, as depicted both in his work and through media portrayals, embodies a unique juxtaposition. On the one hand, he is an ascetic intellectual (Klein, 2017) who observes the world from a metaphorical hilltop, while contemplating its future. This air of solitude, both physical and symbolic, enables him to analyze human nature, social structures, and the evolutionary trajectory of Homo Sapiens. This elevated stance also lends his persona an air of detached wisdom which can be considered reminiscent of an eremite scholar or hermit philosopher, all of which enhances his allure.

Additionally, Harari is recognized as someone who chooses to remain detached from the digital world's frenetic pace. He consciously avoids constant connectivity through mobile technology, maintaining distance from

the relentless flow of information that saturates modern life (Harari, 2020). This stance presents a dual paradox. First, although his work advocates the potential of digital technology for sapiens, his personal choices project a sense of nostalgic detachment from the computerized world. Put simply, he writes as a technophile but lives as a technophobe. Second, despite his apparent disconnect from digital society, Harari has become a respected figure, even a guiding presence, for some of the most connected individuals in the world, particularly the Silicon Valley technology elite. These leaders, who shape the digital and technological landscape, find value in the insights offered by a thinker who personally distances himself from the very digital culture they propagate (Glancy, 2016).

Alongside this performative social persona, Harari's work can be characterised by two symbolic or allegorical strategies for structuring his ideas. The first involves the emphasis he places on what he calls "human myths," referring to the social constructions or fabrications that humans create for various purposes. In this sense, Harari's view aligns with Giddens's (1986) ideas on the imaginary nature of institutions (Olick, 2018) and reflects postmodern notions of the constructed nature of ideological and social phenomena. For example, Harari identifies elements of political and religious structures—such as the concepts of God, money, and wealth—as myths, primarily tools for societal and individual control. According to him, language enables Homo Sapiens to transmit information about "things that do not exist at all" (Harari, 2015: 37). These foster shared myths that support social cooperation, i.e.

Humans think in stories rather than in facts, numbers, or equations, and the simpler the story, the better. Every individual, group, and nation has its own tales and myths. But during the Twentieth Century, global elites in New York, London, Berlin, and Moscow formulated three grand narratives that claimed to explain the entire past and predict the future of the world: the fascist narrative, the communist narrative, and the liberal narrative. (Harari 2018, loc. 165)

Ideas such as these resonate with cultural narratives that advocate for individual freedom, as well as with the notion of a social framework that supports self-construction. This perspective aligns with Harari's concept of mythical social realities imposed by those in power. In this role, Harari may be seen as a "positioned intellectual" (Baert, 2012), rationally challenging dominant narratives to reveal the underlying "myths" that constrain freedom. However, his work largely operates within an ideological framework full of other "myths"—to use his own terminology—such as the notion of "Western liberal democracy." In this sense, he explicitly argues that "there is no serious alternative to the liberal package of individualism, human rights, democracy and a free market" (Harari, 2017: 226).

Harari's work is full of assumptions like the ones mentioned above, which he uses to support his arguments through social labels, ideas, terms, and widely accepted symbols. Yet he rarely problematises or examines in detail what could be called his own mythical framework. In this sense, it is possible to agree with Harari's observation that "Every individual, group, and nation have its tales and myths" (Harari, 2017). Harari's work is no exception, and his theories invite us to scrutinise the myths he himself constructs and integrates into his narratives. From a sociological perspective, this kind of symbolic or mythological structure offers a strong foundation for understanding Harari's appeal as a public intellectual and his connection with his audience. With million books sold globally³, it seems clear that his work and public persona resonate deeply with different types of social groups. Harari skillfully employs well-defined binaries that align with particular "cultural narratives" (Smith & Riley, 2009), which are widely embraced by specific audiences.

Among these binaries, Harari suggests that while mortality has historically been dictated by natural causes, advances in digital, medical, and robotic sciences may allow humans to live indefinitely (Harari, 2017: 49–52). He argues that, despite the inability of philosophy or religion to deliver lasting happiness, pharmaceutical science might now be in a position to provide "pleasant sensations in our bodies" as pathways to permanent happiness (Harari, 2017: 36). Likewise, while political freedom has been a longstanding challenge, Harari contends that modern democracy, guided by enlightened leaders, could finally secure enduring freedom.

Many of these ideas are grounded in an ideological background prevalent in Western societies which may explain why Harari often presents his views as established truths, presuming an audience familiar with these discourses. These concepts underpin the social narrative within large sectors of today's globally connected and cyber-culture-dominated societies (Andreotti et al., 2015) which are frequently referred to as the "free world."

Based on these premises, my analysis examines Harari's interpretations of some widely embraced ideas in contemporary globalized society. This exploration seeks to identify connections between these ideas and the cultural characteristics of Harari's audience, illustrating how his mythological structures reinforce modern social perceptions.

³ According to Nielsen BookScan, *Sapiens* has sold over 25 million copies worldwide and remained among the top three in the Sunday Times bestseller list in the UK for 96 consecutive weeks (El País, 2023). In the United States, combined print sales of *Sapiens* and *Homo Deus* exceeded 580,000 copies by 2018 (Publishers Weekly, 2018), while *21 Lessons* sold over 12,000 copies in its debut week (NPD BookScan, cited in Publishers Weekly, 2018). Across all markets, Harari's books have collectively surpassed 45 million copies in over 65 languages (Grupo Planeta, 2023).

Harari as a dramatic intellectual

From the perspective of cultural sociology, it is plausible to view Harari as a cultural icon whose influence transcends the historical and anthropological topics central to his literature. As a public figure, Harari frequently comments on subjects including culture, science, technology, political and military conflicts, and even lifestyle issues. Across these areas and more, he has both positioned himself, as well as being positioned by others, on numerous platforms and media outlets. Consequently, his followers include social groups that resonate not only with the ideas presented in his works but also align with the ideology, values, and discourses that Harari, as a cultural figure, promotes.

Notably, Harari is less recognized for his academic contributions on historical themes than for his performances, public appearances, and reflections on social media about a wide array of contemporary issues. These range from climate change, gender diversity, and feminism to migration, democracy, global governance, robotics, drugs, artificial intelligence, and more.

The foundation of his public influence lies in his performative approach, through which he adeptly navigates complex, multifaceted themes using simple and categorical language, polished production, and, often, global communication platforms. Indeed, rather than presenting formal theories, Harari crafts narratives with a discourse similar to that of ancient myths. In many of his appearances and presentations, his audience encounters a blend of catastrophic possibilities drawn from historical and current examples alongside the promise of a harmonious future filled with peace, prosperity, happiness, or, at minimum, survival in an increasingly hostile and complex world. These ideas are presented through statements laden with certainty, providing his audience with a genuine sense of security and hope.

Within this performative framework, Harari is consistently called upon to offer sociologically coherent commentary and frameworks for understanding societal phenomena, often on topics at the center of public debate. In this role, he transcends his position as an intellectual and becomes an influential opinion leader on a range of issues, sometimes extending beyond his expertise. As Alexander (2016: 343) states, his “ideas provide poetically potent scripts” that shape the ways people engage with and communicate in diverse social dramas. In this regard, Harari embodies the concept of a “dramatic intellectual” as defined by cultural sociology.

This approach has amplified Harari’s ideas, allowing them to be embraced and accepted as perceived truths among large social groups. From a cultural sociology perspective, his audience connects with him due to the immediacy of his topics and a shared historical and cultural background that unites them.

This connection involves many complex social, ideological, and emotional mechanisms that Harari skillfully navigates to convey his message.

In this context, Harari's work—particularly his socio-anthropological perspective—bridges the realms of intellectual drama and prophetic insight. He often relies on what could be seen as a near-mythical structure to shape his view of the world, frequently employing dualities and cultural dichotomies to simplify complex topics. It can be suggested that this is one of the reasons behind Harari's influence and prominence within certain sociological segments of contemporary Western society, particularly among those who resonate with narratives grounded in "Global Culture," "Global World," or "Global Society". (Andreotti et al., 2015)

Harari's social resonance and the social characteristics of his audience

The final element essential to understanding Harari's work is his audience. Generally, Harari's ideas appeal to individuals who share a cultural foundation that, while not identical, reflects common ideological, cultural, and political understandings about the issues he addresses. His message is not directed at all of "Humanity," as he explicitly emphasizes, but rather at sociologically definable groups whose cultural backgrounds are similar to his own.

This classification is supported by examining the ideological framework of the media that typically covers Harari's public appearances. In this context, it could be argued that Harari primarily speaks to an audience familiar with the values of liberal ideals⁴. These social actors often interpret modern nation-states and their policies through stark binary distinctions such as those found in the Durkheimian categories of the sacred and the profane (Alexander & Mast, 2006) and are viewed as systems that exist primarily to restrict individual freedoms and autonomy.

Unsurprisingly, among the social groups that frequently resonate with Harari's work are digital professionals, social network users, marketing specialists, digital journalists, and various technology enthusiasts (Glancy, 2016). For these audiences, Harari's ideas provide a robust framework for understanding and integrating their digital experiences with a complex social world full of contradictions. Among these groups, Harari's persona and ideas serve as a source of comfort amid the anxiety and chaos of a highly digitalized environment.

In Harari's terms, the social world is simplified into an overarching Humanity as a global entity. This global entity is contrasted with an enlightened

⁴ Here, I refer to "liberal" in the broad sense of classical liberal ideology, not limited to the North American interpretation of the term, which is often associated with affiliation to the Democratic Party.

elite that embraces science, technology, freedom, democracy, and other progressive values, while a darker counterpart seeks to revert to traditional cultural, social, and political forms that could hinder the advent of what Harari interpreted as the ultimate Human Happiness.

Beyond these general social groups, Harari also enjoys substantial popularity among global business leaders who view current political structures as obstacles to achieving a genuinely free and interconnected world. Many in this demographic were educated during the peak of globalization and are familiar with themes such as the limitations imposed by national borders on trade, labour mobility, and capital. This audience champions globalization's ideals and aspires to a more fluid, unrestricted global order as a culmination of societal achievement.

Since the world in which these groups operate is, as Bauman (2004) describes, fluid and liquid, it is not surprising that Harari's ideas—which often classify all humans (or “Sapiens”) as a single category based on a fundamental shared trait: autonomy as individuals—find appeal among them. This notion of “Humanity” posits that, at our core, we share the same intrinsic desire to be unique, autonomous subjects. Such an understanding is widely accepted among those who socialize within “private bubbles” shaped by virtual content. These bubbles, reinforced by mobile devices, streaming platforms, and social networks, create a common language within spaces where many people now conduct most of their social interactions. It is in these spaces that Harari's ideas are most consumed, as they often reflect the virtual realities that these audiences⁵ inhabit.

The last major group to which Harari's theories appeal is the political, cultural, and tech elite. As his website and numerous public engagements demonstrate, Harari is required reading for many leaders in politics and business. His influence is evident in invitations to give keynote speeches on humanity's future, such as his appearances at the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2018 and 2020. He also engages regularly in public dialogues with global leaders, including a widely viewed 2019 conversation with Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg on the role of technology in society's future⁶ (Harari & Zuckerberg, 2019).

Harari has a clear skill for interpreting the intellectual needs, aspirations, and even the fears and vulnerabilities of large social groups. His success, especially among audiences with abundant resources but limited critical engagement, is largely due to factors such as effective publicity, an analytical

⁵ It is important to note that the virtual “Humanity” targeted by Harari's ideas does not, demographically speaking, represent the overwhelming majority of the planet. In fact, it comprises only a small percentage of the global population. However, this segment likely possesses the greatest political, economic, and cultural capital.

⁶ For more information consult: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Boj9eD0Wug8>

framework that mystifies complex ideas, and a well-crafted performative projection. Grasping this theoretical and theatrical framework is essential to fully understanding Harari's persona, his audience, and, more significantly, the financial and media support that has amplified his influence.

A cultural-sociological analysis should link at least part of this audience through identifying trends in the consumption of Harari's work. Although detailed data on this is limited, the prominent voices who have praised—and widely promoted—Harari's books can be highlighted. In many respects, he is not merely a reference point for individual reflection. He has also become a cultural symbol for group identity and cohesion. Reading or viewing Harari's work has even become something of a cultural ritual, mainly within westerns middle class, further bolstering his success.

At this stage, we can only propose this observation as a hypothesis. However, it is notable that highly influential figures have extensively praised Harari's work, including Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, Klaus Schwab, and Reed Hastings, among others. Former President Obama famously compared reading *Sapiens* to visiting the Giza pyramids (Blinkist, 2017). The association of these figures with Harari's work reveals a kind of social network that links his followers to his persona, giving us insights into the social groups that contribute to his prominence.

It is no coincidence that these figures are highlighted in this analysis. They represent distinct but overlapping social, political, technological, and business circles with closely aligned societal and economic models. Harari does not project himself as an impartial thinker whose ideas transcend cultural or ideological divides. Rather, he conceptually embodies the foundational values and interests of specific socio-economic and political groups. These groups, identifiable both geographically, economically and culturally, likely constitute his primary audience.

Paraphrasing Alexander (2016), these leaders guide their audiences toward ideals associated with progress, global order, and proactive engagement in society, economics, ecology, and geopolitics. In truth, there are identifiable social groups, some perfectly classifiable as “elite,” that often find themselves reflected in Harari's work. These groups are akin to what Harari might describe as the inhabitants of the bright, hopeful world envisioned in his *Homo Deus* utopia (Harari, 2017). They are also distinctly separate from the rest, the so-called “useless class⁷,” which Harari identifies as a contributing factor to the decline of nature's “Garden.” (Harari, 2017)

In many ways, Harari serves as a modern prophet within an increasingly binary, dichotomous worldview, where dark and light, superstition and science,

⁷ <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2020/01/yuval-harari-warning-davos-speech-future-predictions/>

tradition and progress, democracy and tyranny—essentially, Homo Sapiens and Homo Deus—are locked in a definitive struggle for humanity’s future. For his audiences, Harari represents, perhaps, a key figure capable of guiding humanity from its uncertain past to a bright, promising future.

Harari’s Conceptual Framework: Evolution, Happiness, and Artificial Intelligence vs. Humanity – Three Myths in His Works

In the previous sections, Harari has been examined as both a performative figure and a symbolic archetype for specific social groups alongside an analysis of the audience segments that resonate with his work. The working hypothesis of this paper suggests that Harari’s cultural impact and the appeal of his ideas stem not only from the quality of his work but also from the mythical aura he cultivates through his persona and the performative aspects of his public engagements. While this mythical dimension contributes to his success, it is essential to recognize that Harari’s works themselves exhibit qualities that foster a strong connection with different social groups. My thesis so far has been that Harari’s ideas are anchored in a mythological framework, reinforced by the persona he embodies and the performative approach he employs. Moving forward, I will now explore three of the foundational themes found in Harari’s works: Evolution and Nature, the juxtaposition of Artificial Intelligence and Humanity, and his ideas about Human Happiness. Each theme reflects Harari’s tendency to develop his ideas through narrative or mythological structures, acting as powerful attractors for a wide range of social groups, audiences, and actors.

Evolution and Nature in Harari’s work

The first concepts I will analyze in Harari’s work are his treatment of Evolution and Nature. Harari interprets Evolution as primarily biological, but at times seemingly geological or physical, as a ‘natural’ or ‘cosmic’ mechanism of perfection, selection, and adaptation. His view suggests that genes carry specific, predefined information enabling species to do things such as perform tasks, respond to their environment, and adapt to changes. According to Harari, Evolution operates through “biochemical algorithms” (Harari 2018, loc. 439) that guide survival and pass on advantageous traits through genetic transmission. This deterministic framing opens up a potentially problematic interpretation: that certain behaviors in species, humans included, may be governed by fixed genetic algorithms which could be unchangeable or unmodifiable. In doing so,

Harari's framework may unintentionally endorse ideologies that suggest that some human behaviors are morphologically or even genetically determined, reinforcing stereotypes or biases toward specific group behaviors.

Harari implies that "Nature" eliminates genetic carriers incompatible with species survival, though he does not clarify precisely what he understands as "Nature"—a term that carries complex and polysemic connotations. At times, Harari references other natures, as in "the true nature of reality" (Harari, 2017: 145), or "the nature of war," hinting at an essentialist or even Aristotelian essence. However, this lack of a consistent definition creates ambiguity, especially as he discusses "the nature of Sapiens, Humans, or even Humanity" (Harari, 2017: 270). This ambiguity is highlighted in his exchange with Slavoj Žižek, where Harari remarks,

Two things to say about Nature; one is that Nature does not care about us in any particular way. If an asteroid were to hit the planet tomorrow morning and all life on Earth would be destroyed, Nature would not care about it, and it would just go on as usual. (Žižek & Harari, 2022, Min. 00:03:10)

Here, Harari's "Nature" represents the evolutionary outcome of pre-designed genes evolving through natural selection. Yet, like his other myths, he does not differentiate between a singular ecological Nature and plural natures that might apply to specific contexts.

Something similar emerges in Harari's anthropological approach where he attempts to construct a comprehensive History of Humanity. Specifically, Harari examines the Evolution of Homo Sapiens as the prevailing branch of the Homo genus. In this regard, he acknowledges the importance of incorporating zoological elements into understanding human societies' social development, asserting that this process cannot be entirely attributed to cultural factors (Žižek & Harari, 2022).

In a sense, the subliminal conclusion of Harari's conception of Nature and Evolution can be interpreted in theological terms: as a dualistic figure of the Father/Nature acting through the Holy Spirit/Evolution. This mysterious Nature, reminiscent of the paternal God of the Torah, appears benevolent if its designs are followed but unyielding if defied. Through this logical structure, Harari resonates with audiences whose symbolic frameworks and cultural codes are innately shaped by this kind of dualistic or Manichean logic.

The uniqueness of contemporary postmodern societies—where the majority of Harari's readership is found—does not lie in a lack of cohesive "social glue," as might, for example, be attached to the historical nation-state. Instead, the key factor here is that these binary logics are masked in various ideologies (modern-isms), political organizations, cultural codes, scientific stances, artistic creations, and so forth, each producing micro-interpretations of

reality and fostering increasingly encapsulated social classes in the sociological sense. Here, Harari's ideas, presented through his specific heuristic structure, offer simplified explanations that align with the concerns of many social factions, even when contradictions may exist among these groups.

In sum, the concepts of Nature and Evolution in Harari's work offer a logical architecture that effectively serves a public increasingly disillusioned with the all-encompassing ideologies of modernity, whether these ideologies are political or theological. That "God is dead" to the modern world does not mean that the need for such an entity has vanished. Harari appears to understand this void well, offering an alternative to fill it—one that remains perfectly coherent with his system yet imbued with its own elements of faith and irrationality, not unlike the ancient traditions he seems poised to replace with his myths.

The Humanity and the Artificial Intelligence (AI), a myth versus another

Harari's conceptualization of Humanity and Artificial Intelligence (AI) brings forward ideas that resonate with his audience's cultural perspectives, revealing both intersections and contradictions in his treatment of these concepts. His approach to these topics continues the mythological and theatrical structures central to his worldview, a feature that arguably underpins his broad social appeal.

In *Homo Deus*, Harari envisions a future where humanism, reinterpreted as a secular religion with Humanity as its deity, will drive humans to pursue God-like powers. He suggests that a potential elite of enlightened humans will guide the rest to the next step of human evolution, taking us from *Homo Sapiens* to what he terms *Homo Deus*. These elites are also the last defence against the total dehumanization of our species.

According to Harari, without this elite, humanity may risk losing control over its creations, which implies an inching toward existential threat. Central to Harari's view is the notion that the greatest challenges of the 21st century are intertwined with humanity's unchecked growth and its potential to destabilize the planet. Despite ongoing dialogue about pollution and climate change, Harari argues that many nations have yet to implement meaningful policies to confront these issues effectively (The TED Interview, 2022).

However, Harari holds out hope for the future, illustrated through what he terms "apocalypse amusement." This vision suggests that social miseries will be alleviated through goals like those outlined in the 2030 agenda, propelled by advanced humanist ideals and cutting-edge technologies (Anthony, 2017). While pursuing this idyllic future, Harari acknowledges that sacrifices and

challenges lie ahead. Yet, he does not specify which segments of his idealized “Humanity” should bear these burdens.

Despite the inherent contradictions within this outlook—for example, the idea of sacrificing large numbers in the name of “Humanity”—Harari’s framework offers a streamlined perspective that resonates with a contemporary need for simplified understandings about an increasingly a complex world. Throughout history, human societies have been marked by geopolitical, political, and social divisions, generating anxieties and fears often exploited by powerful interests.

To such an audience, Harari presents explanations that mitigate this anxiety by reducing complexity to a minimalistic, often binary structure. He employs a familiar “us versus them” narrative, though framed in a prophetic way that seems to transcend division rather than dwell on it. Through this portrayal of ‘Humanity’ as harmonious and united, Harari aims to provide a resolution to issues arising from the dichotomous, dualistic views that are pervasive in social sciences. In this sense, he is not appealing to any one specific group, state, or society; rather, he aspires to reach all *Sapiens*, crafting a unifying discourse that resonates across divides.

Nonetheless, Harari’s framework cannot fully evade the pitfalls of modern, Enlightenment-oriented binary thinking. Although he seems to sideline traditional social dualisms, the simplistic binarism remains prominent, though reconfigured into alternative forms. This duality is especially evident in his recent focus on emerging technologies, such as AI—a topic he has explored in in depth in debates, interviews, and talks, and that has gained renewed attention since 2023. Notably, Harari does not reject AI in totality but cautions against its unregulated development. For example, he positions a controlled AI as potentially beneficial and transformative, while an unregulated AI could spell danger. His central question—“Who will regulate AI?”—finds its answer in his vision of the same rational elite who, according to Harari, is able to represent the entirety Humanity.

AI is therefore another issue that highlights tensions in Harari’s works, only to be solved by him through a straightforward binary, or Manichean, structure that resonates with his audience. He contrasts the concept of a ‘potentially dangerous’, ‘unregulated’ AI with that of a beneficial, carefully controlled AI. This setup raises a critical question: who will oversee these technologies to mitigate their risks? For Harari, the answer lies within his analytical framework where he posits that it is “Humanity”—or, more specifically, an elite tier of enlightened individuals—who must assume responsibility for shaping the future on behalf of all *Sapiens*.

Harari seeks to alert his audience to the dangers of AI misused or unchecked, warning that an unrestrained AI could even “hack the operating system of

human civilisation” (The Economist, 2023). He has voiced particular concern regarding the past 2024 U.S. presidential race where, according to him, AI tools could be deployed to generate political content on a massive scale, including the creation of fake news stories, which underscores the profound impact and risks associated with AI in modern political and social realms (Harari, 2017). Harari also foresees the possibility of AI-authored “sacred texts” forming the basis of new cults, raising alarms about the potential for AI to profoundly shape human belief systems and social dynamics (Melber, 2023).

Expanding upon these ideas, Harari continues to develop an array of apocalyptic forecasts, covering potential economic (Milmo, 2023), political (Melber, 2023), ecological (Žižek & Harari, 2022), and ontological (The Economist, 2023) crises linked to AI. His insights underscore an urgent need for responsible regulation to curb these dangers and unlock AI’s potential benefits. In this context, Harari’s followers are encouraged to exemplify the kind of rational, enlightened Humanity he envisions as fit to steward these profound technological changes.

In this regard, Harari presents a thought-provoking perspective on the future of Humanity where he addresses the roles of AI, human agency, and societal evolution. His viewpoint emphasizes the urgent need for ethical considerations around technological progress and Humanity’s trajectory. For Harari, AI’s potential for social harm calls for the guiding hand of those he considers most suited to lead—individuals he identifies as rational members of his idealized Humanity. Harari concludes that without responsible oversight, AI could, indeed, fulfill society’s worst fears, but with careful regulation, its risks may be mitigated, and its positive impacts realized. In this regard he points out:

Before long, this may become a reality. On a more mundane level, we may soon find ourselves engaging in protracted online debates about subjects like abortion, climate change, or the Russian invasion of Ukraine with entities we presume to be human—but are, in fact, AI. The issue is that it is utterly futile for us to spend time trying to sway an AI bot’s declared viewpoints, whereas the AI could refine its messages so accurately that it stands a reasonable chance of influencing us. (Harari, 2023)

The issue here is not the specifics of these examples, but rather Harari’s use of “us”. This suggests that he speaks on behalf of global humanity - an assumption neglects the reality that political and social entities across the spectrum could voice their own “critical” perspectives as a cautionary tale of AI’s influence. Harari’s vision often bypasses the monetary and power dynamics at play within current liberal democracies. These societies are not merely “conversations among people” (The Economist, 2023), as he likes to

say, but real and complex structures of ideological, cultural and political power, with wealth disparities and ongoing battles for social control.

Both Harari and his audience must consider that the forces driving politics, economics, and progress are sustained through intricate, often conflictual, interactions among individuals, groups, states, and empires (Bueno, 1991). As unfortunate as it may be, even violence and war alongside treaties and agreements are integral, sometimes necessary forms of human interaction, rather than mere misunderstandings of the world.

As these dynamics increasingly permeate individual lives, Harari's worldview may struggle to keep pace with the layered realities of a fragmented world. While Harari's myths—"Humanity," "Progress," "Nature," and "Homo Sapiens"—may fall short of fully explaining these phenomena, they nonetheless fulfill a valuable sociological function. Understanding these constructs helps elucidate not only Harari's framework but also the motivations of the audiences drawn to his ideas and theories.

The Human Happiness for Harari

The final concept I will address is Harari's examination of Happiness, which he frames as yet another mythological construct. In contemporary Western culture, the emphasis on Happiness is undeniable due to how much of our social and value systems are centered around this ideal. Phrases like "Don't worry, be happy" illustrate the prevalence of institutionalized messages urging the pursuit of Happiness, encompassing an array of cultural products—literature, consumer goods, pharmaceuticals, symbols, and practices (Bueno, 2019). This cultural framing of Happiness is key to understanding Harari's perspective.

Harari contends that Science challenges the widespread belief that Happiness stems from accomplishments, wealth, or romantic fulfillment. Instead, he argues that people experience Happiness for one fundamental reason: "due to pleasurable sensations in their bodies" (Harari, 2017: 36). This view suggests that Happiness could theoretically be achieved through chemical means, indicating that a pill or other substance might suffice. For Harari, Happiness is fundamentally linked to a combination of hormones, pheromones, and electrochemical reactions within the biological body, forming what Homo sapiens identify as "Happiness." Within this framework, if these sensations could be artificially induced, the formula for Happiness might indeed be attainable.

Harari's interpretation of Happiness as a biochemical phenomenon contrasts with social or cultural definitions that associate Happiness with

economic stability, moral fulfillment, or spiritual well-being. For him, the source of Happiness is found not in social structures but within the individual biological body, making it, in principle, universally accessible. This biochemical view resonates with contemporary society's evolving relationship with drug use, particularly in so-called first-world nations, where the acceptance of psychedelics and "soft drugs" for medicinal or recreational use has grown significantly, backed by pharmaceutical lobbying.

Expressed in binary social terms, Harari's biochemical concept of true Human Happiness stands in contrast to a sociocultural notion of Happiness tied to economic, moral, or spiritual dimensions of well-being. In his view, the source of Happiness does not lie in the social order but in the individual biological body which makes it theoretically (and potentially) attainable for all. Harari connects his discourse with a socially and culturally well-established sphere. The culture of chemical drug use has deep roots in contemporary societies, especially in developed nations. It includes not only underground or subcultural symbols associated with art and certain alternative lifestyles, but it has also shaped legislation in various countries that have legalized the medicinal and recreational use of psychedelics and "soft drugs." Additionally, this culture intersects with significant economic interests, as large pharmaceutical corporations actively influence it.

Harari's reductionist portrayal of Happiness as a straightforward phenomenon suppressed by the modern technological world resonates more with popular audiences than a nuanced theory of human psychological well-being. His tendency to validate his arguments shows a dismissal of social complexities and the pluralities inherent in scientific inquiry.

According to Harari, the primary sources of human Happiness, up until our current evolutionary stage, "have been random, external, incidental, and, unfortunately, contingent" (Harari, 2017: 39–40). In essence, he proposes an historical explanation of how societies have constructed social frameworks meant to fulfil human needs, which, in his view, do not produce genuine Happiness but rather an illusion of it. Paradoxically, Harari argues, these social constructs have obstructed the true source of human Happiness, which he believes, as Epicurus once posited, lies in bodily pleasure. He points to numerous political, religious, and moral laws that have restricted sexual freedom or the use of drugs and chemicals for enjoyment.

Building on this, he claims that Humanity is now positioned to synthesize and consistently reproduce these pleasurable sensations within individual bodies. Harari is convinced that soon we will be able to attain Happiness without action, thought, achievement, love, or possessions. Without any of these, we will simply "be happy." In his words:

If Science is correct, and our biochemical system determines our Happiness, then the only way to ensure lasting contentment is by manipulating this system.... And this is precisely what we have begun over the past few decades. Fifty years ago, psychiatric drugs were stigmatized. Today, that stigma has been shattered. (Harari, 2017: 39)

The biochemical pathway to Happiness, in Harari's view, contrasts with the philosophical and ideological solutions historically offered by religious and intellectual figures. According to him, this shift is not merely the future of human development; it is the current reality of our societies. Today's barriers are less technical than sociological: opposition from certain social groups poses obstacles, and political challenges arise. States and governments, he suggests, not only inhibit individual Happiness but also the advancement of science (Harari, 2017).

In simple terms, Harari advocates for a reorientation of social structures to prioritize subjective well-being. Essentially, individuals should focus on what they desire for themselves, independently of the needs of the groups, societies, or states to which they belong. This ethos finds fertile ground in popular culture and various social and political movements that populate the intellectual and cultural spaces of many societies. The culture of the autonomous individual, of self-determined identity, centered solely on self-definition, is undoubtedly the prevailing discourse across many sectors of the social and political landscape.

A notable issue with Harari's theory lies in his disregard for the broader social relations that extend beyond individual pleasure. Many human actions are driven by social necessities rather than the immediate pursuit of subjective biochemical satisfaction⁸. These behaviors are not exclusively motivated by personal pleasure but are shaped by cultural institutions that transcend individual desires and decisions. In essence, they are social actions expected to be performed irrespective of personal inclinations.

Harari's depiction of Happiness resembles an egoistic approach reminiscent of the Greek *idiôtēs*, who prioritized only personal well-being within the polis. He implies that individual subjective well-being should be the ultimate goal of all political and social efforts. However, Harari provides little insight into reconciling the diverse worldviews, value systems, and goals of different individuals, groups, and societies in the pursuit of Happiness.

In reality, the relational nature of social interactions often leads to conflicts where one person's pursuit of Happiness may obstruct another's. Even if we were to adopt Harari's pharmaco-technological solutions to address social conflicts, it would be impossible to circumvent this inherent aspect of social coexistence. This is particularly true in a context where resources, like the

⁸ For instance, a parent's sacrifice or a worker's dedication to demanding jobs are not necessarily activities driven by individual corporeal pleasure.

“drugs and games” Harari envisions for the “useless classes,” are limited. In such conditions, individuals would inevitably compete for access to Happiness, potentially fueling social tensions.

Nevertheless, to be fair to Harari, it is important to acknowledge that he is not the first to reduce Happiness to a myth. This reductionist view is a common myth of our time, promoted by marketing agencies, self-help books, entertainment industries, pharmaceutical companies, and other entities. Harari is but one of many voices offering an ultimate formula for Happiness. In this sense, Harari uses a dramatic tone, aiming to appeal to a sociocultural audience ready for this intellectual discourse.

In this regard, Harari aligns with the fundamental principle of marketing: avoid contradictions or references to competing products when promoting an idea. He explicitly associates his Happiness solution with Epicureanism and builds his conceptual framework around this philosophy. His conceptualization of Happiness contributes to the expanding array of literary works on the topic, offering a broad semantic exploration without clearly defining the concept itself. At least, in this respect, Harari makes his philosophical position explicit, which deserves some recognition.

Conclusion

This analysis of Yuval Noah Harari’s work and public persona highlights his pivotal role as a dramatic intellectual with considerable influence across pressing contemporary issues. Harari aligns himself with the tradition of public intellectuals who connect their ideas to prevailing social codes, narratives, symbols, and emotional touchstones (Baert, 2012; Pérez-Jara & Camprubí, 2022).

Through a cultural-sociological lens, I have examined some of the core themes in Harari’s narrative of humanity’s past and future. Topics such as Evolution and Nature, Happiness, Humanity, and Artificial Intelligence, frequently present in his writes and public appearances. His straightforward, definitive, and often generalized approach to controversial subjects fosters a unique cognitive and emotional rapport with his audience, creating a sense of shared language, beliefs, and aspirations. Harari underscores the urgent dangers facing humanity while also presenting accessible solutions.

In many respects, Harari embodies the role of a unifying apostle, drawing together varied actors under a shared cultural framework. He positions himself as a mediator in social debates, assuming the existence of universal truths. Even if this assumption isn’t always accurate, it gains strength from a social drive to resolve contradictions and simplify conflicts, frequently reducing them to clear, often binary, alternatives.

Jeffrey Alexander aptly notes, “a dramaturgy that intends to take meaning seriously must account for the cultural codes and texts that structure the cognitive environments in which speech is given to actors in an attempt to get a closer look at the stage events” (Alexander & Mast, 2006: 4). Harari navigates contentious issues by sometimes softening tension through balanced alternatives, while at other times, he presents humanity’s fate in stark, binary terms. His master stories encapsulate clear views and proposed solutions to avert global dystopia and eventual collapse, structured as compelling narratives that often transform into popular myths or parables. Ultimately, Harari’s work invites not merely knowledge but belief, promising escape from global catastrophe.

While Harari promotes a perspective on the current generation as a transformative force beyond *Homo Sapiens*, it’s crucial to recall that such oracular figures have appeared throughout history. His role as both analyst and social critic is neither a pure reflection of the current socio-political context nor an entirely novel paradigm. By mobilizing new binaries—such as *Homo Sapiens* versus *Homo Deus*—he skillfully taps into collective anxieties about mortality, AI, and ecological collapse, reaching audiences far beyond academia.

Moreover, Harari sets himself apart from other public intellectuals through a narrative structure built around a metaphorical framework that consistently centers human potential, framed in his own terms and interpretations. His teleological perspective casts technology as a utopian and redemptive force, poised to overcome the natural limitations of *Homo Sapiens*. In this view, Harari does not portray himself as the *Homo Deus*, but rather as its prophet.

Ultimately, achieving a nuanced understanding of Harari’s impact in today’s cultural landscape requires a balanced view that considers both the audience who engage with his ideas, performances, and publications, as well as the role he himself performs as a public intellectual. This dual perspective offers a more comprehensive explanation of his influence and appeal across some social segments of the contemporary globalised society.

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