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# Yuval Noah Harari

**Yuval Noah Harari** (Hebrew: יובל נח הררי [juˈval ˈnoaχ haˈʁaʁi]; born 1976) is an Israeli public intellectual, historian, and professor in the Department of History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.<sup>[1]</sup> He is the author of the popular science bestsellers *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (2014), *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (2016), and *21 Lessons for the 21st Century* (2018). His writings examine free will, consciousness, intelligence, happiness, and suffering.

Harari writes about the "cognitive revolution" occurring roughly 70,000 years ago when *Homo sapiens* supplanted the rival Neanderthals and other species of the genus *Homo*, developed language skills and structured societies, and ascended as apex predators, aided by the agricultural revolution and accelerated by the scientific revolution, which have allowed humans to approach near mastery over their environment. His books also examine the possible consequences of a futuristic biotechnological world in which intelligent biological organisms are surpassed by their own creations; he has said, "*Homo sapiens* as we know them will disappear in a century or so".<sup>[2]</sup>

In *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, Harari surveys human history from the evolutionary emergence of Homo Sapiens to 21st Century political and technological revolutions. The book is based on his lectures to an undergraduate world history class.

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## Yuval Noah Harari



Harari in 2017

<b>Born</b>	February 24, 1976 <div>Kiryat Atta, Israel</div>
<b>Alma<span> </span>mater</b>	Hebrew University of Jerusalem (BA) <div>Jesus College, Oxford (DPhil)</div>
<b>Known<span> </span>for</b>	<i>Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind</i> <div><i>Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow</i></div> <div><i>21 Lessons for the 21st Century</i></div>
<b>Spouse(s)</b>	Itzik Yahav
	<b>Scientific career</b>
<b>Fields</b>	Big History, social philosophy

**Published works**[Books](#)[Articles](#)**References****External links****Institutions** [Hebrew University of Jerusalem](#)**Thesis** *History and I: War and the Relations between History and Personal Identity in Renaissance Military Memoirs, c. 1450–1600* (<https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.391070>) (2002)**Doctoral advisor** [Steven J. Gunn](#)**Website** [www.ynharari.com](http://www.ynharari.com) (<https://www.ynharari.com/>)**Signature**

## Early life

Yuval Noah Harari was born and raised in [Kiryat Ata](#), Israel, one of three children born to Shlomo and Pnina Harari. His family was a [secular Jewish](#) family with roots in Lebanon and Eastern Europe. His father was a state-employed armaments engineer and his mother was an office administrator.<sup>[3][4][5]</sup> Harari taught himself to read at age three. He studied in a class for [intellectually gifted children](#) at the Leo Baeck Education Center in [Haifa](#) from the age of eight. He deferred mandatory military service in the [Israel Defense Forces](#) to pursue university studies as part of the [Atuda](#) program but was later exempted from completing his military service following his studies due to health issues.<sup>[5]</sup> He began studying history and international relations at the [Hebrew University of Jerusalem](#) at age 17.

## Academic career

Harari first specialized in medieval history and military history in his studies from 1993 to 1998 at the [Hebrew University of Jerusalem](#). He completed his D.Phil. degree at [Jesus College, Oxford](#), in 2002, under the supervision of Steven J. Gunn. From 2003 to 2005, he pursued postdoctoral studies in history as a [Yad Hanadiv Fellow](#).<sup>[6]</sup> While at Oxford, Harari first encountered the writings of [Jared Diamond](#), whom he has acknowledged as an influence on his own writing. At a [Berggruen Institute](#) salon, Harari said that Diamond's *Guns, Germs, and Steel* “was kind of an epiphany in my academic career. I realized that I could actually write such books.”<sup>[7][8]</sup>

## Literary career

Harari has published numerous books and articles, including *Special Operations in the Age of Chivalry, 1100–1550*;<sup>[9]</sup> *The Ultimate Experience: Battlefield Revelations and the Making of Modern War Culture, 1450–2000*;<sup>[10]</sup> *The Concept of 'Decisive Battles' in World History*;<sup>[11]</sup> and *Armchairs, Coffee and Authority: Eye-witnesses and Flesh-witnesses Speak about War, 1100–2000*.<sup>[12]</sup> He now specializes in world history and macro-historical processes.

His book *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* was originally published in Hebrew in 2011 based on the 20 lectures of an undergraduate world history class he was teaching. It was then released in English in 2014 and has since been translated into some 45 additional languages.<sup>[13]</sup>

The book surveys the entire length of human history, from the evolution of *Homo sapiens* in the Stone Age up to the political and technological revolutions of the 21st century. The Hebrew edition became a bestseller in Israel, and generated much interest among the general public, turning Harari into a celebrity.<sup>[14]</sup> Joseph Drew wrote that "*Sapiens* provides a wide-ranging and thought-provoking introduction for students of comparative civilization," considering it as a work that "highlights the importance and wide expanse of the social sciences."<sup>[15]</sup>

Harari's follow-up book, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow*, was published in 2016 and examines the possibilities for the future of *Homo sapiens*.<sup>[16]</sup> The book's premise outlines that, in the future, humanity is likely to make a significant attempt to gain happiness, immortality and God-like powers.<sup>[17]</sup> The book goes on to openly speculate various ways this ambition might be realised for *Homo sapiens* in the future based on the past and present. Among several possibilities for the future, Harari develops the term dataism for a philosophy or mindset that worships big data.<sup>[18][19]</sup> Writing in *The New York Times Book Review*, Siddhartha Mukherjee stated that although the book "fails to convince me entirely," he considers it "essential reading for those who think about the future."<sup>[20]</sup>

His latest book, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, published on 30 August 2018, focuses more on present-day concerns.<sup>[21][22][23][24]</sup> A review in the *New Statesman* commented on what it called "risible moral dictums littered throughout the text", criticised Harari's writing style and stated that he was "trafficking in pointless asides and excruciating banalities."<sup>[25]</sup> Another review in *Kirkus Reviews* praised the book as a "tour de force" and described it as a "highly instructive exploration of current affairs and the immediate future of human societies."<sup>[26]</sup>

The first volume of his graphic adaptation of *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, *Sapiens: A Graphic History – The Birth of Humankind*, co-authored with David Vandermeulen and Daniel Casanave, was published in November 2020 and launched at a livestream event organised by How to Academy and Penguin Books.<sup>[27]</sup>

## Personal life

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Harari is gay<sup>[28]</sup> and in 2002 met his husband Itzik Yahav, whom he calls "my internet of all things".<sup>[29][30]</sup> Yahav is also Harari's personal manager.<sup>[31]</sup> They married in a civil ceremony in Toronto, Canada.<sup>[32]</sup>

Harari says Vipassana meditation, which he began whilst in Oxford in 2000,<sup>[33]</sup> has "*transformed my life*".<sup>[34]</sup> He practises for two hours every day (one hour at the start and end of his work day<sup>[35]</sup>), every year undertakes a meditation retreat of 30 days or longer, in silence and with no books or social media,<sup>[36][37][38]</sup> and is an assistant meditation teacher.<sup>[39]</sup> He dedicated *Homo Deus* to "my teacher, S. N. Goenka, who lovingly taught me important things", and said "I could not have written this book without the focus, peace and insight gained from practising Vipassana for fifteen years."<sup>[40]</sup> He also regards meditation as a way to research.<sup>[38]</sup>

Harari is a vegan, and says this resulted from his research, including his view that the foundation of the dairy industry is breaking the bond between mother cow and calf.<sup>[4][41]</sup> As of May 2021, Harari did not have a smartphone.<sup>[42][43]</sup>

In a 2020 interview, Harari talks about his place of residence and says, "I live in a kind of middle-class suburb of Tel Aviv."<sup>[44]</sup>

## Awards and recognition

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Harari twice won the Polonsky Prize for "Creativity and Originality", in 2009 and 2012. In 2011, he won the Society for Military History's Moncado Award for outstanding articles in military history. In 2012, he was elected to the Young Israeli Academy of Sciences.

*Sapiens* was in the top 3 of *The New York Times* Best Seller list for 96 consecutive weeks. In 2018, Harari gave the first TED Talk as a digital avatar.<sup>[45]</sup>

In 2017, *Homo Deus* won Handelsblatt's German Economic Book Award for the most thoughtful and influential economic book of the year.<sup>[46]</sup>

In 2018 and 2020, Harari spoke at the World Economic Forum annual conference in Davos.<sup>[47]</sup>

## Controversy

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In July 2019, Harari was widely criticised for allowing several omissions and amendments in the Russian edition of his third book *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, using a softer tone when speaking about Russian authorities.<sup>[48][49]</sup> Leonid Bershidsky in *Moscow Times* called it "caution – or, to call it by its proper name, cowardice",<sup>[50]</sup> and Nettanel Slyomovics in *Haaretz* claimed that "he is sacrificing those same liberal ideas that he presumes to represent".<sup>[51]</sup> In a response, Harari stated that he "was warned that due to these few examples Russian censorship will not allow distribution of a Russian translation of the book" and that he "therefore faced a dilemma," namely to "replace these few examples with other examples, and publish the book in Russia," or "change nothing, and publish nothing," and that he "preferred publishing, because Russia is a leading global power and it seemed important that the book's ideas should reach readers in Russia, especially as the book is still very critical of the Putin regime – just without naming names."<sup>[52]</sup>

## Reception

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Harari's popular writings are considered to belong to the Big History genre, with Ian Parker writing in *New Yorker* that "Harari did not invent Big History, but he updated it with hints of self-help and futurology, as well as a high-altitude, almost nihilistic composure about human suffering."<sup>[53]</sup> His work has been more negatively received in academic circles, with Christopher Robert Hallpike stating in a review of *Sapiens* that: "one has often had to point out how surprisingly little he seems to have read on quite a number of essential topics. It would be fair to say that whenever his facts are broadly correct they are not new, and whenever he tries to strike out on his own he often gets things wrong, sometimes seriously." Hallpike further states that: "we should not judge *Sapiens* as a serious contribution to knowledge but as 'infotainment', a publishing event to titillate its readers by a wild intellectual ride across the landscape of history, dotted with sensational displays of speculation, and ending with blood-curdling predictions about human destiny. By these criteria, it is a most successful book."<sup>[54]</sup> Current Affairs magazine published the article "The Dangerous Populist Science of Yuval Noah Harari" by Darshana Narayanan in July 22, pointing out the lack of scientific support and several errors throughout his books: "The best-selling author is a gifted storyteller and popular speaker. But he sacrifices science for sensationalism, and his work is riddled with errors."<sup>[55]</sup>

# Philanthropy

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During the [COVID-19 pandemic](#), following former United States President [Donald Trump's](#) cut to [WHO](#) funding, Harari announced that he and his husband would donate \$1 million to the WHO through Sapienship, their social impact company.<sup>[56][57]</sup>

## Published works

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### Books

- *Renaissance Military Memoirs: War, History and Identity, 1450–1600* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2004), [ISBN 978-184-383-064-1](#)
- *Special Operations in the Age of Chivalry, 1100–1550* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2007), [ISBN 978-184-383-292-8](#)
- *The Ultimate Experience: Battlefield Revelations and the Making of Modern War Culture, 1450–2000* (Houndmills: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2008), [ISBN 978-023-058-388-7](#)
- *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (London: Harvill Secker, 2014) [ISBN 978-006-231-609-7](#)
- *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (2016), [ISBN 978-1910701881](#)
- *Money: Vintage Minis* (select excerpts from *Sapiens* and *Homo Deus*) (London: Penguin Random House, 2018) [ISBN 978-1784874025](#)
- *21 Lessons for the 21st Century* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2018), [ISBN 1787330672](#)
- *Sapiens: A Graphic History, Volume 1 – The Birth of Humankind* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2020)
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- "Why Technology Favors Tyranny" (<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/10/yuval-noah-harari-technology-tyranny/568330/>), *The Atlantic* (October 2018).
- "Yuval Noah Harari: the world after coronavirus" (<https://www.ft.com/content/19d90308-6858-11ea-a3c9-1fe6fedcca75>), *Financial Times* (20 March 2020).

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## External links

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- Jan Michalski Prize for Literature (<http://www.fondation-janmichalski.com/en/prix-jan-michalski/>), official website
- Official website (<http://www.ynharari.com/>)
- Meet the author - Yuval Harari video interview (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-29205225>) - BBC News
- Yuval Noah Harari ([https://www.ted.com/speakers/yuval\\_noah\\_harari](https://www.ted.com/speakers/yuval_noah_harari)) at TED
- Why fascism is so tempting - and how your data could power it (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHHb7R3kx40>) on YouTube

**External video**

 [21 Lessons for the 21st Century: Noah Harari \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLkxLab4JpE\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLkxLab4JpE), [Matter Of Fact With Stan Grant, ABC News](#)

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