

SOC 105-002

Prof. Elliot

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Harari v. The 21st Century

Over the course of the past few months in this sociology class, I have begun to learn and observe the similarities and differences between different philosophers and their beliefs. One specific philosopher, Yuval Noah Harari, is one that I would like to focus on today.

In Harari's book titled, "21 Lessons for the 21st Century", it obviously leads the reader to believe that all twenty-one lessons discussed in this book are the "correct" way of thinking, and some might see this book as a sort of "wake-up call" on how to act, think, and wonder in the twenty first century. Harari's book covers many topics including religion, education, civilization, war, secularism, equality, and more. Inside each chapter, Harari also touches on different subtopics, including the history of gender inequality.

Included in the chapter named "Civilization", Harari touches on the subject of gender inequality in Jewish tradition. Mentioning the previous scandal with the Brooklyn newspaper in 2011, essentially editing out all women in the photographs of American officials watching Osama Bin Ladens' compound being raided. Hillary Clinton was one of these women edited out in the photos, and at the time, she was Secretary of State.

Editors of the newspaper claimed that this digital erasing was an impact of the Jewish "laws of modesty." As mentioned in the chapter, these laws of modesty are rooted from ancient

synagogues women are carefully segregated from the men and must confine themselves to a restricted zone where they are hidden behind a curtain, so that no man will accidentally see the shape of a woman as he says his prayers or reads scriptures.” (Page 97, paragraph four). This quote attempts to validate the modernized version of gender inequality, and continues to mention other examples of the Jewish “laws of modesty” throughout the chapter.

One of the previous modules we have discussed in class was a story called “The Yellow Wallpaper,” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. The story discusses the tale of a married woman, who believes she has a life-threatening disease, and goes under care of her husband, John. John is described to be a very controlling and dominant persona, controlling his wife’s every move and living situation. This includes when she takes her medication, when she eats, and where she lives inside their house. The husband thinks it is a good idea to keep his wife in the old nursery upstairs with lots of windows, so she can get as much fresh air as she needs. However, this old nursery has almost ancient yellow wallpaper, discolored in some places, peeling off the wall, and overall just unappealing to the human eye.

One quote that stuck out to me in this story was the last sentence of the story, reading, “There comes John, and I must put this away-- he hates to have me write a word.” This sentence specifically stuck out to me for the reason of curiosity-- why does John not like his wife to write? What is his ideology behind him not letting his wife write anything? One must wonder if John is secretly afraid of his controlling and dominant behavior to be exposed to the public one day, because he knows what he is doing is wrong.

I believe this story relates to the previous topic of the Jewish laws of modesty because they both have to deal with controlling women for the benefit of the man. Harari talks about

during prayer. Gilman talks about a husband controlling his wife in order to have a sense of control, or domination. It is no secret that women over the past hundreds of years have been suppressed to their male counterparts. Whether this ideology dates back to Jewish laws of modesty, or even earlier in history is unknown, but there is certainly a common ground between female suppression and male domination.

However, Harari also has some thoughts that are inconsistent with other popular beliefs about humanity. In Harari's chapter, "Meaning", Harari talks about the belief that all humans are a part of a connecting cycle, and that the purpose of life is to figure out what role you play in the connection of all mortal beings. Harari also mentions this way of thinking was related to Hinduism, as it is one of the many beliefs practiced in the religion. As said on page 276 of *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, "One popular story, told for thousands of years to billions of anxious humans, explains that we are all part of an eternal cycle that encompasses and connects all beings. Each being has a distinctive function to fulfill in the cycle. To understand the meaning of life means to understand your unique function, and to live a good life means to accomplish that function." Harari also mentions later in the chapter the term "dharma." Dharma is a term used in the Hindu community to describe the path you are supposed to follow in life, and the duties and responsibilities you are expected to maintain throughout your life.

Harari is implying in these statements that humans have a pre-planned outcome of their life, and it is their own responsibility to figure out what it is and what they need to do in order to successfully achieve and accomplish their meaning in life. Harari also talks about the Hindu belief that if you choose to stray away from your dharma, or to follow someone else's path, you

in your life.

As previously stated, this belief is inconsistent with many other popular beliefs. Although, Hinduism is still a popular religion, and no one has a right to discredit or disrespect the religion solely for the reason of not believing in it, or having loyalty to another religion. However, another belief was previously talked about in our modules.

In module RQ_2, "*Cultural Meanings*," we viewed a reading called "Microfoundations", written by Fligstein and MacAdams. This reading talks about the existential questions humans often ask, including "What is the purpose of my existence?" or "Who am I *really*?". These questions are often answered by a variety of different beliefs, however, this reading in particular did not mention different religions as much as Harari did in *21 Lessons For the 21st Century*. This reading focuses more on the evolution of different beliefs, like what happens after we die, what our life purpose is, and the psychological reasoning behind this progressing ideology through the evolution of humans and our brains over the past centuries.

One quote that stuck out to me in this reading was "Answers to the most basic existential questions often seem clearest during wartime or at any other times of savage conflict. Who am I? I am a holy warrior doing battle with an evil enemy. What does it all mean? It is a cosmic battle between good (us) and evil (them)." (Page 45, paragraph 3) This particular quote stuck out to me because it talks more about a different belief than what Harari mentioned.

This reading in "*Cultural Meanings*" represents more of an open-minded and curious standpoint of religion and purpose of life, while Harari talks more about one specific religion, Hinduism, and what their beliefs, practices, and ideology consist of. There is nothing wrong at all with talking about different religions and their ways of thinking and ways of life, and no one

Meaning, was absolutely valid, and everything that was talked about and discussed in the reading from “*Cultural Meanings*” is also valid.

Harari had a lot of ideas and philosophies about human life, and the human brain; and a lot of his ideas and philosophies can be taken into account and used to better one's mind. I personally gained a lot from reading his book, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, as it made me become more open-minded and made me learn about different cultures, religions, political stances, and countries of the world, and how they all work together to form one humanity. I believe that Harari's overall message to the readers of his book was to look at the world with an open mind, and you will be surprised at how much you can learn.

One section of the book that resonated with me the most talked about how little the human species actually knows, compared to how much we knew centuries back. The hunter-gatherer lifestyle was more focused on survival skills and how to contribute the most to society. As said on page 224, “A hunter-gatherer in the Stone Age knew how to make her own clothes, how to start a fire, how to hunt rabbits, and how to escape lions. We think we know far more today, but as individuals, we actually know far less. We rely on the expertise of others for almost all our needs...because we treat knowledge in the minds of others as if it were our own.” This quote is probably one of the most impactful quotes I read in this book. This book in its entirety really makes you see the world from a different perspective, and it makes you eager to learn more about yourself, the people around you, the different cultures of the world, and how people from across the globe work together to create one humanity. I think Harari mainly coincides with most of the modules we have gone over in class, and I do believe that Yuval Noah Harari is a man of great ideology, and a beautiful perspective on the world itself.

