

The Next Chapter
Program 192 for air August 23, 2017
©2017 by Radio Alexandria*

This transcript is printed in Globeng, the new language for international friendship.

Note: The podcast recording of this program in MP3 format is available for rebroadcast by noncommercial radio stations in the USA. There is no charge. All music is in the public domain including performance rights. No ASCAP/BMI license is required. Contact radioalexandria.net for details.

(Shortwave broadcast only: Roll 'Simple Gifts' id)

(Announcer:) The following program is a production of the North American Service of Radio Alexandria. (Begin domestic broadcast: Roll open theme, then under for:)

Hello Team Humanity. I'm Roland B. Hunt & you're listening to The Next Chapter. (Theme up, then under for:)

The Next Chapter looks at where we seem to be headed as a species on this little blue planet, do we really want to go there, & what are our options? Today I'm going to continue with our series of programs on the deep political, economic, and social divisions afflicting many nations around the world, including ours. According to historian Yuval Harari we humans have become very successful at creating artificial intelligence but not artificial consciousness. Consciousness he believes is the greatest mystery in human existence. Then we'll look at the reason why so many democracies are sliding into dictatorship.

(Pause for stations airing 4 min. newscast.)

The Next Chapter is about ideas. It's not about any particular religion, or joining some movement or cause, or buying gold coins or land in Belize. But if you want intellectual adventure, if you like trying to answer tough questions & solve tough problems, you've come to the right place. & if you go away from this broadcast without feeling challenged or even annoyed by some of what you've heard then I have failed in my effort to rattle cages & stimulate original thinking. We live in a dangerous age but also one full of opportunity to advance humankind to our fullest potential. Let's seize that opportunity while we still can.

Before we get started though let's quickly review the ground rules we follow on the Next Chapter. First, we don't do religion on this program. I'm not a theologian & make no claims to be wiser. Everyone is welcome here though, whether you're a fundamentalist believer, militant atheist, or anywhere in between.

Second, The Next Chapter doesn't pay much attention to conspiracy theories, Big Foot, UFOs, or who killed JFK. It's all very entertaining but this is a serious program about serious issues. I keep an open mind on these subjects & once in a while I might touch on them but generally I let George Noory, Alex Jones, & others carry the black briefcase on such matters.

Third, we have nothing to sell here. No books, no MREs, no gold coins, no land in Central America. We might look at the pros & cons of owning gold, or if you're thinking of moving overseas, what factors you need to consider. But in the end it's up to you to do your own homework & make your own decisions.

Fourth & last, The Next Chapter is neither for or against any government. After living & working for much of my adult life in more than a dozen poor & often war-torn nations, I've come to the conclusion that all governments, ours included, are going to do whatever it takes to keep

themselves in power. That's what governments do. What we as individuals do tho is up to us, not blind, impersonal historical forces...or men in black.

Unlike our ancient ancestors who lived day to day & had no way to anticipate mega-disasters, now we not only anticipate & plan for them, we humans can & hav built vast underground bunkers in many countries that wil allow thousands of humans to live underground for years until conditions on the surface improve. The US has them. So do the Russians & the Chinese.

Switzerland reportedly has bunkers that can shelter its entire populashun of eight million. That kind of capability is a game changer but it doesn't alter the reality that our species has cum up against som extremely dangerous problems for which we curently appear to hav no solushuns. Weapons of mass destrucshun, bioterrorism, & mass unemployment caused by the rise of inteligent machines ar just three examples. So if for whatever reason modern civilizashun does pass into history, ther wil be survivors. The question is, wil those who cum after us be able to learn from our mistakes & not repeat them?

The Next Chapter is for the elite but in this case the elite is self selecting. It's anywun who enjoys thinking deeply about serious issues. Som liseners may find som of the subjects we talk about on this broadcast disturbing but u can be sure that elites in governments & private research institutes around the world ar also thinking about these issues. Our goal is to bring as many people as posible into the conversashun. In a complex technological society we can't hope to meet tomorrow's challenges unles we understand them. (pause for stations carrying a newscast to rejoin)

A little later we'll hear part two of a conversation between historian Yuval Harari and the curator of TED talks Chris Anderson. But before we get to that I want to bring you up to date on some important developments on the world scene. Last week I reported that North Korea has proven that it has a multi-stage missile with intercontinental capability. Within days it was reported that there is strong evidence that North Korea now has mastered the technology to put a nuclear warhead on that missile And further, new intelignce appears to indicate that it has not 20 or 30 nuclear bombs but sixty of them.

All of this taken together indicates that many Western analysts hav seriously underestimated North Korean capabilities, that it poses a far more serious threat to world political stability than previously believed. Now it's tru that we don't want to make the mistak of overestimating North Korean strength but underestimating it can be just as dangerous. In all such maters we constantly hav to ask the question: What's the price of being wrong? When it cums to rogue nashuns ruled by autocratic & irratic dictators, it seems to me that underestimating them can have much mor serious consequences.

Meanwhile the pressures on the world financial system show no sign of abating. In past programs I reported that experts in high finance hav been warning that stocks around the world appear to be seriously overpriced. Now the Bank of America has joined in, warning of what it calls 'ominous signs' for the US stock market.

& things ar not getting better in China either. By wun measure Chinese debt exploded from \$6trn in 2008 to \$28trn by the end of last year. According to International Monetary Fund experts, "International experience suggests that China's credit growth is on a dangerous trajectory, with increasing risks of a disruptive adjustment and/or a marked growth slowdown."

To my mind that's bureaucratic language from an international organization for something mor akin to a financial crash. If the world's second largest economy did crash there wud be

major repercussions around the world, not only economic in nature but political as well. Chinese leaders understand the threat but they seem incapable of reining in borrowing, prompting a headline in London's *Financial Times* that 'China's economy is addicted to debt'.

The fear is that curtailing loans would lead to companies going bankrupt which in turn would lead to widespread unemployment & threaten the continued rule of the Communist Party. The bottom line tho is that the Chinese economy cannot defy the law of gravity forever. Sooner or later investors wil sel everything & run for the exits. Economic followed by social chaos wil soon follow. The only questions ar can Chinese leaders continue to hang on to power & how much effort mite they mak to stir up international tensions in order to distract the masses. In the Nuclear Age there's precious little room for mistakes.

Let's tak a break & when I cum back we'll hear an extended conversashun with wun of the most interesting - & controversial - historians alive today. I'm Roland B. Hunt & u're listening to the Next Chapter, a produshun of the North American Service of Radio Alexandria.

PSA: Listener feedback

Feedback is important here at Radio Alexandria so I hope u wil tak the time to email or write & share ur ideas. Did u find yourself agreeing in part & disagreeing in part? Did we mak u cheer or did u want to throw something at the radio? The whole point of Radio Alexandria & The Next Chapter is to get people to thinking. Send us an email & tell us ur opinions. Please be concise & to the point. We can't respond personaly to every email but we with ur permisson we may include som of ur comments & ideas in futur broadcasts. U'll only be identified by first name & the name of the state, or province, or region u're writing from.

Radio Alexandria is named after the greatest library in the ancient world, wun that was founded several hundred years befor the common era. That center of learning was burned to the ground by religious zealots in the fifth century AD so almost al of its books were lost to posterity. Radio Alexandria's mission is to mak sure that doesn't happen again. The goal is to spread ideas far & wide across the globe to the remotest village & mountain top, ideas about government, society, & the future of our species on this planet.

As a radio station we can't physically spread the great books of today but we can share the ideas contained within them. Our goal is not to tell liseners what to think but how to think, how to use logic & evidence to mak rational decisions about the future drawing upon lessons learned from the past.

We live in a busy world so if u tuned in late or hav to leave early u can always listen to today's program as a podcast. Just go to radioalexandria dot net & click on programs. Transcripts of al the programs in The Next Chapter series ar also available on the website. Once again the web adres is radioalexandria dot net. If u hav comments or questions our email adres is radioshipalexandria at yahoo dot com. That's radioshipalexandria at yahoo.com.

Wun mor reminder. Radio Alexandria is in the demonstration of concept phase right now. We're distributing our programing domesticaly on FM & internationaly on shortwave radio while we evaluate the feasibility of buying & equipping a radio ship & deploying it to the central Pacific.

If u know somthing about shortwave u've probably already figured out why we wud choose such a location. It has to do with the physics of shortwav broadcasting. Unlike conventional AM or FM radio, a shortwave signal can travel thousands of miles by bouncing off a layer of charged particles in the atmosphere called the ionosphere.

The signal may bounce between the earth (or sea) & the ionosphere several times before reaching an audience 5,000 or even 10,000 miles away. Sea water to a shortwav signal is lik a

polished glass mirror compared to a very dirty windshield. It's a thousand times more reflective than ordinary earth. If you want to put a powerful radio signal into Pacific Rim countries like China & Russia using medium sized shortwave transmitters there is no better location than the central Pacific.

The programs you hear now are typical of what you will hear if we decide to go ahead with the next phase but first we need to know if there will be enough listeners to justify such a large project. If you have some ideas or suggestions for foundations or other organizations which might fund a project like Radio Alexandria please feel free to share them with us. Also we're accepting donations from listeners so if you would like to support our efforts to build a more enlightened world just go to radioalexandria.net, click on 'programs', & then the 'donate' button.

Right now our greatest out of pocket expense is paying for airtime. The longer term plan is to offer The Next Chapter not only in English but in other languages as well. The goal is not to get involved in the domestic politics of countries. They have to solve their own problems. What we at Radio Alexandria are trying to do is look at issues all modern governments are confronting & see if there might be some common solutions.

Transparency is such an issue. It's one of the best ways to combat political corruption & boost popular confidence in democratic government. There's a major anti-corruption campaign going on in China right now because the current administration understands that they're not going to be able to keep the Mandate of Heaven unless they govern responsibly.

The USA & other western democracies are also suffering from a major lack of public confidence in their political institutions. The presidential election here in the US as well as elections in Europe show deep dissatisfaction with elites & the kind of leadership they have provided in recent decades.

Humanity is entering a period of profound change, driven by technological forces we have never before encountered as a species. Radio Alexandria's mission is to explore solutions that will benefit all in society, both individually & collectively.

In the coming months we may try some crowd funding to begin raising the money to implement these plans. In the meantime all of you as listeners can do your part by spreading the word. Tell your friends about our website, transcripts, & podcasts. Radio Alexandria is radio for the future. (end promo)

Last week we heard the first of a two part interview with the best selling Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari. Several years ago I interviewed Harari when his first book *Sapiens* was published. Critics acclaimed it as a distinctively original contribution to our understanding of how our species evolved over the last 40,000 years or so. His latest book *Homo Deus* picks up the story with some insightful speculation about our future evolution over the next century. Harari is perhaps most famous for his contention that most of what we take for granted in life, from corporations to nations, to money & religions, are all just fictions created by the human mind. However useful they may be to modern society, they have no concrete existence outside of our imaginations. So humans are willing to kill each other over a pile of rocks in some town because of some ancient writings deemed to be from a supreme being. No other primate, Harari contends, would ever fall for such nonsense.

With ideas like that permeating his books you can easily see why Yuval Harari is controversial in some circles. As for the future he contends we are living through a period of danger in our evolution like no other. The decisions we make in the coming decades had better be correct because we may not get a second chance. Interviewing Harari is TED talks curator Chris Anderson.

(Insert Harari, Y ted conversation, part 2: "Yuval... ..thank you.")(Ted transcrip in standard English)

CA: Yuval, there's a belief among many technologists, certainly, that political concerns are kind of overblown, that actually, political leaders don't have that much influence in the world, that the real determination of humanity at this point is by science, by invention, by companies, by many things other than political leaders, and it's actually very hard for leaders to do much, so we're actually worrying about nothing here.

YNH: Well, first, it should be emphasized that it's true that political leaders' ability to do good is very limited, but their ability to do harm is unlimited. There is a basic imbalance here. You can still press the button and blow everybody up. You have that kind of ability. But if you want, for example, to reduce inequality, that's very, very difficult. But to start a war, you can still do so very easily. So there is a built-in imbalance in the political system today which is very frustrating, where you cannot do a lot of good but you can still do a lot of harm. And this makes the political system still a very big concern.

CA: So as you look at what's happening today, and putting your historian's hat on, do you look back in history at moments when things were going just fine and an individual leader really took the world or their country backwards?

YNH: There are quite a few examples, but I should emphasize, it's never an individual leader. I mean, somebody put him there, and somebody allowed him to continue to be there. So it's never really just the fault of a single individual. There are a lot of people behind every such individual.

CA: Can we have the microphone here, please, to Andrew?

Andrew Solomon: You've talked a lot about the global versus the national, but increasingly, it seems to me, the world situation is in the hands of identity groups. We look at people within the United States who have been recruited by ISIS. We look at these other groups which have formed which go outside of national bounds but still represent significant authorities. How are they to be integrated into the system, and how is a diverse set of identities to be made coherent under either national or global leadership?

YNH: Well, the problem of such diverse identities is a problem from nationalism as well. Nationalism believes in a single, monolithic identity, and exclusive or at least more extreme versions of nationalism believe in an exclusive loyalty to a single identity. And therefore, nationalism has had a lot of problems with people wanting to divide their identities between various groups. So it's not just a problem, say, for a global vision.

And I think, again, history shows that you shouldn't necessarily think in such exclusive terms. If you think that there is just a single identity for a person, "I am just X, that's it, I can't be several things, I can be just that," that's the start of the problem. You have religions, you have nations that sometimes demand exclusive loyalty, but it's not the only option. There are many religions and many nations that enable you to have diverse identities at the same time.

CA: But is one explanation of what's happened in the last year that a group of people have got fed up with, if you like, the liberal elites, for want of a better term, obsessing over many, many different identities and them feeling, "But what about my identity? I am being completely ignored here. And by the way, I thought I was the majority"? And that that's actually sparked a lot

of the anger.

YNH: Yeah. Identity is always problematic, because identity is always based on fictional stories that sooner or later collide with reality. Almost all identities, I mean, beyond the level of the basic community of a few dozen people, are based on a fictional story. They are not the truth. They are not the reality. It's just a story that people invent and tell one another and start believing. And therefore all identities are extremely unstable. They are not a biological reality. Sometimes nationalists, for example, think that the nation is a biological entity. It's made of the combination of soil and blood, creates the nation. But this is just a fictional story.

CA: Soil and blood kind of makes a gooey mess.

(Laughter)

YNH: It does, and also it messes with your mind when you think too much that I am a combination of soil and blood. If you look from a biological perspective, obviously none of the nations that exist today existed 5,000 years ago. Homo sapiens is a social animal, that's for sure. But for millions of years, Homo sapiens and our hominid ancestors lived in small communities of a few dozen individuals. Everybody knew everybody else. Whereas modern nations are imagined communities, in the sense that I don't even know all these people. I come from a relatively small nation, Israel, and of eight million Israelis, I never met most of them. I will never meet most of them. They basically exist here.

CA: But in terms of this identity, this group who feel left out and perhaps have work taken away, I mean, in "Homo Deus," you actually speak of this group in one sense expanding, that so many people may have their jobs taken away by technology in some way that we could end up with a really large -- I think you call it a "useless class" -- a class where traditionally, as viewed by the economy, these people have no use.

YNH: Yes.

CA: How likely a possibility is that? Is that something we should be terrified about? And can we address it in any way?

YNH: We should think about it very carefully. I mean, nobody really knows what the job market will look like in 2040, 2050. There is a chance many new jobs will appear, but it's not certain. And even if new jobs do appear, it won't necessarily be easy for a 50-year old unemployed truck driver made unemployed by self-driving vehicles, it won't be easy for an unemployed truck driver to reinvent himself or herself as a designer of virtual worlds.

Previously, if you look at the trajectory of the industrial revolution, when machines replaced humans in one type of work, the solution usually came from low-skill work in new lines of business. So you didn't need any more agricultural workers, so people moved to working in low-skill industrial jobs, and when this was taken away by more and more machines, people moved to low-skill service jobs. Now, when people say there will be new jobs in the future, that humans can do better than AI, that humans can do better than robots, they usually think about high-skill jobs, like software engineers designing virtual worlds. Now, I don't see how an unemployed cashier from Wal-Mart reinvents herself or himself at 50 as a designer of virtual worlds, and certainly I don't see how the millions of unemployed Bangladeshi textile workers will be able to do that. I mean, if they are going to do it, we need to start teaching the Bangladeshis today how

to be software designers, and we are not doing it. So what will they do in 20 years?

CA: So it feels like you're really highlighting a question that's really been bugging me the last few months more and more. It's almost a hard question to ask in public, but if any mind has some wisdom to offer in it, maybe it's yours, so I'm going to ask you: What are humans for?

YNH: As far as we know, for nothing.

(Laughter)

I mean, there is no great cosmic drama, some great cosmic plan, that we have a role to play in. And we just need to discover what our role is and then play it to the best of our ability. This has been the story of all religions and ideologies and so forth, but as a scientist, the best I can say is this is not true. There is no universal drama with a role in it for Homo sapiens. So --

CA: I'm going to push back on you just for a minute, just from your own book, because in "Homo Deus," you give really one of the most coherent and understandable accounts about sentience, about consciousness, and that unique sort of human skill. You point out that it's different from intelligence, the intelligence that we're building in machines, and that there's actually a lot of mystery around it. How can you be sure there's no purpose when we don't even understand what this sentience thing is? I mean, in your own thinking, isn't there a chance that what humans are for is to be the universe's sentient things, to be the centers of joy and love and happiness and hope? And maybe we can build machines that actually help amplify that, even if they're not going to become sentient themselves? Is that crazy? I kind of found myself hoping that, reading your book.

YNH: Well, I certainly think that the most interesting question today in science is the question of consciousness and the mind. We are getting better and better in understanding the brain and intelligence, but we are not getting much better in understanding the mind and consciousness. People often confuse intelligence and consciousness, especially in places like Silicon Valley, which is understandable, because in humans, they go together. I mean, intelligence basically is the ability to solve problems. Consciousness is the ability to feel things, to feel joy and sadness and boredom and pain and so forth. In Homo sapiens and all other mammals as well -- it's not unique to humans -- in all mammals and birds and some other animals, intelligence and consciousness go together. We often solve problems by feeling things. So we tend to confuse them. But they are different things.

What's happening today in places like Silicon Valley is that we are creating artificial intelligence but not artificial consciousness. There has been an amazing development in computer intelligence over the last 50 years, and exactly zero development in computer consciousness, and there is no indication that computers are going to become conscious anytime soon.

So first of all, if there is some cosmic role for consciousness, it's not unique to Homo sapiens. Cows are conscious, pigs are conscious, chimpanzees are conscious, chickens are conscious, so if we go that way, first of all, we need to broaden our horizons and remember very clearly we are not the only sentient beings on Earth, and when it comes to sentience -- when it comes to intelligence, there is good reason to think we are the most intelligent of the whole bunch.

But when it comes to sentience, to say that humans are more sentient than whales, or more sentient than baboons or more sentient than cats, I see no evidence for that. So first step is, you

go in that direction, expand. And then the second question of what is it for, I would reverse it and I would say that I don't think sentience is for anything. I think we don't need to find our role in the universe. The really important thing is to liberate ourselves from suffering. What characterizes sentient beings in contrast to robots, to stones, to whatever, is that sentient beings suffer, can suffer, and what they should focus on is not finding their place in some mysterious cosmic drama. They should focus on understanding what suffering is, what causes it and how to be liberated from it.

CA: I know this is a big issue for you, and that was very eloquent. We're going to have a blizzard of questions from the audience here, and maybe from Facebook as well, and maybe some comments as well. So let's go quick. There's one right here. Keep your hands held up at the back if you want the mic, and we'll get it back to you.

Question: In your work, you talk a lot about the fictional stories that we accept as truth, and we live our lives by it. As an individual, knowing that, how does it impact the stories that you choose to live your life, and do you confuse them with the truth, like all of us?

YNH: I try not to. I mean, for me, maybe the most important question, both as a scientist and as a person, is how to tell the difference between fiction and reality, because reality is there. I'm not saying that everything is fiction. It's just very difficult for human beings to tell the difference between fiction and reality, and it has become more and more difficult as history progressed, because the fictions that we have created -- nations and gods and money and corporations -- they now control the world. So just to even think, "Oh, this is just all fictional entities that we've created," is very difficult. But reality is there.

For me the best ... There are several tests to tell the difference between fiction and reality. The simplest one, the best one that I can say in short, is the test of suffering. If it can suffer, it's real. If it can't suffer, it's not real. A nation cannot suffer. That's very, very clear. Even if a nation loses a war, we say, "Germany suffered a defeat in the First World War," it's a metaphor. Germany cannot suffer. Germany has no mind. Germany has no consciousness. Germans can suffer, yes, but Germany cannot. Similarly, when a bank goes bust, the bank cannot suffer. When the dollar loses its value, the dollar doesn't suffer. People can suffer. Animals can suffer. This is real. So I would start, if you really want to see reality, I would go through the door of suffering. If you can really understand what suffering is, this will give you also the key to understand what reality is.

CA: There's a Facebook question here that connects to this, from someone around the world in a language that I cannot read.

YNH: Oh, it's Hebrew. CA: Hebrew. There you go.

(Laughter)

Can you read the name?

YNH: Or Lauterbach Goren.

CA: Well, thank you for writing in. The question is: "Is the post-truth era really a brand-new era, or just another climax or moment in a never-ending trend?"

YNH: Personally, I don't connect with this idea of post-truth. My basic reaction as a historian is: If this is the era of post-truth, when the hell was the era of truth?

CA: Right.

(Laughter)

YNH: Was it the 1980s, the 1950s, the Middle Ages? I mean, we have always lived in an era, in a way, of post-truth.

CA: But I'd push back on that, because I think what people are talking about is that there was a world where you had fewer journalistic outlets, where there were traditions, that things were fact-checked. It was incorporated into the charter of those organizations that the truth mattered. So if you believe in a reality, then what you write is information. There was a belief that that information should connect to reality in a real way, and if you wrote a headline, it was a serious, earnest attempt to reflect something that had actually happened. And people didn't always get it right.

But I think the concern now is you've got a technological system that's incredibly powerful that, for a while at least, massively amplified anything with no attention paid to whether it connected to reality, only to whether it connected to clicks and attention, and that that was arguably toxic. That's a reasonable concern, isn't it?

YNH: Yeah, it is. I mean, the technology changes, and it's now easier to disseminate both truth and fiction and falsehood. It goes both ways. It's also much easier, though, to spread the truth than it was ever before. But I don't think there is anything essentially new about this disseminating fictions and errors. There is nothing that -- I don't know -- Joseph Goebbels, didn't know about all this idea of fake news and post-truth. He famously said that if you repeat a lie often enough, people will think it's the truth, and the bigger the lie, the better, because people won't even think that something so big can be a lie. I think that fake news has been with us for thousands of years. Just think of the Bible.

(Laughter)

CA: But there is a concern that the fake news is associated with tyrannical regimes, and when you see an uprise in fake news that is a canary in the coal mine that there may be dark times coming.

YNH: Yeah. I mean, the intentional use of fake news is a disturbing sign. But I'm not saying that it's not bad, I'm just saying that it's not new.

CA: There's a lot of interest on Facebook on this question about global governance versus nationalism. Question here from Phil Dennis: "How do we get people, governments, to relinquish power? Is that -- is that -- actually, the text is so big I can't read the full question. But is that a necessity? Is it going to take war to get there? Sorry Phil -- I mangled your question, but I blame the text right here.

YNH: One option that some people talk about is that only a catastrophe can shake humankind and open the path to a real system of global governance, and they say that we can't do it before the catastrophe, but we need to start laying the foundations so that when the disaster strikes, we can react quickly. But people will just not have the motivation to do such a thing before the disaster strikes. Another thing that I would emphasize is that anybody who is really interested in global governance should always make it very, very clear that it doesn't replace or abolish local

identities and communities, that it should come both as -- It should be part of a single package.

CA: I want to hear more on this, because the very words "global governance" are almost the epitome of evil in the mindset of a lot of people on the alt-right right now. It just seems scary, remote, distant, and it has let them down, and so globalists, global governance -- no, go away! And many view the election as the ultimate poke in the eye to anyone who believes in that. So how do we change the narrative so that it doesn't seem so scary and remote? Build more on this idea of it being compatible with local identity, local communities.

YNH: Well, I think again we should start really with the biological realities of Homo sapiens. And biology tells us two things about Homo sapiens which are very relevant to this issue: first of all, that we are completely dependent on the ecological system around us, and that today we are talking about a global system. You cannot escape that.

And at the same time, biology tells us about Homo sapiens that we are social animals, but that we are social on a very, very local level. It's just a simple fact of humanity that we cannot have intimate familiarity with more than about 150 individuals. The size of the natural group, the natural community of Homo sapiens, is not more than 150 individuals, and everything beyond that is really based on all kinds of imaginary stories and large-scale institutions, and I think that we can find a way, again, based on a biological understanding of our species, to weave the two together and to understand that today in the 21st century, we need both the global level and the local community.

And I would go even further than that and say that it starts with the body itself. The feelings that people today have of alienation and loneliness and not finding their place in the world, I would think that the chief problem is not global capitalism. The chief problem is that over the last hundred years, people have been becoming disembodied, have been distancing themselves from their body. As a hunter-gatherer or even as a peasant, to survive, you need to be constantly in touch with your body and with your senses, every moment. If you go to the forest to look for mushrooms and you don't pay attention to what you hear, to what you smell, to what you taste, you're dead. So you must be very connected.

In the last hundred years, people are losing their ability to be in touch with their body and their senses, to hear, to smell, to feel. More and more attention goes to screens, to what is happening elsewhere, some other time. This, I think, is the deep reason for the feelings of alienation and loneliness and so forth, and therefore part of the solution is not to bring back some mass nationalism, but also reconnect with our own bodies, and if you are back in touch with your body, you will feel much more at home in the world also.

CA: Well, depending on how things go, we may all be back in the forest soon. We're going to have one more question in the room and one more on Facebook.

Ama Adi-Dako: Hello. I'm from Ghana, West Africa, and my question is: I'm wondering how do you present and justify the idea of global governance to countries that have been historically disenfranchised by the effects of globalization, and also, if we're talking about global governance, it sounds to me like it will definitely come from a very Westernized idea of what the "global" is supposed to look like. So how do we present and justify that idea of global versus wholly nationalist to people in countries like Ghana and Nigeria and Togo and other countries like that?

YNH: I would start by saying that history is extremely unfair, and that we should realize that. Many of the countries that suffered most from the last 200 years of globalization and imperialism and industrialization are exactly the countries which are also most likely to suffer most from the next wave. And we should be very, very clear about that. If we don't have a global governance, and if we suffer from climate change, from technological disruptions, the worst suffering will not be in the US. The worst suffering will be in Ghana, will be in Sudan, will be in Syria, will be in Bangladesh, will be in those places.

So I think those countries have an even greater incentive to do something about the next wave of disruption, whether it's ecological or whether it's technological. Again, if you think about technological disruption, so if AI and 3D printers and robots will take the jobs from billions of people, I worry far less about the Swedes than about the people in Ghana or in Bangladesh. And therefore, because history is so unfair and the results of a calamity will not be shared equally between everybody, as usual, the rich will be able to get away from the worst consequences of climate change in a way that the poor will not be able to.

CA: And here's a great question from Cameron Taylor on Facebook: "At the end of 'Sapiens,'" you said we should be asking the question, 'What do we want to want?' Well, what do you think we should want to want?"

YNH: I think we should want to want to know the truth, to understand reality. Mostly what we want is to change reality, to fit it to our own desires, to our own wishes, and I think we should first want to understand it. If you look at the long-term trajectory of history, what you see is that for thousands of years we humans have been gaining control of the world outside us and trying to shape it to fit our own desires. And we've gained control of the other animals, of the rivers, of the forests, and reshaped them completely, causing an ecological destruction without making ourselves satisfied.

So the next step is we turn our gaze inwards, and we say OK, getting control of the world outside us did not really make us satisfied. Let's now try to gain control of the world inside us. This is the really big project of science and technology and industry in the 21st century -- to try and gain control of the world inside us, to learn how to engineer and produce bodies and brains and minds. These are likely to be the main products of the 21st century economy. When people think about the future, very often they think in terms, "Oh, I want to gain control of my body and of my brain." And I think that's very dangerous.

If we've learned anything from our previous history, it's that yes, we gain the power to manipulate, but because we didn't really understand the complexity of the ecological system, we are now facing an ecological meltdown. And if we now try to reengineer the world inside us without really understanding it, especially without understanding the complexity of our mental system, we might cause a kind of internal ecological disaster, and we'll face a kind of mental meltdown inside us.

CA: Putting all the pieces together here -- the current politics, the coming technology, concerns like the one you've just outlined -- I mean, it seems like you yourself are in quite a bleak place when you think about the future. You're pretty worried about it. Is that right? And if there was one cause for hope, how would you state that?

YNH: I focus on the most dangerous possibilities partly because this is like my job or responsibility as a historian or social critic. I mean, the industry focuses mainly on the positive sides, so it's the job of historians and philosophers and sociologists to highlight the more dangerous potential of all these new technologies. I don't think any of that is inevitable. Technology is never deterministic. You can use the same technology to create very different kinds of societies.

If you look at the 20th century, so, the technologies of the Industrial Revolution, the trains and electricity and all that could be used to create a communist dictatorship or a fascist regime or a liberal democracy. The trains did not tell you what to do with them. Similarly, now, artificial intelligence and bioengineering and all of that -- they don't predetermine a single outcome. Humanity can rise up to the challenge, and the best example we have of humanity rising up to the challenge of a new technology is nuclear weapons. In the late 1940s, '50s, many people were convinced that sooner or later the Cold War will end in a nuclear catastrophe, destroying human civilization. And this did not happen. In fact, nuclear weapons prompted humans all over the world to change the way that they manage international politics to reduce violence.

And many countries basically took out war from their political toolkit. They no longer tried to pursue their interests with warfare. Not all countries have done so, but many countries have. And this is maybe the most important reason why international violence declined dramatically since 1945, and today, as I said, more people commit suicide than are killed in war. So this, I think, gives us a good example that even the most frightening technology, humans can rise up to the challenge and actually some good can come out of it. The problem is, we have very little margin for error. If we don't get it right, we might not have a second option to try again.

CA: That's a very powerful note, on which I think we should draw this to a conclusion. Before I wrap up, I just want to say one thing to people here and to the global TED community watching online, anyone watching online: help us with these dialogues. If you believe, like we do, that we need to find a different kind of conversation, now more than ever, help us do it. Reach out to other people, try and have conversations with people you disagree with, understand them, pull the pieces together, and help us figure out how to take these conversations forward so we can make a real contribution to what's happening in the world right now.

I think everyone feels more alive, more concerned, more engaged with the politics of the moment. The stakes do seem quite high, so help us respond to it in a wise, wise way.

Yuval Harari, thank you.

(Applause)

That was the curator of TED talks Chris Anderson in a conversashun with historian Yuval Noah Harari. Harari is without doubt a bold & original thinker, but that does not mean wun has to agree with everything he says. When he talks about corporashuns, & money, & nations, & gods as being ficshuns that to him means they ar not real. They are creashuns of the human mind.

I agree but that does not mean those creashuns do not hav power & influence over the way we look at life & how we interact with others. So I wud argue that it is not meaningless to say that Germany lost War World Two. Individuals as individuals do not lose a war. Individuals thru a colective identity lik a nashun can & do. & such a loss can hav profound efects, both

positive & negative, on the individual humans who are members of that collective identity.

So the international behavior of both Germany and Japan, after their defeat has been very, very different than before the war.

Fascism has been replaced for the past 70 years by democratic institutions which appear to have become ingrained in the political culture of both countries.

For something to be real, Harari says, it must be able to feel pain. I would argue that rocks & oceans & clouds may not be able to feel pain but that doesn't make them unreal. When it comes to such human creations as corporations & money & laws & even rights I think a better descriptor might be 'formalized custom', which means it is something that is carefully defined, that is widely observed within a group or tribe, & which includes an acceptance of collective force if necessary to ensure the 'custom' is followed by all.

As for calling gods & religions fictions that would imply that in such matters you can know the truth in some final & irrefutable way, which of course you cannot since these fall outside of the realm of the physical world & are therefore ideas that exist in philosophy. You can look for logical inconsistencies in such beliefs but the beliefs themselves cannot be proven or disproven unlike the laws of nature as humans understand them.

Harari argues that although modern humans are richer materially they are less happy than our hunter-gatherer ancestors. I don't think that's true at all. We may not always appreciate how much better off we are today but our lives are longer, we can be cured of many more ailments, and most people have vastly more free time to pursue their interests. Did the hunter-gatherers of 20 or 40 thousand years ago have two days off each week where they didn't have to fight off other animals or search for more food?

It may be true that there have been periods during the transition from hunting & gathering to the modern world when humans suffered deprivation from slavery & exploitation by other humans. However we could not have progressed to our present advanced state without civilization, & civilizations require cities & labor specialization. Those would not be possible without the food surpluses created by farming.

Where I do agree with Yuval Harari is that humankind has reached a very dangerous period in our evolution. It is not clear at all what the future holds for us. Our species could choose to go in a number of directions, some of which could lead to our destruction. & as Harari says, the margin for error is small. Make the wrong decision & we may not get a second chance.

I do believe however that there are some lessons to be learned from our present predicament & we'll look at them more closely after the break. I'm Roland B. Hunt & you're listening to The Next Chapter, a production of the North American Service of Radio Alexandria.

PSA: Shopping for a good shortwave radio

Many of you are listening to this program as a shortwave broadcast but others are listening to it as a podcast. If you're an internet listener I'd like to encourage you to invest in a portable shortwave receiver. Someday the worldwide web may not be available. Besides there are quite a few shortwave stations broadcasting to North America, many of them with programs you're not likely to hear on the domestic media.

There are a number of good AM-FM-shortwave sets on the market now, many with advanced circuitry only the military would have had just a few years ago. If you've listened much on the shortwave bands you know that it's not like tuning in a standard AM or FM station.

Reception conditions can vary greatly even over the span of a few hours or days. That's why advanced features like PLL, digital tuning, & double conversion are important. They help

bring in weak signals & filter out stronger stations on adjacent channels. As you read customer reviews on the web & are trying to decide between models, be sure to select a radio that is highly rated for sensitivity to weak signals. When it comes to shortwave listening that's probably the single most important criterion.

If two radios are very close in their sensitivity rating then you may want to make your decision based on other important features like estimated battery life, or keypad frequency entry, or an audio output for recording programs off the air. If you want to listen to ham radio operators you'll need to spend a little more & get a receiver with SSB or single sideband capability. That's a special type of voice transmission pioneered by the hams & now also widely used by military organizations. Without an SSB switch on the radio, the conversations & reports of hundreds of thousands of ham operators around the world will be totally unintelligible.

Sometime shortwave radio could be your only source of uncensored news & information. If a state of national emergency is ever declared, all domestic broadcast stations will be under the control of the national government. If you want to hear anything other than the official version of what's going on you'll have to listen to shortwave radio & if you're serious about it you'll want to hear what ham radio operators around the world are reporting. Shortwave radio, in the past, in the present, & in the future, your window on the world. [end psa]

Before the break we were considering some of Yuval Harari's ideas about whether humans have any cosmic purpose in the universe. He argues that from his perspective as a scientist there is none. My response is that science has nothing to say on such questions because they are philosophical in nature. We can speculate but there is no final determination to be made.

Humans can & do look for evidence of some divine order or purpose. They arrive at different answers which is why we have different religions & different forms of spirituality. Some people, our militant materialists among them, think all of that is useless nonsense. Others, myself included, believe that to the contrary, spirituality does indeed have meaning & relevance to the human condition. As for the various religions, individuals must make up their own minds about such matters.

Before we close I do want to touch on the apparent decline of democracy around the world. In Venezuela, Turkey, Russia, Iran, Zambia, and a number of other nations we are seeing a consistent pattern whereby the leader, usually won with the title of 'president', slowly dismantles the power of the legislature & courts, subjugates or intimidates the press, & brings the military & police under his control. Before long he can rule like a dictator. His opponents are either jailed, or murdered, or driven into exile. Once such a dictatorship is created it is very difficult to get rid of. Often violent revolution is the only means available.

As regular listeners to the Next Chapter know I have five rules of governance, the first of which states that elites always rule. The question is which elites & in whose interest do they govern? I have also suggested that in the future in order to make democracy work we're going to have to make some fundamental changes.

One of the most important is to do away with single person leaders like presidents & instead go to collective leadership in the form of parliamentary government with a cabinet & a prime minister. There might still be a ceremonial president but that person would have no real power.

No form of government can guarantee that it will not degenerate into dictatorship but with a parliamentary system power is dispersed. Prime ministers rarely can garner the centralized power necessary to make themselves dictators. Before that can happen they are much more likely to be removed by a vote of no confidence.

There are other changes which I believe will have to be made in order to transition from mass democracy, which is inherently unstable, to what I call responsible democracy but such changes would be too controversial today for serious consideration. In a future program I will go through them & let you decide whether or not they make sense.

In an age of weapons of mass destruction, an age when artificial intelligence threatens to render just about all of us as useless in terms of productive work, humanity is facing its greatest challenges. But I doubt very much that we are the first. Almost certainly other intelligent species have reached this point in their evolution. Some survived while others did not. All we have to do is figure out how the successful ones did it.

If we can spread the idea to the remotest village & most isolated hamlet that we are members of one intelligent species among many in the universe, working toward a goal of greater enlightenment, then no matter what catastrophe might befall us in the coming years, those who survive will have a common vision of humankind, a shared ideal of who we are & where we want to go in this adventure we call life.

This is our planet & we are its stewards. Everyone has a part to play in the drama that is human existence. & that's what Radio Alexandria is all about. You, our listeners, are the wild cards. History could someday turn on your knowledge & insight. Until next time think deeply & act wisely. The future is in our hands Team Humanity. Let us embrace it! (music up until end)
(announcer:) You've been listening to The Next Chapter with your host Roland B. Hunt. A transcript of this broadcast is available at our website radioalexandria dot net. Tune in again next week at this time for a new exploration into alternative futures on The Next Chapter, coming to you from Radio Alexandria.

*Permission is hereby granted for non-commercial reproduction & use of this transcript. All other rights reserved.

Definitions of commonly used terms on The Next Chapter:

The Hunt Paradox, sometimes called the Strangelove Paradox, was inspired by the famous 1964 motion picture *Dr. Strangelove or How I Learned to Stop Worrying & Love the Bomb*. The more advanced an intelligent species becomes the more likely it is to destroy itself.

The Hunt Paradigm is a conjectural premise that states there are quite a few carbon based intelligent species in the universe. After reaching a certain level in their evolution they all go through a similar sequence of development until the point they encounter the Hunt-Strangelove Paradox. Some find a solution to the paradox & advance to a still higher level. Others do not & destroy themselves.

Note: It is not necessary that the conjecture be true. It is merely a useful mental construct for integrating ideas about evolution with ideas about the rise & fall of civilizations.