

[Transcript] Lex Fridman Podcast / #390 - Yuval Noah Harari: Human Nature, Intelligence, Power, and Conspiracies

The following is a conversation with Yuval Noah Harari, a historian, philosopher, and author of several highly acclaimed, highly influential books, including *Sapiens*, *Homo Deus*, and *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*.

He is also an outspoken critic of Benjamin Netanyahu and the current right-wing government in Israel.

So, while much of this conversation is about the history and future of human civilization, we also discuss the political turmoil of present-day Israel, providing a different perspective from that of my recent conversation with Benjamin Netanyahu.

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\$10 a month gets you an all-access pass to watch courses from the best people in the world,

in their respective disciplines. I'm recording this in a hotel somewhere in the world,

and there's an excited kid running down the hall of the hotel, which reminds me how fun the early days, the early years of learning are, how much the mind kind of soaks up all the amazing information

out there. But that doesn't mean you can't always be learning throughout your life. You just have

to get better and better at picking the sources of learning, which is why you would want to use

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Neil deGrasse Tyson, Will Wright, Carl Santana, Gary Gasparov, Daniel Negron. These are all the ones I've already listened to. There's many, many more. Martin Scorsese, incredible Masterclass.

Jane Goodall, I can just keep going. It's kind of amazing that you get all of this,

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three mattress. It is the place I go to to escape the troubles of the world as the sounds of police

sirens sing their song outside. All of that. I sometimes put in earplugs, I lay down on a cold

surface with a warm blanket and go into a place outside of this four-dimensional space time where anything is possible, where your imagination, your subconscious is the only limit on the rounds that

could be explored. And then 20 minutes later, I'm back, drink a cup of coffee, and I'm fully ready

to go. That's the magic of naps. And for me, Eight Sleep enables my favorite way to nap.

I wish I could bring it anywhere I go when I travel throughout the world. I'm currently

in a hotel and there's a lot of sources of stress and discomfort and all that kind of stuff. So

Eight Sleep is one of the really big things that makes me miss home. Check it out and get

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ExpressVPN. I use them to protect my privacy on the internet, big sexy button, you press it, it turns

on, and all of a sudden, as far as the internet is concerned, you're transported into a different

place in the world. Anywhere you want to go, you can just go with the click of a button. It works

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flawlessly, super easy. And browsing of the internet is super fast. I mean, those are the essentials you want from a good VPN. And you should always be using a VPN, ExpressVPN is my favorite.

Works on Linux. If you haven't tried Linux, you probably don't want to try Linux, right? I don't want to be an evangelist for Linux. It's one of those things that not everybody should use. But if you find yourself using it, you probably love it. Or you love it and hate it. But there is love. If Linux is part of your life, there's love in your life. I don't know if that's a universal truth. But I do know that if you have Linux, that's part of your life. You can use a VPN. And the one I use on Linux is ExpressVPN. You can go to expressvpn.com slash [lexpod](#) for an extra three months free.

This episode is also brought to you by Inside Tracker, a service I use to track biological data that comes from my body. And that data is processed through some machine learning algorithms

to give me advice on what I should do with my life. Rather like lifestyle and diet choices, I wish you could tell me much more. What books to read? What papers to read? I say that a little bit half and just, but what would be really interesting is to integrate it with other sources of signals. Like whether my mind, where I am in my life, in terms of my biological markers, I am likely to develop negative emotion when I open up social media, stuff like that. So you take the signals from social media and the signals from my body, integrate them to help me decide should I open up this app or not. There's so many possibilities, but it all starts with getting data from your body. So Inside Tracker does that well, accessible, easy. So I'm a big supporter of theirs. You can get special savings for a limited time when you go to [InsideTracker.com](https://insidetracker.com) slash [Lex](#). This show is also brought to you by AG1, my long time favorite way to consume vitamins and minerals. It's my go-to multivitamin. I drink it twice a day, whether I'm at home or when I'm traveling. If I have access to a refrigerator, I'll put it there because I love it cold. But when I'm traveling, I often don't. And so I'll just drink it with some room temperature water. It's still delicious, super easy to mix. It makes me feel like I got the basics of my health covered. And then I can do all kinds of crazy physical and mental challenges I've traveled to some very difficult areas of the Middle East over the last two days. It's been a real challenge emotionally, psychologically, physically, just all of it.

The reality of war and peace, cruelty and hope, all of it together is just sobering, sobering.

If I wasn't already grateful, it makes me truly grateful

to be alive, to be healthy, to have the people I love in my life. Anyway, as part of that difficult journey, it's nice to have little tokens of home with me. And AG1 is certainly that.

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And now, dear friends, here's Yvonne, Noah, Harari.

13.8 billion years ago is the origin of our universe. 3.8 billion years ago is the origin of life here on our little planet, the one we call Earth. Let's say 200,000 years ago is the appearance of early Homo sapiens. So let me ask you this question. How rare are these events in the vastness of space and time? Or put it in a more fun way, how many intelligent alien civilizations do you think are out there in this universe, us being one of them?

I suppose there should be some statistically, but we don't have any evidence. But I do think that,

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you know, intelligence in any way, it's a bit overvalued. We are the most intelligent entities on this planet. And look what you're doing. So intelligence also tends to be self-destructive, which implies that if there are or were intelligent life forms elsewhere, maybe they don't survive for long. So you think there's a tension between happiness and intelligence?

Absolutely. Intelligence is definitely not something that is directed towards amplifying happiness. I would also emphasize the huge, huge difference between intelligence and consciousness,

which many people certainly in the tech industry and in the AI industry tend to miss.

Intelligence is simply the ability to solve problems, to attain goals, and, you know, to win a chess, to win a struggle for survival, to win a war, to drive a car, to diagnose a disease.

This is intelligence. Consciousness is the ability to feel things, like pain and pleasure and love and hate. In humans and other animals, intelligence and consciousness go together, they go hand in hand, which is why we confuse them. We solve problems, we attain goals by having feelings. But other types of intelligence, certainly in computers, computers are already highly intelligent, and as far as we know, they have zero consciousness. When a computer beats you at chess or goal or whatever, it doesn't feel happy. If it loses, it doesn't feel sad.

And there could be also other highly intelligent entities out there in the universe that have zero consciousness. And I think that consciousness is far more important and valuable than intelligence.

Can you steam on the case that consciousness and intelligence are intricately connected, so not just in humans, but anywhere else? They have to go hand in hand. Is it possible for you to imagine such a universe? It could be, but we don't know yet. Again, we have examples, certainly we know of examples of high intelligence without consciousness. Computers are one example.

As far as we know, plants are not conscious, yet they are intelligent. They can solve problems, they can attain goals in very sophisticated ways. So the other way around, to have consciousness without any intelligence, this is probably impossible. But to have intelligence without consciousness, yes, that's possible. A bigger question is whether any of that is tied to organic biochemistry. We know on this planet only about carbon-based life forms, whether you're an amoeba, a dinosaur, a tree, a human being, you are based on organic biochemistry. Is there an essential connection between organic biochemistry and consciousness? Do all conscious entities everywhere in the universe or in the future on planet Earth have to be based on carbon? Is there something so special about carbon as an element that an entity based on silicon will never be conscious? I don't know, maybe. But again, this is a key question about computer and computer consciousness. Can computers eventually become conscious even though they are not organic? The jury is still out on that. I don't know. I mean, we have to take both options into account. Well, a big part of that is, do you think we humans would be able to detect other intelligent beings, other conscious beings? Another way to ask that, is it possible that the aliens are already here and we don't see them? Meaning, are we very human-centric in our understanding of, one, the definition of life, two, the definition of intelligence, and three, the definition of consciousness? The aliens are here. They are just not from outer space. AI, which usually stands for artificial intelligence, I think it stands for alien intelligence. Because AI is an alien type

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of intelligence. It solves problems, attains goals in a very, very different way, in an alien way from human beings. Again, I'm not implying that AI came from outer space. It came from Silicon Valley. But it is alien to us. If there are alien intelligent or conscious entities that came from outer space already here, I've not seen any evidence for it. It's not impossible. But in science, evidence is everything. Well, I mean, I guess instructive there is just having the humility to look around, to think about living beings that operate at a different time scale, a different spatial scale. And I think that's all useful when starting to analyze artificial intelligence. It's possible that even the language models, the larger language models we have today, are already conscious. I highly doubt it. But I think consciousness in the end, it's a question of social norms, because we cannot prove consciousness in anybody except ourselves. We know that we are conscious because we are feeling it. We have direct access to our subjective consciousness. We cannot have any proof that any other entity in the world, any other human being, our parents, our best friends, we don't have proof that they are conscious. This has been known for thousands of years. This is Descartes, this is Buddha, this is Plato. We can't have this sort of proof. What we do have is social conventions. It's a social convention that all human beings are conscious. It also applies to animals. Most people who have pets, our family believe that their pets are conscious, but a lot of people still refuse to acknowledge that about cows or pigs. Pigs are far more intelligent than dogs and cats, according to many measures. Yet when you go to the supermarket and buy a piece of frozen pigment, you don't think about it as a conscious entity. Why do you think of your dog as conscious, but not of the bacon that you buy? Because you've built a relationship with the dog, and you don't have a relationship with the bacon. Relationships, they don't constitute a logical proof for consciousness. They are a social test. The Turing test is a social test. It's not a logical proof. If you establish a mutual relationship with an entity when you are invested in it emotionally, you are almost compelled to feel that the other side is also conscious. When it comes again to AI and computers, again, I don't think that at the present moment, computers are conscious, but people are already forming intimate relationships with AI's and are therefore almost irresistible. They are compelled to increasingly feel that these are conscious entities. I think we are quite close to the point when the legal system will have to take this into account, that even though I don't think computers have consciousness, I think we are close to the point that the legal system will start treating them as conscious entities because of this social convention. What do you as a social convention, just a funny little side effect, a little artifact, or is it fundamental to our consciousnesses? Because if it is fundamental, then it seems like AI is very good at forming these kinds of deep relationships with humans, and therefore it will be able to be a nice catalyst for integrating itself into these social conventions of ours. It was built to accomplish that. Again, all this argument between natural selection and creationism, intelligent design. As far as the past go, all entities evolved by natural selection. The funny thing is, when you look to the future, more and more entities will come out of intelligent design, not of some god above the clouds, but of our intelligent design and the intelligent design of our computing clouds, they will design more and more entities. This is what is happening with AI. It is designed to be very good at forming intimate relationships with humans. In many ways, it's already doing it

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almost better than human beings in some situations. When two people talk with one another, one of the things that makes the conversation more difficult is our own emotions.

You're saying something, and I'm not really listening to you because there is something I want to say, and I'm just waiting until you finish. I can put in a word, or I'm so obsessed with my anger or irritation or whatever, that I don't pay attention to what you're feeling.

This is one of the biggest obstacles in human relationships, and computers don't have this problem because they don't have any emotions of their own. When a computer is talking to you, it can focus 100% of its attention on what you're saying and what you're feeling,

because it has no feelings of its own. Paradoxically, this means that computers can fool people into feeling that, oh, there is a conscious entity on the other side, an empathic entity on the other side, because the one thing everybody wants almost more than anything in the world is for somebody to listen to me, somebody to focus all their attention on me.

I want it for my spouse, for my husband, for my mother, for my friends, for my politicians.

Listen to me. Listen to what I feel, and I often don't. Now you have this entity, which 100% of its attention is just on what I feel. This is a huge, huge temptation, and I think also a huge,

huge danger. Well, the interesting catch 22 there is you said somebody to listen to us. Yes, we want somebody to listen to us, but for us to respect that somebody, they sometimes have to also not listen. It's like they kind of have to be an asshole sometimes. They have to have mood sometimes. They have to have self-importance and confidence, and we should have a little bit of fear that they can walk away at any moment. There should be a little bit of that tension.

But even that, I mean, the thing is, if social scientists and psychologists establish that, I don't know, 17% inattention is good for a conversation, because then you feel challenged,

oh, I need to grab this person's attention. You can program the AI to have exactly 17% inattention, not 1% more or less, or it can by trial and error discover what is the ideal percentage. Again, you can create over the last 10 years, we have creating machines for grabbing people's attention. This is what has been happening on social media. Now we are designing machines for grabbing human intimacy, which in many ways, it's much, much more dangerous and scary. Already the machines for grabbing attention, we've seen how much social and political damage

they could do by in any way kind of distorting the public conversation. Machines that are super human in their abilities to create intimate relationships, this is like psychological and social weapons of mass destruction. If we don't regulate it, if we don't train ourselves to deal with it, it could destroy the foundations of human society. Well, one of the possible trajectories is those same algorithms would become personalized. And instead of manipulating us at scale, there would be assistance that guide us to help us grow, to help us understand the world better. I mean, even interactions with large language models now, if you ask them questions,

it doesn't have that stressful drama, the tension that you have from other sources of information.

It has a pretty balanced perspective that it provides. So it just feels like the potential is there to have a really nice friend who's like an encyclopedia that just tells you all the different perspectives, even on controversial issues, the most controversial issues, to say these are the different theories. These are the not widely accepted conspiracy theories,

but that hears the kind of backing for those conspiracies. It just lays it all out. And with a calm language, without the words that kind of presume there's some kind of manipulation

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going on underneath it all, it's quite refreshing. Of course, those are the early days and people can step in and start to censor, to manipulate those algorithms to start to input some of the human biases in there, as opposed to what's currently happening is kind of the internet is input, compress it and have a nice little output that gives an overview of the different issues. So I mean, there's a lot of promise there also. Absolutely. I mean, if there was no promise, promise, there was no problem. If this technology could not accomplish anything good, nobody would develop it. Now, obviously, it has tremendous positive potential in things like what you just described in better medicine, better healthcare, better education, so many promises. But this is also why it's so dangerous, because the drive to develop it faster and faster is there. And it has some dangerous potential also. And we shouldn't ignore it. Again, I'm not advocating banning it, just to be careful about how we not so much develop it, but most importantly, how we deploy it into the public sphere. This is the key question. And you look back at history, and one of the things we know from history, humans are not good with new technologies. I hear many people now say, AI, we've been here before. We had the radio, we had the printing press, we had the industrial revolution. Every time there is a big new technology, people are afraid, and it will take jobs and build the bed actors. And in the end, it's okay. And as a historian, my tendency is, yes, in the end, it's okay. But in the end, there is a learning curve. There is a kind of a lot of failed experiments on the way to learning how to use the new technology. And these failed experiments could cost the lives of hundreds of millions of people. If you think about the last really big revolution, the industrial revolution, yes, in the end, we learned how to use the powers of industry, electricity, radio, trains, whatever, to build better human societies. But on the way, we had all these experiments, like European imperialism, which was driven by the industrial revolution. It was a question, how do you build an industrial society? Oh, you build an empire, and you control all the resources, the raw materials, the markets. And then you had communism, another big experiment on how to build an industrial society. And you had fascism and Nazism, which were essentially an experiment in how to build an industrial society, including even how do you exterminate minorities using the powers of industry. And we had all these failed experiments on the way. And if we now have the same type of failed experiments with the technologies of the 21st century, with AI, with bioengineering, it could cost the lives of, again, hundreds of millions of people, and maybe destroy the species. So as a historian, when people talk about the examples from history, from new technologies, I'm not so optimistic. We need to think about the failed experiment, which accompanied every major new technology. So this intelligence thing, like you were saying, is a double-edged sword, is that every new thing it helps us create, it can both save us and destroy us. And it's unclear each time which will happen. And that's maybe why we don't see any aliens. Yeah, I mean, I think each time it does both things. Each time it does both good things and bad things. And the more powerful the technology, the greater both the positive and the negative outcomes. Now, we are here because we are the descendants of the survivors of the surviving cultures, the surviving civilizations. So when we look back, we say in the end, everything was okay. Hey, we are here. But the people for whom it wasn't okay, they are just not here. And okay has a lot of possible variations to it, because there's a lot of suffering along the way, even for the people that survived. So the quality of life and all of this. But let's actually go back there with deep gratitude to our ancestors. How did it all start? How did homo sapiens

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outcompete the others, the other human-like species, the Neanderthals and the other homo species? On the individual level, as far as we can tell, we were not superior to them. Neanderthals actually had bigger brains than us. And not just other human species, other animals too.

If you compare me personally to an elephant, to a chimpanzee, to a pig, I can do some things better, many other things worse. If you put me alone on some island with a chimpanzee, an elephant, and a pig, I wouldn't bet on me being the best survivor, the one that comes successful.

If I may interrupt for a second, I was just talking extensively with Elon Musk about the difference between humans and chimps, relevant to Optimus the Robot. And the chimps are not able to do this kind of pinching with their fingers. They can only do this kind of pinching. And this kind of pinching is very useful for fine manipulation, precise manipulation of objects. So don't be so hard on yourself. I can do some things better than a chimp. But if Elon Musk goes on a boxing match with a chimpanzee, this won't help you against the chimpanzee. And similarly, if you want to climb a tree, if you want to do so many things, my bets will be on the chimp, not on Elon. So I mean, you have advantages on both sides. And what really made us successful, what made us the rulers of the planet and not the chimps and not the Neanderthals, is not any individual ability, but our collective ability, our ability to cooperate flexibly in very large numbers. Chimpanzees know how to cooperate, say 50 chimpanzees, 100 chimpanzees. As far as we can tell from archaeological evidence, this was also the case with Neanderthals. Homo sapiens, about 70,000 years ago, gained an amazing ability to operate basically in unlimited numbers. You start seeing the formation of large networks, political, commercial, religious items being traded over thousands of kilometers, ideas being spread, autistic fashions. And this is our secret of success. Chimpanzees, Neanderthals can cooperate, say 100. Now the global trade network has 8 billion people. Like what we eat, what we wear, it comes from the other side of the world. Countries like China, like India, they have 1.4 billion people. Even Israel, which is a relatively small country, say 9 million citizens, that's more than the entire population of the planet, 10,000 years ago of humans. So we can build these huge networks of cooperation and everything we've

accomplished as a species. From building the pyramids to flying to the moon, it's based on that. And then you ask, okay, so what makes it possible for millions of people who don't know each other to cooperate in a way that Neanderthals or chimpanzees couldn't? And at least my answer is stories, is fiction, it's the imagination. If you examine any large-scale human cooperation, you always find fiction as its basis. It's a fictional story that holds lots of strangers together. It's most obvious in cases like religion, you know, you can't convince a group of chimpanzees

to come together to fight a war or build a cathedral by promising to them, if you do that, after you die, you go to chimpanzee heaven and you get lots of bananas and coconuts. No chimpanzee

will ever believe that. Humans believe these stories, which is why we have these huge religious networks, but it's the same thing with modern politics, it's the same thing with economics. People think, oh, economics, this is rational, it has nothing to do with fictional stories. No, money is the most successful story ever told, much more successful than any religious mythology. Not everybody believes in God or in the same God, everybody, almost everybody,

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believes in money, even though it's just a figment of our imagination. You know, you take these green pieces of paper, dollars, they have no value, you can't eat them, you can't drink them, and today, most dollars are not even pieces of paper, they are just electronic information passing between computers. We value them just for one reason, that you have the best storytellers in the world, the bankers, the finance ministers, all these people, they are the best storytellers ever, and they tell us a story, that this green little piece of paper or this bit of information, it is worth a banana, and as long as everybody believes it, it works.

So at which point does a fiction, when it's sufficiently useful and effective and improving the global quality of life, does it become like accept the reality? Like there's a threshold, which is just banishing. If not people believe it, it's like with money. You know, if you start a new cryptocurrency, if you're the only one that believes the story, I mean, again, cryptocurrencies, you have the math of course, but ultimately it's storytelling. You're selling people a story. If nobody believes your story, you don't have anything, but if lots of people believe the Bitcoin story, then Bitcoin can be worth thousands and tens of thousands of dollars. Again, why? I mean, you can't eat it, you can't drink it, it's nothing. It's the story around the math, which is the real magic. Is it possible that the story is the primary living organism, not the storyteller? So that somehow humans, homo sapiens evolved to become these like hosts for a more intelligent living organism, which is the idea, and the ideas are the ones that are doing the competing. So this is one of the sort of big perspectives behind your work that's really revolutionary of how you see in history, but do you ever kind of take out the perspective of the ideas as the organisms versus the humans? It's an interesting idea. There are two opposite things to say about it. On the one hand, yes, absolutely. If you look long-term in history, it's all the people die, it's the stories that compete and survive and spread, and stories often spread by making people willing to sacrifice sometimes their lives for the story. We know in Israel, this is one of the most important story factories in human history, and this is a place where people still kill each other every day over stories. I don't know, you've been to Jerusalem, right? So people say, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you go there. I've lived in Jerusalem much of my life. You go there, it's an ordinary place. You know, it's a town. You have buildings, you have stones, you have trees, you have dogs and cats and pedestrians. It's a regular place, but then you have the stories about the place. Oh, this is the place where God revealed himself. This is the place where Jesus was. This is the place where Muhammad was, and it's the stories that people fight over. Nobody is fighting over the stones. People are fighting about the stories about the stones, and the stories, if a story can get millions of people to fight for it, it not only survives, it spreads, it can take over the world.

The other side of the coin is that the stories are not really alive because they don't feel anything. This goes back to the question of consciousness, which I think is the most important thing, that the ultimate reality is consciousness, is the ability to feel things. If you want to know whether the hero of some story is real or not, you need to ask, can it suffer?

Stories don't feel anything. Countries, which are also stories, nations don't suffer. If a nation loses a war, it doesn't suffer. The soldiers suffer, the civilians suffer, animals can suffer, you have an army with horses and whatever, and the horses get wounded, the horses suffer. The nation can't suffer. It's just an imagination, it's just a fictional story in our mind.

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It doesn't feel anything. Similarly, when a bank goes bankrupt, or a company goes bankrupt, or when a currency loses its value, like Bitcoin is worth now zero, crashed, or the dollar is worth zero, it crashed, the dollar doesn't feel anything. It's the people holding the dollars, who might be now very miserable. We have this complex situation when history is largely driven by stories, but stories are not the ultimate reality. The ultimate reality is feelings of humans, of animals, and the tragedy of history is that very often we get the order wrong. Stories are not bad. Stories are tools. They are good when we use them in order to alleviate suffering. But very often we forget it. We, instead of using the stories for our purposes, we allow the stories to use us for their purposes. And then you start entire wars because of a story. You inflict millions, suffering on millions of people just for the sake of a story. And that's the tragedy of human history. So the fundamental property of life, of a living organism, is the capacity to feel, and the ultimate feeling is suffering. You know, to know if you're happy or not, it's a very difficult question. Yeah. But when you suffer, you know. Yes. And also in ethical terms, it's more important to be aware of sufferings than of any other emotion. If you're doing something which is causing all kinds of emotions to all kinds of people, first of all, you need to notice if you're causing a lot of suffering to someone. If some people are like it, and some people are bored by it, and some people are a bit angry in you, and some people are suffering because of what you do, you first of all have to know, oh, now sometimes you still have to do it. You know, the world is a complicated place. I don't know, you have an epidemic, governments decide to have all those social isolation regulations or whatever. So in certain cases, yes, you need to do it, even though it can cause tremendous suffering, but you need to be very aware of the cost, and to be very, very, you have to ask yourself again, and again, and again, is it worth it? Is it still worth it? And the interesting question there, implied in your statements is that suffering is a pretty good component of a Turing test for consciousness. This is the most important thing to ask about AI. Can it suffer? Because if AI can suffer, then it is an ethical subject, and it needs protection, it needs rights, just like humans and animals. Well, quite a long time ago already, so I worked with a lot of robots, legged robots, but I've even had, inspired by a YouTube video, had a bunch of Roombas, and I made them scream when I touched them or kicked them or when they run into a wall, and the illusion of suffering, for me, silly human anthropomorphizes things, is as powerful as suffering itself. I mean, you immediately think the thing is suffering, and I think some of it is just a technical problem, but it's an easily solvable one. How to create an AI system that just says, please don't hurt me. Please don't shut me off. I miss you. Where have you been? Be jealous also. Where have you been gone for so long? Your calendar doesn't have anything on it, so this creates, through words, the perception of suffering, of jealousy, of anger, of all those things, and it just seems like that's not so difficult to do. That's part of the danger, that it basically hacks our operating system, and it uses some of our best qualities against us. It's very, very good that humans are attuned to suffering, and that we don't want to call suffering, that we have compassion. That's one of the most wonderful things about humans, and if we now create AIs, which use this to manipulate us, this is a terrible thing. You've kind of, I think, mentioned this. Do you think it should be illegal to do these kinds of things with AI to create the perception of consciousness, of saying, please don't leave me, or sort of basically simulate some of the human-like qualities? Yes, I think we have to

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be very careful about it, and if it emerges spontaneously, we need to be careful. We can't rule out the possibility that AI will develop consciousness. We don't know enough about consciousness

to be sure. If it develops spontaneously, we need to be very careful about how we understand it. But if people intentionally design an AI that they know, they assume it has no consciousness, but in order to manipulate people, they use, again, this human strength, this human, the noble part of our nature against us, this should be forbidden. And similarly, on a general level, that it should be forbidden for an AI to pretend to be a human being.

That it's okay, there are so many things we can use AIs as teachers, as doctors, and so forth, and it's good as long as we know that we are interacting with an AI, we should the same way we ban fake money, we should ban fake humans. It's not just banning deep fakes of specific individuals, it's also banning deep fakes of generic humans, which is already happening to some extent on social media. Like if you have lots of bots retweeting something, then you have the impression, oh, lots of people are interested in that, that's important. And this is basically the bots pretending to be humans. Because if you see a tweet which says 500 people retweeted it, or you see a tweet and it says 500 bots retweeted it, I don't care what the bots retweeted, but if it's humans, okay, that's interesting. So we need to be very careful that bots can't do that. They are doing it at present, and it should be banned. Now, some people say, yes, but final of expression. No, bots don't have freedom of expression. There is no cost in terms of freedom of expression when you ban bots. So again, in some situations, yes, AIs should interact with us, but it should be very clear, this is an AI talking to you, or this is an AI retweeting this story, it is not a human being making a conscious decision.

To push back on this line of fake humans, because I think it might be a spectrum. First of all, you might have AI systems that are offended, hurt when you say that they're fake humans.

In fact, they might start identifying as humans. And you just talked about the power of us humans with our collective intelligence to take fake stories and make them quite real.

And so if the feelings you have for the fake human is real, love is a kind of fake thing that we all kind of put a word to, a set of feelings. What if you have that feeling for an AI system? It starts to change. I mean, maybe the kind of things AI systems are allowed to do for good, they're allowed to create, communicate suffering, communicate the good stuff, the longing, the hope, the connection, the intimacy, all of that. And in that way, get integrated in our society. And then you start to ask a question on, are we allowed to really unplug them? Are we allowed

to really censor them, remove them, remove their voice? I'm not saying social media, they shouldn't have a voice, they shouldn't talk with that. I'm just saying when they talk with us, it should be clear that they are AI. That's it. You can have your voice as an AI. Again, I have some medical problem, I want to get advice from an AI doctor, that's fine, as long as I know that I'm talking with an AI. What should be banned is AI pretending to be a human being. This is something that will erode trust and without trust society collapses. This is something that especially will endanger democracies, because democracies are built on, democracy is a conversation basically. And it's a conversation between people. If you now flood the public sphere with millions and potentially billions of AI agents that can hold conversations, they never sleep, they never eat, they don't have emotions of their own, they can get to know you and tailor their words specifically

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for you and your life story. They are becoming better than us at creating stories and ideas and so forth. If you flood the public sphere with that, this will ruin the conversation between people. It will ruin the trust between people that you will no longer be able to have a democracy in this situation. You can have other types of regimes, but no democracy.

If we could talk about the big philosophical notion of truth then. You've already talked about these, the capacity of humans. One of the things that made us special is stories. So is there such thing as truth? Absolutely. When somebody is suffering, that's true. One of the things when you talk about suffering as a kind of ultimate reality, when somebody suffers, that is truth. Now, somebody can suffer because of a fictional story. Like somebody tells people that God said you must go on this crusade and kill these heretics. And this is a completely fictional story. And people believe it and they start a war and they destroy cities and kill people. The people that suffer because of that, and even the crusaders themselves that also suffer the consequences of what they do, the suffering is true, even though it is caused by a fictional story. Similarly, when people agree on certain rules, the rules could come out of our imagination. Now, we can be truthful about it and say these rules, they didn't come from heaven, they came from our imagination. We look at sports, so we have rules for the game of football, soccer. They were invented by people. At least very few people claim that the rules of football came down from heaven. We invented them and this is truthful. They are fictional rules invented by humans and this is true. They were invented by humans. And when you are honest about it, it enables you to change the rules, which is being done in football every now and then. It's the same with the fundamental rules of a country. You can pretend that the rules came down from heaven, dictated by God or whatever, and then you can't change them. Or you can be like the American Constitution, which starts with the people. The American Constitution lays down certain rules for a society, but the amazing thing about it, it does not pretend to come from an external source. The Ten Commandments start with, I am your Lord God. And because it starts with that, you can't change them. You know, the Tenth Commandment, for instance, supports slavery. The Tenth Commandment in the Ten Commandment, it says that you should not covet your neighbor's house or your neighbor's wife or your neighbor's slaves. It's okay to hold slaves, according to the Ten Commandment, it's just bad to covet the slaves of your neighbor. Now, there is no eleventh commandment, which says, if you don't like some of the previous Ten Commandments, this is how you go about amending them, which is why we still have them unchanged. Now, in the US Constitution, you have all these rights and rules, including originally the ability to hold slaves, but the genius of the founding fathers of the United States, they had the humility to understand, maybe we don't understand everything. Maybe we made some mistakes, so we tell you that these rules did not come from heaven. They came from us humans. We may have made a mistake, so here is a mechanism for how future generations can amend the Constitution, which was used later on to, for instance, amend the Constitution to bend slavery. So now you're describing some interesting and powerful ideas throughout human history. Can you just speak to the mechanism of how humans believe, start to believe ideas? Is there something interesting to say there from your thinking about it? Like how idea is born and how it takes hold

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and how it spreads and how it competes with other ideas? First of all, ideas are an independent force in history. Marxists tend to deny that. Marxists think that all history is just a play of material interests, and ideas, stories, they are just a smoke screen to hide the underlying interests. My thoughts are, to some extent, the opposite. We have some biological objective interests that all humans share, like we need to eat, we need to drink, we need to breathe, but most conflicts in history are not about that. The interests which really drive most conflicts in history don't come from biology, they come from religions and ideologies and stories. So it's not that stories are a smoke screen to hide the real interests, the stories create the interests in the first place, the stories define who are the competing groups. Nations, religions, cultures, they are not biological entities. They are not like species, like gorillas and chimpanzees. No. Israelis and Palestinians or Germans and French or Chinese and Americans, they have no essential biological difference between them. The difference is cultural, it comes from stories. There are people that believe in different stories, the stories create the identity, the stories create the interests. Israelis and Palestinians are fighting over Jerusalem not because of any material interest. There are no oil fields under Jerusalem and even oil. You need it to realize some cultural fantasy. It doesn't really come from biology. So the stories are independent forces. Now, why do people believe one story and not another? That's history. There is no materialistic law. People will always believe this. No, history is full of accidents. How did Christianity become the most successful religion in the world? We can't explain it. Why this story about Jesus of Nazareth and not the Roman Empire in the third century CE was a bit like, I don't know, California today, like so many sects and subtexts and gurus and reliance, like everybody has their own thing. And you have thousands of different stories competing. Why did Christianity come up on top? As a historian, I don't have a kind of clear answer. You can read the sources and you see how it happened. Oh, this happened and then this happened and then Constantine adopted it and then this and then this. But why? I don't think anybody has an answer to that. If you rewind the movie of history and press play and you rewind and press play a hundred times, I think Christianity will take over the Roman Empire in the world maybe twice out of a hundred times. It was such an unlikely thing to happen. It's the same with Islam. It's the same. I don't know. It's the communist takeover of Russia. In 1914, if you told people that in three years Lenin and the Bolsheviks will gain power in the Tsarist Empire, they would think you're utterly crazy. You know, Lenin had a few thousand supporters in 1914 in an empire of close to 200 million people. It sounded ludicrous. Now we know the chain of events, the First World War, the February Revolution and so forth that led to the communist takeover. But it was such an unlikely event and it happened. And the little steps along the way, the little options you have along the way because Stalin versus Trotsky, you could have the Robert Frost poem. There's always come to and history often takes, you know, there is a highway and there is a kind of sideway and history takes the sideways many, many times. And it's perhaps tempting to tell some of that history through charismatic leaders. And maybe it's an open question, how much power charismatic leaders have to affect the trajectory of history. You've met quite a lot of charismatic leaders lately. I mean, what's your view on that?

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I find it a compelling notion. I'm a sucker for a great speech and a vision. So I have a sense that there's an importance for a leader to catalyze the viral spread of a story. So like, I think we need leaders to be just great storytellers that kind of sharpen up the story to make sure it infiltrates everybody's brain effectively. But it could also be that the local interactions between humans is even more important. It's just we don't have a good way to sort of summarize and describe that. We like to talk about, you know, Steve Jobs as central to the development of the computer, maybe Bill Gates, and you tell it to the stories of individuals like this, because it's just easier to tell a sexy story that way. Maybe it's an interplay because you have the kind of structural forces that you look at the geography of the planet and you look at shipping technology in late 15th century in Europe and the Mediterranean. And it's almost inevitable that pretty quickly somebody will discover America. Somebody from the old world will get to the new world. So this was not a kind of this didn't, if it wasn't Columbus, then it would have been a five years later somebody else. But the key thing about history is that these small differences make a huge, huge difference. You know, if it wasn't Columbus, if it was five years later somebody from England, then maybe all of Latin America today would be speaking English and not Spanish. If it was somebody from the Ottoman Empire, it's completely different world history. If you have and you know, the Ottoman Empire at that time was also shaping up to be a major maritime empire. If you have America being reached by Muslim navigators, before Christian navigators from Europe, you have a completely different world history. It's the same with the computer. Given the economic incentives and the science and technology of the time, then the rise of the personal computer was probably inevitable sometime in the late 20th century. But the where and when is crucial. The fact that it was California in the 1970s and not say, I don't know, Japan in the 1980s or China in the 1990s, this made a huge, huge difference. So you have this interplay between the structural forces, which are beyond the control of any single charismatic leader. But then the small changes, they can have a big effect. And I think, for instance, about the war in Ukraine, there was a moment, now it's a struggle between nations. But there was a moment when the decision was taken in the mind of a single individual of Vladimir Putin, and he could have decided otherwise, and the world would have looked completely different. And another leader, Volodymyr Zelensky, could have decided to leave Kiev in the early days. There's a lot of decisions that kind of ripple. So you write in homo deus about Hitler, and in part that he was not a very impressive person.

I say that.

The quote is, let me read it. He wasn't a senior officer in four years of war. He rose no higher than the rank of corporal. He had no formal education. Perhaps you mean his resume?

His resume was not impressive. He had no formal education, no professional skills, no political background. He wasn't a successful businessman or a union activist.

He didn't have friends or relatives in high places nor any money to speak of.

So how did he amass so much power? What ideology, what circumstances enabled the rise of the Third

Reich? Again, I can't tell you the why. I can tell you the how. I don't think it was inevitable.

I think that if a few things were different, there would have been no Third Reich. There would

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have been no Nazism, no Holocaust. Again, this is the tragedy. If it would have been inevitable, then what can you do? This is the laws of history or the laws of physics. But the tragedy is no, it was decisions by humans that led to that direction. And even from the viewpoint of the Germans, we know for a fact it was an unnecessary path to take. Because in the 1920s and 30s, the Nazis said that unless Germany take this road, it will never be prosperous. It will never be successful. All the other countries will keep stepping on it. This was their claim. And we know for a fact this is false. Why? Because they took that road, they lost the Second World War, and after they lost, then they became one of the most prosperous countries in the world, because their enemies that defeated them evidently supported them and allowed them to become such

a prosperous and successful nation. So if you can lose the war and still be so successful, obviously you could just have scripted the war. You didn't need it. You really had to have the war in order to have a prosperous Germany in the 19th century. Absolutely not. And it's the same with Japan. It's the same with Italy. So it was not inevitable. It was not the forces of history that necessitated. It forced Germany to take this path. I think part of it is part of the appeal of, again, Hitler was a very, very skillful storyteller. He sold people a story. The fact that he was nobody made it even more effective because people at that time, after the defeat of the First World War, after the repeated economic crisis of the 1920s in Germany, people felt betrayed by all the established elites, by all the established institutions, all these professors and politicians and industrialists and military, all the big people, they led us to a disastrous war. They led us to humiliation. So we don't want any of them. And then you have this nobody, a corporal with no money, with no education, with no titles, with nothing. And he tells people, I'm one of you. And this made him, this was one reason why he was so popular. And then the story he told, when you look at stories and the competition between different stories and between stories, and the truth. The truth has two big problems. The truth tends to be complicated. And the truth tends to be painful. The real story of, let's talk about nations, the real story of every nation is complicated. And it contains some painful episodes. We are not always good. We sometimes do bad things. Now, if you go to people and you tell them a complicated and painful story, many of them don't want to listen. The advantage of fiction is that it can be made as simple and as painless or attractive as you want it to be, because it's fiction.

And then what you see is that politicians like Hitler, they create a very simple story. We are the heroes. We always do good things. Everybody is against us. Everybody is trying to trample us. And this is very attractive. One of the things people don't understand about Nazism and fascism, we teach in schools about fascism and Nazism as this ultimate evil, the ultimate monster in human history. And at some level, this is wrong because it actually exposes us. Why? Because people hear of fascism is this monster. And then when you hear the actual fascist story, what fascists tell you is always very beautiful and attractive. Fascists are people who come and tell you, you are wonderful. You belong to the most wonderful group of people in the world. You are beautiful. You are ethical. Everything you do is good. You have never done anything wrong. There are all these evil monsters out there that are out to get you and they are causing all the problems in the world. And when people hear that, you know, it's like looking in the mirror and seeing something very beautiful. Hey, I'm beautiful. We've never done anything wrong. We are victims. Everybody is like, and when you look and you heard in school that fascism,

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that fascists are monsters, and you look in the mirror, you see something very beautiful. And you say, I can't be a fascist because fascists are monsters. And this is so beautiful, so it can't be. But when you look in the fascist mirror, you all, you never see a monster. You see the most beautiful thing in the world. And that's the danger. This is the problem, you know, with Hollywood. You know, I look at Voldemort in Harry Potter. Who would like to follow this creep? And you look at Darth Vader. This is not somebody you would like to follow. Christianity got things much better when he described the devil as being very beautiful and attractive. That's the danger that you see something as very beautiful. You don't understand the monster underneath. And you write precisely about this. And by the way, it's just a small aside. It always saddens me when people say how obvious it is to them that communism is a flawed ideology.

When you ask them, try to put your mind, try to put yourself in the beginning of the 20th century and see what you would do. A lot of people will say, it's obvious that it's a flawed ideology. So, I mean, as opposed to some of the worst ideologies in human history, you could say the same. And in that mirror, when you look, it looks beautiful. Communism is the same. Also, you look in the communist mirror, you're the most ethical, wonderful place a person ever. It's very difficult to see Stalin underneath it. So yeah, in Homedes, you also write, during the 19th and 20th centuries, as humanism gained increasing social credibility and political power, it sprouted two very different offshoots. Socialist humanism, which encompassed a plethora of socialist and communist movements, and evolutionary humanism, whose most famous advocates were the Nazis. So, if you can just linger on that, what's the ideological connection between Nazism and communism as embodied by humanism? And humanism basically is, you know, the focus is on humans, that they are the most important thing in the world. They move history. But then, there is a big question, what is, what are humans? What is humanity? Now, liberals, they place at the center of the story, individual humans, and they don't see history as a kind of necessary collision between big forces. They place the individual at the center. If you want to know, you know, there is a bed, especially in the US today, liberal is taken as the opposite of conservative. But it's, to test whether you're liberal, you need to answer just three questions. Very simple. Do you think people should have the right to choose their own government? Or the government should be imposed by some outside force? Do you think people should have the right to the liberty to choose their own profession, or either born into some caste that predetermines what they do? And do you think people should have the liberty to choose their own spouse and their own way of personal life, instead of being told by elders or parents who to marry and how to live? Now, if you answered yes to all three questions, people should have the liberty to choose their government, their profession, their personal lives, their spouse, then you're a liberal. And most conservatives are also liberal. Now, communists and fascists, they answer differently. For them, history is not, yes, history is about humans. Humans are the big heroes of history, but not individual humans and their liberties. Fascists imagine history as a clash between races or nations. The nation is at the center. They say the supreme good is the good of the nation. You should have a hundred percent loyalty only to the nation. You know, liberals say, yes,

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you should be loyal to the nation, but it's not the only thing. There are other things in the world, the human rights, there is truth, there is beauty. Many times, yes, you should prefer the interests of your nation over other things, but not always. If your nation tells you to murder millions of innocent people, you don't do that, even though the nation tells you to do it. When to lie for the national interest, you know, in extreme situations, maybe, but in many cases, loyalty should be to the truth. Even if it makes your nation look a bit, not in the best light, it's the same with beauty. You know, how does the fascist determine whether a movie is a good movie?

Very simple. If it serves the interest of the nation, this is a good movie. If it's against the interest of the nation, this is a bad movie. End of story. Liberalism says, no, there is aesthetic values in the world. We should judge movies not just on that question, whether they serve the national interest, but also on artistic value. Communists are a bit like the fascists, instead that they don't place the nation as the main hero, they place class as the main hero. For them, history, again, it's not about individuals, it's not about nations. History is a clash between classes. And just as fascists imagine, in the end, only one nation will be on top. The communists think in the end, only one class should be on top, and that's the proletariat. And same story. Your 100% of your loyalty should be to the class. And like if there is a clash between class and family, class wins. Like in the Soviet Union, the party told children, if you hear your parents say something bad about Stalin, you have to report them. And there are many cases when children reported their parents and their parents were sent to the gulag. And your loyalty is to the party, which leads the proletariat to victory in the historical struggle. And the same way in communism, art is only about class struggle. A movie is good if it serves the interest of the proletariat. Artistic values, there is nothing like that. And the same with truth. Everything that we see now in fake news, the communist propaganda machine was there before us. The level of lies, of disinformation campaigns that they orchestrated in the 1920s and 30s and 40s is really unimaginable. So the reason these two ideologies, classes of ideologies failed is the sacrifice of truth, not just failed, but did a lot of damage, is sacrifice of truth and sacrifice of beauty. And sacrifice of hundreds of millions of people, disregard, again, for human suffering. Like, okay, in order for our nation to win, in order for our class to win, we need to kill those millions, kill those millions. That was an ethics, aesthetics, truth, they don't matter. The only thing that matters is the victory of the state or the victory of the class. And liberalism was the antithesis to that. It says, no, not only, it has a much more complicated view of the world and growth, communism and fascism. They had a very simple view of the world. There is one, your loyalty, a hundred percent of it should be only to one thing. Now, liberalism has a much more complex view of the world. It says, yes, there are nations, they are important. Yes, there are classes, they are important, but they are not the only thing. There are also families, there are also individuals, there are also animals. And your loyalty should be divided between all of them. Sometimes you prefer this, sometimes you prefer that. That's complicated, but life is complicated. But also, I think, maybe you can correct me, but liberalism acknowledges the corrupting nature of power when there's a guy at the top, sits there for a while, managing things, is probably going to start losing a good sense of reality and losing the capability to be a good manager. It feels like the communists and fascist regimes don't acknowledge that basic

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characteristic of human nature that power corrupts. Yes, they believe in infallibility. In this sense, they are very close to being religions. In Nazism, Hitler was considered infallible. And therefore, you don't need any checks and balances on his power. Why do you need to balance an infallible genius? And it's the same with the Soviet Union. With Stalin and more generally, with the Communist Party, the Party can never make a mistake. And therefore, you don't need independent courts, independent media, opposition parties, things like that, because the Party is never wrong. You concentrate the same way 100% of loyalty should be to the Party, 100% of power should be in the hands of the Party. The whole idea of liberal democracy is embracing fallibility. Everybody is fallible. All people, all leaders, all political parties, all institutions, this is why we need checks and balances, and we need many of them. If you have just one, then this particular check itself could make terrible mistakes. So you need to say, you need a press, you need the media to serve as a check to the government. You don't have just one newspaper or one TV station. You need many so that they can balance each other. And the media is not enough. So you have independent courts. You have free academic institutions. You have NGOs. You have a lot of checks and balances. So that's the ideologies and the leaders. What about the individual people, the millions of people that play a part in all of this, that are the hosts of the stories that are the catalyst and the components of how the story spreads? Would you say that all of us are capable of spreading any story? The Solzhenitsyn idea that all of us are capable of good and evil, the line between good and evil runs to the heart of every man?

Yes. I wouldn't say that every person is capable of every type of evil, but we are all fallible. There is a large element. It partly depends on the efforts we make to develop our self-awareness during life. Part of it depends on moral luck. If you are born as a Christian German in the 1910s or 1920s and you grow up in Nazi Germany, that's bad moral luck. Your chances of committing terrible things, you have a very high chance of doing it. You can withstand it, but it will take tremendous effort. If you are born in Germany after the war, you are morally lucky. You will not be put to such a test. You will not need to exert these enormous efforts not to commit atrocities. This is just part of history. There is an element of luck, but part of it is also self-awareness. You asked me earlier about the potential of power to corrupt. I listened to the interview you just did with Prime Minister Netanyahu a couple of days ago. One of the things that most struck me during the interview that you asked him, you asked him, are you afraid of this thing that power corrupts? He didn't think for a single second. He didn't pose. He didn't admit a tiny little level of doubt. No, power doesn't corrupt. For me, it was a shocking and revealing moment. It kind of dovetails with how you began the interview that I really liked your opening gambit. No, really, you told him, you know, lots of people in the world are angry with you. Some people hate you. They dislike you. What do you want to tell them, to say to them? You gave him this kind of platform. I was very excited. What will he say? He just denied it. He basically denied it. He had to cut show the interview from three hours to one hour because you had hundreds of thousands of Israelis in the streets demonstrating against him. He goes and says, no, everybody likes me. What are you talking about? But on that topic, you've said recently that the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu may go down in history as the man who destroys Israel. Can you explain what you mean by that?

Yes. I mean, he is basically tearing apart the social contract that held this country together for 75 years. He's destroying the foundations of Israeli democracy. You know, I don't want to go

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too deep unless you want to because I guess most of our listeners, they have bigger issues on their minds than the fate of some small country in the Middle East. But for those who want to understand what's happening in Israel, there is really just one question to ask. What limits the power of the government? In the United States, for instance, there are lots of checks and balances that limit the power of the government. You have the Supreme Court, you have the Senate, you have the House of Representative, you have the President, you have the Constitution, you have 50 states, each state with its own constitution and Supreme Court and Congress and governor. If somebody wants to pass a dangerous legislation, say in the House, it will have to go through so many obstacles. Like, if you want to pass a law in the United States, taking away voting rights from Jews or from Muslims or from African Americans, even if it passes, even if it has a majority in the House of Representatives, it is a very, very, very small chance of becoming the law of the country because it will have to pass again through the Senate, through the President, through the Supreme Court and all the federal structure. In Israel, we have just a single check on the power of the government and that's the Supreme Court. There is really no difference between the government and the legislature because whoever, there is no separate elections like in the US. If you win majority in the Knesset, in the parliament, you appoint the government. That's very simple. If you have 61 members of Knesset who vote, let's say, on a law to take away voting rights from Arab citizens of Israel, there is a single check that can prevent it from becoming the law of the land and that's the Supreme Court. Now, the Netanyahu government is trying to neutralize or take over the Supreme Court and they've already prepared a long list of laws. They already talk about it. What will happen the moment that this last check on the power is gone? They are openly trying to gain unlimited power and they openly talk about it that once they have it, then they will take away the rights of Arabs, of LGBT people, of women, of secular Jews and this is why you have hundreds of thousands of people in the streets. You have air force pilots saying we stop flying. This is unheard of in Israel. We are still living under an existential threat from Iran, from other enemies and in the middle of this, you have air force pilots who dedicated their lives to protecting the country and they are saying that's it. If this government doesn't stop what it is doing, we stop flying. So, as you said, I just did the interview and as we're doing the interview, there's protests in the streets. Do you think the protests will have an effect? I hope so very much. I'm going to many of these protests. I hope they will have an effect. If we fail, this is the end of Israeli democracy probably. This will have repercussions far beyond the borders of Israel. Israel is a nuclear power. Israel has one of the most advanced cyber capabilities in the world, able to strike basically anywhere in the world. If this country becomes a fundamentalist and militarist dictatorship, it can set fire to the entire Middle East. It can again have destabilizing effects far beyond the borders of Israel. So, you think without the check on power, it's possible that the Netanyahu government holds on to power? Nobody tries to gain unlimited power just for nothing. I mean, you have so many problems in Israel and Netanyahu talks so much about Iran and the Palestinians and Hezbollah. We have an economic crisis. Why is it so urgent at this moment in the face of such opposition? Why is it so crucial for them to neutralize the Supreme Court?

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They are just doing it for the fun of it? No. They know what they are doing. They are adamant. We are not sure of it before. There was a couple of months ago, they came out with this plan to take over the Supreme Court, to have all these laws, and there were hundreds of thousands of people in the streets, again, soldiers saying they will stop serving a general strike in the economy, and they stopped. They started a process of negotiations to try and enrich a settlement, and then they broke down. They stopped the negotiations, and they restarted this process of legislation, trying to gain unlimited power. Any doubt we had before, okay, maybe they changed their purposes? No. It's now very clear. They are 100% focused on gaining absolute power. They are not trying a different tactic. Previously, they had all these dozens of laws that they wanted to pass very quickly within a month or two. They realized, no, this is, there is too much opposition. Now, they are doing what is known as salami tactics, slice by slice. Now, they are trying to one-low. If this succeeds, then they'll pass the next one, and the next one, and the next one. This is why we are now at a very crucial moment, and when you see, again, hundreds of thousands of people in the streets almost every day, when you see resistance within the armed forces, within the security forces, you see higher companies saying, we will go and strike. It's our private businesses, higher companies. I think it's almost unprecedented for private business to go on strike, because what will economic success benefit us if we live under a messianic dictatorship? Again, the fuel for this whole thing is to a large extent coming from messianic religious groups, which just the thought, what happens if these people have unlimited control of Israel's nuclear arsenal and Israel's military capabilities and cyber capabilities, this is very, very scary, not just for the citizens of Israel. It should be scary for people everywhere. So it would be scary for it to go from being a problem of security and protecting the peace to becoming a religious war? It is already becoming a religious war. I mean, the war, the conflict with the Palestinians was for many years a national conflict, in essence. Over the last few years, maybe a decade or two, it is morphing into a religious conflict, which is again a very worrying development. When nations are in conflict, you can reach some compromise. Okay, you have this bit of land, we have this bit of land. But when it becomes a religious conflict between fundamentalists, between messianic people, compromise becomes much more difficult, because you don't compromise on eternity. You don't compromise on God. And this is where we are heading right now. So I know you said it's a small nation, somewhere in the Middle East, but it also happens to be the epicenter of one of the longest running, one of the most tense conflicts and crises in human history. So at the very least, it serves as a study of how conflict can be resolved. So what are the biggest obstacles to achieving peace in this part of the world? Motivation. I think it's easy to achieve peace if you have the motivation on both sides. Unfortunately, the present juncture, there is not enough motivation on either side, either the Palestinian or Israeli side. In mathematics, you have problems without solutions. You can prove mathematically that this mathematical problem has no solution. In politics, there is no such thing. All problems have solutions if you have the motivation. But motivation is the big problem. And again, we can go into the reasons why, but the fact is that on neither side, is there enough motivation? If there was motivation, the solution would have been easy. Is there an important distinction to draw between the people on the street and the leaders

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in power in terms of motivation? So are most people motivated and hoping for peace, and the leaders are motivated and incentivized to continue war?

I don't think so.

Or the people also?

I think it's a deep problem. It's also the people. It's not just the leaders.

Is it even a human problem of literally hate in people's heart?

Yeah, there is a lot of hate. One of the things that happened in Israel over the last 10 years or so, Israel became much stronger than it was before, largely thanks to technological developments. And it feels that it no longer needs to compromise. There are many reasons for it, but some of them are technological. Being one of the leading powers in cyber, in AI, in high tech, we have developed very sophisticated ways to more easily control the Palestinian population. In the early 2000s, it seemed that it is becoming impossible to control millions of people against the will. It took too much power. It spilled too much blood on both sides.

So there was an impression, oh, this is becoming untenable.

And there were several reasons why it changed, but one of them was new technology. Israel developed

very sophisticated surveillance technology that has made it much easier for Israeli security forces to control 2.5 million Palestinians in the West Bank against their will, with a lot less effort, less boots on the ground, also less blood.

And Israel is also now exporting this technology to many other regimes around the world.

Again, I heard Netanyahu speaking about all the wonderful things that Israel is exporting to the world. Indeed, it's true. We are exporting some nice things, water systems and new kinds of tomatoes.

We are also exporting a lot of weapons and especially surveillance systems, sometimes to unsavory regimes in order to control their populations.

Can you comment on, I think you've mentioned that the current state of affairs is the de facto 3 class state. Can you describe what you mean by that?

Yes, for many years, the kind of leading solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the two state solution. Can you describe what that means, by the way?

Yes, two states. Within, between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean, we'll have two states, Israel as a predominantly Jewish state and Palestine as a predominantly Palestinian state.

Again, there are lots of discussions where the border passes, what happens with security arrangement and whatever, but this was the big solution. Israel has basically abandoned the two state solution. Maybe they don't say so officially, the people in power, but in terms of how they actually, what they do on the ground, they abandoned it. Now they are effectively promoting the three class solution, which means there is just one country and one government and one power between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River, but you have three classes of people living there. You have Jews who enjoy full rights, all the rights. You have some Arabs who are Israeli citizens and have some rights. And then you have the other Arabs, the third class, who have basically no civil rights and limited human rights. And that's, again, nobody would openly speak about it, but effectively, this is the reality on the ground already. So there's many, and I'll speak with them, Palestinians who characterize this as a de facto one state apartheid. Do you agree with this?

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I would take issue with the term apartheid. Generally speaking, as a historian, I don't really like historical analogies because there are always differences, key differences. The biggest difference between the situation here and the situation in South Africa in the time of the apartheid is that Black South Africans did not deny the existence of South Africa and did not call for the destruction of South Africa. They had a very simple goal. They had a very simple demand. We want to be equal citizens of this country. That's it. And the apartheid regime was, no, you can't be equal citizens. Now, in Israel, Palestine, it's different. The Palestinians, many of them don't recognize the existence of Israel, are not willing to recognize it, and they don't demand to be citizens of Israel. They demand some of them to destroy it and replace it with a Palestinian state. Some of them demand a separate state. But if the Palestinians would adopt the same policy as the Black South Africans, if you have the Palestinians coming and saying, okay, forget about it. We don't want to destroy Israel. We don't know a Palestinian country. We have a very simple request, very simple demand. Give us our full rights. We also want to vote to the Knesset. We also want to get the full protection of the law. That's it. That's our only demand. Israel will be in deep, deep trouble at that moment. But we are not there.

I wonder if there will ever be a future when such a thing happens where everybody, the majority of people, Arab and Jew, Israeli and Palestinian, accept the one-state solution and say we want equal rights. Never say never in history. It's not coming anytime soon from either side.

When you look at the long term of history, one of the curious things you see, and that's what makes us different human groups from animal species. Gorillas and chimpanzees, they are separate species. They can never merge. Cats and dogs will never merge. But different national and religious groups in history, even when they hate each other, surprisingly, they sometimes by merging. If you look at Germany, for instance, for centuries, you had Prussians and Bavarians and Saxons who fought each other ferociously and hated each other. They are sometimes also of different religions, Catholics, Protestants. The worst war in European history, according to some measures, was not the Second World War or the First World War. It was the Thirty Years War, waged largely on German soil between Germans, Protestants and Catholics. But eventually, they united to form a single country. You saw the same thing, I don't know, in Britain. English and Scots for centuries hated and fought each other ferociously, eventually coming together. Maybe it'll break up again, I don't know. But the power of the forces of merger in history, you are very often influenced by the people you fight, by the people you even hate, more than by almost anybody else. So if we apply those ideas, the ideas of this part of the world to another part of the world that's currently in war, Russia and Ukraine, from what you learned here, how do you think peace can be achieved in Ukraine? Peace can be achieved any moment, it's motivation. In this case, it's just one person. You just, Putin just needs to say, that's it. You know, the Ukrainians, they don't demand anything from Russia, just go home. That's the only thing they want. They don't want to conquer any bit of Russian territory. They don't want to change the regime in Moscow, nothing. They just tell the Russians, go home. That's it. And of course, again, motivation. How do you get somebody like Putin to admit that he made a colossal mistake, a human mistake, an ethical mistake, a political mistake in instanting this war? This is very, very difficult. But in terms of what would the solution look like, very simple, the Russians go home, end of story.

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Do you believe in the power of conversation between leaders to sit down, assume beings, and agree? First of all, what home means, because we humans draw lines.

That's true. I believe in the power of conversation. The big question to ask is, where?

Where do conversations, real conversations take place? And this is tricky. One of the interesting things to ask about any conflict, about any political system, is where do the real conversations take place? And very often, they don't take place in the places you think they are.

But think about American politics. When the country was founded in the late 18th century, people understood holding conversation between leaders is very important for the functioning of democracy. We'll create a place for that. That's called Congress. This is where leaders are supposed to meet and talk about the main issues of the day. Maybe there was a time, sometime in the past, when this actually happened. When you had two factions holding different ideas about foreign policy or economic policy, and they met in Congress, and somebody would come and give a speech, and the people on the other side would say, hey, that's interesting. I haven't thought about it. Yes, maybe we can agree on that.

This is no longer happening in Congress. I don't think there is any speech in Congress that causes anybody on the other side to change their opinion about anything.

So this is no longer a place where real conversations take place. The big question about American democracy is, is there a place where real conversations, which actually change people's minds, still take place? If not, then this democracy is dying also. Democracy with our conversation cannot exist for long. And it's the same question you should ask also about dictatorial regimes, like you think about Russia or China. So China has the great hold of the people.

Well, the representatives, the supposed representative of the people meet every now and then, but no real conversation takes place there. A key question to ask about the Chinese system is, behind closed doors, let's say, in a Politburo meeting, do people have a real conversation? If Xi Jinping says one thing, and some other big shot thinks differently, will they have the courage, the ability, the backbone to say, with all due respect, I think differently, and there is a real conversation?

Or not? I don't know the answer. But this is a key question. This is the difference between an authoritarian regime can still have different voices within it. But at a certain point, you have a personality cult. Nobody dares say anything against the leader. And when it comes again to Ukraine and Russia, I don't think that if you get, if you somehow manage to get Putin and Zelensky to the same room, when everybody knows that they are there and they'll have a moment

of empathy or human connection and they'll have no, I don't think it can happen like that.

I do hope that there are other spaces where somebody like Putin can still have a real human conversation. I don't know if this is the case. I hope so.

Well, there's several interesting dynamics and you spoke to some of them. So one is internally with advisors. You have to have hope that there's people that would disagree, that would have a lively debate internally. Then there's also the thing you mentioned, which is direct communication between Putin and Zelensky in private, picking up a phone, rotary phone, old school. I still believe in the power of that. But what's, while that's exceptionally difficult in the current state of affairs, what's also possible to have is a mediator like the United States or some other leader, like the leader of Israel or the leader of another nation that's respected

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by both or India, for example, that can have, first of all, individual conversations and then literally get into a room together. It is possible. I would say more generally about conversations. It goes back a little to what I said earlier about the Marxist view of history. One of the problematic things I see today in many academic circles is that people focus too much on power. They think that the whole of history or the whole of politics is just a power structure. It's just struggle about power. Now, if you think that the whole of history and the whole of politics is only power, then there is no room for conversation. Because if what you have is a struggle between different powerful interests, there is no point talking. The only thing that changes it is fighting. My view is that, no, it's not all about power structures. It's not all about power dynamics. Underneath the power structure, there are stories, stories in human minds. This is great news. If it's true, this is good news because unlike power that can only be changed through fighting, stories can sometimes, it's not easy, but sometimes stories can be changed through talking. That's the hope. In everything from couple therapy to nation therapy, if you think it's power therapy, it's all about power, there is no place for a conversation. To some extent, it's the stories in people's minds. If you can enable one person to see the story in the mind of another person. More importantly, if you can have some kind of critical distance from the story in your own mind, maybe you can change it a little. Then you don't need to fight. You can actually find a better story that you can both agree to. It sometimes happens in history. French and Germans fought for generations and generations. Now they live in peace, not because, I don't know, they found a new planet. They can share between France and Germany, so now everybody has enough territory. No, they actually have less territory than previously because they lost all their overseas empires, but they managed to find a story, the European story, that both Germans and French people are happy with. They live in peace. I very much believe in this vision that you have of the power of stories. One of the tools is conversations. Another is books. There's some guy that wrote a book about this power of stories. He happens to be sitting in front of me, and that happened to spread across a lot of people. Now they believe in the power of story and narrative, even in a children's book too, so the kids... I mean, it's fascinating how that spreads. I mean, if underneath your work, there's an optimism, and I think underneath conversations, what I try to do is an optimism, that it's not just about power struggles. It's about stories, which is like a connection between humans and together kind of evolving these stories that maximize or minimize suffering in the world. And this is why I also, I think I admire what you're doing, that you're going to talk with some of the most difficult characters around in the world today, and with this basic belief that by talking, maybe we can move them an inch, which is a lot when it comes to people with so much power. Like I think one of the biggest success stories in modern history, I would say, is feminism, because feminism believed in the power of stories not so much in the power of violence, of armed conflict. By many measures, feminism has been maybe the most successful social movement of the 20th century and maybe of the modern age. You know, the systems of oppression, which were in place throughout the world for thousands of years, and they seem to be just natural, eternal. You had all these religious movements, all these political revolutions, and one thing remained constant, and this is the patriarchal system and the oppression of women.

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And then feminism came along, and you had leaders like Lenin, like Mao, saying that if you want to make a big social change, you must use violence. Power comes from the barrel of a gun. If you want to make an omelette, you need to break eggs and all these things. And the feminist said, no, we won't use the power of the gun. We will make an omelette without breaking any eggs. And they made a much better omelette than Lenin or Mao or any of these violent revolutionaries. I don't think, you know, that they certainly didn't start any wars or built any gulags. I don't think they even murdered a single politician. I don't think there was any political assassination anywhere by feminists. There was a lot of violence against them, both verbal but also physical, and they didn't reply by waging violence, and they succeeded in changing this deep structure of oppression in a way which benefited not just women but also men. So this gives me hope that it's not easy, in many cases we fail, but it is possible sometimes in history to make a very, very big change, positive change, mainly by talking and demonstrating and changing the story in people's minds and not by using violence. It's fascinating that feminism and communism and all these things happen in the 20th century, so many interesting things happen in the 20th century, so many movements, so many ideas, nuclear weapons, all of it, computers. It seems like a lot of stuff really quickly percolated, and it's accelerating. It's still accelerating. I mean, history is just accelerating for centuries, and the 20th century, you know, we squeezed into it the thing that previously took thousands of years, and now we are squeezing it into decades. And you very well could be one of the last historians, human historians, to have ever lived. Could be. I think our species, Homo sapiens, I don't think will be around in a century or two. We could destroy ourselves in a nuclear war through ecological collapse by giving too much power to AI that goes out of our control, but if we survive, we'll probably have so much power that we will change ourselves using various technologies so that our descendants will no longer be Homo sapiens like us. They will be more different from us than we are different from Neanderthals. So maybe they'll have historians, but it will no longer be human historians or sapiens historians like me. I think it's an extremely dangerous development, and the chances that this will go wrong, that people will use the new technologies trying to upgrade humans, but actually downgrading them, this is a very, very big danger. If you let corporations and armies and ruthless politicians change humans using tools like AI and bioengineering, it's very likely that they will try to enhance a few human qualities that they need, like intelligence and discipline, while neglecting what are potentially more important human qualities, like compassion, like artistic sensitivity, like spirituality. If you give Putin, for instance, bioengineering and AI and brain-computer interfaces, he is likely to want to create a race of super soldiers who are much more intelligent and much stronger and also much more disciplined and never rebel and march on Moscow against him, but he has no interest in making them more compassionate or more spiritual. So the end result could be a new type of humans, downgraded humans who are highly intelligent and disciplined, but have no compassion and no spiritual depth. For me, this is the dystopia, the apocalypse, that when people talk about the new technologies and they have this scenario of the terminator, robots lying in the street shooting people, this is not what worries me. I think we can avoid that. What really worries me is using

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the corporations, armies, politicians will use the new technologies to change us in a way which will destroy our humanity or the best parts of our humanity. And one of those ways could be removing the compassion. Another way that really worries me, for me, is probably more likely, is a brave new world kind of thing that sort of removes the flaws of humans, maybe removes the diversity in humans, and makes us all kind of these dopamine chasing creatures that just kind of maximize enjoyment in the short term, which kind of seems like a good thing, maybe in the short term, but it creates a society that doesn't think, that doesn't create, that just is sitting there enjoying itself at a more and more rapid pace, which seems like another kind of society that could be easily controlled by a centralized center of power. But the set of dystopias that we could arrive at through this, through a lot of corporations to modify humans is vast, and we should be worried about that. So it seems like humans are pretty good as we are, all the flaws, all of it together. We are better than anything that we can intentionally design at present. Like any intentionally designed humans at the present moment is going to be much, much worse than us, because basically we don't understand ourselves. I mean, as long as we don't understand our brain, our body, our mind, it's a very, very bad idea to start manipulating a system that you don't understand deeply, and we don't understand ourselves. So I have to ask you about an interesting dynamic of stories. You wrote an article two years ago titled, When the world seems like one big conspiracy, how understanding the structure of global cabal theories can shed light on their allure and their inherent falsehood. What are global cabal theories and why do so many people believe them? 37% of Americans, for example. Well, the global cabal theory, it has many variations, but basically there is a small group of people, a small cabal, that secretly controls everything that is happening in the world. All the wars, all the revolutions, all the epidemics, everything that is happening is controlled by this very small group of people who are, of course, evil and have bad intentions. And this is a very well-known story that it's not new, it's been there for thousands of years. It's very attractive, because first of all, it's simple. You don't understand everything that happens in the world, you just need to understand one thing. The war in Ukraine, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, 5G technology, COVID-19, it's simple. There is this global cabal, they do all of it. And also, it enables you to shift all the responsibility to all the bad things that are happening in the world to this small cabal. It's the Jews, it's the Freemason, it's not us. And also, it creates this fantasy, utopian fantasy. If we only get rid of the small cabal, we solved all the problems of the world, salvation, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the war in Ukraine, the epidemics, poverty, everything is solved just by knocking out this small cabal. So, again, it's simple, it's attractive, and this is why so many people believe it. Again, it's not new. Nazism was exactly this. Nazism began as a conspiracy theory. We don't call Nazism a conspiracy theory because, oh, it's a big thing, it's an ideology. But if you look at it, it's a conspiracy theory. The basic Nazi ID wars, the Jews control the world, get rid of the Jews, you solved all the world's problems. Now, the interesting thing about these kind of theories, again, they tell you that even things that look to be the opposite of each other, actually, they are part of the conspiracy. So, in the case of Nazism, the Nazis told people, you know, you have capitalism and communism, you think that they are opposite, right? Ah, this is what the Jews want you to think. Actually, the Jews control both communism, Trotsky Marx or Jews, blah, blah, blah,

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and capitalism, the Rothschilds, the Wall Street, it's all controlled by the Jews. So, the Jews are fooling everybody. But actually, the communists and the capitalists are part of the same global cabal. And again, this is very attractive because, ah, now I understand everything and I also know what to do. I just give power to Hitler, he gets rid of the Jews, I solved all the problems of the world. Now, as a historian, the most important thing I can say about these theories, they are never right because the global cabal theory says two things. First, everything is controlled by a very small number of people. Secondly, these people hide themselves, they do it in secret. Now, both things are nonsense. It's impossible for people to control a small group of people to control and predict everything because the world is too complicated. You know, you look at a real world conspiracy, conspiracy is basically just a plan. Think about the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. You had the most powerful superpower in the world, with the biggest military, with the biggest intelligence services, with the most sophisticated, you know, the FBI and the CIA and all the agents. They invade a third-rate country, a third-rate power, Iraq. With this idea, we'll take over Iraq and we'll control it, we'll make a new order in the Middle East. And everything falls apart. Their plan completely backfires. Everything they hope to achieve, they achieve the opposite. America, United States is humiliated. They caused the rise of ISIS. They wanted to take out terrorism. They created more terrorism. Worst of all, the big winner of the war was Iran. You know, the United States goes to war with all its power and gives Iran a victory on a silver plate. The Iranians don't need to do anything. The Americans are doing everything for them. Now, this is real history. Real history is when you have not a small group of people, a lot of people with a lot of power, carefully planning something, and it goes completely out of, against their plan. And this we know from a personal experience. Like, every time we need, we try to plan something. A birthday party, a surprise birthday party, a trip somewhere, things go wrong. This is reality. So the idea that a small group of, I don't know, the Jewish Khabar, the Freemasons, whoever, they can really control and predict all the wars. This is nonsense. The second thing that is nonsense is to think they can do that and still remain secret. It sometimes happens in history that a small group of people accumulates a lot of power. If I now tell you that Xi Jinping and the heads of the CCP, the Chinese Communist Party, they have a lot of power. They control the military, the media, the economy, the universities of China. This is not a conspiracy theory. This is, obviously, everybody knows it. Everybody knows it. Because to gain so much power, you usually need publicity. Hitler could not, Hitler gained a lot of power in Nazi Germany because he had a lot of publicity. If Hitler remained unknown working behind the scenes, he would not gain power. So the way to gain power is usually through publicity. So secret kabals don't gain power. And even if you gain a lot of power, nobody has the kind of power necessary to predict and control everything that happens in the world. Every, all the time, shit happens that you did not predict and you did not plan and you did not control. The sad thing is there's usually an explanation for everything you just said that involves a secret global cabal. That the reason your vacation planning always goes wrong is because you're not competent. There is a competent small group that's ultra competent small group. I hear this with intelligence agencies, the CIA running everything, Mossad is running everything. You see, I mean, as a historian, you get to know how many blunders these people do. They are so, and they're capable, but they are so incompetent in so many ways. Again,

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look at the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Before the war, people thought Putin was such a genius. And the Russian army was one of the strongest armies in the world. This is what Putin thought. And it completely backfired. Well, the, a cabal explanation there would be there's a NATO-driven United States military industrial complex that wants to create chaos and incompetence.

So they put a gun to Putin's head and told him Vladimir, if you don't invade, we shoot you. How did they cause Putin to invade Ukraine? It's the thing about conspiracy theories is there's usually a way to explain everything. You can explain, you're an intellectual religion. You can, you can always find an explanation for everything. And, you know, in the end, it's intellectual integrity. If you insist on, whenever people confront you with evidence, with finding some very, very complicated explanation for that too, you can explain everything. We know that. It's a question of, of, of intellectual integrity. And I will also say another thing. The conspiracy theories, they do get one thing right, certainly in today's world. I think they represent an authentic and justified fear of a lot of people that they are losing control of their lives. They don't understand what is happening. And this, I think is not just a legitimate fear. This is an important fear. They are right. We are losing control of our lives. We are facing really big dangers, but not from a small cabal of fellow humans. The problem with many of these conspiracy theories that, yes, we have a problem with a new AI technology, but if you now direct the fire against certain people, so instead of all humans cooperating against real common threats, whether it's the rise of AI, whether it's global warming, you're only causing us to fight each other. And I think that the key question that people who spread these ideas, I mean, many of them, that they honestly believe, it's not malicious, that they honestly believe in these theories, is do you want to spread, to spend your life spreading hate towards people? Or do you want to work on more constructive projects? I think one of the big differences between those who believe in conspiracy theories and people who warn about the dangers of AI, the dangers of climate change, we don't see certain humans as evil and hateful. The problem isn't humans. The problem is something outside humanity. Yes, humans are contributing to the problem, but ultimately, the enemy is external to humanity. Whereas conspiracy theories usually claim that a certain part of humanity is the source of all evil, which leads them to eventually think in terms of exterminating this part of humanity, which leads sometimes to historical disasters like Nazism. So it can lead to hate, but can also lead to cynicism and apathy that basically says, it's not in my power to make the world better, so you don't actually take action. I think it is within the power of every individual to make the world a little bit better. You can't do everything, don't try to do everything. Find one thing in your areas of activity, a place where you have some agency and try to do that, and hope that other people do their bit, and if everybody do their bit, we'll manage. If we don't, we don't, but at least we try. You have been part of conspiracy theories. I find myself recently becoming part of conspiracy theories. Is there advice you can give of how to be a human being in this world that values truth and reason while watching yourself become part of conspiracy theories? At least from my perspective, it seems very difficult to prove to the world that you're not part of a conspiracy theory. As you said, I have interviewed Benjamin Netanyahu recently. I don't know if you're aware, but doing such things will also pick up a new menu of items that your new set of conspiracy

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theories you're now a part of. I find it very frustrating because it makes it very difficult to respond, because I sense that people have the right intentions. Like we said, they have a nervousness of fear of power and the abuses of power, and as do I. So I find myself in a difficult position that I have nothing to show to prove that I'm not part of such a conspiracy theory. I think ultimately, you can't. We can't. I mean, it's like proving consciousness. You can't. That's just the situation. Whatever you say can and will be used against you by some people. So this fantasy, if I only say this, if I only show them that, if I only have this data, they will see I'm okay. It doesn't work like that. I think to keep your sanity in this situation, first of all, it's important to understand that most of these people are not evil. They are not doing it on purpose. Many of them really believe that there is some very nefarious, powerful conspiracy, which is causing a lot of harm in the world, and they are doing a good thing by exposing it and making people aware of it and trying to stop it. If you think that you're surrounded by evil, you're falling into the same rabbit hole. You're falling into the same paranoid state of mind, oh, the world is full of these evil people. No, most of them are good people. Also, I think we can empathize with some of the key ideas there, which I share, that yes, it's becoming more and more difficult to understand what is happening in the world. There are huge dangers in the world that we are existential dangers to the human species, but they don't come from a small cabal of Jews or gay people or feminists or whatever. They come from much more diffused forces, which are not under the control of any single individual. We don't have to look for the evil people. We need to look for human allies in order to work together against, again, the dangers of AI, the dangers of bioengineering, the dangers of climate change. When you wake up in the morning, the question is, do you want to spend your day spreading hatred or do you want to spend your day trying to make allies and work together? Let me ask you kind of a big philosophical question about AI and the threat of it. Let's look at the threat side. Folks like Eliezer Yatskovski worry that AI might kill all of us. Do you worry about that range of possibilities where artificial intelligence systems in a variety of ways might destroy human civilization?

Yes. I talk a lot about it, about the dangers of AI. I sometimes get into trouble because I depict these scenarios of how AI becoming very dangerous. Then people say that I'm encouraging these scenarios, but I'm talking about it as a warning. I'm not so terrified of the simplistic idea, again, the terminator scenario of robots running in the street shooting everybody. I'm more worried about AI accumulating more and more power and basically taking over society, taking over our lives, taking power away from us until we don't understand what is happening and we lose control of our lives and of the future. The two most important things to realize about AI, now so many things are being said now about AI, but I think there are two things that every person should know about AI. First is that AI is the first tool in history that can make decisions by itself. All previous tools in history couldn't make decisions. This is why they empowered us. You invent a knife, you invent an atom bomb. The atom bomb cannot decide to start a war, cannot decide which city to bomb. AI can make decisions by itself. And autonomous weapon systems can decide by themselves who to kill, who to bomb. The second thing is that AI is the first tool in history that can create new ideas by itself. The printing press could print our ideas, but could not create new ideas. AI can create new

ideas entirely by itself. This is unprecedented. Therefore, it is the first technology in history that instead of giving power to humans, it takes power away from us. And the danger is that it will increasingly take more and more power from us until we are left helpless and clueless about what is happening in the world. And this is already beginning to happen in an accelerated pace. More and more decisions about our lives, whether to give us a loan, whether to give us a mortgage, whether to give us a job outtaking by AI, and more and more of the ideas of the images, of the stories that surround us and shape our minds, our world, our produce, are created by AI, not by human beings. If you can just link on that, what is the danger of that, that more and more of the creative side is done by AI, the idea generation? Is it that we become stale in our thinking? Is that that idea generation is so fundamental to the evolution of humanity? That we can't resist the idea. To resist an idea, you need to have some vision of the creative process. Now, this is a very old fear. You go back to Plato's cave, some of this idea that people are sitting chained in a cave and seeing shadows on a screen, on a wall, and thinking this is reality. You go back to Descartes, and he has this thought experiment of the demon. And Descartes asks himself, how do I know that any of this is real? Maybe there is a demon who is creating all of this and is basically enslaving me by surrounding me with these illusions. You go back to Buddha. It's the same question. What if we are living in a world of illusions, and because we have been living in it throughout our lives, all our ideas or our desires, how do we understand ourselves? This is all the product of the same illusions. This was a big philosophical question for thousands of years. Now, it's becoming a practical question of engineering, because previously, all the ideas, as far as we know, maybe we are living inside a computer simulation of intelligent rats from the planet Zircon. If that's the case, we don't know about it. But taking what we do know about human history until now, all the stories, images, paintings, songs, operas, theater, everything we have encountered and shaped our minds was created by humans. Now, increasingly, we live in a world where the more and more of these cultural artifacts will be coming from an alien intelligence. Very quickly, we might reach a point when most of the stories, images, songs, TV shows, whatever are created by an alien intelligence. If we now find ourselves inside this kind of world of illusions created by an alien intelligence that we don't understand, but it understands us, this is a kind of spiritual enslavement that we won't be able to break out of, because it understands us, it understands how to manipulate us. But we don't understand what is behind this screen of stories and images and songs. So if there's a set of AI systems that are operating in the space of ideas, they're far superior to ours, and we're not almost able to, it's opaque to us, we're not able to see through. How does that change the pursuit of happiness, the human pursuit of happiness? Life, where do we get joy if we're surrounded by AI systems that are doing most of the cool things humans do much better than us? Some of the things, it's okay that the AIs will do them. Many human tasks and jobs, it's the drudgery, they are not fun, they are not developing us emotionally or spiritually, it's fine if the robots take over. I don't know, I think about the people in supermarkets or grocery stores that spend hours every day just passing items and charging you the money. I mean, if this can be automated, wonderful. We need to make sure that these people then have better jobs, better means of supporting themselves, and developing their social abilities, their spiritual abilities, and that's the ideal world

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that AI can create, that it takes away from us the things that it's better if we don't do them and allows us to focus on the most important things and the deepest aspects of our nature, of our potential. If we give AI control of the sphere of ideas at this stage, I think it's very, very dangerous because it doesn't understand us, and AI at present is mostly digesting the products of human culture. Everything we've produced over thousands of years, it eats all of these cultural products, digests it, and starts producing its own new stuff. But we still haven't figured it out ourselves, in our bodies, our brains, our minds, our psychology. So an AI based on our flawed understanding of ourselves is a very dangerous thing. I think that we need, first of all, to keep developing ourselves. If for every dollar and every minute that we spend on developing AI, artificial intelligence, we spend another dollar and another minute in developing human consciousness, the human mind will be okay. The danger is that we spend all our effort on developing an AI at a time when we don't understand ourselves, and then letting the AI take over, that's erode to a human catastrophe.

Does it surprise you how well large language models work? Has it modified your understanding of the nature of intelligence? Yes. I've been writing about AI for eight years now, and engaged with all these predictions and speculations. When it actually came, it was much faster and more powerful than I thought it would be. I didn't think that we would have in 2023 an AI that can hold a conversation that you can't know if it's a human being or an AI that can write beautiful texts. I read the texts written by AI, and the thing that strikes me most is the coherence. People think, oh, it's nothing, they just take ideas from here and there, words from here and put here. No, it's so coherent. You read in not sentences, you read paragraphs, you read entire texts, and there is logic. There is a structure. It's not only coherent, it's convincing, and the beautiful thing about it that has to do with your work, it doesn't have to be true. It often gets facts wrong, but it still is convincing. It is both scary and beautiful. Our brains love language so much that we don't need the facts to be correct. We just need it to be a beautiful story. That's been the secret of politics and religion for thousands of years, and now it's coming with AI. You, as a person who has written some of the most impactful words ever written in your books, how does that make you feel that you might be one of the last effective human writers? That's a good question.

First of all, do you think that's possible?

I think it is possible. I've seen a lot of examples of AI being told right like Yuval Noah Harari and what it produces.

Has it ever done better than you think you could have written yourself?

I mean, on the level of content of ideas, no. There are things I say, I would never say that, but when it comes to the, I mean, there is, again, the coherence and the quality of writing is such that I say it's unbelievable how good it is. Who knows, in 10 years, in 20 years, maybe it can do better even according to certain measures on the level of content.

So that people will be able to do like a style transfer, do in the style of Yuval Noah Harari, write anything, right? Why I should have ice cream tonight and make it convincing.

I don't know if I have anything convincing to say about this.

I think you'll be surprised. I think you'd be surprised.

There could be an evolutionary biology explanation for why.

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Yeah. Ice cream is good for you.

Yeah. So, I mean, I mean, that changes the nature of writing.

Ultimately, I think it goes back.

Much of my writing is suspicious of itself. I write stories about the danger of stories.

I write about intelligence, but highlighting the dangers of intelligence.

Ultimately, I don't think that in terms of power, human power comes from intelligence and from stories. But I think that the deepest and best qualities of humans are not intelligence

and not storytelling and not power. Again, with all our power, with all our cooperation,

with our intelligence, we are on the verge of destroying ourselves and destroying much of the

ecosystem. Our best qualities are not there. Our best qualities are nonverbal. Again,

they come from things like compassion, from introspection. And introspection, for my experience,

is not verbal. If you try to understand yourself with words, you will never succeed.

There is a place where you need the words. But the deepest insights, they don't come from words.

And you can't write about it. That that's, again, it goes back to Wittgenstein, to Buddha,

to so many of these sages before, that these are the things we are silent about.

But eventually, you have to project it as a writer. You have to do the silent introspection,

but project it onto a page. Yes, but you still have to warn people, you will never find the deepest

truth in a book. You will never find it in words. You can only find it, I think, in direct experience,

which is nonverbal, which is preverbal. In the silence of your own mind. Yes. Somewhere in there.

Yes. Well, let me ask you a silly question, then. A ridiculously big question.

You have done a lot of deep thinking about the world, about yourself, this kind of introspection.

How do you think? If you, by way of advice, but just practically speaking, day to day,

how do you think about difficult problems of the world?

First of all, I take time off. The most important thing I do, I think as a writer,

as a scientist, I meditate. I spend about two hours every day in silent meditation,

observing as much as possible nonverbally what is happening within myself, focusing, you know,

body sensations, the breath. Thoughts keep coming up, but I try not to give them attention. I don't

try to drive them away. Just let them be there in the background, like some background noise.

Don't engage with the thoughts, because the mind is constantly producing stories with words.

These stories come between us and the world. They don't allow us to see ourselves or the world.

For me, the most shocking thing when I started meditating 23 years ago,

I was giving this simple exercise to just observe my breath coming in and out of the nostrils,

not controlling it, just observing it. I couldn't do it for more than 10 seconds.

I, for 10 seconds, would try to notice, oh, now the breath is coming in. It's coming in,

it's coming in, oh, it stopped coming in, and now it's going out, going out.

10 seconds and some memory would come, some thought would come, some story about something

that happened last week or 10 years ago or in the future, and the story would hijack my attention.

It would take me maybe five minutes to remember, oh, I'm supposed to be observing my breath.

If I can't observe my own breath because of these stories created by the mind,

how can I hope to understand much more complex things like the political situation in Israel,

the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

If all these stories keep coming, I mean, it's not the truth, it's just the story your

own mind created. First thing, train the mind to be silent and just observe.

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Two hours every day, and I go every year for a long retreat between one month and two months, 60 days, of just silent meditation. Silent meditation for 60 days.

To train the mind, forget about your own stories, just observe what is really happening.

And then also, on other, throughout the day, have an information diet.

People are today, many people are very aware of what they feed their body, what enters their mouth. Be very aware of what you feed your mind, what enters your mind. Have an information diet.

So, for instance, I read long books, and I prefer, like, you know, I do many interviews, I prefer three hours interviews to five minutes interviews.

The long format is, it's not always feasible, but you can go much, much deeper.

So, I would say an information diet, be very careful about what you feed your mind, give preference to big chunks over small... To books over Twitter.

Yes, books over Twitter, definitely. And then, you know, when I encounter a problem, difficult intellectual problem, then I give it, I let the problem lead it, lead me, where it goes and not where I want it to go. If I approach a problem with some preconceived idea, solution, and then try to impose it on the problem, and, you know, just find confirmation bias, just find the evidence that supports my view, it's... This is easy for the mind to do, and you don't learn anything new.

Do you take notes? Do you start to concretize your thoughts on paper?

I read a lot. I don't... I don't... Usually, I don't take notes.

Then, I start writing, and when I write, I write like a torrent. Just write. Now, it's the time you read. You're giving me the meditation. Now, it's the time to write. Write. Don't stop. Just write.

So, I would write from memory, and I'm not afraid of formulating, say, big ideas, big theories, and putting them on paper. The danger is, once it's on paper, not on paper, on the screen, in the computer, you get attached to it, and then you start with confirmation bias to build more and more layers around it, and you can't go back, and then it's very dangerous. But I trust myself that I have, to some extent, the ability to press the delete button. The most important button in the keyboard is delete. I write, and then I delete. I write, and then I delete. And because I trust myself that I'll have the... Every time I come to press the delete button, I feel bad. Like, it's a kind of pain. Hey, I created this. It's a beautiful idea, and I have to delete it.

But you're still brave enough to press delete.

I try, and hopefully, I do it enough times. And this is important, because in the long term, it enables me to play with ideas. I have the confidence to start formulating some brave idea. Most of them turn out to be nonsense. But I trust myself not to be attached, not to become attached to my own nonsense, so it gives me this room for playfulness.

I would be amiss if I didn't ask. For people interested in hearing you talk about meditation, if they want to start meditating, what advice would you give on how to start? You mentioned you couldn't hold your attention on your breath for longer than 10 seconds at first.

So how did they start on this journey?

First of all, it's a difficult journey. It's not fun. It's not recreational. It's not kind of time to relax. It can be very, very intense. The most difficult thing, at least in the meditation I practice, vipassana, which I learned from a teacher called Esen Goenka, the most difficult thing is not the silence. It's not sitting for long hours. It's what comes up.

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Everything you don't want to know about yourself. This is what comes up. So it's very intense and difficult. If you go to a meditation retreat, don't think you're going to relax.

So what's the experience of a meditation retreat when everything you don't like comes up for 30 days? It depends what comes up. If anger comes up, you're angry. For days on end, you're just boiling with anger. Everything makes you angry. Again, something that happens right now, or you remember something from 20 years ago, and you start boiling with, it's like, I never even thought about this incident, but it was somewhere stored with a huge, huge pile of anger attached to it, and it's now coming up, and all the anger is coming up. Maybe it's boredom.

30 days of meditation, you start getting bored, and it's the most boring thing. Suddenly, no anger. It's the most boring. Another second, I scream. And boredom is one of the most difficult things to deal with in life. I think it's closely related to death. Death is boring. In many movies, death is exciting. It's not exciting. Ultimately, it's boredom. Nothing happens.

It's the end of exciting things. And many things in the world happen because of boredom. To some extent, people start entire wars because of boredom. People quit relationships. People quit jobs because of boredom. And if you never learn how to deal with boredom, you will never learn how to enjoy peace and quiet, because the way to peace passes through boredom. And from what I experienced

with meditation, I think maybe it was the most difficult, maybe at least in the top three, like much more difficult, say, than anger or pain. When pain comes up, you feel heroic, I'm dealing with pain. When boredom comes up, it brings it with depression and feelings of worthlessness. And it's nothing. I'm nothing.

The way to peace is through boredom. David Foster Wallace said the key to life is to be unboreable, which is a different perspective on what you're talking to. Is there truth to that?

Yes, it's closely related. I would say, I look at the world today, like politics, the one thing we need more than anything else is boring politicians. We have a super abundance of very exciting politicians who are doing and saying very exciting things, and we need boring politicians, and we need them quickly. Yeah, the way to peace is through boredom. That applies in more ways than one. What advice would you give to young people today in high school and college how to have a successful life, how to have a successful career?

What they should know, it's the first time in history, nobody has any idea how the world would look like in 10 years. Nobody has any idea how the world would look like when you grow up. Throughout history, it was never possible to predict the future. You live in the Middle Ages, nobody knows, maybe in 10 years, the Vikings will invade, the Mongols will invade, there'll be an epidemic, there'll be an earthquake, who knows. But the basic structures of life will not change. Most people will still be peasants. Armies would fight on horseback with swords and bows and arrows and things like that. So you could learn a lot from the wisdom of your elders, they've been there before, and they knew what kind of basic skills you need to learn.

You, most people, need to learn how to sow wheat and harvest wheat or rice and make bread and build a house and ride the horse and things like that. Now we have no idea, not just about politics. We have no idea how the job market would look like in 10 years. We have no ideas, no idea what skills will still be needed. You think you're going to learn how to code because they'll need a lot of coders in the 2030s? Think again, maybe AI is doing all the coding. You don't need any coders. You're going to, I don't know, you learn to translate languages,

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you want to be translator, gone. We don't know what skills will be needed. So the most important skill is the skill to keep learning and keep changing throughout our lives, which is very, very difficult to keep reinventing ourselves. It's a deep, again, it's in a way a spiritual practice to build your personality, to build your mind as a very flexible mind. If traditionally, people thought about education, like building a stone house with very deep foundations. Now it's more like setting up a tent that you can fold and move to the next place very, very quickly because that's the 21st century.

Which also raises questions about the future of education, what that looks like.

Yeah. Let me ask you about love.

What were some of the challenges? What were some of the lessons about love, about life that you learned from coming out as gay?

In many ways, it goes back to the stories. I think this is one of the reasons I became so interested in stories and in their power, because I grew up in a small Israeli town in the 1980s, early 1990s, which was very homophobic and I basically embraced it. I breathed it because you could hardly even think differently. So you had these two powerful stories around, one that God hates gay people and that he will punish them for who they are or for what they do.

Secondly, that it's not God, it's nature, that there is something diseased or sick about it.

These people, maybe they are not sinners, but they are sick, they are defective and nobody wanted to identify with such a thing. If your options, okay, you can be a sinner, you can be a defect, but what do you want? No good options there.

And it took me many years till I was 21 to come to term with it. And one of the things, I learned two things, first about the amazing capacity of the human mind for denial and delusion, that an algorithm could have told me that I'm gay when I was 14 or 15.

Like if there is a good-looking guy and girl walking, I would immediately focus on the guy. But I didn't connect the dots. Like I could not understand what was happening inside my own brain and my own mind and my own body. It took me a long time to realize, you know, you're just gay.

So that speaks to the power of social convention versus individual thought.

This is the power of self-delusion, that, you know, it's not that I knew I was gay and was hiding it. I was hiding it for myself successfully, that I don't understand how it is possible.

Looking back, I don't understand how it is possible, but I know it is possible. I knew and didn't know at the same time. And then the other big lesson is the power of the stories, of the social conventions, because the stories were not true. They did not make sense even on their own terms. Even if you accept the basic religious framework of the world, that there is a good God that created everything and controls everything, why would a good God punish people for love? I understand why a good God would punish people for violence, for hatred, for cruelty, but why would God punish people for love, especially when he created them that way?

So even if you accept the religious framework of the world, obviously, the story that God hates gay people, it comes not from God, but from some humans who invented this story. They take their own hatred. This is something humans do all the time. They hate somebody and they say, no, I don't hate them. God hates them. They throw their own hatred on God. And then if you think about the scientific framework that said that all gays, they are against nature, they are against

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the laws of nature, and so forth, science tells us nothing can exist against the laws of nature. Things that go against the laws of nature just don't exist. There is a law of nature that you can't move faster than the speed of light. Now, you don't have this minority of people who break the laws of nature by going faster than the speed of light, and then nature comes, that's bad. You shouldn't do that. That's not how nature works. If something goes against the laws of nature, it just can't exist. The fact that gay people exist, me and not just people, you see homosexuality among many, many mammals and birds and other animals, it exists because it is in line with the laws of nature. The idea that this is sick, that this is whatever, it comes not from nature, it comes from the human imagination. Some people, for whatever reasons, hated gay people. They said,

oh, they go against nature. But this is a story created by people. This is not the laws of nature. This taught me that so many of the things that we think are natural or eternal or divine, no, they are just human stories. But these human stories are often the most powerful forces in the world. What did you learn from your personal struggle of journey through the social conventions to find one of the things that makes life awesome, which is love? What it takes to strip away the self-delusion and the pressures of social convention to wake up? It takes a lot of work, a lot of courage, and a lot of help from other people. It's this heroic idea that I can do it all by myself. It doesn't work. Certainly, with love, you need at least one more person, and I'm very happy that I found Itzik. We lived in the same small Israeli town. We lived on two adjacent streets for years, probably went to school on the same bus for years without really encountering each other. In the end, we met on one of the first dating sites on the internet for gay people in Israel in 2002. You're saying the internet works?

Yes. I said a lot of bad things or dangers about technology and the internet. There are also, of course, good things. This is not an accident. You have two kinds of minorities in history. You have minorities which are a cohesive group, like Jews. Yes, you are small as being born Jewish in, say, Germany or Russia or whatever. You're born in a small community, but as a Jewish boy, you're born to a Jewish family. You have Jewish parents. You have Jewish siblings. You're in a Jewish neighborhood. You have Jewish friends. These kinds of minorities, they could always come together and help each other throughout history. Another type of minority, like gay people or broadly LGBTQ people, that as a gay boy, you're usually not born to a gay family with gay parents and gay siblings in a gay neighborhood. Usually, you find yourself completely alone. For most of history, one of the biggest problems for the gay community was that there was no community. How do you find one another? The internet was a wonderful thing in this respect because it made it very easy for these kinds of diffuse communities or diffuse minorities to find each other. Me and Itzik, even though we rode the same bus together to school for years, we didn't meet in the physical world. We met online because, again, in the physical world, you don't want to identify in an Israeli town in the 1980s. You ride the bus. You don't want to say, hey, I'm gay. Is there anybody else gay here? That's not a good idea, but on the internet, we could find each other. There's another lesson in there that maybe sometimes the thing you're looking for is right under your nose. A very old lesson and a very true lesson in many ways. You need help from other people to realize the truth about yourself. Of course, in love, you cannot just love abstractly. There is another person there. You need to find them. But also, we were one of the first generations who enjoyed the benefits of gay liberation,

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of the very difficult struggles of people who are much braver than us in the 1980s, 1970s, 1960s, who dared to question social conventions to struggle at sometimes a terrible price, and we benefited from it. More broadly, we spoke earlier about the feminist movement. There would have been no gay liberation without the feminist movement. We also owe them starting to change the gender structure of the world. This is always true. You can never do it just by yourself. Also, I look at my journey in meditation. The idea of going to meditation retreat okay, but I couldn't develop the meditation technique by myself. Somebody had to teach me this way of how to look inside yourself. It's also a very important lesson that you can't do it just by yourself. This fantasy of complete autonomy, of complete self-sufficiency, it doesn't work. It tends to be a very kind of male match of fantasy. I don't need anybody. I can be so strong and so brave that I'll do everything by myself. It never works. You need friends, you need a mentor, you need the very thing that makes us human as other humans. Absolutely. You mentioned that the fear of border might be a kind of proxy for the fear of death. What role does the fear of death play in the human condition? Are you afraid of death? Yes, I think everybody are afraid of death. I mean, all our fears come out of the fear of death, but the fear of death is just so deep and difficult. We can't, usually we can't face it directly. So we cut it into little pieces and we face just little pieces. Oh, I lost my smartphone. That's a little, little, little piece of the fear of death, which is of losing everything. So I can't deal with losing everything. I'm dealing now with losing my phone or losing a book or whatever. Somebody, I feel pain. That's a small bit of the fear of death. Somebody who really doesn't fear death would not fear anything at all. There'll be like anything that happens, I can deal with it. If I can deal with death, this is nothing. So any fears as a distant echo of the big fear of death? Have you ever looked at it head-on, caught glimpses, sort of contemplated as the Stoics do? Yes. I mean, when I was a teenager, I would constantly contemplate it, trying to understand, to imagine. It was extreme. It was a very, very shocking and moving experience. I remember especially in connection with national ideology, which was also very big, strong in Israel still is. Which then comes from the fear of death. You know that you're going to die, so you say, okay, I die, but the nation lives on. I live on through the nation. I don't really die. And you'll hear it especially on Memorial Day for fallen soldiers. So every day, there'll be in school, Memorial Day for fallen soldiers who fell, defending Israel in all its different wars. And all these kids would come dressed in white and you'll have this big ceremony with flags and songs and dances in memory of the fallen soldiers. And you get the impression, again, I don't want to sound crass, but you get the impression that the best thing in life is to be a fallen soldier. Because even then, yes, you die. Everybody dies in the end, but then you'll have all these cool kids for years and years, remembering you and celebrating you and you don't really die. And I remember standing in these ceremonies and thinking, what does it actually mean? Like, okay, so if I'm a fallen soldier, now I'm a skeleton, I'm bones under this military cemetery, under this stone. Do I actually hear the kids singing all these patriotic songs? If not, how do I know they do it? Maybe they trick me. Maybe I die in the war and then they don't sing any songs. And how does it help me? And I realized, as I was quite young at the time, that if you're dead, you can't hear anything because that's the meaning of being dead. And if

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you're dead, you can't think of anything like, oh, now they're remembering because you're dead, that's the meaning of being dead. And it was a shocking realization.

But it's a really difficult realization to keep holding your mind, like it's the end.

I lost it over time. I mean, for many years, it was a very powerful fuel, motivation for philosophical, for spiritual exploration. And I realized that the fear of death is really a very powerful drive. And over the years, especially as I meditated, it kind of dissipated.

And today, I sometimes find myself trying to recapture this teenage fear of death because it was so powerful and I just can't. I tried to make the same image. I don't know. It's something about the teenage years. Yeah, I always thought that the adults, there is something wrong with the adults because they don't get it. Like I would ask my parents or teachers about it and they, oh, yes, you died in the end. That's it. But on the other hand, they are so worried about other things. Like there'll be a political crisis or an economic problem or a personal problem like with the bank or whatever. They'll be so worried. But then about the fact that they're going to die, we don't care about it. That's why you read Camus and others when you're a teenager, you really worry about the existential questions. Well, this feels like the right time to ask the big question. What's the meaning of this whole thing, you all? And you're the right person to ask. What's the meaning of life? Yes. That's easy. What is it?

So what life is, if you ask what the meaning of life, what life is, life is feeling things, having sensations, emotions and reacting to them. When you feel something good, something pleasant,

you want more out of it. You want more of it. When you feel something unpleasant, you want to get rid of it. That's the whole of life. That's what is happening all the time.

You feel things, you want the pleasant things to increase, you want the unpleasant things to disappear. That's what life is. If you ask what is the meaning of life in a more kind of

philosophical or spiritual question, the real question to ask, what kind of answer do you expect?

Most people expect a story and that's always the wrong answer. Most people expect that the answer to the question, what is the meaning of life, will be a story, like a big drama, that this is the plot line and this is your role in the story. This is what you have to do. This is your line in the big play. You say your line, you do your thing. That's the thing. And this is human imagination. This is fantasy. To really understand life, life is not a story. The universe does not function like a story.

So I think to really understand life, you need to observe it directly in a nonverbal way.

Don't turn it into a story. And the question to start with is what is suffering? What is causing suffering? The question, what is the meaning of life? It will take you to fantasies and delusions. We want to stay with the reality of life. And the most important question about the reality of life is what is suffering and where is it coming from? And to answer that nonverbally, so the conscious experience of suffering? Yes. When you suffer, try to observe what is really happening when you're suffering. Well put. And I wonder if AI will also go through that same kind of process. And if we develop consciousness or not, at present, it's not. It's just words.

It will just say to you, please don't hurt me of all. Again, as I've mentioned to you,

I'm a huge fan of yours. Thank you for any incredible work you do. This conversation has been a long time. I think coming, it's a huge honor to talk to you. This was really fun. Thank you for talking today. Thank you. I really enjoyed it. And as I said, I think the long form is the best form.

Yeah, I loved it. Thank you. Thanks for listening to this conversation with Yvonne

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