

We Start With...

A two minute period of silence - a moment of peace.

From the 'Chair'

Our meeting time, from 5.30 to 7.30 pm, spans a meal time. From 5.30 to 6 pm we share some chat and catch-up time together, with a hot savoury, a sandwich and a cuppa. While not exactly a meal, it seems to meet the immediate needs! Please feel welcome to join us for this welcome and friendly time.

Our meetings usually start with a speaker, a book review, or a video piece on some topic of interest. This is followed by discussion and comment. By the end of the evening most people have contributed, and we have all heard things to take away and think about.

What happens between meetings – the thinking – is our valuable outcome. If you'd like to hear, talk about, and continue to think about something new and interesting, new folk are welcome to any of our meetings *Gretchen*

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Next Meeting

Marion Christie will review the book "Leaving Alexandria: a memoir of faith and doubt", by Richard Holloway, former Episcopalian Primus and Bishop of Edinburgh, whose doubts about the authority and certainties of organised religion led to him resigning from his role within the Church. He now describes himself as an "after-religionist". It is a moving and thought-provoking account of his life and his struggles with some of the core beliefs of the Church.

Richard Holloway

In reviewing the book, The Independent newspaper asked "*There's one question about Leaving Alexandria - otherwise a quiet epic of a biography about faith, doubt, class, philosophy and social action - that won't go away. How did such an innate dissimulator and self-dramatist as Richard Holloway, wracked with crippling, carnal doubts about the authority and certainties of organised religion, actually get to become the Episcopalian Primus and Bishop of Edinburgh?*"

Leaving Alexandria

Book Review by

Marion Christie

Thursday, 27th JULY

St John's Church Hall,
Cnr Wright Street
& Highgate

Tea and Coffee
will be available from 5.30pm

The programme will start at
6.00pm

Contribution - \$5

Yuval Noah Harari

Last month Gretchen introduced us to two books written by Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens* and *Homo Deus*. I had never heard of either the writer or the books before the meeting and was pleased, as always, to come away from a Sea of Faith meeting with new ideas and stimulating thoughts. So when thinking about the newsletter for this month, I thought it would be a good idea to look further at Prof Harari and the two books, especially as they come highly recommended not only by Gretchen but also Barak Obama and Bill Gates.

I have such a great pile of books, which I have bought, awaiting attention that I resorted to listening to *YouTube* and *IntelligenceSquared* interviews on each book. The interviews are a bit like the *Reith Lectures* in which the speaker makes the case and then there is time for audience questions. I will say at the outset that I found both books quite riveting and can unreservedly recommend the two interviews (locations below) to anyone with an open mind.

I was on comfortable ground with most of *Sapiens* and the start of *Homo Deus* as Lloyd Geering has told us much of that material. *Our success to date has been our ability to believe in shared fictions. Religions, nations and money, Harari argues, are all human fictions that have enabled collaboration and organisation on a massive scale.* Harari tells much more about how the artificial intelligence and algorithms in such things as driverless cars and free e-mail software (g-mail for example) are affecting our lives. He sets the scene for a new stage in our evolution where many of us will have jobs replaced by automation (we covered some of that earlier in the year when we discussed Universal Basic Income) and thus will emerge a group of people who are largely without use or function. The

elite (well Calvin had his elite group too) will become very rich (a process already happening) and will be at the front of the new developments – but they will not be actually steering the new society, it will steer itself in the same way as the growth of the internet and cell phone technology is not being steered by any one group but by a number of different forces (companies – think Microsoft, Google, FaceBook and the rest).

From *Sapiens*

“We did not domesticate wheat,” he wrote, “wheat domesticated us”; or “How do you cause people to believe in an imagined order such as Christianity, democracy or capitalism? First, you never admit that the order is imagined.”

From *Homo Deus*

“Modernity is a deal,” Harari writes. “The entire contract can be summarised in a single phrase: humans agree to give up meaning in exchange for power.”

The new longevity and super-human qualities are likely to be the preserve of the techno super-rich, the masters of the data universe. Meanwhile, the redundancy of labour, supplanted by efficient machines, will create an enormous “useless class”, without economic or military purpose. In the absence of religion, overarching fictions will be required to make sense of the world.

Guardian review – by Andrew Anthony

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Sapiens <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eOO5xrEiC0M>

Homo Deus <http://www.intelligencesquared.com/events/yuval-noah-harari-on-the-rise-of-homo-deus/>