A BOOK REPORT
"21 LESSONS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY"

<u>Title of Book</u>: "21 Lessons for the 21st Century"

<u>Author</u>: Yuval Noah Harari, who holds a Ph.D. in history from the University of Oxford and now lectures at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, specializing in world history. He is an Israeli citizen. He has, in addition to this book, authored two previous best selling books, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Mankind,* and *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow.* (Personal Note to the Reader: The Reader should be aware of the fact that the author is clearly a complete secularist or what is called a "humanistic-secularist", who believes in the ultimate goodness of man, and puts no or little stock in the Divine. I don't know that I would conclude that he is an atheist, but his views of all of the world's major religions (including mine, Christianity, and the one in which the author was brought up, Judaism) are not favorable ones, while his views of the "Secularist Ethics" are far more favorable than his views of the major religions, although Secularist Ethics also receive critical comments from the author. So if the Reader is a person of faith, a religious person, he or she is going to find parts of this book to be somewhat difficult to swallow. So, Reader beware!)

<u>Publisher and Publication Date</u>: 2018, and in paperback, 2019, published in the U.S. by Penguin Random House.

<u>First Impressions</u>: This book review is, by far, the most difficult review that I have ever undertaken. While I have reviewed well over 20 books, some of which are quite complex and difficult to read, reviewing this book has presented me with a challenge which I have put off undertaking because of its difficulty. A good friend gave me this book, and asked me to review it for her. Right now I don't know whether to thank her or be angry at her for even giving me the book, much less for asking me to review it. Large parts of this book challenge my belief systems, my worldview, but, as I have read those parts of the book I have asked myself "do you want to believe responsibly, meaning do I want to believe on the basis of evidence and not just pure belief in some story or fiction"? (Note: The author argues that most, if not all of what we believe, not just from a religious point of view but from almost every point of view, including a belief that a nation even exists, is based on a story or fiction.) I have found this book to be very intellectually challenging, very thought provoking, in some respects downright scary or frightening and depressing, and, in some of its later chapters, quite controversial. While much of it is quite scary, if not downright frightening and directly challenges many of our belief systems, it does force the reader to confront what the future might bring for humanity, although the author readily admits that neither he nor anyone else can accurately predict what the future will bring, particularly in 2050 or in 100 years from now. I want to caution the reader that if the reader is a person of faith, a religious person of any faith, whether it be Christian, Jewish, Muslim or whatever, he or she is going to find parts of this book to be very controversial, if not in fact downright obnoxious. But I would caution the reader, as I did myself, "if our faith is not strong enough to withstand a critical analysis, and argumentative criticism, then, perhaps, we really have

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no faith or certainly not a very strong one". Surely we want to believe responsibly, and base our beliefs on truth and evidence, and not on pure made up fictions. Whether we feel comfortable or not in doing so it does not hurt to find our beliefs challenged so that we can make the thoughtful effort to examine the evidence and determine just what the truth might be, even if the truth takes us where we do not want to go. So I found that even those chapters which are critical of the various religions and faiths are quite useful if, for no other reason because they point out the challenges which the world's religions (including mine, Christianity) will face in coming years if they are to remain relevant to mankind as a whole and even to the very preservation of mankind.

So I would urge the reader to do his or her best to approach this book with an open mind, and with an effort to keep in mind that the author's goal is to stimulate thinking about humankind, and its future, and about individual humans and their futures, and even about the very fate of humankind and of this world. The author is going to make statements which you will find difficult to understand or to accept, some of which are hugely frightening and some of which are very controversial, but he does so with a purpose and that is to stimulate each of us to think, and think very deeply about the future and fate of mankind and of individual humans.

<u>What are the Book's Overall Contents/What is the Author Doing With What the Author is Saying</u>?: It is at this point in my Review that my review of this book becomes one of extreme difficulty. Why is that the case? That is the case because, when I review a book I like to try, at an early state of the Review, to state or outline its overall theme or themes. Finding in this book any overall or overriding themes has been for me a difficult if not impossible task. In fact, I am not sure that the author even intended to set forth an overriding theme for the entire book. Parts of the book just don't seem to hang together with other parts of the book. In fact, some of its chapters seem to contradict what is stated in one or more of the earlier chapters. With apologies to the author and the other brilliant people who have reviewed this book and have made very favorable comments about it which appear on its front and rear cover sheets, and in the pages before the Introduction (including, for example, Bill Gates) I just cannot find a coherent, overall theme for the book. However, each of its individual chapters and parts does make a point which is worthy of thought and careful consideration. So, again with apologies to the author, I am going to attempt to set forth, in a somewhat summary fashion, some of the author's basic arguments, conclusions or points of discussion, with my hope being that you, the Reader, might be led to read and review the book for yourself. You can then challenge my summary and conclusions. So let me try to, in my words if not those of the author (and with apologies to the author) try to set forth several prominent points, declarations, conclusions or arguments of the author which I have gleaned from this book. They are as follows:

1) <u>Liberalism is Losing Favor with Humanity</u>: The author's first point of argument is that people, humans/humankind are losing their faith in what he refers to as "liberalism" or "the liberal story." This is a point of huge importance for our country, the USA, and for many countries and for humankind as a whole. Much of our entire belief system, as citizens of at least the Western World, is based on the liberal story, liberalism, and if faith in that story is lost then

there will be a huge shift in at least political thought, if not one or more outright revolutions. So what is "liberalism"? What is the "liberal story", as defined by the author.

     2) <u>Liberalism</u>: The term "liberal" has been hijacked or misused in the American political vernacular. It is a term that is most often used to distinguish one's political views (the so called "liberal view") from those views which are called "conservative". However, most so called "conservatives" would embrace classic liberalism. The foundation of "liberalism" is "liberty" or "freedom." True liberalism embraces the free and unencumbered rights of a person to marry whomever he or she chooses to marry, to worship or not worship as he or she sees fit, to pursue whatever job or profession or education which he or she chooses and is capable of pursuing, to spend one's money as he or she chooses to spend it, to vote as he or she chooses in open and free elections or referendums, and to live where he or she chooses to live and is capable of living. To quote the author, "the liberal story explained history as a struggle between liberty and tyranny, and envisioned a world in which all humans cooperate freely and peacefully, with minimum central control even at the price of some inequality...and...(T)he liberal story celebrates the value and power of liberty...(as)...it says that for thousands of years humankind lived under oppressive regimes that allowed people few political rights, economic opportunities, or personal liberties, and which heavily restricted the movements of individuals, ideas, and goods." While the liberal story acknowledges that there are many problems in our country and the world, it holds to the premises that these problems can eventually be overcome by giving people more liberty, and by achieving economic growth. You can contrast "liberal societies" with "illiberal" ones, such as those in Russia, China and in other world dictatorship and oligarchical countries (countries which are dominated by and run for the benefit of an extremely wealthy few). In the political arena, the liberal story would stand for free elections, the rule of law and the protection of minority rights. In the personal field, the liberal story would stand for free choices, individualism, diversity and gender equality. Prominent "conservatives", Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher would be classified as true "liberals", as they believed, strongly in and championed at least most the liberal story. So we would characterize the United States, Great Britain, many if not all of the Western Nations, and many of the world's nations as being nations which have adopted liberalism and the liberal story. If faith in that story is lost, then huge political and economic disruptions will occur.

     3) <u>Elections Are About "Feelings", and Not Rational Thinking</u>: The author would urge that while we of the electorate in countries which have adopted the Liberal Story would like to believe that our votes and the votes of our co-voters are based upon, and the outcomes of our "free elections" (which are an essential component of the Liberal Story) are based upon rational, thought through decisions about the issues and the positions of the candidates on the issues, such, in fact, is not the case. Voters vote their "feelings", not necessarily their rational conclusions based on a thoughtful analysis of the issues and the positions of the candidates on those issues. We vote for "who we like" or against "whom we do not like." Political advisors will state that a "candidate needs to be likeable" even if he or she is an absolute fool. The candidates, the politicians themselves use rhetoric, and advertising which are directed to appeal to "emotions", "feelings", not necessarily to the truth or the facts. They and the media, which is not always seeking the "truth" manipulate our feelings. Be honest with yourself, in the last few national elections did you cast your vote, at least in strong part on a basis of a "feeling" that you liked one

candidate and did not like another, even if the one you "liked" might have, in fact, been a total incompetent. So why is this "elections are decided by feelings" an important factor to consider in trying to determine the future fate of a society or country which is grounded in the liberal story, a story which places huge importance on free elections? Quite obviously, if the means to manipulate our "feelings" become vested in a few persons, much less computer algorithms, we can become subject to a dictatorship, even a very benign one, of a different sort. (Note: This book was written before the 2020 election. Regardless of how one might feel, good or bad, about the results of that election can one rationally conclude that Facebook/Social Media did not have an impact on that election, whether you believe that impact to have been good or bad? I make this point, not to argue about the results of the election but simply to point out that at least parts of the predictions of the future made by the author in 2018 (and he was speaking of the future in, like, 2050) have already proven to be true. Can we rationally contend that our very thoughts, our very feelings are not manipulated by the inventions of the Silicon Valley engineers?)

4) <u>But Many More Things Than Elections Are Based on Feelings</u>: It is not just our voting that is affected by "our feelings". Many of the decisions we make throughout our daily lives are based on our moods, our emotions, our feelings. Why do we want to drink one soft drink as opposed to another? Why do we like Coca Cola? Why do we prefer one type of car over another? How do I feel about my spouse, or a potential mate or date? What is my mood? Am I happy or depressed or neither? Our feelings dictate much of our lives. So if someone or something can know our feelings, our most intimate feelings, then that someone or that something can manipulate those feelings and actually manipulate us.

5) <u>What if Not Just Our Feelings But Our Very Thoughts Can be Known and Manipulated Or Used To Direct What We Do</u>? Each of us likes to believe that he or she has "free will", meaning that he or she can and will determine, in a free and unencumbered fashion, his or her actions and, ultimately, his or her own life. Without getting into a John Calvinistic argument about whether or not man has or does not have "free will" or whether his or her actions are "pre-determined or pre-destined", the author would argue with the proposition that any of us actually has free will. He seems to somewhat equate a human being to a machine, a computer. He submits that our actions are determined by our thoughts, which are simply a result of some electro-chemical firing of various synapses in our brains. That firing, those thoughts, are influenced, in large part, if not in fact actually directed by our environment, our life experiences, our belief systems (the author argues, the fictional stories upon which our view of the world is based), our educational background and factors which have been and are beyond our control. If this is in fact the case, then what would happen if someone or something (an inanimate machine, a computer) can monitor our thoughts or even direct or control them? The author raises some examples. What if our refrigerator knows our mood, and, therefore, can put forth food which is intended to deal with that mood? What if our TV or Sound System knows our mood, and knows that we have had a fight with our spouse or lover and can then turn on a program or music which deals with that mood or situation? Sounds wonderful doesn't it? But if these inanimate items can affect our moods and thoughts, when do we actually lose ourselves to machines and cease to be "I" or "me" or "myself"? When do I cede my decision making process to a machine, a computer?

6) <u>AI and the Marriage of Infotech and Biotech Will Give Us (or others) Control of the World Inside Us and Enable Us (or others or machines) to Engineer And Manufacture Life Or Outcomes</u>: All of this sounds like something from science fiction, or Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* which was written in 1931, in which Huxley presented a thesis that humans are biological algorithms and that science can hack the human algorithm and that technology can be used to manipulate it. In Huxley's book, the Brave New World, the New World Government uses advanced biotechnology and social engineering to make sure that everyone is always content and has no reason to rebel. The author proposes that the continued development (with ever increasing speed) of Artificial Intelligence ("AI") (which allows machines, computers, to learn and in even teach themselves), together with the quickly advancing knowledge in areas of biotechnology (the knowledge of our bodies and brains and their functions) and infotechnology (the ability to gather and analyze and use large quantities of information and data, including data about our likes, dislikes, actions and inactions, and even including data about our very bodies and minds) can ultimately give machines, computers, the ability to "hack" our minds, with the ability to know and manipulate our very thoughts and actions. In any event, the marriage of AI, with biotech and infotech can cause huge disruptions in the liberal story and in society. For example:

a) Machines, computers, through AI, will have the ability to perform many of the jobs which are now performed by humans, thereby eliminating those jobs for humans and possibly rendering large groups of humanity as "irrelevant", meaning that they are no longer needed.

b) Since technology can eliminate many jobs, governments will have to find ways to provide a Basic Level of Support to otherwise irrelevant people, as well as finding some ways for them to have "meaningful functions" which are essential to emotional health.

c) In all likelihood no person can enter any job or profession (even in the arts and humanities) and count on their job or profession being one that can be pursued for a lifetime. So people will be placed in a position of constant change, with change bringing high levels of stress.

d) Poor or developing countries will have economies which are hard hit, as those economies are based in large part upon the providing of cheap labor (e.g. for making of shoes shirts, or providing call centers) which is useful to the more developed nations, Since computers, through AI can provide the functions which have been previously performed by the cheap labor, those who have previously provided it will be irrelevant, and the economies of their countries will be hard hit. For example, one might go onto his or her computer and order a shirt, which is then "printed" at an Amazon "copier/printer center" or even on his or her own home printer.

e) Questions will arise as to how to provide our AI machines (e.g. a self driving car) with "morals" or "ethics." Question, if my car has to make a choice between saving my life or the lives of another family, what decision will it make and what governs that decision?

f) War Fighting will be affected. In view of the nuclear age and the ability to provide Mutually Assured Destruction ("MAD") most leaders and countries have learned that all out war does not pay, and can be hugely destructive of their own country. What happens, however, if war can be fought with machines, robots, and some country develops a technology which will allow it to start and fight and win a war without damage to itself, particularly if that country is governed by an evil dictator and its machines are developed with no morals or ethical standards?

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g) It is certainly conceivable that sensors will be attached to our bodies and that these will monitor our bodily functions and mental functions, all of which can be assimilated as a part of infotech, big data, and used to govern or manipulate our thoughts and actions, as well as to provide healthcare decisions.

h) Ultimately, AI, with biotech can be used so as to enhance life spans and mental if not also physical capacities and performances. Those of wealth will now have something meaningful on which to spend their money. They can use AI and biotech to make them and their children almost super human beings. There will then be two "biological" classes of humans, those with technologically enhanced capabilities and those without such enhanced capabilities, who will be "irrelevant" to those with the enhanced capabilities and to the economy in general. The potential for true "class warfare", or "revolution" clearly exists.

i) In summary the author cautions that much of who we are will be replaced by machines, algorithms. We will no longer know ourselves, our "I" or "me" or think for ourselves, as our thoughts will be replaced or actually produced by algorithms. With this book, as is the case with many books one can get some sense of the book's entire message or its purpose by going to the end of the book. In this book, the author states at a point near its end: *"In the future, algorithms might bring this process to completion, making it well-nigh impossible for people to observe the reality about themselves. It will be the algorithms that decide for us who we are, and what we should know about ourselves. For a few more years or decades, we still have a choice. If we make the effort, we can investigate who we really are. But if we want t make use of this opportunity, we had better do it now."* These are sad, scary words if not just plain horrors in and of themselves.

7) <u>Loss of the Liberal Story</u>: So the author would argue that the technological developments of AI, Infotech and Biotech will result in huge disruptions in society, and, very possibly, in the abandonment of the "liberal story", in favor of some form of government which will control people's lives (and likely be controlled by the monied and enhanced ability "elites") and which provides those who are rendered irrelevant with some level of "Basic Income Support", leaving aside questions (to be decided by these elites of course) as to what is "basic" and what is a basic level of "support", and how are "irrelevant people" to be provided with any sort of meaningful and purposeful pursuits.

8) <u>Much If Not All That We Believe Or Which Is At The Very Foundation Of What We Believe Is Grounded In One Or More Stories/Fictions</u>: Perhaps the most startling of the author's assertions is his assertion about the need for, and the pervading effect of fiction, of story in our lives. He asserts that much of what is at the very core of our belief systems and thought processes is grounded, not in objective facts, but in pure fiction or story. For example, he refers to the country of Poland and its terrible experiences with Russia and later the Soviet Union. He asserts that Poland itself (and any country) is simply a man made up story, a fiction. The author further asserts that each of the world's religions is based on a fiction, a man made up story. Why are fictions important? They are important because some believable story which is believed by the various groupings of mankind is required in order to bring about cooperation from such a grouping. How do we get the people of a country to work together, or to owe some loyalty to that which they call their "country", something which did not even exist several hundred years

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ago? We create that country by a "story", and then we bring that story to life, day in and day out, by an anthem, a flag and other symbols. Part of the results of a country's story can be "nationalism", a belief in a citizen of that country that his or her country is unique and that he or she is to cherish it and favor it, although he or she also believes that his or her country and its people do owe obligations to other peoples of this world, who are, like them, human beings. However, "nationalism" on steroids, an abuse of nationalism, can become fascism. Fascism would assert that, not only is my country unique, but I must honor it, serve it, cherish it and it only, and that we, our country or our people can totally disregard and bring to heel if not outright destroy other countries, and other people, and even some of the people of our own country who are "not like us" and need to be destroyed in order to protect the purity of "our people" or "our race". The term "Fascist" is being greatly misused in today's political vernacular. Properly used it might essentially be defined by a belief that "my country or my people are totally superior to any other country or people and that my country, or my people, is (are) entitled to dominate or not outright destroy other countries or peoples."

9) <u>Globalization</u>: One approach to trying to save the "liberal story" of an individual country is to seek to isolate that country from other countries and their people and their problems. We can try to build a fortress around our country and sort of "go it alone". This super nationalism approach does not recognize the increasing world wide interconnections of nations in the areas of economics, trade, politics and "war prevention" efforts. These areas of human endeavor require an interconnectedness of people all over the globe. Many of the world's problems are globally wide problems, and cannot be successfully dealt with by any single country, "going it alone." The problem of climate change is one such global problem. No country can, by itself, deal with that problem to any extent.

10) <u>Solutions</u>: Does the author offer any solutions to these problems (I would call them "horrors")? If he does I am not smart enough to glean them from this book. I suppose that, rationally, we must each concede that technological developments in AI, biotech and infotech, which are already fast upon us and are coming at us with accelerating speeds, day by day, could have some, if not all of the results which the author envisions "might occur" (Note, he does concede that neither he nor anyone else can truly predict the future). So since some or all of these "horrors" might come about if we "don't do something", what does the author propose that we might do? If he makes any such proposals or at least any realistic ones, I am not smart enough to figure out, from this book what the suggested proposals might be. The author does, however, propose that there are some possible solutions which he does not think will work, and they include:

a) Religions: The author is quite critical of, and in fact almost condemning of each of the world's religions, each of which he claims to be based upon a fiction, a story, which cannot withstand critical investigation. He notes that "more people have been killed or tortured in the name of God or some religion or other than have been killed in many of the world's wars or by many of its plagues". So I would surmise that he would conclude that none of the world's religions (particularly including Christianity) will be of much help in dealing with the problems which will be forthcoming in the future, as such problems are described, above, in very general terms.

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b) Nations and Nationalism: I believe that the author's views about nations and nationalism are summarized in 8 and 9 above.

c) Personal Investigations By Each Of Us As To Who We Are And What Or Who We Want To Be: I believe that the author's views in this respect are adequately summarized by the quotations from his book which appear in paragraph 6i above. In summary, he would surmise that our personal thought processes and our personal thinking about "who I am", or "Who do I Want to Be" will be replaced, in the coming years and decades by algorithms.

d) Communities: The author, like many sociologists laments the loss and the increasing losses (at an alarmingly accelerating rate) of the interconnectedness which humans find and experience in various communities. We are losing "community". We are losing our church groups (Note: The author is likely not much in favor of church to begin with) civic club groupings, social clubs and other "communal gatherings" which were, formerly, a part of our lives. We don't even really "visit" or "communicate" with each other in a physical, face to face manner. We communicate, more and more, through social media and cell phones and have little inter-personal communications with each others. Surprisingly, at least to me, is the author's assertion that Mark Zuckerberg, by some 2017 "manifesto" began, through Facebook, to seek to bring about a world community, or at least communities in the world (an effort which the author finds to be laudatory). Without getting into a contentious argument about "just what kind of community does Mark want to create, and who put him in charge of dictating just what that community should believe or not believe", the author does note that "human beings have bodies and not just minds or thought processes" and that "community" actually requires at least some physical interaction of people. So the author would contend that Mark's efforts to create "communities" through Facebook might be doomed to failure. (Note: If we want to know just how fast technology is moving, and how quickly at least some of the author's concerns will come to pass, just look at what Facebook/Zuckerberg is now trying to do. Facebook is re-branding itself as "Meta", and it is seeking to create a "Meta World", almost a false world or virtual world or made up world into which each of its participants can inject himself or herself, and in which he or she can can interact with virtual others in virtual situations. It is almost like Facebook/Meta wants to create for each of us something like *The Truman Show*, in which each of us can live our lives, vicariously, in a vicarious or artificial world which each of us creates. If what Meta has presented does not scare you, it sure scares me and I would urge that it should scare all of us. I am also advised that there is some children's game or system *Roblox* (and I really know little about it) which is something like Meta. Are we doomed and are our children doomed to a situation where each of us and each of our children will sits) in front of a computer all day creating our own world and interacting with other beings in our created world?)

11) Loss of Reality: What is "reality?" Is it something that exists in objective fact or is it something that is made up/created by me or by some story or fiction which is at the foundation of my view of the world? What is reality for me? Is it what I objectively see or can through investigation discover, or is it something grounded in my thoughts? If it is something grounded in my thoughts, then, as we go forward in the future years and decades will my thoughts be "mine" or those of some algorithm? If algorithms direct our thoughts then what prevents the occurrence of something like Huxley's *Brave New World*? Who will be in control, us humans or

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algorithms? If algorithms, married with AI and Biotech and Infotech can truly hack human minds and direct human thoughts (as the author predicts) and even create a new form of "human life" through the marriage of man with technology, then what will prevent that which the author fears, true "class warfare", with the classes to consist of almost "super humans", wealthy human beings who have been able to create for themselves and their children beings with super minds, and the rest of humanity all of whom have been rendered obsolete or irrelevant? Another author, whose name and book I cannot recall indicated that any species has a life span of some roughly 20,000 years or thereabouts, and that such species is will then be eliminated through some cause or other. That author predicted that mankind would be eliminated, as a species, by a "virus", but that such virus would not be the kind of virus we are accustomed to calling a "virus" (e.g. Covid) but will be a virus whereby men are "infected" with technological "parts" if you will. Perhaps movies about Cyborgs, and about wars between men and cyborgs or robots, etc. are not really all that far fetched.

  12) Other Points: The author makes a number of other points. For example, he posits that the threat of terrorism is greatly exaggerated since terrorists operate from a position of weakness and cannot win a true military confrontation and, that, therefore, they initiate terrorist attacks, not with the hope of winning some war or battle, but in the hope of causing that adversary to completely over react, thereby causing that adversary to lose credibility or standing among the world's populace or even its own populace. He also proposes that most countries have really lost the art of winning wars, as modern wars end up inflicting as much damage (in one way or another, whether outright physical damage or economic damage or political damage) on each of the adversaries as to cause those possible adversaries to avoid war to begin with. However, he points out that if some future dictatorship is able to find ways to win wars without damage to or destruction of its own country (such as by inventing new technologically advanced weapons) then "hell might truly be released."In the author's further judgment "ethics" or "morality" has not resulted from the actions of any divine being, but rather has resulted from "secular" ethics, or "human ethics", which have been brought into existence so that people can live together and survive. The author is also a strong advocate for the need to deal with climate change, urging that we are fast reaching an irreversible tipping point and that unless something changes, quickly, heavily inhabited parts of the world and many major cities will become completely unlivable. However, he notes that not all nations view climate change in the same manner. For example, Russia has large parts of its economy (and of the wealth of its leaders) which are totally dependent upon the production of fossil fuels, as is also the case with many Middle Eastern Countries. So Russia and these other countries are not going to be particularly anxious to cut down on the production and use of fossil fuels. There are countries or parts of countries which might actually be benefitted by climate change. For example, large parts of the world which cannot be productive, from an agricultural point of view, by reason of their cold climates, might be caused by climate change to become agriculturally productive. The impacts of climate change will not be uniform across the globe, or even within the boundaries of individual countries.. So climate change becomes a problem that is extremely difficult to deal with. While no one country can deal with the problem by itself it might well find it difficult to get allies in dealing with the problem. The author would also favor fairly free"immigration", but does state

that it would be wrong, and completely counter productive for the government of any country to allow that country to be overwhelmed with a flood of immigrants. There are also a number of other points which are made in this book. What is set forth in this Section of this Review is a mere outline of some of what I, your Reviewer, have (has) perceived as being the most important points which the author seeks to make.

13) <u>Absence of Hope</u>: While the author, particularly in the Q and A which appears at the conclusion of the book, seems to express some cautious optimism about the fate of mankind I find little cause for "hope" in this book. I wish I could find some reasons for "hope" in the author's book, but I have not been smart enough to do so. I find myself concluding that if I "buy" most of what the author is saying, then we might, as the old saying goes, "eat, drink and be merry because we are all going to die soon." At one point the author sort of infers that governments, through "ethics", might be able to slow or stop the march forward of technology, or certainly its use to alter human minds or bodies. As one who has little faith in what government can accomplish I am not particularly hopeful that the author's wishes in this respect will come to pass. How does government stand in the way of what the majority of its citizens considers to be "medical progress" or "scientific progress" which heals disease or enhances human abilities or life spans? How does a government the political leaders of which are funded in their election efforts (if not in fact in much of their lives) by the super wealthy stand in the way of super wealthy, technological oligarches who seek to enhance their wealth or the physical or mental abilities of themselves or of their children? It does not appear (or arguably does not appear) that our country's government is doing much of a job in that respect today. So, while I am challenged by this book and the author's visions, I am disappointed in the author's failure to provide some "hopeful" solutions for the future horrors which he thinks might well come to pass. Does he propose that each of us abandon our faith as it is a complete fiction and is useless in dealing with the looming problems? Does he propose that national governments should somehow be eliminated? What does he propose? Frankly, I am not sure what he proposes. That said, I still believe that this book is well worth a good, careful reading. We need to have our thoughts about the challenges he mentions challenged. We need to start thinking about how these challenges might be met, and we need to do that thinking, and take some actions quickly.

<u>What Is The Intended Audience For This Book/To Whom Is It Directed?</u>: This book seems to be directed to a general audience of people who I would classify as "deeply thinking people." It is not an entertaining book. It is not anything like a novel. I don't think that many in the general public will want to read it and absorb it. However, people who like to think deeply and in a critical fashion about matters, such as the questions of where humanity is going and where our country might be going will find this book to be one which challenges their thinking and which is, therefore, helpful in guiding that thinking. Personally, I would urge that business and political leaders, and church pastors and leaders read this book, although church pastors and leaders will doubtlessly hate parts of it. Such hating aside, I think that these pastors and leaders will be made

aware (if painfully so) of the challenges which they and their churches face today and will most certainly face (at a hugely accelerating rate) in the future.

How To Read This Book: Normally I would provide some advice as to how a reader might approach a book in an effort to determine just what the book contains and to determine whether he or she wants to invest in the book or read it, or read parts of it. It is hard to provide such advice about this book. That said, I think that if you read the "Introduction", and the Q and A with the author, which appears at the conclusion of the book, you will get a pretty good picture of "from whence the author is coming". You might then skim the Statements which appear at the very beginning of each of the book's 5 parts, Parts I though V (great quotes appear at the beginning of each of such parts) and the chapter titles. If you take each of these steps then you should be pretty well acquainted with the book's general contents and you can then determine whether or not you want to read the book in its entirety. I hate to say it, but if you really want to get the full benefit of this book (or its full detriment if that is your view) then you need to carefully read it, in its entirety, underling while you go, and then, perhaps, preparing some summary outline such as the one which appears above. This book is not easy to read, and, as stated above, it just does not seem to have one, single overriding theme, and parts of it seem to contradict other parts of it.

Can This Book Be Used In Some Class Our Course, Such As Those Taught AT TEI/ECLI? I don't think so.

Personal Thoughts: I am not intelligent or learned enough to debate this author. However, as the Reviewer of this book, I feel that I am entitled to at least challenge or critique or raise questions about some of the author's thoughts and assertions, as they appear in this book. I have to particularly challenge his assertions about the failures of the world's religions, particularly Christianity (and, admittedly, there have been many such failings, some of an absolutely horrific nature) and the inability of those religions to provide some hope for dealing with the problems which the author foresees as happening or possibly/probably happening in the coming years or decades.

    Since I am a Christian, let me confine my remarks to the faith/religion which I know best (although, admittedly there is much about Christianity/God/Jesus Christ which I do not now know). As stated above, I concede that much harm, some horrific harms and atrocities have been carried out by "Christians" or those who called themselves "Christians", purportedly in the name of God or the name of Jesus. Included within these sad occurrences would be at least part of the Crusades (although some scholars believe that the Crusades, or at least part of them have been given a bad rap), the Inquisition, the Irish/Northern Irish "Problems" or "Troubles" and the burning at the stake of many completely innocent individuals by reason of their religious convictions or lack thereof. That these atrocities were carried out, or initiated by people who called themselves "Christians", and that they purportedly did so "in the name of God", or the "name of Jesus" (I would respectfully submit) no more defines Christianity than slavery does the United States. Every man directed country, faith or enterprise has its black marks, which need to

be owned up to and dealt with, and hopefully corrected and forever eliminated. In the case of some of the Christian "atrocities" they were initiated by individuals who had to have been completely blind to the teachings of Jesus. There is no way, no way at all to read the Gospels, and the Epistles and conclude that Jesus called upon His followers to kill or torture or mistreat individuals, any individuals in His name. The Inquisition resulted from a total misreading of Scripture by the Father/Priest Confessor of the Spanish King and Queen, Ferdinand and Isabella. So, yes we Christians have to admit and own the "bad" that has happened in the name of our faith, but that "bad" does not begin to define our faith.

With that said, let's address what I believe to be the most critical question which scholars would submit is the most critical question which a person can answer for himself or herself, and which the author (who I would surmise is a "secular humanist") has apparently addressed and answered to his satisfaction, in the negative. That question: "Is There A God, Or Do I Believe There Is A God?" Put another way, "Does God Exist" or were the philosophers Nitetzsche and Roseau, whose philosophies spawned the world's most horrible governments and systems, correct in their belief that there is no God or that God is Dead? If there is no God then who or what decides or what standard decides what is Good or what is Evil? For that matter, in the absence of some overriding standard how do we even know that something in fact is Evil? If these philosophers were correct, and Darwin was correct, and it is a pure "survival of the fittest" world, then what is wrong with extremely wealthy people's seeking to make themselves and their children into "super beings" or into, one could argue, "god like beings" through the use of technological advancements which are not available to the rest of us poor humans? For that matter, since they are (at least in their view) smarter and more able than other poor jerks, what is wrong with their seeking to acquire huge percentages of the world's wealth at the expense of those who are "less fit" than they are? If we don't attach some huge value to human life and human beings, then what is wrong with technologically modifying people to make them "more fit" even if they truly cease to be human beings but rather become some sort of other "being"?

The author urges that there is no transcendent standard or arbiter of Good and Evil, or of Morality or Ethics, and that Secular Ethics will work if it is guided by the "one true reality" which is "suffering" and the "need to avoid suffering." I believe that this is an incredibly naive belief. It is a belief based on what I submit to be a totally wrong assumption, which is that man, left to man's own devices, "wants to do good" or "seeks to avoid suffering in others." This assumption totally ignores basic human nature. What is that nature? It is that everything is "all about me." Left to my own "humanistic", "naturalistic", "survival of the fittest nature", I would see nothing at all wrong with "suffering", as long as I am not the one who is suffering, and my loved ones are not the ones who are suffering. Something bigger than I am, something totally outside of me and totally above me has to embed in me a standard, a morality if you will, that dictates to me that I have a duty "to love my neighbor", even if he or she is a total, complete jerk who, in my opinion, has nothing good to say for him or her, and to do whatever I can reasonably do to avoid his or her suffering or to mitigate his or her suffering, and certainly not to cause his suffering.

I am sorry Mr. Author, but I think that in the absence of God, and for Christians in the absence of Jesus and His teachings as set forth in Scripture (which you tend to debunk) the

individuals of mankind are, on the whole, totally selfish and self centered. That being the case I would urge that in the absence of God, and for Christians, in the absence of Jesus, and in God's standards of Good and Evil as revealed to us through Scripture and Jesus there is no hope that we can avoid the horrors which you described, so very eloquently, in your book. If mankind, un-technologically altered and artificially enhanced mankind, does not have a transcendent value, a value which can only exist if there is some power, some creator greater than us, then we are doomed to succumb to the horrors you describe.

All of this being said Mr. Author, I thank you for causing me to think about the issues you do so eloquently describe. THANK YOU!

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