

## Yuval Noah Harari on “The Late Late Show” with James Corden, about the Covid-19 Crisis (April 2020)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRRhvwkV7L0&feature=youtu.be>

Yuval Harari became known globally with his bestseller, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, Vintage, 2011. In this book, he argues that *homo sapiens* has come to dominate the animal world because we can communicate and we can coordinate our actions thanks to the common stories we tell ourselves. Harari points out that these stories – such as human rights – are not objective. They just allow societies to hold together, and mobilise around a common cause.

**Listening for “gist” (gist = *l’essentiel, les grandes lignes*).** This text has subtitles, which are useful to help you listen for gist, but often WRONG! You can find key points of the discussion below to help you understand the gist. There are comprehension questions at various stages in the interview (answers are at the end). Words with \* are translated.

**1/ JC: How are you bearing up\*?**

**2/ JC: “How do you think the world will be different, when we get through the epidemic”?**

3/ YH: It’s not pre-determined... It’s our choices.

4/ YH: One big choice is whether we deal with the crisis through nationalistic isolation, countries competing... or through solidarity and cooperation.

5/ YH: This will shape\*the crisis and the world for years to come.

6/ YH: Each country must choose whether to empower\* authority (dictators) or citizens and checks and balances\*.

7/ YH: The coming weeks are the critical point... People coming afterwards are like coming late to a party to wash the dishes\*. Now they are handing out trillions of dollars, changing the job market. Later it will be hard to rewind the clock.

Q1/ James Corden introduces Harari as a historian and as a \_\_\_\_\_ .

Q2/ Where and with whom is Harari locked down?

Q3/ What are countries competing for?

Q4/ Harari contrasts authoritarian government with \_\_\_\_\_ .

Q5/ Why are the coming weeks so critical?

\*Bearing up = *se porter, tenir le coup* / shape = *forme, vb. façonner* / empower = *habiliter, responsabiliser* / checks and balances = *(ici) contre-pouvoirs* ; / wash the dishes = *faire la vaisselle* /

**8/ (2: 44) JC: there is such mistrust\*... scientists aren’t being listened to.... Trust is a fundamental issue.**

9/ YH: Without trust, we cannot deal with the crisis effectively. In recent years we have had politicians that deliberately undermined\* trust... in public authorities, in science, in the media...

10/ YH: In normal times – maybe – you can run a country when only half the population trusts the government – maybe? But in an emergency you need 100% of the people to trust the government.

11/ YH: People have a hidden reservoir\* of trust in science – despite recent years... Synagogues, mosques and churches are closed. Why? Because the scientists said so. Even these religious establishments trust in science...

12/ YH: I hope after the crisis, people will remember who they trusted... and listen to scientists about climate change.

Q6/ Who is not trusted, according to Corden?

Q7/ According to Harari, why is trust so important?

Q8/ If politicians give \_\_\_\_\_ on TV, it needs to be trusted.

Q9/ What have religious establishments been doing in these times of crisis?

\*Mistrust = *méfiance* / undermine = *saper* / hidden reservoir = *un réservoir caché*

**13/ (5:00) JC: How will we interact socially in the future? What will be the big changes?**

14/ YH: There could be big changes in the job market... if universities move on-line, this will create a different social atmosphere for the students. When I went to school, some of the most important things happened in the breaks\*.

15/ YH: But the fundamentals of human nature will not change. We are social animals... we want to help the sick... The Black Death\* did not change human nature. The 1918 influenza\* did not change human nature.

16/ YH: The AIDS epidemic was in many ways much worse... in the early 1980s, it was a death sentence, people were abandoned... Politicians saying AIDS was punishment from god... the LGBT\* community came out much stronger.

Q10/ What will happen if all classes are on Zoom?

Q11/ What is the difference between AIDS in the 1980s and Covid-19 today?

Q12/ *What happened in the LGBT community following the AIDS epidemic?*

*\*Breaks = les pauses / Black Death = la peste noire/ influenza = grippe / LGBT = lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender*

**17/ (7:31) JC: what you say makes me feel better... you do think there is hope the other side of this?**

18/ YH: It will be long and difficult, especially for some... but for the first time in history, we have everything to overcome this epidemic... Above all, a good scientific understanding of what causes the disease and how to prevent it from spreading. During the Black Death, nobody had an idea why and what could be done...the Medical Faculty in Paris said it had something to do with the stars.

19/ YH: Even with influenza 100 years ago, nobody knew what virus was causing the epidemic. Now it took two weeks to identify the virus, sequence its entire genome and develop reliable tests.

20/ YH: We have the scientific knowledge, but not necessarily the political wisdom\* to make use of our power.

21/ YH: maybe the biggest problem is the lack of international cooperation, and of global solidarity.

22/ YH: I am not so afraid of the virus. I am much more afraid of the inner demons of humanity coming out... people reacting with hatred or greed\*.

Q13/ *What was the biggest problem during the Black Death?*

Q14/ *What was the cause of the Black Death?*

*\*Wisdom = sagesse / greed = avidité*

**23/ (9:56) JC: during Ebola crisis, the G7 leaders came together... Obama was leading discussions. The President of the US now does not seem interested. Who are the other world leaders who may? Do you think it will happen?**

24/ YH: At present it seems there are no adults in the room... no-one is taking the global responsibility... we don't have a global plan of action: not in health care, and certainly not in the economic field.

24/ YH: Many countries are looking after their own interests, and competing for scarce resources, like medical equipment. Traditionally the US was the responsible adult, and stepped forward in the Ebola epidemic or the 2008 financial crisis... now the US has abdicated its role... maybe that is not a bad thing, when you look at what is happening in the US... Greece is doing an amazing job.

Q15/ *What did the US do after the Ebola epidemic and the financial crisis in 2008?*

Q16/ *What is the US doing today?*

Q17/ *According to Harari, which country should be giving us a plan of action now?*

**25/ (11:50) JC: That's quite depressing ... You wrote a piece\* in *The Financial Times* where you talked about smartphones and surveillance technology. Is it a good or bad thing?**

26/ YH: It could be good, but we need to be very careful. What is happening is a watershed\*. First, we see mass surveillance systems being adopted in democratic countries... Secondly, we see the nature of surveillance changing, from "over the skin surveillance\*" to "under the skin surveillance". Over the skin: a government or corporations watching where you go, what you buy, what you watch on TV...

27/ YH: Under the skin surveillances starts by monitoring\* your body temperature and blood pressure. Ultimately it is about hacking\* your body and what you are feeling... our emotions, as a biological phenomena, like the flu. If you have a surveillance system that can tell you if someone is sick, it can tell you how they feel. Fast forward\* ten years, to North Korea, where every citizen has to wear a biometric bracelet on the arm... and you have to watch the Big Leader, and while you are watching, they can watch what is happening in your body. You can smile... but if you are angry, they know...

28/ YH: This technology in reach today ... and the coronavirus epidemic can be this watershed event, when governments going under our skin becomes acceptable.

*\*piece = (ici) un article, un billet / watershed = (ici) un tournant / over the skin = (ici) à l'extérieur du corps / to hack = pirater / monitor = observer/ fast forward = avance rapide*

**ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS:** Q1/ philosopher; Q2/ he is locked down between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv with his husband; Q3/ for scarce resources; Q4/ democracy; Q5/ because major decisions are being made; Q6/ the politicians; Q7/ without trust you cannot deal with the crisis effectively; Q8/ advice; Q9/ they trust in science; Q10/ students will not be able to meet; Q11/ AIDS in the 1980s certainly led to death; Q12/ people discovered a lot of strengths in themselves, they established voluntary organisations to help sick people, ... to fight for political recognition; Q13/ ignorance; Q14/ a tiny pathogen coming from fleas on rats; Q15/ it managed to gather enough countries around it to prevent the worst outcomes; Q16/ it is saying "I don't want this job. I care only about myself"; Q17/ Greece