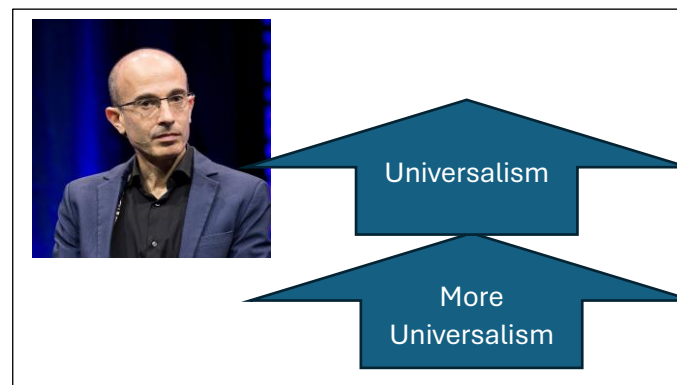
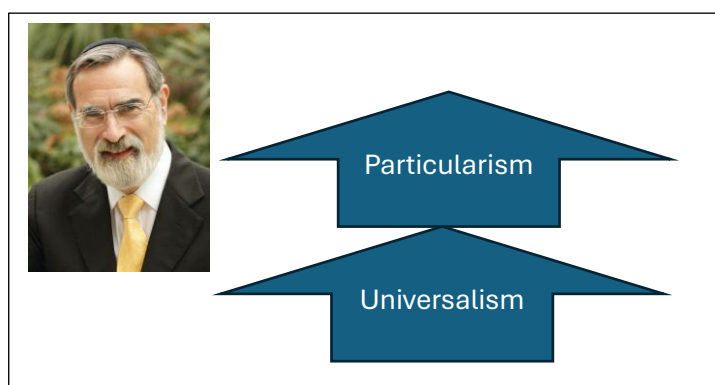


A Tale of Two Humanists: The Disagreement between Rabbi Sacks and Yuval Noah Harari



What is Humanism?

- Philosophy
- > Themes
- > In public life
- Demographics

Humanism is a philosophical stance that emphasizes the individual and social potential, and agency of human beings, whom it considers the starting point for serious moral and philosophical inquiry.

Part of a series on
Humanism



Common Ground Between Sacks and Harari

The Environment

“The record of human intervention in the natural order is marked by devastation on a massive scale... **What has changed [today] of course is the pace and scope of environmental devastation** that has followed in the wake of industrialization, pollution and the destruction of rainforests. Today, **1,666 of the 9000 bird species are endangered**...most significant...is the pressure on the environment by the growth of the human population...”

Jonathan Sacks, The Dignity of Difference, p. 163

“Humans are destabilizing the global biosphere...we are taking more and more resources out of the environment, while pumping back into it waste and poison...for thousands of years *Homo sapiens* **behaved as an ecological serial killer; now it is morphing into an ecological mass murderer** [with]...**the annihilation of a large percentage of all life forms**”.

Yuval Noah Harari, 21 lessons for the 21st Century, P.116

Aaron Seidler

Consumerism

“Every television commercial is **another little legend** about how consuming some product or service will make life better... The tourism industry does not sell flight tickets and hotel bedrooms. It sells experiences. Paris is not a city, nor India a country – they are both experiences, the consumption of which **is supposed to** widen our horizons, fulfil our human potential, and ‘**make us happier**’.”

Yuval Noah Harari , **Sapiens: Brief History of Mankind**

“Happiness is good for **us** but bad for business. Hence **we** have to be induced to see it as always lying just around the corner, immediately after the next product we buy. **We’re** encouraged to spend money we don’t have, on products we don’t need, for a happiness that won’t last”.

Jonathan Sacks, **Morality**, P.106

Poverty

“Globalisation has certainly benefited large segments of humanity, but **there are signs of growing inequality** both between and within societies. As **some groups increasingly monopolise the fruits of globalisation**, billions are left behind.”

Yuval Noah Harari , **Sapiens: Brief History of Mankind**

“It is **morally impossible** not to be troubled by the ever-growing gap between the few at the top and the many at the bottom of the economic ladder. **And the gap grows**. Americans spend more on cosmetics and Europeans on ice cream than it would cost to provide schooling and sanitation for the two billion people who currently go without both.”

Jonathan Sacks, **Dignity of Difference**

The Other

“Many times I have been inspired by **the community-building, life-transforming, hope-creating work** of Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Zoroastrians, Bahai...Equally I value the force of many forms of secular humanism from John Stuart Mill to Bertrand Russell.”

Jonathan Sacks, **To Heal A Fractured World**, P.10

“The world is full of ‘culturalists’...denigrating remarks...**the problem is alleged to be with the [other’s] culture** [and causes] pressure on the ‘others’ to assimilate and there is harsh criticism of their failure to do so”

Yuval Noah Harari, **21 lessons for the 21st Century**, P.151

Aaron Seidler

Story- Telling: A Double-Edged Sword

“Storytelling is of the essence of who we are as meaning-seeking animals”

*Jonathan Sacks, **Morality**, P.55*

“Homo sapiens is a storytelling animal that thinks in stories rather than in numbers or graphs, and believes that the universe itself works like a story, replete with heroes and villains, conflicts and resolutions, climaxes and happy endings. When we look for the meaning of life, we want a story that will explain what reality is all about and what my particular role is in the cosmic drama.”

*Yuval Noah Harari, **21 lessons for the 21st Century***

The Differences between Sacks and Harari

Morality and Free Will

“Morality doesn’t mean following god’s commands. **It means reducing suffering.** Hence in order to act morally, you just need to develop a deep appreciation of suffering.”

*Yuval Noah Harari, **21 lessons for the 21st Century**, P.201*

“Scientific insights into the way our brains and bodies work suggest that **our feelings are not some uniquely human spiritual qualities, and they do not reflect any kind of free will.**

Rather **feelings are biochemical mechanisms** that all mammals and birds use to calculate probabilities of survival and reproduction. Feelings aren’t based on intuition, inspiration or freedom. **They are based on calculation.**”

*Yuval Noah Harari, **21 lessons for the 21st Century**, P.47*

“It is our ability to see the world not only from our own perspective but from that of others that gives us our privilege and responsibility as moral agents, the only such known to us in the entire universe. It is our ability to stand outside our own desires and drives, our capacity to refrain from doing what we can do and want to do because we know it might harm others, **our very experience of choice itself as both the challenge and glory of the human situation that makes us different and confers dignity** on the human life.”

“To be human is to be creative, a master of fate not its slave”

*Jonathan Sacks, **Morality**, P.248*

Aaron Seidler

The central insight of monotheism-that if God is the parent of humanity, then we are all members of a single extended family-has become more real in its implications than ever before. The Enlightenment gave us the concept of universal rights, but this remains a 'thin' morality, stronger in abstract ideas than in its grip on the moral imagination. **Far more powerful is the biblical idea that those in need are our brothers and sisters and that poverty is something we feel in our bones.** Every year on Passover, Jews eat the bread of affliction and the bitter herbs of slavery. On the festival of Sukkot, they leave the comfort of their homes to live in shacks- tabernacles, as a reminder of what it feels like to be without a solid roof, exposed to the elements, living as millions do today in Calcutta or Caracas. The great faiths do more than give abstract expression to our shared humanity; **they move us to action and give compelling shape to the claims of others upon us.**

Jonathan Sacks, Dignity of Difference, P.112

Israel and the Jewish People

Sacks	Harari
The Jewish people has its own nation state, set in the landscape of the prophets, resonating to the language of the Bible, and surrounded by visible reminders of its history”.	The humble religion of a small, persecuted minority
‘Jewry survived while every empire that sought its destruction has ceased to be. In our time it has passed through the worst crime of man against man’	The humble religion of a small, persecuted minority
The State of Israel in a mere half century has achieved things of which there is no comparison in any of the hundred or more new states that have come into being in the United Nations since the end of the Second World War.	the fate of one small nation and one tiny land”
To be part of this history is a rare and precious heritage and one of which I am proud	Since it is more polite to criticise one’s own people than to criticise foreigners, I will use the example of Judaism to illustrate how ludicrous such self-important narratives are
Surely no religion has more actively encouraged the asking of questions above all within the Yeshiva, the citadel of traditional Jewish learning	Only in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries do we see Jews make an extraordinary contribution to humankind as a whole through their outsized role in modern science. Once they had abandoned the yeshivas in favour of the laboratories

And then there is the immense moral energy at the core of Jewish life that connects Abraham and Moses with the Jewish civil rights and anti-apartheid activists of recent times...Was it the insistence on the absolute transcendence of G-d that allows Jews to see the human situation so clearly understanding both our smallness and potential greatness as partners with the Holy One in the work of creation?	From an ethical perspective, monotheism was arguably one of the worst ideas in human history
In our uniqueness lies our universality. Through being what we alone are, we give to humanity what only we can give.	Jewish morality was initially shaped as an exclusive tribal affair and has remained so to some extent to this day
Why then am I a Jew? Not because I believe Judaism contains all there is of the human story. Jews didn't write Shakespeare's sonnets or Beethoven's quartets. Nor is it because I think Jews are better than others...the difference lies not in Jews but in Judaism, not in who we are but in what we are called on to be	There is no reason to credit Judaism with the important Christian idea that all human beings are equal before god.
I believe that Jews and Judaism would not have survived for long, under such varied and adverse conditions, without having discovered profound truths about the human condition. From the earliest days our ancestors were convinced that the vision by which they felt themselves addressed would endure as long as man walked the Earth and so far, they have been proved correct...this, if not a proof is an intimation that Jewish history has been a scroll through which G-d has sent a message to mankind".-	For many centuries, Judaism ...when you look at the big picture, you must realise that they have had a very limited impact on the world"

Aaron Seidler

“Of course it is possible to live a life without G-d, just as it is possible to live a life without humour, love or music, and one can no more prove G-d than one can prove these other things exist to those who lack a sense of humour or to whom Schubert is mere noise or love a figment of the romantic imagination

Jewish Faith is not a metaphysical wager, a leap into the improbable. It is to see the world as it is , without the comfort of myth or the self-pity of despair, knowing that the evil cruelty and injustice it contains are neither inevitable nor meaningless but a call to human responsibility”

- *Jonathan Sacks, **Radical Then, Radical Now (A Letter in The Scroll)***