

Are we still human in a world inundated with high-tech?

By Brigitte Battat



“We are running on fumes. What about this [American] economy that we are building? What are we producing? You know that’s what made us a great power between 1865 and basically and 1920. That’s when your industrial base was created; that’s when you had people like Edison and Tesla Rockefeller all these people. They were tough and they were intelligent, and they were creating. The only person I see out there now is remotely like that is Musk. He is building something; he is creating something. When you do that you create employment. I don’t see that happening. High Tech Startups? What the hell are they doing for us, a new app on your phone? We’ve got to wakeup and say, oh hell AI. AI is better algorithms. Better algorithms do not replace human beings and they don’t necessarily create opportunity for people to work.”

[Colonel Douglas McGregor interview with Tucker Carlson](#)

Contents

Are we still human in a world inundated with high-tech?.....	1
Introduction.....	2
High Tech – A Tentative Beginning.....	4
The Future Is Better than You Think - Peter Diamandis and Steven Kotler ...	5
Humans in Search of Happiness.....	6
Conclusion	7

Introduction

This essay attempts to analyze the impact of high tech on our lives. The write-up assumes that humanity is primarily the essence of the individual who progresses as a member of a nation, a community, and a family, and within this multifaceted existence, he or she acquires the necessary skills to relate rationally to his/her environment while maintaining a modicum of happiness. The question is, to what degree can the individual preserve human qualities in an environment overwhelmed by gadgets and global corporations targeting humans as mere consumers.

The write-up attempts to provide a hopefully objective bird's-eye-view of high-tech utility and its potential to strip individuals of their humanity. The assumption is that humanity encompasses a diversity of characteristics that enable the continuation of partnership, friendship, family, community, nationhood, structures based on characteristics embracing the ability to love, have compassion, maintain creativity, and acquire the skill of conducting polite conversations with fellow human beings. Humanity should also be defined by the skill that enables individuals to differentiate between good and evil, the capacity to exclude robotic tendencies and group-think mentality seeded by addiction to high tech products and bias media.

In his book, "Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind," Yuval Noah Harari argues that Sapiens came to dominate the world because it is the only animal that can cooperate flexibly in large numbers. He argues that prehistoric Sapiens were a key cause of the extinction of other human species such as the Neanderthals and numerous other megafauna. The author suggests that Homo sapiens rules the world because it is the only animal that can believe in things that exist purely in its own imagination, such as gods, states, money, and human rights. Harari, however, refuses to depict Sapiens as a perfect creature and suggests that although today's human being is far more powerful than our ancient ancestors, **we aren't much happier.**

In his final chapter, "*The Animal that Became a God*," Yuval Noah Harari provides an uncomfortable conclusion vis-à-vis the fate of humanity:

"Seventy thousand years ago, Homo sapiens was still an insignificant animal minding its own business in a corner of Africa. In the following millennia it transformed itself into the master of the entire planet and the terror of the ecosystem. Today it stands on the verge of becoming a god, poised to acquire not only eternal youth, but also the divine abilities of creation and destruction.

*Unfortunately, the Sapiens regime on earth has so far produced little that we can be proud of. We have mastered our surroundings, increased food production, built cities, established empires and created far-flung trade networks. But did we decrease the amount of suffering in the world? Time and again, **massive increases in human power did not necessarily improve the well-being of individual Sapiens**, and usually caused immense misery to other animals."*

According to this author, Sapiens has acquired God-like qualities that empower it to fabricate an endless array of products. In his final chapter, Harari emphasizes that *“despite the astonishing things that humans are capable of doing, we remain unsure of our goals and **we seem to be as discontented as ever.**”* Nevertheless, Yuval Noah Harari does not mention the fact that most of the Sapiens have become consumers without a say in the production process. Neither are material objects the source of permanent joy. Here, one can interject that happiness and personal satisfaction, have occasionally benefited parts of this planet. Abstract considerations such as friendship, polite conversations with fellow Sapiens, intellectual pursuits, and others may provide a more palpable sense of happiness, the sort of trait that enables the individual to function within the framework of a family, a community, a nation.

“Only Human” is a YouTube site which claims that it *“celebrates and explores the unique and personal qualities we all have. Our channel offers a range of TV series and documentaries about human experiences and life journeys - while looking at the challenges life throws at us, turning ordinary people into everyday heroes.”* One of this organization’s video discusses [the topic of loneliness](#). In contrast with the milieu depicted by media and movies in which the humans living in the so-called free world can have a perfect life, this video describes emotions experienced by individuals in a world dominated by social isolation. The narrator notes, *“Our society has changed and being alone is increasingly part of life today. We move away from family and friends, we go to the cities to find work, to have a career.”* One of the interviewed characters emphasizes that, *“You are living the dream, you are working hard, you are playing hard, and while these things are true, you’re not necessarily happy. You feel like you just constantly need to be the top of your game... I want to achieve, achieve, achieve, and this can be very nice sometimes, but it can also be very lonely.”* This character attempts to fill the gap in her life by being on social media, but this does not alleviate her sense of loneliness.

An [ABC foreign correspondent](#) who reports on events taking place in Japan, describes the lonely and loveless existence of this country’s citizens. One of the interviewed characters expresses his sense of failure in life, the result of social isolation: *“I thought I didn’t fit in and I was bad or inferior.”* The narrator mentions the following: *“Tens of thousands of people are dying alone and neglected. Birth numbers are plummeting, and people are staying single.”*

[Al Jazeera](#) reports that Japanese citizens *live in the age of social withdrawal*. [An ABC foreign correspondent](#) living in South Korea claims that the people in this country are worked to death.

““Since the start of the pandemic, 21 delivery workers in South Korea have died. Unions blame overwork. The Koreans even have a word for death by overwork: ‘gwarosa’. We all rely on home deliveries to get us through the pandemic, but do we ever spare a thought for the workers who bring them to us? As demand for home deliveries explodes, the pressure on warehouse sorters and drivers has become relentless.”

Lee Seong Wook, 44, is a delivery driver. He works six days a week from early in the morning until late at night. "I'd be lying if I said it isn't tough for me. But it's a matter of survival. My children won't eat if I don't earn." Lee's colleague, 47-year-old driver Im Gwang Soo, recently suffered a massive brain haemorrhage and fell into a coma. His life is hanging in the balance. Before his collapse, Im Gwang Soo had been working over 90 hours a week. As companies compete with each other to offer faster delivery times, distribution workers and drivers have borne the brunt, putting in longer and longer hours.

The ABC's South Korea correspondent Carrington Clarke goes on the road with the drivers and hears stories of their struggles as they race against the clock to deliver more packages than ever before. He rides with 61-year-old driver Huh Wonjea, the son of an activist and fighter in the Korean Independence Movement. Mr Huh says South Koreans worked hard to rebuild their country after the war, but not everyone is reaping the rewards. "The whole country's been developing, but still in terms of the fair distribution of the assets or human rights... not really fairly developed yet."

There is a cornucopia of stories describing the hardship and sense of isolation experienced by millions of humans in a globalized, high-tech flooded world. The question remains as to why the individual who presumably lives in freedom, does not appear to reap the benefits consistent with the needs of the human being.

High Tech – A Tentative Beginning

So, what is high tech and what can be considered as its point of inception? For the sake of brevity, this essay starts with the early 20th century, when the term "technology" embraced a growing range of means, processes, and ideas, that also incorporated tools and machines. By the mid-20th century, technology was defined by such phrases as "*the means or activity by which man seeks to change or manipulate his environment.*" Many, however, pointed out the increasing difficulty of distinguishing between [scientific inquiry and technological activity](#).

High-technology businesses are those engaged in securing growth and revenue from industry sectors characterized by new and rapidly changing technology. In fact, advanced technology has come to be utilized in so many different industries that members of the business community now often regard it as its own unique industry subset, with applications across the spectrum of the world of commerce. Today, high-tech businesses are involved in industries as diverse as food exporting, retail product design, oil extraction, and a host of others.

The conquest of Space is considered by many to be one of the important catalysts in the rapid development of high technology. On 4 October 1957, the USSR successfully launched Sputnik 1, the first Earth-orbiting satellite in history. On 3 November 1957, the USSR successfully launched Sputnik 2 that was carrying a dog named Laika into

space. Thus, the Soviet Union became the first nation to successfully send a living organism into orbit.

At this point in history, the USA decided that the education system must be transformed to bring up people whose work would preserve the American status as the ultimate superpower. The American education facilities changed gear to compete with the Soviet technology. Thus, the American education system did not address the ingredients needed by individuals to function within a family, a community, or a nation. Rather, it treated the person as a pawn in the ambition to preserve America's superpower rank. The children morphed into adults forced to survive in an environment dominated by competition, mass production, consumerism, and other basic components of an impersonal, globalized world.

The Future Is Better than You Think - Peter Diamandis and Steven Kotler

In their book entitled "Abundance: The Future is Better than You Think," the writers refer to a future in which nine billion people have access to clean water, food, energy, health care, housing, education, and everything else that is necessary for a satisfying standard of living provided by rapid developments in technological innovation causing economic progress during the decades of the 2010s and 2020s. A deeper examination reveals that in this case, abundance refers to the potential for a comfortable life rather than the universal existence of wealth:

"Abundance is not about providing everyone on this planet with a life of luxury—rather it's about providing all with a life of possibility."

An interesting comment is provided by the [Wall Street Journal](#) in its review of this book:

"Economic growth is a form of deflation. If the cost of, say, computing power goes down, then the users of computing power acquire more of it for less—and thus attain a higher standard of living. One thing that makes such deflation possible is dematerialization, the reduction in the quantity of stuff needed to produce a product. An iPhone, for example, weighs 1/100th and costs 1/10th as much as an Osborne Executive computer did in 1982, but it has 150 times the processing speed and 100,000 times the memory."

"Technology is a resource-liberating mechanism. It can make the once scarce the now abundant."

"Diamandis and Kotler think that individual innovators can and will make huge differences to human living standards... Take Iqbal Quadir, who quit his job as a venture capitalist in New York to start a cellphone company in his native Bangladesh, at a time when cellphones cost nearly twice the annual income of the average Bangladeshi. He had the foresight to bet on falling costs and the usefulness of the new technology for the long-isolated rural poor."

Humans in Search of Happiness

Mohamad-Mo-Gawdat has worked for IBM and Microsoft; he was a VP at Google and then chief business officer for [Google X](#), the famously secretive “moonshot” factory known for tackling with innovation some of the largest problems affecting the world. In an interview with [CNBC Make It](#), Mo Gawdat made the following comment:

*“I am the typical driven businessman engineer who solves problem with his left brain. And that got me to a corner early in my life where I was extremely successful – like scary successful – age 28. **But completely depressed.**”*

Gawdat emphasizes the fact that despite his professional and financial success, at a point when he had a handsome salary, two company cars and a massive villa with a swimming pool; he traveled first class, was living in Dubai and was making double-digit returns every single month of his life, he was deeply unhappy. With his math skills, he had developed his own algorithm and made a ton of money – the market going up, going down, he was making money, nonstop. Despite all these achievements, today he declares, *“**And I wasn’t happy.**”* Gawdat repeats his declaration:

“I had everything that everyone’s dreaming of: I had the wonderful wife, two amazing children, right? And I wasn’t happy. So it gave me a wakeup call and I had to research the topic.”

So Mo Gawdat embarked on a personal journey in search of happiness, and discovered that **happiness cannot be achieved externally**:

“It basically starts with a simple assumption – which is incredibly eye-opening – that happiness is not outside you; you don’t strive to attain it. Happiness is ... within you,”

“Until your basic needs are met, your every dollar more that you earn makes you happier of course.... But once you get your basic needs met more money doesn’t make you happier. There is nothing that you can do to [achieve happiness by buying it.](#)”

If you look for it in external sources, says Gawdat, that only results in temporary satisfaction. “The minute you got it, you started to pause and say, ‘OK, where’s the next goal?’ Especially driven entrepreneurs. They will move from goal to goal – it’s almost as if the goal is constant moving.”

Peter Diamandis is a New York Times Bestselling author of the books “Abundance” and “BOLD.” He earned degrees in Molecular Genetics and Aerospace Engineering from MIT and holds an M.D. from Harvard Medical School. Peter's favorite saying is *“**the best way to predict the future is to create it yourself.**”*

In a YouTube video entitled [Solving the Sadness Epidemic](#), Peter H. Diamandis interviews Mo Gawdat, who expresses opinions regarding the topic of consumerism:

*“... let’s grow [the productivity], let’s grow, let’s grow, and that growth is basically driving our entire modern world. **Our entire modern world is based on an idea that each company has to grow...** we started being bombarded with things that we don’t need.”*

A comment related to this interview suggests the following viewpoint on the topic of consumerism vis-à-vis happiness:

“Mo is a reflection of how we should all view our existence. Until you experience great loss you can't truly know gratitude. You can mouth the words but you don't possess the humility to really feel it. Loving something more than yourself is what true loss is. I always enjoy listening to Peter and Mo. They are really intelligent people and very optimistic. This podcast is so important. I have been saying this in the educational system for a long time. We are not preparing kids. Not at all. Even if you do use AI they punish you for using it. Crazy. Teachers unions and all the other garbage that comes with the system are going to fight back too. Not because they really understand the issue but rather because they want to preserve their pensions and work schedules. Thanks Peter for the really informative podcast and for Mo. Truly a real treat.”

I disagree with this opinion. If I understand correctly, the author of this comment suggests that children should be trained to accept and use Artificial Intelligence (AI) in order to prepare them for the future. For decades now, children all over the world have been drilled to adapt to the high technology of the moment. Where is the ability to conduct a polite, intelligent conversation with another human being? Where is the patience to read a complex novel and analyze its contents? Where is the capacity to enjoy an opera and a play, or the ability to listen to a symphony or concert? All these things do not provide instant gratification and are gradually becoming obsolete in our robotized society.

Conclusion

The topic of duality that entails living as a human being in a perennially changing world, is not possible to summarize in a brief article or even a lengthy book. Some predict that Artificial Intelligence (AI) will conquer the world and will eventually become more knowledgeable than humans. Others claim that AI is a threat to our very existence.

So, what should we expect in the future? What will societies look like in ten, twenty, or a hundred years from now? In his book *“Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind,”* Yuval Noah Harari talks about the possibility of humans becoming bionic creatures:

“There is another new technology which could change the laws of life: cyborg engineering. Cyborgs are beings which combine organic and inorganic parts, such as a human with bionic hands. In a sense, nearly all of us are bionic these days, since our natural senses and functions are supplemented by devices such as eyeglasses, pacemakers, orthotics, and even computers and mobile phones (which relieve our brains of some of their data storage and processing burdens). We stand poised on the brink of becoming true cyborgs, of having inorganic features that are inseparable from our bodies, features that modify our abilities, desires, personalities and identities.”

I believe that extreme changes can only happen if people cease to question the practicality of AI or any other toy introduced by global corporations in their search for wealth and control of humanity.