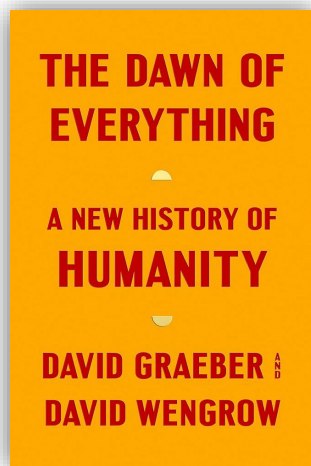


BOOK REVIEW

The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity

By David Graeber and David Wengrow

Reviewed by Elizabeth M. Joransen



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The New York Times bestseller, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*, was a long-term project, originally intended as an experiment. Eventually, the experiment became a heartfelt project of David Graeber and David Wengrow, a work that would pierce the expectation and interpretation of the early history of our human race.

Graeber (an anthropologist) and Wengrow (an archaeologist) aimed to challenge the conventional presentation of our knowledge regarding humanity. They presented humanity as being complex from the beginning, rather than slowly evolving from simpler systems, as is taught in educational settings. The usual progression can be summarized as follows: people start as hunter-gatherers, then progress towards farming, eventually farmers create cities, the cities become states, and the states lead humanity to where we are now (you can find the general summary of this notion in chapter eleven). The authors' view, however, is that there was a sense of freedom throughout early history when it came to setting up societies. Humanity did not

begin in a primitive or "savage" state and then slowly evolve toward civilization, but rather had various advanced groups that demonstrated a wealth of thought and knowledge regarding systematic societal structures and hierarchies. There was not a shift in the human brain that led them slowly through an evolutionary track, but rather a brain that chose. Some chose an advanced systematic structure, while others chose basic hunter-gatherer realities.

From my perspective, this popular text ultimately challenges the social evolution that we are typically taught. The authors do not agree with the idea of society starting from an egalitarian structure, making its way slowly towards the complex structure that produces hierarchy and division. They focus on the idea of freedom being a part of the human experience from the very beginning. They believe that humanity has always had the freedom to choose its societal and governmental structures, which contradicts the notion of the savage mentality that many historians and anthropologists assume was present in the early human race. Their case studies suggest that there were different advanced groups that were not egalitarian in nature.

The case studies are effective and extensive, but I do not believe that they hold enough tangible evidence. I found myself questioning the validity of their purpose. Since they are not connecting the dots to create a full picture of a hierarchically and advanced-focused world, the audience is still left questioning how we came to be at this point. I felt as though there were too many gaps in a text that was meant to give a full picture.

Graeber and Wengrow's views align well with a Christian worldview, though they leave the human story almost as if it were an experiment, or left up to the fate of the individuals. In a Christian perspective, humanity is a reflection of God. But this text points towards humans as being the main characters of Earth's story, not focused on a greater purpose. They believe

that good and evil are the choices of humanity, whereas a Christian or an individual of a different religion will focus on the reality of divine presence as being the beacon that guides societies in certain ways.

This book is an inspirational piece and leaves one thinking about the historical start of humanity. It made me look through a new pair of glasses. With that being said, though, the book does not fully succeed in making its case. It broadens one's perspective, but leaves one guessing a lot. As a Christian, the biggest turnaway is the lack of a role for divine intervention, in which the majority of humanity believes. I believe that this text has many correct elements, but misses the overall reason and divine nature that humanity embodies. Though life is held in high esteem by the authors, I was left with the idea that there is little real purpose for humanity.

Still, overall, the book is a worthwhile read. New perspectives and perceptions are critical when studying our world. This book provides an extensive new train of thought that will leave the reader with a better sense of what to question regarding the start of humanity. The text was truly an interesting read, and would be one I would recommend to anyone who is interested in early human history.



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