

# **Generous Respect**

The next story  
of humanity

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## PRELUDE

“It is clear that we have to change the way we arrange our socio-economic affairs, which will not be easy” says Moshe Vardi, professor of computer science at Rice University in Texas. He predicts that machines will destroy half of all the jobs over the coming 30 years. “The industrial revolution started in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and we needed roughly 200 years to build a modern social welfare state, which is, in a way, an answer to that revolution. The next 50 years will force us to reinvent society again, but in a much shorter time. The question is which institutional mechanisms or settings society will develop as an answer to the fourth industrial revolution, whose revolutionary character we are fully aware of.”<sup>1</sup>

This book is the story about the ongoing shift in the way we all look at the world, and thus organize our world. All of us alive today grew up during the reign of the economic narrative, which tells the stories of our lives as a series of transactions, whose ideal is growth and whose behavior is to maximize profit. It’s promise, which is very attractive when you are dirt poor, is ever-growing wealth. It shapes the way we see, act, dream and hope. It limits and confines what we think is possible. Lately, though, that frame

1 Translated by me from <http://www.zeit.de/kultur/2016-12/automatisierung-arbeitsgesellschaft-roboter-utopie-kommunismus/seite-2> The original, in German, goes like this: “Moshe Vardi, Professor für Computerwissenschaften an der Rice University in Texas, hält von einem generellen Müßiggang wenig. Er sagt: „Ich bin sehr skeptisch gegenüber solch grenzenlosem Optimismus. Es ist aber klar, dass wir die Art, unsere sozio-ökonomischen Angelegenheiten zu arrangieren, ändern müssen, was nicht einfach sein wird.“ Vardi prognostiziert, dass Maschinen in den nächsten 30 Jahren die Hälfte aller Arbeitsplätze vernichten werden. „Die Industrielle Revolution begann im 18. Jahrhundert und wir brauchten rund 200 Jahre, um einen modernen sozialen Wohlfahrtsstaat aufzubauen, der ja eine Antwort auf die Industrielle Revolution ist. Die nächsten 50 Jahre werden uns zwingen, die Gesellschaft neu zu erfinden, aber in einer sehr viel kürzeren Zeit.“

is showing signs of wear and tear. Ending in Tomáš Sedláček's indictment that "the only thing remaining for us is growth – growth which knows nothing but itself, because it has no goal to measure. The feeling of aimlessness binds it to meaninglessness and homelessness"<sup>1</sup>

Once old frames have lost their ability to help us find meaning in our everyday lives, a new one emerges. We are witnessing such an emergence of a new frame, built on relations, generosity and respect. This book is about the possibility to change our lives and our societies that both have become empty, wasted and mean. This book is about hope.

What follows is my contribution to the conversation about what kind of life we might want to live. Read, enjoy and criticize it - but above all use it as a trigger to ponder what kind of life *you* and your loved ones may want to live. And then live it.

### **Note about footnotes**

Footnotes disrupt the flow of the text. Yet I use them for sources and explanations because we live in a time of lies and networks that pretend to be social.

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2 Tomáš Sedláček, 2013, *Economics of Good and Evil: The Quest for Economic Meaning from Gilgamesh to Wall Street*, Oxford University Press, pg. 241, ISBN 978-0199322183

## BEFORE THE BEGINNING

If I were to ask you how you decide what you decide, you most likely will talk about facts, constraints and truths. About weighing the pros and cons, about listening to a friend, celebrity or influencer whom you admire and who's judgment you trust. You might mention the hidden persuaders<sup>1</sup>. Finally, you may talk about your intuition and your excellent gut feeling.

While true, all of that happens within a narrative frame - a story which comes long *before* any of the considerations above. The catch is that these frames are so much a part of us, that we don't recognize them as such. We may think we have 20/20 vision, but it is the frame we use, almost always subconsciously, that limits, shapes and distorts what we see, notice and pay attention to. The frame largely determines what we consider possible, how we shape our responses and deliver our re-actions. We really do only hear what we want to hear, and disregard the rest<sup>2</sup>.

This is not a shortcoming of ours. On the contrary, it is a brilliant way to make it through the day, the seasons, in fact through life. As Shiller and Akerlof point out in their book *Animal Spirits*: "The human mind is built to think in terms of narratives, of sequences of events with an integral logic and dynamic that appear as a unified whole. ... Life could be 'just one damn thing after another' if it weren't for these stories."<sup>3</sup>

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1 Vance Packard, 1957, *The Hidden Persuaders*, Random House Inc, New York, ISBN: 9780679500308

2 Unless you work in a ministry of propaganda, or an ad-agency

3 Shiller & Akerlof, 2009, *Animal Spirits: How Human Psychology Drives the Economy*, Princeton, ISBN 978-069114233-3, pg. 51

Yuval Harari takes this idea one step further: he elevates our human ability to create collective narratives about things that don't exist to what he calls the cognitive revolution; and to which he traces the fact that homo sapiens dominates the earth<sup>1</sup>.

This is not just the musings of some, admittedly very clever, people, there seems to be a neurological basis for what they write. Kahneman in his book *Thinking, Fast and Slow*<sup>2</sup> writes of countless psychological and neuro-psychological experiments that strongly suggest that we use two modes of orienting ourselves in the reality that surrounds us. He calls them 'system 1' (fast) and 'system 2' (slow). The first is the one we use most of the time and it organizes what see, hear, read, smell etc. very fast into a coherent narrative, if need be at the expense of factual truth. This system 1 is impulsive, emotional, automatic and above all, fast. Within the blink of the proverbial eye it judges danger and pleasure and gets you to react in an appropriate manner. It's mechanism of choice is to create in your mind internally coherent stories that 'explain' what is going on and what to do about it.

The other system, system 2, is conscious, deliberate, considerate and, well, slow. While we are able to use it to distinguish between truth and fiction, it requires an effort which we often do not make. Thus, we gladly use existing framing narratives that 'explain the world to us'.

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1 Harari, YN, 2015, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, Harper, ISBN 9780062316097. An excerpt from chapter 2 on his website is well worth reading: <http://www.ynharari.com/power-and-imagination/articles/the-most-important-things-in-the-world-exist-only-in-our-imagination/> accessed March 2016

2 Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Penguin, ISBN 978-0141033570

Given all the things we have to attend to using such frames 'ready-made off the shelves' is a smart move – until the frame is no longer a good enough representation of the real world. When that happens, it's time to work on a new one, better suited for the reality at hand.

These framing narratives are our windows onto the world. Just like real windows in their window-frames they can be tiny, vast, dirty, clean, distorting or completely invisible<sup>1</sup>. Even though we hardly ever think about them - unless we are professional window cleaners<sup>2</sup> - they totally determine what we see. And if they become collective, they determine the ways that societies, and all the members of that



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- 1 We all have seen videos of people bumping into glass partitions they thought weren't there. Some of us have even done the bumping all ourselves.
  - 2 Van Morrison, *Cleaning Windows*, © Universal Music Publishing Group



society, choose to see, act upon and interpret the world around them. That, in a way, is the bad news.

The good news is that these collective frames are not cast in stone. You can clean your windows - at



least once in a while; you can even replace them and make the opening larger! Similarly, collective societal frames can and have been changed in the past. Not in some haphazard or arbitrary way, mind you. Because narrative frames are purposeful. They have a task to do. What is their task?

### **The task of frames**

Glad you asked: the task of narrative frames is to create meaning, direction and structure, and by doing so, help answer the question of what is a life worth living. As Shiller and Akerlof note, without them life's just one damn thing after another. To avoid that fate, we have become the story-telling animal: "Only nature knows neither memory nor history. But man - let me offer you a definition - is the story-telling animal. Wherever he goes he wants

to leave behind not a chaotic wake, not an empty space, but the comforting marker-buoys and trail-signs of stories. He has to go on telling stories. He has to keep making them up. As long as there's a story, it's alright."<sup>1</sup> Echoes of Kahneman's 'system 1'.

All strong narrative frames are fractal<sup>2</sup>. They exist at the same time on many levels and are intricately linked: individual, family, group, society, humanity - yesterday, today, tomorrow, next week, next year, eternity. For the rest of this short book, I am focusing my attention on the level of humanity, in the somewhat longer term.

To let you catch your breath, to get you a little more into the spirit of frames, to give you a feeling for how they can be both the most liberating and at the same time the most constricting partner in your life, allow me to take you on a breezy detour through frames of the past<sup>3</sup>.

### **Frames of the past**

At the level of humanity, frames are longer lasting, typically hundreds of years, and since the dawn of time, there have been four<sup>4</sup>. They are the heroic, the

1 Swift G, 1992, *Waterland*, Picador, London ISBN 9780330336321

2 A fractal is a never-ending pattern. Fractals are infinitely complex patterns that are self-similar across different scales. They are created by repeating a simple process over and over in an ongoing feedback loop. Driven by recursion, fractals are images of dynamic systems – the pictures of Chaos. Geometrically, they exist in between our familiar dimensions. Fractal patterns are extremely familiar, since nature is full of fractals. For instance: trees, rivers, coastlines, mountains, clouds, seashells, hurricanes, etc. <http://fractalfoundation.org/resources/what-are-fractals/> accessed March 2016

3 If you prefer literary fiction, a great way to get into the spirit of frames is Jonas Karlsson, 2015, *The Room*, Hogarth, an imprint of Penguin Random House, ISBN 9780804139984

4 This review of the four frames and the structure to talk about them come from Betty Sue Flowers during many years of working on proj-

religious, the scientific and the economic frame. A good way to talk about them in a brisk way is to highlight each frame's promise, ideal, actors, language, behavior and energy. If you arrange this in a table, it looks like this<sup>1</sup>:

If you are the pondering type, if you always pause a

|          | Hero | Religion | Science | Economy |
|----------|------|----------|---------|---------|
| Promise  |      |          |         |         |
| Ideal    |      |          |         |         |
| Actors   |      |          |         |         |
| Language |      |          |         |         |
| Behavior |      |          |         |         |
| Energy   |      |          |         |         |

bit before you open the shutters on your windows, spend a little time on trying to fill in the blanks. This is *not* a test to see if you get it right - there really is no right or wrong - it is more an exercise to give you a feeling for frames. They are real, and not frightening at all, once you spend a little time with them and inside them. They don't bite and I promise I won't leave you alone with them - I'll take you by the hand as I walk you through them.

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ects together and numerous conversations. A free written account is Betty S Flowers, 2007, *The American dream and the economic myth*, Fetzer Institute, Kalamazoo, Mich., Series: Essays on deepening the American dream, essay no. 12. available here: <http://www.fetzer.org/resources/american-dream-and-economic-myth-deepening-american-dream-series> and listed in the World Catalogue here: [https://www.worldcat.org/title/american-dream-and-the-economic-myth/oclc/183705278&referer=brief\\_results](https://www.worldcat.org/title/american-dream-and-the-economic-myth/oclc/183705278&referer=brief_results)

1 You can download all graphs and matrices in a larger size from [www.blueway.net/GenerousRespectTheGraphs.pdf](http://www.blueway.net/GenerousRespectTheGraphs.pdf)

Each narrative frame starts with a promise. The promise is the – promised<sup>1</sup> – outcome if you adhere, if you live by, if you accept the rules of the frame. Second, it has an ideal, which is “a conception of something in its perfection”, as the dictionary informs us. Put more plainly, the ideal is the goal that a particular frames pushes, or nudges its members to strive towards. Doesn’t mean it is ever reached, but it is always held up as the shining example. And worth making sacrifices for.

The other four criteria are archetypes. An archetype is a model after which other similar things are patterned, a prototype, the quintessence of something. Archetypes are not all-encompassing, for example, if the archetypical behavior of a dog is to be submissive, it does not mean that the dog is never bored, ill-behaved, aggressive or antagonistic. It just means that the quintessence of a dog is that he or she submits to someone else’s authority.

Thus, each narrative frame has archetypical actors who carry, or who embody the narrative. The archetypical surf bum, for example, is young, male, long-haired, wears a neoprene suit (but not on Hawaii – and never neoprene boots!), smiles and is dangerously handsome - you get the picture. Again, it does not mean there are no female surf bums, also dangerously handsome, it just means the archetype is male and barefoot.

Each frame also has an archetypical language (think of legalese, or doctor talk, as archetypical examples in our world) in which it expresses itself and which it’s actors prefer to use. Furthermore, each frame

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1 Not always realized