

# "The Dawn of Everything" – David Graeber, David Wengrow

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Discussed in [UNREAD Book Club](#) on Feb 17, 2026

## Impressions and discussion points

- Graeber was part of Occupy Wallstreet, an anarchist
- Sapiens by Harari gets a critical mention
- Good book to follow "What we can know", since it's kinda about how little we can know
- Explores the assumptions people make, based on very little evidence
- Acknowledges that people in past times were probably more complex than usually credited
- Very dense, already clear after two pages
- "The Americans" => native americans, nice little detail
- Liked the humor in the subtitles
- Radically self-reflected book, western self (Hobbes/Rousseau)
- It's a book about what we can know and what we can't know
- We're all prone to mythologize, in the past, just as now
- Writing style was approachable and accessible, sometimes funny, but also has its dry/academic parts
- Love the topic, but it doesn't feel like it's opening up the mind much
- Makes the case that we've underestimated ancient civilizations
- Not a very clean argument, hard to follow as an audio book
- Writing is dry, feels like studying for a class
- Sapiens: Hard to compare, very different goals here and approach
- It's curious, it's complexity-conscious, it's impressively dense ... but that also makes it a tough read
- Argues that there's too much focus on agriculture as a turning point,

setting us on a path towards states and inequality ... the Davids set out to debunk that notion

- Agriculture not as domination of nature and maximum extraction, but cultivation, started by women
- Conclusion: We could organize the world differently, as shown by past civilizations
- "Don't analyze the drop, let it just rain on you" – not every detail matters, just keep going
- Who's the audience? Is this for a mass audience? Is it for scholars?
  - For a book written by anthropologists, it is quite accessible!
- How we understand who we are and where we come from influences how we live today
- Argues against a biologically deterministic perspective
- Are they arguing a convincing case? Would people be swayed who initially disagree?
  - Maybe the point is not to convince everyone, but make a case to keep an open mind, opening up our imagination
- Nice bits that stuck with us:
  - People can change their governance mode by the season, we're more flexible than we think
  - Description of circular cities in Ukraine, where neighbors care for each other
  - Connects quite well with "Mushroom at the end of the world" and Lynn Margulis ... humans are not inherently competitive and hierarchical
  - What does equality mean? Different definitions are given. Also reasons to argue for it: Everyone is the same, so treat them the same or everyone is so wildly different, so treating them the same is the only fair option.
- What is this book about? Inequality? Freedom? Debunking "human nature"?
  - In later chapters it dives more into freedom
- Self-reflective "double history"

Reading recommendations:

- "Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States" – James C. Scott
- "Bullshit Jobs" by Graeber
- "Technology wants whatever power wants" - Jenka Gurfinkel
- "Goliath's Curse"

Other recommendation:

- Currently there's an exhibition in Berlin about Göbekli Tepe

Next up:

- We meet again in four weeks to discuss the remaining chapters
- In six weeks we meet to discuss a graphic novel ... still need to choose one. Ideally one that is originally a graphic novel, and not an adaptation
  - They called us enemy?
  - Persepolis?