

Faded Waters

A perspective on life

Written by
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Preface

Life is the most beautiful thing in the universe. We, as human beings, have been granted the gift of consciousness, which allows us to play the game of life on another level. Modern humans are especially different because we live in our own synthetic worlds: society. While any other living organism lives in accordance with its environment, human beings have shaped the environment to suit their needs. The implications of this are still uncharted.

Faded Waters is a book about our life as the human species. It aims to reflect on the human condition and put our fascinating history into perspective. It is also a book about the modern era and our current society. It argues that an overwhelming amount has changed in an extremely short period, leaving us confused, lost, and disconnected. Issues such as drug abuse, mental illness, and (teen) suicidality have surged in the past few decades, which is extremely concerning. Through a personal analytical perspective on the modern world, taking evolutionary history and a scientific context into consideration, the book goes on a quest to discover the root causes of these issues.

I wrote this book because I am deeply concerned about the direction we, as a Western society, are heading. People just seem unhappier and less optimistic about the future, something I strongly feel as well. Fewer people are happily married, and they have fewer children on average. The incentives for work are diminishing, the economic landscape has shifted in terrible ways, and Europe is still struggling to deal with the migration movements, which have accelerated since the Syrian war in 2011. However, in reality, there are many more dimensions that encompass our lives that have been tainted. It appears that our society as a whole, and how we interact with it and each other, has shifted dramatically and in an extremely short period.

Ultimately, this book is an invitation for all of us to slow down, stop, and think about what our current world really is, what being alive means, and what the purpose of being human actually is. It is an invitation for you to ask questions and to truly think about the more philosophical aspects of life. Society is about all of us. If we feel, think, and know that

certain aspects of society are broken, unjust, or misguided, then it is up to us to make changes.

Chapter 1: Fading water

The native tigers that inhabit the regions of Southeast Asia are well-adapted to their environment. Their territory includes forests, swamps, and grasslands, rich with forestation that provides cover and shade to protect them from the intense summer heat. Tigers are adept predators that rely on stealth, stalking, and ambushing to successfully hunt their prey. They are fast sprinters, too, but they lack endurance. If the tiger cannot quickly catch up to its prey, it is forced to abandon the hunt. Sometimes, starvation is the fatal outcome.

Unsurprisingly, the environment the tiger lives in is pivotal to its survival. It relies on the cover provided by the forest to successfully sneak closer to its prey. The tiger also relies on the shade from the trees to provide cooling during the warm summers. And it especially relies on the rich ecosystem that keeps the environment intact: the existence of various animal and plant species, the amount of trees that cover the area, the multitude of rivers that flow through the region, and so forth. Imbalances in this ecosystem can dramatically affect the life of the tiger, though these factors are generally indirect and invisible.¹

The tiger did not come into existence out of nowhere, just like any other living organism on Earth. Through millions of years of evolution, these organisms have adapted to their environments to give them the best chance at survival. Specifically, the tiger has successfully adapted to the aforementioned environment and has become a fearsome apex predator.

Humans arrived somewhat later on the evolutionary timescale. Humans are animals too, but we are different from any other animal. We quickly dominated multiple regions on the planet, through factors such as our means of communication, our ability to cooperate and bundle our strengths, the development and usage of tools, our advanced intelligence and memory, and our heightened consciousness. All these factors gave us major advantages compared to other animals and within various environments. We have not just survived and adapted, we have dominated. We are the ultimate apex predator.

The humans in Southeast Asia have dominated their environment as well. It is undeniable that the presence of humans affected the habitat of tigers, leading to severe consequences for their survival. Through factors such as deforestation, the culling of prey animals, the contamination of natural waters – and multiple other factors – humans have endangered the natural habitat of tigers. And this does not include the direct hunting and killing of tigers, which has happened as well (albeit this is relatively much less common).

As a direct consequence of a shifting environment, the tiger population dwindled. The forestation shrank and more trees were felled. There were fewer prey animals for the tiger to hunt. The territory itself became smaller, leading to more conflicts with competitors. There was less drinkable water available, and so on. It is no surprise that a worsening environment has drastic consequences for the ability of the tiger to survive, let alone thrive.

The start of the Industrial Revolution, which began roughly in the year 1750, marked the beginning of a significant shift in human societies. The ability to mass-produce goods through the use of factories had a profound impact on our lives, influencing the way we worked, traded, and lived. The 18th century was merely the beginning, as developments in certain fields such as technology, science, and medicine have exponentially exploded since then. Throughout various breakthroughs, from the development of automobiles, airplanes, slaughterhouses, and most critically, the computer and later the internet, our lives have dramatically transformed in an extremely short period of time. Especially, our ability to travel and communicate quickly and globally has had a severe impact on human civilisation. Being able to instantly talk to someone on the other side of the world was completely unheard of not even two hundred years ago. But now it's just a normal fact in our daily lives.

These are just examples, as there are countless other ways to measure the shifts and changes we have experienced in just the last hundred years. We are currently in the so-called *Information Age*, because almost all of human knowledge is at our fingertips at any given moment. All you need is access to the internet. The way in which we share information, learn, teach, and discover has also drastically shifted since the 1800's. Our world has expanded in ways we can never truly comprehend. And we can never go back.

All of the aforementioned topics, and so many more, have impacted the way we live our lives today. This rings especially true for young adults, who struggle to find purpose and meaning in this world and who are dealing with the consequences of all these adaptations that have happened over the past few aeons. This is specifically noticeable in the expectations we put on these young adults. They are expected to study and work hard and to be able to adapt to modern society with all its complexities and entanglements. Young adults who are unable to deal with the expectations and burdens of modern society are deemed mentally ill. They become burned out, depressed, or worse. Is this judgement truly accurate and fair?

Evolution is an extremely slow process. An uncountable number of species have lived and gone extinct because they were unable to adapt to their environment within a sufficient time frame. Perhaps they were prey animals who were unable to escape from their predators, or they were animals with extremely high nutritional requirements, and their environment lacked sufficient food. Or they were cold-blooded animals, and the environment was simply too cold. These time frames can easily span tens of thousands of years or more. Evolution is a slow, gradual process. It is typically not something you can measure or grasp within one generation.

Humans are living organisms. We are animals, like many other species on this planet. At the deepest level, we are built from the same building blocks. We are made from DNA, which is made from molecules that are built from atoms. We are not fundamentally different from anything else in existence. We did not come from outside this universe. We are a part of it, like anything else on Earth. This important fact often gets overlooked due to our dominance over this planet. Humans are different from other animals in many ways; our intelligence has unlocked our ability to discover uncountable miracles that this universe has to offer. From the discovery of electricity and the fundamental forces of physics to the life-saving medication we have created, humans are different from other animals because we are so intelligent, curious, and able to work together. Yet fundamentally, we are simply animals. This implies we are also subject to the rules of evolution. Adaptations and mutations happen slowly. But since we are so dominant, prominent, and densely populated, it is unlikely that significant changes will happen to our DNA. Humans have already conquered this planet. We have (seemingly) won the game of evolution; there is no need to further adapt. However, this only applies to the natural world. This does not apply to all that we have created for ourselves, such as metropolises, computers, social media, instant global communication, internet and the access to information, and so much more. All these creations are extremely recent within the context of evolution. No one alive in the current era has properly adapted to the many, rapid changes in the modern world. No living organism can truly adapt to such drastic shifts in such a short time period of only a few hundred years. Our hardware is not well-equipped to handle this brand new software.

Humans are highly intelligent and have a strong ability to adapt. That's why we can still easily survive and reproduce. Yet, that is not the same as saying that we have properly adapted to our world. It seems that our primal brains truly struggle to keep up with all these rapid shifts. Does anyone truly comprehend what we are doing on this planet? What the point of being human actually is? Or how we can thrive in our environment? Based on observations from the past few decades, it seems more likely that humans are merely surviving, trying their hardest not to drown in the shifting tides of change. And not everyone succeeds. Suicidality is still a major problem, and it has risen recently, especially among young adults, which should be a major red flag to anyone who cares.²⁻⁴

Even those who seem to be thriving—such as doctors, businessmen or famous actors—are likely struggling more than you may think. The process that was described in this chapter affects everyone. Perhaps not equally, as some people are slightly more adapted and resilient than others, but fundamentally it's true. No living organism can truly, properly adapt to a massively shifted environment in just a few hundred years. We are all just surviving, doing our best to keep going. Perhaps those who think the least have the easiest lives; ignorance is bliss. Yet without philosophy, self-reflection and the willingness to change, nothing will change. While it is true that nature is chaotic, and unpredictable changes are to be expected, these changes are rarely desirable. Our strengths come from the fact that we can manipulate our environments through our cooperation and the clever use of resources. However, this all becomes moot if we abuse or misuse these strengths, changing our environment for the worse instead of the better.

Humans have achieved superbly miraculous things, many of which have improved the quality of our lives or raised our comprehension of the universe and our world. Despite these achievements, it seems we are struggling more and more. How does it make sense that, in a world with so much advancement and so many resources, a tremendous number of people still struggle so much with the very fundamentals, like having inner peace and living a meaningful life?

Our environments have changed way too rapidly. We are maladapted, with all consequences on display. Like the tiger trying to survive in a diminishing forest, it is nonsensical to put the blame on any one individual. We need to take a step back, zoom out, and reflect on the bigger picture. The currents of the waters of life have shifted in unpredictable and immeasurable ways. *The waters have faded*, and we have forgotten how to swim.

To truly live and thrive again, we need to reconsider what it means to exist in the modern day on planet Earth. Are we going too fast? Do we need to put restraints on technological advancements? Or do we need to find a different way to adapt to hyper-progress? And how would we even begin to do that? Whatever the case, we need to realign ourselves with our environments in order to truly thrive again. This means we adapt ourselves to a shifting environment, or we change the environment again to better suit our needs. Perhaps we just need to take things a bit more slowly.

Chapter 2: Defilement

The theory of evolution is often misunderstood. It is common for most people to jumble the cause and effect of evolution. Many animals seem to thrive in their environments, leading us to believe that they exist and thrive *because* they are so well adapted. However, the adaptation came afterwards. There are an uncountable number of animal species that have lived and died in the history of the Earth. Many of these animal species have gone extinct primarily because they could not adapt to their environment, regardless of reason. All animal species that exist on Earth today are those that have successfully adapted to their environments over extremely long periods. However, any animal species alive today can still face extinction for various reasons. The species alive today have just been the most successful, so far. Ultimately, the primary concern for DNA is to survive long enough in order to reproduce.

DNA is often misunderstood as well. As described in the book “*The Selfish Gene*,” DNA is the first proprietor of advanced life.⁵ In other words, DNA came first and created almost all life we see around us, including humans. If there is a creator, then it must be DNA, as it has created us. From all features to our many intricate and complicated systems, such as our nervous system, our hormonal balances, our digestive system, and so much more, DNA has created it all. The human body is a fascinating, highly complicated creation. DNA is our fundamental blueprint that defines our very existence and the way we live our lives.

The reason this is misunderstood is that it is a common misconception that human beings merely “carry” DNA. As in, human beings are the true proprietors of life, and DNA is something we carry with us. This is completely false. DNA came first and has created us, as it has with almost all other life forms on Earth. It is our “god.” To put it more clearly: DNA is a self-replicating biological machine that writes genetic code, creating living organisms.⁶ These organisms live in accordance to this code, and it defines their very existence. A cat is a cat because its DNA said so. Hopefully, this code provides the organism with whatever it needs to survive in its environment. The main goal of DNA is to create organisms that can