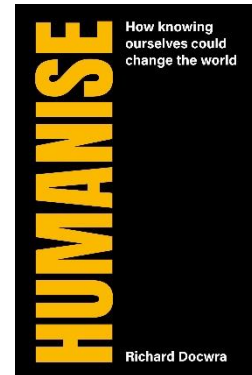# Humanise: How knowing ourselves could change the world

**Summary and chapters**
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## Summary

Do you think you understand people? Think again.

Most of us have a completely inaccurate picture of how we, and other human beings, think and behave. This leads us to set unrealistic expectations for ourselves, build societies that don't make us happy and struggle to solve the problems facing our species.

This book will unveil the astonishing truth of what human beings are really like as creatures, using the latest evidence from psychology and real-world examples. For example, although our brains are powerful, they still need to simplify the world in ways that can lead to biases and blind spots in our thinking. We are also so influenced by other people that it might be more accurate to see ourselves as nodes in a network rather than as individuals. The book will present a model of 5 key characteristics to help us understand human thinking and behaviour.

It will then explore how we can use this knowledge to more effectively address some of the challenges we face as a species, including the need to reduce prejudice and violence, tackle the obesity crisis, avoid inaccurate beliefs and stop climate change. It will ask why we struggle to achieve these things, and consider how we can set more realistic views and expectations for ourselves, given the creatures we are. It will argue that it is meaningless to call human beings good, bad, imperfect, or anything else - we are simply the creatures we are, and we have to make the best of this. It will then show how we can harness our traits of human thinking and behaviour to approach these challenges in more effective ways.

The book will also consider how we can use this knowledge about ourselves to build a better future, both for human beings and the natural world we are part of. It will reflect on what it means for human beings to flourish, given the creatures we really are. It will ask why we're struggling to flourish within the modern world we have created, and show how many of the institutions and ideas around us (from our conception of freedom to the continual pursuit of economic growth) have been built either on a faulty, out-of-date idea of what human beings are like, or to serve goals other than human flourishing. As a result, we are living in a world that is actually hostile to the creatures we are.

Finally, the book will explore what a society might look like that both prioritised human flourishing and took into account the creatures we really are. It will argue that human beings

need structures around us in our lives to support us in being the creatures we want (and need) to be in order to build the peaceful, sustainable lives we want - for example, protecting rather than exploiting our vulnerabilities to tribalism. With wide-ranging ideas such as banning advertising, giving everyone access to basic resources, and helping people develop their 'superpower' of cooperation, it will paint a radical picture of how we can build this nurturing environment for humanity and seek a better world.

Overall, 'Humanise' will force us to challenge and rethink some of our most cherished ideas about ourselves, and the ideas, institutions and societies that surround us.  It will show how we can carve out better lives and a better society if we are prepared to understand and accept the creatures we really are.


# Chapter-by-chapter outline


## Part 1 - how we think and behave

### Chapter 1 - Our thinking has limits
As human beings, we don't see and experience our external reality and the world around us 'as it really is'. This chapter we will show how we only have a partial and particular view of reality, which is determined by our size, location and capabilities as creatures. Our brains also have limits, and this chapter will explore what these are.

### Chapter 2 - We think for a purpose
Our ability to think is directed at a specific, restricted set of aims, which ultimately enable us to pass our genes down the line within a specific environment. This chapter will explore what these aims are, and how our focus on them can direct our thinking capabilities away from other aims, including those that we might value within particular cultures or at specific times.

### Chapter 3 - We simplify the world
The world and reality we live within is complex, so human brains need to simplify it in order for us to be able to survive in it and make sense of it, and to avoid using too much valuable energy thinking about this. This chapter will explore how we do this, including our capacity for building 'models' of the world around us in our heads, and our use of two levels of thinking - quick, automatic, energy-saving thought processes and more rational, effortful reasoning. The chapter will explore how these work, and show how the human tendency towards the quick, automatic style of thinking can bring biases in our judgements and decisions, as well as how the rational side can mislead us too.

### Chapter 4 - We are influenced
Some of the biggest differences between the brains of humans and other animals have evolved due to our need to navigate the complexity of relationships and co-operation with other people. This chapter will argue that human beings don't think for ourselves anywhere near as much as

we believe - because much of our thinking and behaviour is influenced by the presence or views of others. It will demonstrate how our 'groupishness' is just one aspect of our overall tendency for our thinking and behaviour to be influenced by the context we are in - and how it may be more accurate to see ourselves as 'contextuals' than as individuals.

**Chapter 5 - We deceive ourselves**
We do not experience any of these limitations or influences on our thinking in our everyday experiences. We just assume that we make decisions and take action accordingly. This chapter will explore how this sophisticated self-deception serves several purposes, including making us feel in control of our place in the world. It will also explore the consequences of this, including how it can make it difficult to get people to accept what we really are as creatures, and the consequent limitations of their thinking.

**Chapter 6 - 5 key ingredients of human thinking**
This chapter presents a simple model to understand human thinking and behaviour using 5 key characteristics. Our minds are LASID - *Limited, Adapted, Simplifying, Influenced and Deceived*.


**Part 2 - the challenges we face**

**Chapters 7 and 8 - Health**
Most of us know we should eat healthily, drink less alcohol, avoid smoking and do more exercise. So why do so many of us still lead unhealthy lives? For example, the increased availability of calorie-rich foods has caused an obesity crisis in many countries, which has become one of the leading global causes of death and ill-health. This chapter will explore the important role that our particular psychological makeup plays in sustaining these health crises, alongside economic and political factors. It will show how humans are programmed to seek and retain calories, how diets can be counterproductive and how we can be influenced by our environment into maintaining unhealthy habits. It will also ask what human beings can do to address our health challenges as a society and manage our own diets as individuals, given the creatures we are.

**Chapters 9 and 10 - Truth**
A significant number of people hold beliefs about the world that are inconsistent with reality - including those who believe Donald Trump's big lie that the 2020 election was stolen from him, the earth is only 6,000 years old, or conspiracy theories about the Covid vaccine. This chapter will explore the traits in human thinking - such as our need for coherence rather than truth - that can lead people to incorrect beliefs about the world, and why this matters. It will also ask how untruths and conspiracy theories can spread so easily, why it is so difficult to change people's minds and whether some people are more vulnerable to these incorrect ideas than others. It will also explore how we can protect the privileged status of truth in society.

**Chapters 11 and 12 - Prejudice, hate and discrimination**

Why is there so much prejudice, hate and discrimination in the world? This chapter will explore the factors that can lead people to adopt prejudiced or hateful views - including social identity and our tendency to feel more positively towards in-group members - and where these emerged from in our thinking. It will also examine how these are exploited by the media, political parties and public figures, and enabled by the institutions and values around us. It will ask whether there are any effective steps we could take to reduce the level of hate and prejudice - both within individuals and wider society.

**Chapters 13, 14 and 15 - Violence**

Conflict and violence have been features of human societies since they existed. Yet in the twentieth century, over 100 million people died violently at the hands of other human beings. This chapter will explore some of the drivers of aggression and violence within and between people. It will also ask whether the potential for terrible acts of violence lies within all of us or just particular individuals. It will then consider what, if anything, can be taken to reduce the human potential for violence as much as possible.

**Chapters 16 and 17 - Climate change**

Climate change is a threat to all human beings, and yet we are struggling to meaningfully tackle it as a global society. This chapter will explore some of the traits in human thinking and behaviour that make it so difficult to address global issues like climate change, including tribalism, abstract long-term goals, and social and cultural influences such as the impact of lobbying and media. It will then set out some of the human traits that we could employ to help us address it more effectively, such as channelling our capacity for co-operation to protect our broad human 'tribe'.

**Part 3 - building a better future**

**Chapter 18 - Why human beings are struggling**

This chapter will draw together some conclusions from the various themes in Part 2 to show how some of our traits of thinking and behaviour as LASID creatures can make it difficult for us to meet some of the challenges and expectations we face in the modern world. This for a number of reasons, including the fact that we have not evolved to live in our specific modern environment and our failure to apply the available scientific knowledge about human beings to the expectations and challenges we face. It will argue that we need to build a world fit for the creatures we really are, and will set out some of the key principles that such a world might need to incorporate - including satisfying our psychological needs, protecting rather than exploiting our behavioural vulnerabilities and living within the parameters of our planet.

**Chapter 19 - Why we need scaffolding**

This chapter will show how the context in which human beings live is critical in determining how we think and behave. We therefore need to give ourselves the conditions (in the structures and institutions we build around us) to protect our vulnerabilities and support us in being the self-

determined, co-operative creatures we can be. This chapter describes this external support as 'scaffolding' - and challenges our traditional views of freedom and it means. It also outlines how the structures that currently surround us in the modern world are failing to provide this support, and how we are suffering as a result.

**Chapter 20 - What sort of world should we seek?**
This chapter asks what aims we should set for human society, given the LASID creatures we really are. It will explore the arbitrary nature of any goals to change the world and the dangers these can pose when exploited by people in power. It sets out a goal that doesn't ask too much of humanity and that can't be used to harm people later down the line. On the way, it explores ideas such as what we mean by human flourishing. It concludes with a new goal for the creatures we really are - human flourishing within the natural world we are part of.

**Chapter 21 - A world fit for humans**
The final chapter will explore what our society, culture and institutions might look like if we built them around the goal of human flourishing within the natural world we are part of. Features include building a stronger sense of an in-group as a global community, and harnessing our institutions and ideas to protect rather than exploit our mental vulnerabilities. This chapter also sets out some of the radical practical steps this could lead to, such as building independent, non-commercial information sources, exposing people to unfamiliar others as part of their education, and banning certain forms of exploitative communication, including advertising.