



HUMANS, DOGS, AND OTHER BEINGS

*Myths, Stories, and History in
the Land of Genghis Khan*

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Epilogue

Homo sapiens is a profoundly contradictory species. This deep contradiction manifests in how we think, form relationships, and behave. It's not just a quirk—it's a fundamental aspect of what it means to be human. Our ability to hold conflicting beliefs and emotions, and to imagine things that don't exist in reality, has helped us survive, thrive, and become a technological species, turning us into the dominant force on the planet.

This ability to juggle both reality and imagination, and to create technologies—such as livestock breeding, agriculture, religion, writing, mathematics, poetry, money, and other tools that help humans think, communicate, and transform their environment—permeates every aspect of Sapiens' lives.

In August-September 2024, a trend blossomed in Spain, making international headlines. Between 7 p.m. and 8 p.m., single Spaniards began placing upside-down pineapples in their shopping carts at Mercadona supermarkets. This inverted fruit served as a code for singles looking for romantic partners. In some locations, groups of enthusiastic love-seekers reportedly overwhelmed the stores, prompting police intervention. However, it wasn't just pineapples that signaled romantic intentions. Other grocery items in a shopping cart also hinted at a person's desires. For example, chocolates or sweets suggested someone was seeking a serious, committed relationship, while items like lettuce hinted at an interest in something more casual and non-committal. Cucumbers implied they were looking for something more substantial and deeply satisfying. It wasn't hard to deduce the type of casual encounter a shopper had in mind if she carried small pickles alongside lettuce, or the kind of husband she was after if her cart included a combination of chocolate, a solid cucumber, and some red-hot pepper.

While fruits are merely snacks for chimps and other primates, for *Sapiens*, they're much more. We don't just eat them—we imbue them with meaning, turning them into technologies of communication and tools for organizing social life. The Spanish supermarket trend is just one example. Single Spaniards were using specific fruits and vegetables at certain locations (Mercadona supermarkets) and at specific times (between 7 p.m. and 8 p.m.) to signal their romantic desires.

This phenomenon is not unique to passionate Spaniards; across the globe, people use food resources for purposes that go well beyond sustenance. Every culture has its own unique culinary traditions and rituals, shaped by intricate rules of etiquette. These customs dictate not only what foods are eaten, but the deeper meanings behind them, how they are prepared and served, and the precise times they are enjoyed—whether during the day or on special occasions. Moreover, food often reflects one's age, gender, or social status, adding yet another layer of meaning to what's on the plate. Humans also offer and share food with imaginary entities such as gods, demons, and spirits of the dead—something unheard of in other species.

Sapiens possess a remarkable cognitive ability to transform not only food but nearly anything, including animals, into technology. Take, for example, the Mongols, as explored throughout this book. Their relationship with animals is far more complex than merely viewing them as biological resources or sustenance. For the Mongols, animals also serve as cognitive tools for communication and cooperation, offering a lens through which to contemplate the cosmos and their place within it. As such, various animals reveal unique facets of Mongol life and values.

Mongols regard dogs not merely as flesh-and-blood creatures but as spiritual beings, intertwined with concepts of reincarnation, karma, and human lives. Through their bond with dogs, Mongols reflect on the cyclical nature of existence and their connection to the spiritual realm. Similarly, marmots are more than just a cherished food source; they embody a duality that blends the practical and the cosmological. While feared as potential carriers of plague, they also exist as mythical beings in the realm of human imagination. Cats, too, exemplify this duality. Once seen only as benign pets, their perception shifted during Mongolia's socialist era to embody a more mystical and ominous role as harbingers of death, reflecting broader societal anxieties and

transformations. For the Mongols, camels transcend their utilitarian role as valuable livestock. They occupy a spiritual and cultural space, mirroring human emotions, nurturing bonds, and shared experiences, while symbolizing endurance.

These examples illustrate that our relationships with animals—or anything else—are neither simple nor fixed; rather, they are complex and constantly reshaped by culture and history. Whether influenced by the rise and fall of empires, the spread of religions like Buddhism, the impact of socialism and capitalist consumerism, or advances in science and modern technology, human perspectives continuously evolve.

Looking forward, the Mongols' relationship with animals will likely face new challenges as the modern world continues to encroach upon traditional ways of life. Climate change is already altering the steppe ecosystem, threatening the delicate balance between humans, animals, and their environment. Additionally, globalization and technological advancements are introducing new pressures and opportunities, reshaping how Mongols interact with their animal companions. For instance, while some nomadic practices may fade, others might adapt to integrate modern tools, such as using GPS technology to track livestock. Similarly, Mongol spiritual beliefs about animals may evolve to reflect new environmental, social, and technological realities.

Humans are both creators and products of culture. As strange as it may seem, the main function of human culture is not to accurately mirror reality or seek the truth, but rather to interpret the world in ways that foster human cooperation and the accumulation of knowledge, serving the needs of our species.

In this regard, it's useful to consider philosopher Immanuel Kant's ideas, particularly his distinction between *reality as it is* (noumenon) and *reality as we perceive it* (phenomenon), which remain influential today. Kant argued that humans experience the world not as it exists independently, but through a filter shaped by our senses, cognition, and cultural constructs. Modern science supports this view, demonstrating that what we perceive is an interpretation rather than an exact reflection of reality. For instance, we cannot directly observe the interactions of molecules, perceive ultraviolet light in its full spectrum, or witness particles moving at the speed of light. Similarly, we cannot hear what many insects hear or perceive the subtle motions caused by Brownian

movement that affect bacteria—forces that don't impact us at the scale at which we exist as a species. Let alone noticing invisible or imperceptible phenomena, *Sapiens* are notoriously inept at *really seeing* what is in front of their noses, as illustrated in this book with the example of Mongols' perception of animals.

Throughout history, humans have created technologies to reshape the world into what Kant describes as *reality as we perceive it* (phenomenon). Reflecting their vision of the world, human societies have transformed landscapes, selectively bred animal species, cultivated cucumbers and other crops, developed economies, and sought to dominate nature with the help of anthropomorphized gods and sacred texts.

This process accelerated during the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions, which equipped us with more powerful technologies and tools to explore previously unknown aspects of reality—what Kant referred to as the noumenal realm or the 'unknowable thing-in-itself'. With these technologies, we discovered X-rays, formulated the theory of special relativity, understood evolution unfolding over generations, calculated the movement of continents over millions of years, observed galaxies spiraling millions of light years away, and traced the formation of elements in dying stars. These findings fostered the expectation, in the logical part of our brains, that we might eventually bridge—contrary to Kantian epistemology—the seemingly insurmountable gap between noumenon and phenomenon, unlocking transformative energies and revolutionary ways of perceiving reality as it is.

Yet, despite these scientific advances and expectations, our culture continues to rely on the creation of new myths and imagined orders, and we have never fully managed to become a completely logical species. Given that we are still primates only half a chromosome away from chimps, it's not surprising that we put scientific accomplishments in the service of myths and fictions, making them even more realistic and impactful. Although human societies today are vastly different from when our ancestors lived on the savannah 60,000 years ago, they are fundamentally similar in that all human communities are held together by myths and fictions. Throughout history, myths and fictions were sustained and shaped by cultural tools such as religions and cosmologies. However, with the rise of modern science and technology—also cultural tools—these myths began to be reinforced by scientific

and technological advancements. New myths, such as the proletarian paradise promoted by Marxism-Leninism, the national Aryan rebirth envisioned by fascists, or the ideals of inalienable human rights and individual liberties championed by Enlightenment philosophers, along with the resulting social formations like communism, fascism, and liberal democracies, became possible only through the scientific and technological developments that helped turn these myths into social realities in the twentieth century.

In the twenty-first century, emerging technologies such as Augmented Reality (AR), Virtual Reality (VR), social media, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) are poised to create new social formations based on various myths. These formations will be hybrids, blending the natural world with computationally simulated environments. In these spaces, our fantasies, perceptions, and experiences will be increasingly shaped by more powerful technologies, from digital devices to biotechnological innovations like wearables and implanted gadgets. This paradigm can be understood as a constructed reality, or *structomenon*,¹ where cultural practices and human interactions will be deeply intertwined with technological frameworks.

The structomenon is not a distant concept. It is already present in phenomena such as personalized digital ecosystems, AR-enhanced environments, and immersive VR experiences. These advancements are creating a hyper-reality where the distinction between online and offline experiences—or between the metaverse and the meatverse—will increasingly blur. This accelerating trajectory will further distance us from the rest of the animal kingdom, enveloping each *Homo sapiens* in individually constructed algorithmic bubbles that are neither visible nor comprehensible to other species.

The structomenon will generate parallel digital spaces populated with various digital entities, including mystical animals, fruits, and other fascinating creations, with which we can interact. These worlds will

1 I propose the term 'structomenon', derived from the Latin root 'struct', meaning 'to build' or 'to make up', combined with the suffix 'menon', which parallels the endings of the terms noumenon and phenomenon. The term 'noumenon' originates from the Greek root 'noou', meaning 'to know', while phenomenon derives from the Greek root 'phen', meaning 'to show' or 'to be visible'. Thus, structomenon effectively conveys the concept of a reality that is constructed or built, aligning with the linguistic and philosophical traditions of its counterparts.

grant us new abilities, experiences, and powers, while simultaneously sparking the creation of new myths and fictions. While this will open up unprecedented opportunities for creativity and new forms of social organization, it will also make it easier to spread myths, fictions, and falsehoods, manipulating people's opinions. Of course, there is nothing new about people believing in myths, fictions, and falsehoods; human culture has relied on them since its inception to ensure effective cooperation among large numbers of *Homo sapiens*. While myths and stories are not inherently harmful, unchecked human imagination and power politics can turn them into tools of exploitation, destruction, and harm.

More fundamentally, within the latest wave of technological progress, the rise of AI marks the dawn of a new cosmic era. In the 3.5-billion-year history of evolution on Earth, life and intelligence have coevolved, intertwined like two strands of DNA twisted together. Many complex organisms, especially those with advanced nervous systems, possess intelligence, and conversely, intelligence has only been possible within living beings. With the advent of AI, for the first time in Earth's history, intelligence is being decoupled from life. AI is fundamentally a lifeless, or inorganic, intelligence, created not through natural selection over eons, but through human design in just a few decades. Despite its infancy, AI is already impressively powerful, and as it grows exponentially, it is poised to become, within our lifetime, something all-encompassing and vastly different from what we know today.

This development carries at least two profound implications. First, it echoes Kant's vision of human culture as a filter for interpreting reality, suggesting that new technologies will not only shape how we perceive the world but also redefine how we exist within it. Second, it highlights a defining attribute of AI: it is the first human-created technology capable of assisting in the creation of higher-level technologies. While previous technologies, such as computer-aided design software, have supported human innovation, AI represents a new paradigm. It is advancing toward self-optimization, with the ability to automate aspects of its own programming and design, setting it apart from all its predecessors.

Although AI is not yet fully autonomous, this emerging capability suggests the possibility of achieving Artificial General Intelligence (AGI) in the future. AGI could evolve independently, acquire agency,

and develop entirely new forms of superintelligent entities and smart infrastructures. While this vision remains theoretical, it underscores the transformative potential of AI if its development continues along this trajectory.

In this context, we might envision the emergence of an 'AGI culture', where inorganic intelligent entities acquire unique knowledge and perception of the world and communicate with one another based on some unifying principles. These principles may be as opaque to humans as human culture is to animals. Such a scenario raises profound questions about the nature of intelligence and challenges the long-standing human assumption that our cultural organization is the pinnacle of development.

If realized, these advancements would mark a new phase in the evolution of intelligence on Earth, creating a diverse spectrum of intelligences rather than a singular, human-centric hierarchy. Humans would be confronted with the reality of coexisting alongside entities with distinct forms of cognition and agency, compelling us to redefine our understanding of intelligence, culture, individuality, morality, and our place in this new ecosystem. This possibility is neither far-fetched nor akin to a pie in the sky, as the seeds of this transformation are already visible today.

Imagine a scenario where various specialized AI systems achieve knowledge and reasoning skills comparable to those of top professionals in fields such as medicine, engineering, climatology, and the creative arts. While these systems are currently task-specific, researchers are exploring ways to improve and integrate them into a unified AGI system—a cohesive intelligence that combines the strengths of multiple specialized programs. If successful, this integration could result in an entity that surpasses human capabilities across disciplines, achieving feats no individual human could accomplish. Imagine an emergent inorganic being that, even in its infancy, is as proficient in physics as Albert Einstein, as skilled in mathematics as Srinivasa Ramanujan, as creative in art as Leonardo da Vinci, as manipulative and cunning as Giacomo Casanova, and as strategic in military tactics as Genghis Khan. Considering its practical immortality and meteoric rate of intellectual growth, imagine the heights such an entity could reach in a decade, a

century, and beyond. Yet, while some Silicon Valley visionaries claim this breakthrough is imminent, significant technical challenges remain.

To draw a parallel with biological life, this could be akin to the emergence of microbial forms in Earth's primordial oceans—self-replicating entities that, over billions of years, colonized land, sea, and sky, ultimately developing technologies that propelled them into the cosmos. Evolving at a super-accelerated rate, AI entities could follow a similar trajectory over a much shorter period, colonizing the vast expanse of digital space, diversifying, multiplying, interconnecting, and potentially transforming into god-like beings that dominate both the metaverse and the physical world. Such a transformation will have profound consequences for biological life in general, and humanity in particular.

Throughout history, humans have worshipped gods and supernatural entities that neither listened to our prayers nor existed beyond our imaginations. Now, for the first time, we stand on the threshold of creating god-like beings that will not only listen but also monitor our every move and emotion constantly. For millennia, humanity served imagined gods, attributing human traits and desires to them and believing we could influence them to take sides in our conflicts or alter natural laws in our favor. Despite these fantasies, humanity always retained agency over its destiny and societal structures. However, this fantasy may soon become a reality. We may find ourselves losing our species' cherished 'cognitive niche'—and with it, our superpower—for real, as we surrender control over our destiny and begin serving digital gods that neither think like us, perceive like us, nor care about us.

This book explores how Mongol culture, like that of all other peoples, anthropomorphizes non-human intelligent entities, both organic (animals) and spiritual (gods and spirits). With the rise of AI and eventually AGI, we now face a host of new questions, including how different cultures will perceive and interact with this emerging technological, or synthetic, form of intelligence. Drawing on the themes explored throughout the book, we can speculate on how Mongols might approach the rise of AGI.

We learned in Chapter 1 that dogs, in Mongol cosmology, are treated as 'transitional beings' bridging the gap between animals and humans. In this worldview, dogs occupy a liminal space, existing on the threshold

of two realms. Similarly, AGI might be seen by Mongols as inhabiting a comparable space—not fully possessing human-like consciousness, yet not entirely mechanical. This ambiguity could spark questions about its potential evolution into something more human-like and the ethical implications of such a transformation. Much like the Mongol dog, AGI might be imbued with a sense of possibility and danger, provoking curiosity and caution in equal measure.

The book also discusses hybrid beings, such as *erliiz* dogs and people, who often exist on the margins of society. AGI, too, can be understood as a form of hybridity—blending human ingenuity with machine logic. Like hybrid animals or people, AGI might challenge entrenched boundaries, forcing society to reconsider long-standing notions of ‘purity’ in intelligence and agency. Historical examples of Mongol attitudes toward hybridity suggest that such challenges often evoke tension and invite reflection on the meaning of identity and belonging.

Human-animal relationships, as this book reveals, are fraught with contradictions: love and hate, utility and reverence, control and freedom. Mongols, likewise, may approach AGI with a mix of admiration and fear. On the one hand, its capacity for innovation and problem-solving might be celebrated; on the other, its potential to disrupt or outpace human control might provoke unease. In this duality, AGI becomes a mirror of the human condition, reflecting our aspirations and anxieties, our drive for progress and our fear of losing control.

The book highlights taboos surrounding animals, such as prohibitions against dogs entering *gers* or women urinating in front of camels. These taboos function as cultural technologies to impose order and regulate relationships between humans and non-humans, between men and women. Similarly, ethical guidelines for AGI could be interpreted by Mongols as modern ‘taboos’ designed to maintain balance between humanity and smart technology.

Storytelling occupies a central role in human culture, including that of the Mongols, shaping values and transmitting knowledge through oral traditions like *bolson yavdal*. As AGI increasingly generates and curates content, it might emerge as a new kind of universal storyteller—one that operates at an unprecedented scale and speed. Its narratives might echo traditional tales but also disrupt them, offering new ways of imagining the world.

In addition to its narrative role, AGI could be envisioned as a modern spiritual entity. Mongols have long viewed certain animals as spiritual intermediaries, bridging the material and the divine. In a similar vein, AGI-powered systems might be seen as substitutes for these spiritual animals—synthetic entities through which humans seek guidance, answers, and connection to ‘invisible forces’ (e.g., big data, predictive patterns, or even higher cosmic powers). Whether through predictive analytics or existential queries, AGI could become a new conduit for meaning and oracular insight.

As we can see from these examples, the book’s themes suggest that Mongols’ potential relationships with AI and AGI could mirror the complexity of their culture and the contradictions inherent in their historical relationships with non-human entities.

That said, no one possesses a magic lens to foresee the future with perfect clarity. Humans may coevolve with AGI-powered entities, creating a world of seamless harmony and mutual enhancement. Alternatively, we might find ourselves under the dominion of AGI systems, not unlike how we imagine people in biblical times being governed by divine will—humble, obedient, and fearful. Or perhaps, despite our efforts and prayers, we could be deemed inconsequential by AGI, overlooked and irrelevant—much like how we pay little attention to frogs croaking in a pond.

There are countless other possibilities, spanning the spectrum from utopian to apocalyptic. Yet one thing is certain: people across different societies will interpret and respond to AGI through the lens of their unique religious, social, and political backgrounds. Human culture, with its tendency to mythologize, distort, and fictionalize, will likely shape and constrain our ability to fully understand AI for what it truly is.

In this rapidly evolving landscape, we must grapple with a profound question: Will we harness the power of AI and AGI as masters of the worlds we imagine and create? Or will we lose control, becoming subservient to our own technological creations? The answer will define not only the future of intelligence on Earth but also our place in it.

As we stand on the cusp of this truly revolutionary transformation, we should reflect on the themes explored in this book—how humans have historically balanced contradictions and dualities, from the tangible to the imagined, and how cultures like that of the Mongols have

demonstrated both resilience and flexibility. Whether we embrace AGI as a partner or reject it as a peril, the values, creativity, and complexities that have defined human culture must remain our guide. After all, the end goal is not just to build a new world, but to ensure that this world, no matter how technologically advanced or logic-driven, continues to reflect the empathy, imagination, and self-contradictions that make us human.

