

Cognitive Revolution to Capitalist Expansion: Exploring the Illusion of Justice in Human History

Navneet Kumar Verma

Department of Political Science, Government College, Sirohi, Rajasthan, India

email: drnavneetverma@gmail.com

Abstract

The idea of justice is often portrayed as the foundation of civilization, yet a deeper exploration of human history reveals that justice has never been a universal reality. Instead, the development of humankind has consistently been shaped by myths, imagined orders, survival instincts, and the pursuit of power. From the cognitive revolution to the agricultural transition, from the consolidation of empires to the union of capitalism and science, each milestone in history reflects humanity's capacity to cooperate through shared beliefs while simultaneously creating inequalities and hierarchies. The agricultural revolution, for instance, did not simply secure food surpluses; it also entrenched anxieties, labor exploitation, and rigid social structures. Empires extended control over vast populations through narratives of religion and political legitimacy, while capitalism and scientific progress became powerful engines of expansion, innovation, and domination. Industrialization intensified this trajectory, generating both unprecedented technological progress and alarming ecological destruction, as well as social alienation and the breakdown of traditional bonds. The thread that runs through these transformations is not one of justice, but of continuous adaptation through imagined realities and shifting balances of power. In the present age, humanity faces its most decisive challenge: the pursuit of immortality through biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and genetic engineering. This so-called race for overcoming death risks replacing Homo sapiens with post-human or non-organic beings, raising profound ethical and existential questions. Thus, the history of humanity is not a linear progression toward fairness or equality but a complex and often unsettling narrative of myths, survival strategies, and technological ambitions. The future of our species depends not on illusions of justice or immortality but on how responsibly we navigate the powers we have created.

Keywords: Justice; Myths; Cognitive revolution; Agricultural revolution; Empires; Capitalism; Science; Industrialization; Immortality; Homo sapiens; Artificial intelligence; Biotechnology; Survival; Future of humanity.

1. Introduction

Human history is often presented as a story of progress, justice, and enlightenment, but such a narrative hides the underlying realities of power, survival, and myth-making that have shaped the destiny of our species. From the earliest emergence of Homo sapiens as social beings to the complex globalized world of the twenty-first century, human civilization has been propelled not by fairness or equality but by imagined orders, cultural constructs, and the continuous struggle to adapt to ever-changing conditions. Justice, often celebrated as the bedrock of social and political systems, has rarely existed in its pure form across history. Instead, what we call justice has always been a negotiated outcome—embedded within cultural myths, economic hierarchies, political institutions, and religious frameworks that benefit some groups while disadvantaging others. The human journey, therefore, is less about realizing ideals of justice and more about the capacity to invent stories, organize cooperation on a massive scale, and reshape environments through technology and institutions.

The first defining leap in this journey occurred during the cognitive revolution, when humans began to create shared myths, symbols, and languages that enabled large-scale cooperation. Unlike other species, Homo sapiens could imagine concepts that did not physically exist—such as gods, nations, or justice—and act collectively in accordance with these beliefs. These imagined realities, while powerful tools of survival, also introduced inequality, exclusion, and conflict. As small nomadic groups settled into agricultural communities, the agricultural revolution transformed patterns of labor, wealth distribution, and social organization. While agriculture provided food security and enabled population growth, it also imposed rigid hierarchies, dependency on crops, and an

anxiety-driven focus on the future. Justice, in this new order, became less about fairness and more about sustaining the structures that preserved surplus, power, and stability.

The rise of empires expanded these dynamics on a grand scale. Empires thrived not only through military conquest but also through the ability to unify diverse populations under common myths—religious doctrines, imperial ideologies, and legal systems. In doing so, they institutionalized new forms of inequality while fostering unprecedented cultural exchange and integration. Justice in imperial societies was often tied to loyalty and hierarchy, with the benefits of law and order accessible primarily to the privileged classes. Parallel to political empires, religion emerged as another unifying force, granting divine legitimacy to social structures and offering universal orders that transcended local traditions. Yet, as with other myths, religion became a double-edged sword—capable of inspiring tolerance in some contexts while fueling exclusion and conflict in others.

The dawn of the scientific revolution and its entanglement with capitalism marked another profound transformation. By embracing the principle of ignorance—that knowledge could always be revised—human societies unleashed an unprecedented capacity for discovery and innovation. However, this new knowledge did not evolve in isolation; it was deeply intertwined with economic interests and political agendas. Capitalism, with its ethic of continuous growth, turned scientific inquiry into a tool for profit-making and imperial expansion. As trade routes expanded and credit systems developed, global wealth increased, but so did inequality and exploitation. Justice in this era became subordinated to market dynamics, with progress measured in terms of economic output rather than human well-being.

The industrial revolution intensified this trajectory, fundamentally altering labor, family structures, and the natural environment. Machines replaced manual labor, markets penetrated every sphere of life, and states expanded their reach into the daily existence of individuals. Industrialization created new opportunities but also alienated individuals from traditional communities, eroded familial bonds, and accelerated ecological destruction. The rhetoric of progress often obscured the fact that industrial society left many disempowered, fragmented, and dependent on systems beyond their control. Justice, far from being universal, was largely contingent on economic class, access to resources, and political influence.

As we advance further into the twenty-first century, humanity stands at a crossroads. The most pressing challenge today is not only social inequality or ecological crisis but the pursuit of immortality through biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and genetic engineering. The so-called race to overcome death—the "Gilgamesh Project"—symbolizes both the ambition and the hubris of our species. While the prospect of enhanced life spans and post-human entities excites technological optimism, it also poses an existential threat to *Homo sapiens* as we know them. In the absence of justice in history, there is little guarantee that the benefits of such advancements will be distributed equitably. Instead, these technologies may deepen divides, redefine the meaning of humanity, and potentially hasten the extinction of our species.

This paper examines the trajectory of humankind through a critical lens, highlighting how myths, imagined orders, and technological shifts have driven transformations in justice, power, and survival. By analyzing the major stages of history—cognitive revolution, agriculture, empires, capitalism, science, industrialization, and future challenges—the aim is to show that human progress is neither linear nor inherently just. Rather, it is a continuous negotiation with myths and inventions that redefine what it means to be human. The conclusion reached here is clear: the future of humanity depends less on achieving justice as an abstract ideal and more on consciously and responsibly managing the narratives, technologies, and powers we have created.

2. Literature Survey

The exploration of human history and social transformation has attracted scholars across disciplines, and a wide range of works provide valuable insights into the stages of human development. Jared Diamond's *Guns, Germs, and Steel* [1] presents one of the most influential accounts of how geography, climate, and environmental resources shaped the unequal distribution of wealth and power among human societies. By tracing the availability of domesticable plants and animals, Diamond explains why some regions advanced more rapidly than others. Complementing this environmental perspective, Steven Mithen's *The Prehistory of the Mind* [2] focuses on the cognitive and symbolic capacities of early humans. His work highlights how imagination, language, and cultural expression distinguished *Homo sapiens* from other species and became the basis for large-scale cooperation.

Agricultural transformations are central to the literature as well. Gordon Childe's classic *Man Makes Himself* [3] introduced the concept of the "Neolithic Revolution," emphasizing how farming enabled permanent settlements and technological progress. Yet, modern scholarship has also highlighted the costs of agriculture. James C. Scott's *Against the Grain* [4] argues that agriculture was less a step forward and more a trap, as it locked humans into rigid systems of labor, taxation, and state control. These perspectives together show that agriculture simultaneously enabled civilization and imposed new forms of inequality and dependence.

The rise of empires and civilizations is another recurring theme. Benedict Anderson, in *Imagined Communities* [5], explains how nations are built on shared myths and narratives that unite people who will never meet face to face. Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations* [6] offers a controversial but important argument that cultural and religious identities remain central to global conflicts. These works emphasize how political authority and social cohesion depend on stories and imagined orders as much as on military or economic power.

Economic systems, science, and industrialization have also been widely studied. Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* [7] critiques capitalism as a system rooted in profit and class exploitation, while Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* [8] examines how religious and cultural values contributed to the rise of modern economic systems. Both perspectives highlight that capitalism is not simply an economic arrangement but a cultural and ideological force that shapes social life and technological progress.

In more recent decades, scholars have turned their attention to the challenges of biotechnology and artificial intelligence. Francis Fukuyama's *Our Posthuman Future* [9] explores the ethical and political consequences of genetic engineering and biomedical technologies, raising questions about human dignity and inequality. Nick Bostrom's *Superintelligence* [10] warns of the existential risks posed by artificial intelligence, arguing that once machines surpass human intelligence, control may no longer be possible. These works demonstrate that the human story is not only about past transformations but also about the future trajectory of our species.

Among integrative accounts, Yuval Noah Harari's *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* [11] offers a sweeping narrative that connects cognitive developments, agriculture, empires, capitalism, and science into a single story. While some critics find the generalizations too broad, the book has succeeded in sparking global discussions about the nature of human progress. Read alongside other scholarly contributions, it provides a valuable perspective on how myths, imagined orders, and technologies have shaped human societies.

Taken together, this literature illustrates that human history is best understood as an interplay of environmental conditions, cultural imagination, social structures, and technological innovation. The insights of these authors provide a foundation for the present study, which re-examines the stages of human development through the lens of justice, myths, revolutions, and the looming challenges posed by the pursuit of immortality.

3. Analysis and Discussion

The historical development of humankind illustrates that justice has rarely functioned as a universal reality. Instead, it has consistently appeared as an imagined order or legitimizing construct, serving to stabilize societies, preserve hierarchies, and justify inequalities. The great revolutions in human history—cognitive, agricultural, imperial, scientific, capitalist, and industrial—expanded cooperation but also entrenched disparities. A critical examination of these stages highlights the persistent illusion of justice as both a unifying and divisive force.

3.1 Early Transformations: Cognitive and Agricultural Revolutions

The cognitive revolution, around 70,000 years ago, provided *Homo sapiens* with the capacity for imagination, language, and symbolic thought. This ability did more than allow humans to communicate about immediate dangers or opportunities; it empowered them to create and share imagined realities—gods, nations, spirits, laws, and justice itself. These imagined constructs made possible cooperation among large groups of unrelated individuals, a capacity unmatched by other species. Gossip about reputations, alliances, and betrayals functioned as an early social technology, binding communities together and fostering trust within bands.

Yet the same myths that unified insiders also excluded outsiders. Justice, in this early context, was not impartial fairness but loyalty to the group's shared narrative. Archaeological and genetic evidence suggests that at least six human species once coexisted on Earth. Today, only *Homo sapiens* remains. The likely cause was not chance alone but the ability of *Homo sapiens* to cooperate flexibly through shared myths, enabling them to displace or eliminate rivals such as Neanderthals. Thus, the very foundation of human dominance was built on exclusion and survival at the expense of others. Justice, in this sense, emerged as a relative and partial construct—a justification for survival strategies, not a universal principle. The agricultural revolution, beginning about 12,000 years ago, reinforced these contradictions. Farming is often celebrated as the dawn of civilization, promising stability, abundance, and progress. Yet, in practice, agriculture bound humans to grueling labor, dependency on fragile crops, and anxieties about the future. Yuval Harari's remark that "wheat domesticated humans" captures the irony: it was not humans who mastered crops but crops that reshaped human life into cycles of toil and subjugation.

Permanent settlements facilitated population growth but also entrenched hierarchies. Surpluses accumulated in the hands of elites, while peasants labored under rigid systems of taxation and control. The invention of writing reflects this dynamic. Far from being a creative tool for poetry or philosophy, writing first served to record taxes, laws, and surpluses. These systems were justified as mechanisms of order and fairness, yet they functioned to

entrench inequality. Justice, in the agricultural age, meant compliance with rules that preserved surplus and hierarchy, not equality among members of society. Anxiety about harvests and survival became institutionalized in bureaucratic systems that cloaked hierarchy under the language of order.

3.2 Empires, Religion, and Economic Exchange

The rise of empires magnified the role of imagined orders in legitimizing inequality. Empires unified vast territories and diverse peoples not only through conquest but also through narratives of divine legitimacy and imperial benevolence. The Roman Empire, for example, promoted the idea of Pax Romana, presenting imperial domination as the guarantor of order and justice. Similarly, Chinese dynasties justified authority through the “Mandate of Heaven.” These frameworks portrayed justice as loyalty to the empire and obedience to rulers. Law and order, though celebrated as universal, primarily served elites and reinforced hierarchy.

Religion amplified this paradox. Polytheistic traditions, with their multiplicity of gods, often encouraged tolerance. Empires such as the Persian Achaemenid dynasty and the Roman Empire accommodated diverse religious practices, allowing subject peoples to worship their own gods alongside imperial cults. Yet the emergence of monotheism introduced exclusivity. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam centered justice on loyalty to one God and one truth, sharply distinguishing insiders from outsiders. Religious law reinforced hierarchy and conformity, embedding justice in obedience rather than impartiality. The emergence of money and markets added another layer of illusion. In Mesopotamia, barley served as a unit of exchange, later replaced by silver shekels and eventually coins stamped by kings. Money appeared to be neutral, universal, and objective—a tool equally accessible to all. Yet this neutrality was deceptive. As David Graeber has argued, money transformed human relations by commodifying values such as honor, loyalty, and even morality. Markets increasingly displaced communities as the basis of trust, subordinating social life to economic exchange. Justice became defined in terms of equivalence, price, and transaction, rather than fairness or dignity. The market presented itself as impartial, but in practice entrenched structural disparities between those with wealth and those without.

Thus, empires, religions, and markets institutionalized justice as rhetoric while perpetuating inequality. Each presented itself as universal, neutral, or divine, yet in reality served to stabilize hierarchies and sustain elites. Justice was invoked to mask the concentration of power, not to distribute it evenly.

3.3 Science, Capitalism, and Industrialization

The scientific revolution, beginning in the sixteenth century, marked another profound transformation. Its ethos lay in the willingness to admit ignorance and systematically pursue knowledge through observation and experimentation. This framework distinguished modern science from earlier traditions based on revelation or authority. Yet science did not evolve in isolation; it was entangled with political and economic interests. Empires funded voyages of discovery, seeking resources and trade routes. Capitalists invested in projects promising economic gain. Scientific achievements such as Isaac Newton’s *Principia Mathematica* exemplified the fusion of observation, theory, and mathematical expression, but also reflected the elitism of knowledge systems accessible only to trained specialists. Justice, in this context, was equated with universal knowledge, yet the benefits of science were distributed unequally.

The integration of capitalism and science amplified these dynamics. Capitalism introduced the ethic of continuous growth, profit reinvestment, and credit. As Thomas Piketty has shown, capitalism systematically concentrates wealth, producing long-term inequality. Yet it also redefined justice in economic terms: prosperity, growth, and opportunity were presented as signs of fairness. Scientific research was directed toward profitable ventures, shaping the trajectory of knowledge. Projects promising military advantage or commercial value were funded, while those with no immediate return were neglected. Justice thus became embedded in the ideology of growth, masking structural inequities behind the rhetoric of prosperity. The industrial revolution extended these contradictions. Machines transformed labor, replacing manual skills with mechanized production. Families and communities lost their centrality, as individuals were redefined as citizens and consumers. The new working class endured long hours and unsafe conditions, while elites amassed wealth. Karl Marx criticized capitalism as a system of exploitation rooted in profit and class struggle, while Max Weber highlighted the cultural values—such as Protestant ethics—that reinforced capitalist expansion. Both perspectives converge in recognizing that justice in the industrial age was subordinated to economic structures, class positions, and cultural hierarchies.

Industrialization also introduced ecological consequences. The reliance on coal, steam, and later fossil fuels initiated processes of climate disruption and environmental degradation. Consumerism, tied to capitalist growth, accelerated resource depletion. What was celebrated as progress concealed profound costs: alienation, ecological destruction, and inequality. The industrial age institutionalized the illusion of justice as progress, even as it produced unsustainable systems that marginalized large segments of humanity and endangered planetary survival.

3.4 Synthesis

The examination of human history through cognitive, agricultural, imperial, scientific, capitalist, and industrial revolutions reveal a consistent pattern: justice has functioned less as an inherent principle and more as an imagined order. At each stage, myths and innovations expanded cooperation while simultaneously deepening inequality. Whether through religious legitimacy, economic neutrality, scientific universality, or industrial progress, justice has repeatedly served as a narrative mask stabilizing systems of power.

This analysis demonstrates that the illusion of justice is not an aberration but a central thread of the human story. From gossip and myths to empires and markets, from science and capitalism to industrialization, justice has been invoked to justify hierarchies, not to dismantle them. The soul of human history lies not in the realization of justice but in the invention of myths and technologies that preserve order while concealing inequality.

4. Contemporary Challenges

The twenty-first century represents a new and decisive stage in the story of humankind, where myths of justice are intertwined with unprecedented technological ambitions and global crises. Just as earlier revolutions redefined cooperation and inequality, contemporary transformations—biotechnology, artificial intelligence, ecological disruption, and globalization—extend the same paradox. Justice continues to function as an illusion: invoked to legitimize progress but rarely realized as fairness.

4.1 The Pursuit of Immortality: Biotechnology and Artificial Intelligence

One of the defining ambitions of our age is the “Gilgamesh Project”—the pursuit of immortality. Where earlier civilizations accepted death as inevitable, modern science reframes mortality as a technical problem to be solved. Advances in biotechnology, regenerative medicine, and genetic engineering suggest the possibility of extending human life indefinitely. At the same time, artificial intelligence is reshaping economies, politics, and even human identity, promising new forms of intelligence beyond biological limits.

These pursuits, however, mirror earlier patterns of inequality. Access to life-extension technologies is likely to remain restricted to elites, just as agricultural surpluses, imperial privileges, and capitalist profits were historically unequally distributed. Justice here becomes a privilege rather than a universal principle, repeating the age-old illusion that progress benefits all. Moreover, biotechnology and genetic engineering raise the possibility of creating biologically enhanced classes, dividing humanity into “natural” and “engineered” beings. Justice, in this scenario, risks being biologically predetermined. Artificial intelligence presents similar contradictions. Algorithms claim neutrality but frequently reproduce biases embedded in their training data. Automated systems in finance, employment, and governance can produce discriminatory outcomes while maintaining the appearance of objectivity. This reflects the same illusion as money in earlier epochs: the myth of neutrality concealing structural inequalities. Beyond bias, AI threatens to destabilize labor markets, displacing millions of workers. The benefits of automation accrue to corporations and elites, while ordinary people face disempowerment. Nick Bostrom’s warnings about superintelligence underscore an even deeper risk: once machines surpass human intelligence, control may no longer be possible, raising the prospect of human obsolescence.

In both biotechnology and AI, the rhetoric of justice—progress, innovation, human enhancement—conceals the reality of selective access, systemic inequality, and existential risk. Justice, far from being achieved, is reconfigured as an illusion that legitimizes technological ambition.

4.2 Ecological and Social Crises

Alongside technological optimism lies the ecological crisis, which starkly exposes the illusion of justice at a planetary scale. Industrialization and capitalism, driven by the ethic of endless growth, have led to global warming, rising sea levels, deforestation, and mass extinction. The benefits of industrial progress were concentrated in certain regions, while the costs—climate vulnerability, resource scarcity, environmental disasters—are disproportionately borne by poorer populations. Justice here is presented as sustainable development but practiced as unequal exposure to catastrophe.

The pursuit of immortality further collides with ecological reality. Extending individual lifespans or creating post-human beings has little meaning if planetary systems collapse. The illusion of justice is evident in the disjunction between promises of longevity and the neglect of collective survival. The very survival of *Homo sapiens* is jeopardized by the same technological and economic systems that claim to advance fairness and prosperity. Equally urgent is the crisis of alienation and happiness. Industrial and consumer societies already transformed humans into citizens and consumers, weakening communal bonds. Digital technologies intensify this process,

promising connection but often producing isolation and dissatisfaction. Happiness, understood as a balance between objective conditions and subjective expectations, proves elusive. Even when material standards improve, subjective desires often outpace achievements, leaving individuals unfulfilled. Justice, in this cultural frame, becomes tied to consumption and personal choice, yet fails to deliver fulfillment. The myth of consumer happiness echoes earlier myths of divine justice or imperial benevolence: persuasive in rhetoric but hollow in practice.

These ecological and social crises highlight the continuity of human history. Progress and justice are celebrated in discourse but undermined in reality. The illusion of fairness sustains systems that privilege some while marginalizing others, whether through environmental vulnerability, social alienation, or the endless chase for happiness.

4.3 Globalization and the New Empire

The emergence of a global empire illustrates how justice continues to operate as a legitimizing myth in the twenty-first century. Sovereign states are increasingly shaped by multinational corporations, global financial markets, international organizations, and non-governmental actors. Together, these forces constitute a “deep state” of global elites who promote universal values such as democracy, human rights, and sustainability. On the surface, this global order suggests progress toward fairness and cooperation. Yet in practice, it often erodes sovereignty, privileges powerful nations and corporations, and leaves weaker populations vulnerable. Justice, presented as a global norm, legitimizes intervention and control while masking structural inequalities. The global empire, much like earlier empires, sustains itself through myths of benevolence and universality while serving the interests of elites.

The rhetoric of global justice thus conceals the concentration of power. Whether through climate agreements that disproportionately burden developing nations, trade policies that favor wealthy economies, or digital infrastructures controlled by corporations, the global empire exemplifies the continuity of imagined orders. Justice, far from being universal, becomes an ideological veneer sustaining global hierarchies.

The contemporary challenges of biotechnology, artificial intelligence, ecological disruption, and globalization reveal that justice remains what it has always been: an imagined order invoked to stabilize hierarchies and legitimize power. Just as myths, agriculture, empires, money, and science shaped earlier epochs, so too do modern technologies and global systems. Humanity’s most pressing challenge is not simply to innovate but to recognize the illusory character of justice and consciously manage the narratives and technologies it creates. The future of *Homo sapiens* depends on whether we can resist repeating the cycles of inequality and domination that have defined our past.

5. Conclusion

The history of humankind demonstrates that justice has rarely been a universal principle. Rather, it has functioned as an imagined construct—invoked to unify communities, legitimize authority, and stabilize social orders while concealing inequalities. From the cognitive revolution to the industrial age, each transformation expanded cooperation but entrenched disparities, reinforcing the illusion of justice rather than realizing it.

The cognitive revolution enabled *Homo sapiens* to create myths and imagined orders that bound groups together but also divided insiders from outsiders. The agricultural revolution promised stability yet produced rigid hierarchies, taxation systems, and permanent labor burdens. Empires and religions institutionalized justice as loyalty and obedience, offering divine or imperial legitimacy while reinforcing exclusion. The invention of money and markets introduced the illusion of neutrality, commodifying values and embedding justice in exchange rather than fairness. The scientific revolution and its entanglement with capitalism brought discovery and growth, but directed inquiry toward profit and empire. The industrial revolution intensified these dynamics, generating wealth and innovation alongside alienation, ecological destruction, and new forms of inequality.

The contemporary age continues this pattern. Biotechnology and artificial intelligence promise breakthroughs but risk producing new hierarchies—biologically engineered elites, algorithmic discrimination, or post-human successors beyond our control. The ecological crisis reveals the cost of industrialization, with vulnerable populations bearing disproportionate burdens while elites insulate themselves. Consumer culture and digital technologies deepen alienation, making happiness elusive and justice a matter of consumption rather than equality. Globalization further institutionalizes justice as a global myth, legitimizing elite control under the rhetoric of human rights and cooperation. Across these stages, a recurring theme emerges: justice functions less as a universal reality than as a rhetorical device and cultural myth. It provides stability and meaning but rarely equality. The history of humankind is therefore not a steady march toward fairness but a cycle of survival strategies, imagined orders, and technological ambitions that perpetuate disparities. What this means for the future is clear. The pursuit of justice as an abstract ideal, or immortality as a technological goal, risks repeating historical patterns of exclusion

and domination. The true challenge is not to perfect justice as myth but to consciously manage the narratives and technologies we create. Ethical responsibility, sustainability, and equitable distribution must guide the future if Homo sapiens is to avoid extinction at the hands of its own inventions.

Justice may remain an illusion, but illusions shape reality. By recognizing its constructed nature, humanity can reimagine justice—not as divine order, imperial law, or market neutrality, but as a conscious ethic of survival. The task ahead is not to escape myths but to craft them responsibly, ensuring that our imagined orders sustain life rather than destroy it.

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