

'GROUNDBREAKING'
RUTGER BREGMAN

THE DAWN OF EVERYTHING

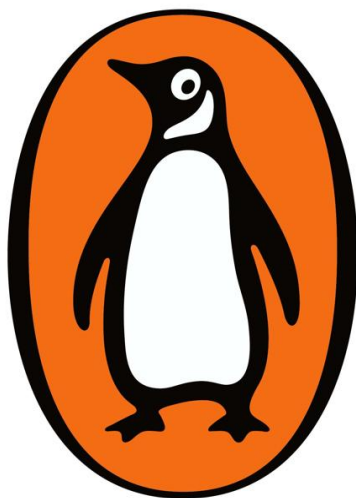
'AN INTELLECTUAL FEAST'
NASSIM NICHOLAS TALEB

A NEW HISTORY OF HUMANITY

'THE RADICAL REVISION OF EVERYTHING'
REBECCA SOLNIT

DAVID GRAEBER **AND**
DAVID WENGROW

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David Graeber and David Wengrow

THE DAWN OF EVERYTHING

A New History of Humanity



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About the Authors

David Graeber was a professor of anthropology at the London School of Economics. He is the author of *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* and *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*, and was a contributor to *Harper's Magazine*, *The Guardian*, and *The Baffler*. An iconic thinker and renowned activist, his early efforts helped to make Occupy Wall Street an era-defining movement. He died on 2 September 2020.

David Wengrow is a professor of comparative archaeology at the Institute of Archaeology, University College London, and has been a visiting professor at New York University. He is the author of three books, including *What Makes Civilization?*. Wengrow conducts archaeological fieldwork in various parts of Africa and the Middle East.

BY THE SAME AUTHORS

David Graeber:

*Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own
Dreams*

Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology

Lost People: Magic and the Legacy of Slavery in Madagascar

Direct Action: An Ethnography

Debt: The First 5,000 Years

The Democracy Project: A History, a Crisis, a Movement

*The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of
Bureaucracy*

Bullshit Jobs: A Theory

David Wengrow:

*The Archaeology of Early Egypt: Social Transformations in North-East
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(After A. C. Fletcher and F. La Flesche (1911), ‘The Omaha tribe’. *Twenty-seventh Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, 1905–6. Washington D.C.: Bureau of American Ethnology; and F. La Flesche (1939), *War Ceremony and Peace Ceremony of the Osage*

Indians. Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 101. Washington: US Government.)

Foreword and Dedication (by David Wengrow)

David Rolfe Graeber died aged fifty-nine on 2 September 2020, just over three weeks after we finished writing this book, which had absorbed us for more than ten years. It began as a diversion from our more ‘serious’ academic duties: an experiment, a game almost, in which an anthropologist and an archaeologist tried to reconstruct the sort of grand dialogue about human history that was once quite common in our fields, but this time with modern evidence. There were no rules or deadlines. We wrote as and when we felt like it, which increasingly became a daily occurrence. In the final years before its completion, as the project gained momentum, it was not uncommon for us to talk two or three times a day. We would often lose track of who came up with what idea or which new set of facts and examples; it all went into ‘the archive’, which quickly outgrew the scope of a single book. The result is not a patchwork but a true synthesis. We could sense our styles of writing and thought converging by increments into what eventually became a single stream. Realizing we didn’t want to end the intellectual journey we’d embarked on, and that many of the concepts introduced in this book would benefit from further development and exemplification, we planned to write sequels: no less than three. But this first book had to finish somewhere, and at 9.18 p.m. on 6 August David Graeber announced, with characteristic Twitter-flair (and loosely citing Jim Morrison), that it was done: ‘My brain feels bruised with numb surprise.’ We got to the end just as we’d started, in dialogue, with drafts passing constantly back and forth between us as we read, shared and discussed the same sources, often into the small hours of the night. David was far more than an anthropologist. He was an activist and public intellectual of international repute who tried to live his ideas about social justice and liberation, giving hope to the oppressed and inspiring countless others to follow suit. The book is dedicated to the fond memory of David Graeber

(1961–2020) and, as he wished, to the memory of his parents, Ruth Rubinstein Graeber (1917–2006) and Kenneth Graeber (1914–1996). May they rest together in peace.

Acknowledgements

Sad circumstances oblige me (David Wengrow) to write these acknowledgements in David Graeber's absence. He is survived by his wife Nika. David's passing was marked by an extraordinary outpouring of grief, which united people across continents, social classes and ideological boundaries. Ten years of writing and thinking together is a long time, and it is not for me to guess whom David would have wished to thank in this particular context. His co-travellers along the pathways that led to this book will already know who they are, and how much he treasured their support, care and advice. Of one thing I am certain: this book would not have happened – or at least not in anything remotely like its present form – without the inspiration and energy of Melissa Flashman, our wise counsel at all times in all things literary. In Eric Chinski of Farrar, Straus and Giroux and Thomas Penn of Penguin UK we found a superb editorial team and true intellectual partners. For their passionate engagements with and interventions in our thinking over many years, heartfelt thanks to Debbie Bookchin, Alpa Shah, Erhard Schüttpelz and Andrea Luka Zimmerman. For generous, expert guidance on different aspects of the book thanks to: Manuel Arroyo-Kalin, Elizabeth Baquedano, Nora Bateson, Stephen Berquist, Nurit Bird-David, Maurice Bloch, David Carballo, John Chapman, Luiz Costa, Philippe Descola, Aleksandr Diachenko, Kevan Edinborough, Dorian Fuller, Bisserka Gaydarska, Colin Grier, Thomas Grisaffi, Chris Hann, Wendy James, Megan Laws, Patricia McAnany, Barbara Alice Mann, Simon Martin, Jens Notroff, José R. Oliver, Mike Parker Pearson, Timothy Pauketat, Matthew Pope, Karen Radner, Natasha Reynolds, Marshall Sahlins, James C. Scott, Stephen Shennan and Michele Wollstonecroft.

A number of the arguments in this book were first presented as named lectures and in scholarly journals: an earlier version of [Chapter Two](#) appeared in French as 'La sagesse de Kandiaronk: la critique indigène, le

mythe du progrès et la naissance de la Gauche' (*La Revue du MAUSS*); parts of [Chapter Three](#) were first presented as 'Farewell to the childhood of man: ritual, seasonality, and the origins of inequality' (The 2014 Henry Myers Lecture, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*); of [Chapter Four](#) as 'Many seasons ago: slavery and its rejection among foragers on the Pacific Coast of North America' (*American Anthropologist*); and of [Chapter Eight](#) as 'Cities before the state in early Eurasia' (The 2015 Jack Goody Lecture, *Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology*).

Thanks to the various academic institutions and research groups that welcomed us to speak and debate on topics relating to this book, and especially to Enzo Rossi and Philippe Descola for memorable occasions at the University of Amsterdam and the Collège de France. James Thomson (formerly editor-in-chief at *Eurozine*) first helped us get our ideas out into the wider world with the essay 'How to change the course of human history (at least, the part that's already happened)', which he adopted with conviction when other publishing venues shied away; thanks also to the many translators who have extended its audience since; and to Kelly Burdick of *Lapham's Quarterly* for inviting our contribution to a special issue on the theme of democracy, where we aired some of the ideas to be found here in [Chapter Nine](#).

From the very beginning, both David and I incorporated our work on this book into our teaching, respectively at the LSE Department of Anthropology and the UCL Institute of Archaeology, so on behalf of both of us I wish to thank our students of the last ten years for their many insights and reflections. Martin, Judy, Abigail and Jack Wengrow were by my side every step of the way. My last and deepest thanks to Ewa Domaradzka for providing both the sharpest criticism and the most devoted support a partner could wish for; you came into my life, much as David and this book did: 'Rain riding suddenly out of the air, Battering the bare walls of the sun ... Rain, rain on dry ground!'

