The Worst Mistake in the History of the Human Race by Jared Diamond

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* “The Worst Mistake in Human Life”
* Agriculture is bad.
* We are humbled by our place in the universe.
* We claim that we have better advantages in this age.
* Hunter gatherer, life brutish and short, constant struggle-escape 10,000 years ago with agriculture revolution. Neolithic revolution.
* Why? Agriculture affective….band of savages exhausted getting the chance to eat from a full orchard, advantageous
* Agriculture=art maybe, since it gives us more free time. Birth of Agriculture=Birth of Civilization
* Hard to prove, however.
* Archaeologists = indirect tests, failed to support views
* Kalahari bushmen support themselves as hunter-gatherers, work less hard, free time.
* “Why should we resort to agriculture if this works?”
* Good mix of nutrition for hunter-gatherers
* 2,000+ calories a day
* Hard to die of starvation with this consistency
* Lives of hunter-gatherers aren’t brutish, despite poor living space
* Conditions before Neolithic Revo not known
* Distinguish wild animals from domesticated in research
* How can you deduce health of garbage-makers and dispute Progressives?
* Well-preserved mummies have cause of death determined by autopsy
* Feces of long-dead Indians are reserved to look for disease (e.g. hookworm, etc.) How’d you like to study ancient feces for a living?
* 5’ 9” for men average, 5’ 5” for women (In Greece and Turkey)
* After agriculture: 5’ 3”, 5’ 0” (Just after Agri. Revo)
* Heights started growing later, though average Greek/Turk is still shorter than those early averages
* Indian skeletons from Illinois, Ohio River Valley (600 skeletons)
* Maize production (early corn) in 1150 A.D.
* Compared to hunter-gatherers, 50% increase in enamel defects
* 4x more iron deficiency anemia
* 3x more cases of bone lesions
* Increase in degeneration of spine (physical labor)
* Hunter-gatherer society – 26 life expectancy
* After agriculture – 19
* Illinois Indians took up agriculture by necessity instead of choice
* “I don’t think hunter-gatherers switched to farming until they had to”
* 1. Hunter-gatherers have varied diet – Early farmers had starchy crops
* 2. Because of dependence on one crop, if it fails, huge famine (like Irish Potato Famine)
* 3. Agriculture encouraged overpopulation, carry on trade with other (overpopulated) societies, spreads disease like wildfire
* Farming helps bring class divisions
* Hunter-gatherers have almost no stored food, therefore no kings or social classes
* For farmers, control of crops = more power = higher class
* Only in farming could elitism happen, set themselves over masses
* Royal skeletons = physically better, taller
* Food affects height
* Possibly in Africa, hunting-gathering is the better choice over farming (smaller society, etc.)
* Farming women had more frequent pregnancies
* Constant pregnancy drains health
* Women in agricultural societies are sometimes beast of burden, too hard-worked compared to men at times
* Why did we switch to agriculture?
* -Might makes right, farming supports more people
* Population densities for hunter-gatherers are 100 times less
* Hunter-gatherers use infanticide to control population (one baby every four years); Farming = one every 2 years
* Feed more mouths or limit growth (farming or hunting-gathering)
* Both routes chosen, but farmers’ population grows, attack hunter-gatherers
* Hunter-gatherers forced into poor land
* Archaeologists need to reconstruct stage, revisit this switch
* Hunter-gatherers = most successful lifestyle in history?