



Homo notsosapien.

Even the most foundational stories can be changed.

— Rebecca Solnit

As the apex predator in the food chain, and the only species currently able to write down words, we got to name all the species, including our own.

We are *Homo sapiens*, the sole surviving (nonextinct) member of the genus *Homo*. Or so one member of our species, Carolus Linnaeus, the father of modern biological classification, named us in 1758. In Latin, “homo sapien” means “wise man.”

Naming ourselves—an act of nepotism rife with all the self-dealing and virtue-pandering you might expect—is a perilous art, and it’s possible we’ve gotten it dead wrong. Fortunately, our official name has not prevented various observers of the scene from coining unofficial ones.

Aristotle thought of us as *Homo politicus*, political man. Our essential quality, what most fundamentally distinguished us from our brother and sister animals, was our ability to form complex societies. For Marx, we were *Homo faber*, tool-making man: man as producer, as creator. For cultural historian Johan Huizinga, it was *Homo ludens*, game-playing man. Whether love, war, poker, or theoretical physics, we’re the species that loves to play, whose very existence is the “game of life.” For novelist T. H. White, it was *Homo ferox*, ferocious man, the species that all other species are afraid of, including our own.

Each of these stories elevates one aspect of human existence as definitional, and in so doing, provides an essential insight into who we are. Each perspective is also a product of its time: for Aristotle, the political flourishing and chaos of the Greek city-states; for Marx, the extraordinary explosion of human productivity during the Industrial Revolution; for T. H. White, the cruel fox hunts and even crueler world wars of 20th century Britain.

What of our time? In the teeth of a self-inflicted mass extinction event, what does our time teach us about the essential nature of humanity?

Maybe it is more accurate to think of ourselves as *Homo notsosapiens*? Unwise man. We might be clever, boundlessly clever, but you’d be hard-pressed to call any species that managed to work themselves into the self-defeating predicament we’ve worked ourselves into “wise”.

What name would you give our species? What “story of us” would you tell?

Maybe *Homo myopicus*? Short-sighted man. Man whose actions and wants have consequences far beyond our ability or willingness to see? Or *Homo malafide*? Bad-faith man. Man who refuses to act on what he knows to be true. Or possibly *Homo perdita*? Lost man. Man who has cut himself off from his own surrounds, from his brother and sister species and the rhythms of the cosmos, even from his own nature. This man is a stranger to himself and his world.

Or *Homo deus*? Man with the power of gods—to split atoms and undo hundreds of millions of years of geologic time in a cosmic second—who now, to paraphrase Stewart Brand, had better get good at it. Or *Homo ubercomplicaticus*. Overly complicated man. The creature who can (and everything else being equal, will) make things more complicated than it can handle. Or even, *Homo postsapiens*. The creature that—either by despoiling its own habitat, or inventing its own AI-enhanced superior⁸—is determined to extinguish itself.

There’s certainly many worse things you could say: *Homo culus*. Asshole man. *Homo somebodyelsesproblemicus*. *Homo wereallyfucked-thisupicus*.

And to a degree, it’s all true: We are irresponsible destructive assholes. We are the lost, myopic, overly complicated creature, who, wielding god-like powers yet unable to operate in good faith, is destroying itself and the world.

Can we imagine ourselves differently? Can we put some *sapiens* back into *Homo sapiens*, and earn those stripes? Instead of *Homo culus*, asshole man, why not *Homo supercoolus*? Man blessed with wonder. The creature who looks around at the world and finds it so supercool that we treat it with care and respect? Instead of *Homo somebodyelsesproblemicus*, can we become *Homo ibrokeitsoillfixiticus*? Man who takes responsibility for his own mess, who tries to heal the world he has broken. Instead of *Homo wereallyfuckedthisupicus*, can we evolve into *Homo letsunfuckthisupicus-andfast!?*

In the end, all we have is our name.