TOPIC OF THE WEEK

HAS HUMANITY ADVANCED

Yes—but **"advanced" depends on what we mean by advancement**.

Humanity has clearly advanced in some measurable respects: knowledge, medicine, technology, life expectancy, literacy, scientific understanding, and the ability to communicate and cooperate across enormous distances.

But that doesn't necessarily mean that **humanity itself has advanced**.

There is a distinction between:

Humanity has become more capable

and

Humanity has become better.

Technology can increase our power without necessarily increasing our wisdom. Scientific knowledge can expand without eliminating prejudice, violence, fear, or the desire for domination.

So we might separate advancement into three dimensions:

1. Material advancement
What can humans *do* that they couldn't do before?

2. Intellectual advancement
What do humans *understand* that they didn't understand before?

3. Moral advancement
Have humans become better at deciding **how we ought to use our knowledge and power**?

The first two can be demonstrated comparatively more easily. The third is much more difficult.

And this connects directly with your earlier questions about **politics and political change**.

Perhaps political history is partly the story of humanity acquiring **greater collective power**, while continually struggling with the question:

Can our wisdom advance as quickly as our ability to change the world?

That may be the more fundamental question behind **"Has humanity advanced?"**