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Techno-Fix: Why Technology Won't Save Us Or The Environment



Synopsis

Techno-Fix questions a primary paradigm of our age: that advanced technology will extricate us from an ever increasing load of social, environmental, and economic ills. Techno-Fix shows why negative unintended consequences of science and technology are inherently unavoidable and unpredictable, why counter-technologies, techno-fixes, and efficiency improvements do not offer lasting solutions, and why modern technology, in the presence of continued economic growth, does not promote sustainability but instead hastens collapse. The authors explore the reasons for the uncritical acceptance of new technologies; show that technological optimism is based on ignorance and that increasing consumerism and materialism, which have been facilitated by science and technology, have failed to increase happiness. The common belief that technological change is inevitable is questioned, the myth of the value-neutrality of technology is exposed and the ethics of the technological imperative: "what can be done should be done" is challenged. Techno-Fix asserts that science and technology, as currently practiced, cannot solve the many serious problems we face and that a paradigm shift is needed to reorient science and technology in a more socially responsible and environmentally sustainable direction. The authors of Techno-Fix are inside observers of the technological scene. ã Æ Educated and experienced in science and engineering, the authors deliver a highly readable, insightful and powerful critique of modern technology. The readers of Techno-Fix will learn a number of inconvenient truths about science and technology, topics that are rarely, if ever, covered in the media or discussed among professionals. Readers will be challenged to re-examine their current worldview, their paradigms and assumptions about the so-called promises of modern technology. But they will also feel empowered and inspired by the fact that most problems confronting humanity have inherently simple, low-tech solutions. Who should read Techno-Fix? Anyone concerned about the effects of technology on society and the environment; anyone teaching or studying science, engineering, medicine, or related disciplines; anyone intending to create a better future. Techno-Fix has been endorsed by Richard Heinberg, Bill McKibben, David Suzuki, William Rees, and many other important figures in the environmental and academic community.

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Customer Reviews

Technology has become our near-universal object of faith, but it is people who must provide the answers. This book should be read and discussed in every home, school, and legislature. -- Richard Heinberg, Senior Fellow at the Post Carbon Institute, author, *The End of Growth*. Technology alone won't be our salvation. This book explains why. -- Bill McKibben, Schumann Distinguished Scholar at Middlebury College, author, *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet*. Possibly the best myth-busting book the environmental movement has ever seen. -- William Rees, Professor, University of British Columbia, author, *Our Ecological Footprint*. Science and technology have advanced impressively and have promised much over the past century, but as this book shows, it is suicidal to put our hopes in such promises. -- David Suzuki, Professor emeritus, University of British Columbia, host, *The Nature of Things*, author of 43 books. Techno-fix shows how unsustainable and destructive technologies, shaped and driven by the profit motive, have emerged as a major cause of harm to people and the earth. We need to go beyond a blind techno-religion and this book shows us how. -- Vandana Shiva, New Delhi based environmental and anti-globalization activist, philosopher, author of 20 books. This book is outstanding, the most thorough, clear, systematic refutation that I've seen of the absurd idea that new technology will be our savior from advancing ecological breakdown - A must-read for anyone seeking realistic pathways forward. -- Jerry Mander, Founder, International Forum on Globalization. Salvation by technological advance and unlimited growth is the blind dogma of our age. The Huesemanns provide a devastatingly cogent and well-referenced critique of this modern Gnosticism, as well some good alternative ideas. Highly recommended! --Herman Daly, Former World Bank Senior Economist, author, *Steady-State Economics*, and *Ecological Economics*. Techno-Fix deals with a wide range of issues at the core of the sustainability crisis, showing that these problems are not going to be solved by technical advances which leave the fundamental structures and values of

rampant consumer society in place...Techno-Fix goes beyond technical issues to consider the social, economic and philosophical dimensions of our predicament. TED TRAINER University of New South Wales

Michael Huesemann, PhD is a research scientist with a special interest in sustainability and critical science. He has specialized in environmental biotechnology for more than 25 years. Joyce Huesemann, PhD is an activist and academic who has taught at several universities and participates in environmental, wildlife protection and companion-animal organizations.

I have worked in biotechnology for about 50 years. I also develop graduate courses related to the anthropogenic impacts on the environment - especially the marine environment. While I agree with the basic tenet of this book - that technology will not eliminate the impacts of human overpopulation of the planetary ecosystems that support that population, the authors fail to adequately grasp the multiplier affect of overpopulation not only on negative anthropogenic impacts, but as well the temporal limits aspects of overpopulation on the depletion and dilution of critical resources necessary to maintain the current still growing human population and its historically underestimated future growth. The authors fail to approach critical resources in terms of basic math and consumption economics - and even first define and quantify what a sustainable human population might number. Instead they pursue numerous sociological solutions - while failing to understand that the social failings of the current overpopulation is what produced our problems to start with and the difficulty of changing that society en mass. Their expectations for this same society to suddenly change sufficiently to correct those failings in time is at best grossly improbable, if not totally absurd. The authors biggest failing is to address the necessity of relatively rapid human population reductions (say five generations to get back to 1 billion) and to explore the difficulty if not impossibility of negative growth economics during the period of negative population and market growth. Essentially, the book is the typical social science approach to the grossly unsustainable over population of humans and the problems it has created. Most of the solutions they propose are already attempted and are or have failed, demonstrably impractical, and are physically impossible in terms of the laws of thermodynamics, While technology will not balance and make human overpopulation sustainable, neither will the sociological solutions of that same overpopulation recognize its social failings, fix them at their own expense (population reduction), nor could they do so in a timely manner to prevent our impending species resource critical depletion and dilution collapse. There are no solutions to true human population sustainability that don't first deal with the problem of

overpopulation and have a workable population reduction plan and an accompanying economic strategy that prevents global chaos. While TechnoFix may be arguably better than previous social based commentaries, it misses the mark a lot on providing real scientifically based solutions.

Welcome to our all-you-can-eat buffet of eco-predicaments, a remarkable achievement brought to you by our old friend, technological innovation. Our friend isn't evil.

He's a hilarious charismatic trickster who excels at making comical mistakes.

Every brilliant idea blows up in his face, flattens him with a boulder, or rockets him over a cliff. He never gives up. He never learns from his mistakes. He never succeeds. Like the trickster, Americans are famous for our manic techno-optimism. Economic growth and material progress make us giddy with delight, and seventy-two percent of us believe that the benefits far outweigh the harms. The planet doesn't matter. Technology will certainly enable the kids to have a somewhat life-like experience, riveted to their glowing screens. A sane person can only conclude that we live in a world of illusions. Techno-Fix, by Michael and Joyce Huesemann, takes us on a voyage through the hall of illusions. It provides readers with magic x-ray glasses that allow us to see right through heavy layers of encrusted bull excrement and clearly observe our way of life in its bare-naked essence. It delivers a super-sized serving of precious common sense that should be a central part of every youngster's rite of passage, but isn't. The human species invented techno-addiction, a dangerous habit that seems impossible to quit; we always need bigger doses. This addiction has put quite a kink in our evolutionary journey, repeatedly blowing up in our face. Science and technology are the mommy and daddy of most of our severe problems. No other species has developed a fascination with endless growth. The other critters have remained in balance for millions of years, limited by predators and food supply, nature's brilliant time-proven design. The Huesemanns note that we took a different path. "Humans have used powerful technologies to escape these natural constraints, first by using weapons to eliminate large predators, then by inventing agriculture to increase food supplies, and finally by employing sanitation and medical technologies to increase their chances for survival. Our devious experiments at controlling and exploiting nature have created a thousand nightmares. We've zoomed right past seven billion, giving the planet quite a fever. Still, the mainstream mindset is convinced that life is always getting better and better, and that technology will overcome any challenges on our joyride to utopia. We have no doubt economic growth can continue until the sun burns out, and nothing will ever slow us down. According to Huesemann's Law of Techno-Optimism,

~f~c~ â ~ Å“Optimism is inversely proportional to knowledge.~f~c~ â ~ Å•The mainstream mindset is so weird ~f~c~ â ~ Å â • it celebrates the benefits of technology, and steps around the stinky messes, pretending not to see them. Innovation is never a free lunch. Every benefit has costs, and it~f~c~ â ~ Å â„cs impossible to predict every unintended consequence. When serious problems are discovered, we tend to resolve them with additional innovation, which generates additional unintended consequences. We can delay paying the bills for our mistakes, but every debt must and will be paid. It~f~c~ â ~ Å â„cs something like quicksand.A century ago, the benefits of the automobile were immediately apparent, and the staggering unintended consequences were not. This technology has caused huge damage to our health, our families and communities, the ecosystem, and the unborn. Car problems are still growing, as billions of people in the developing world are eager to live as foolishly as Americans do. The car and the television are our two biggest techno-bloopers, according to the Huesemanns.Foolish fantasies are the deliberate consequence of the mass media and advertising, which are tremendously successful at persuading folks that the purpose of life is to transfer as much stuff as possible from nature to landfills.

~f~c~ â ~ Å Å“Needs~f~c~ â ~ Å Å• are what is necessary for survival and health, like food, shelter, and community. ~f~c~ â ~ Å Å“Wants~f~c~ â ~ Å Å• are things we have no need for, stuff we have sudden impulses to acquire. They are infinite in number, constantly changing, generally frivolous, and often useless.The path to consumer happiness and high status involves devoting a substantial portion of our lives to doing various sorts of work. For many, the work is less than meaningful or satisfying. The reward is trade tokens, which are used to acquire wants, and each purchase provides a brief consumer orgasm. The thrill is soon gone, the gnawing returns, and we are compelled to go back to the mall and get another fix.No matter how hard we thrash our credit cards, we never arrive at our destination ~f~c~ â ~ Å â • wholeness and contentment.

~f~c~ â ~ Å Å“We are chasing a mirage, thereby remaining forever dissatisfied and unhappy.~f~c~ â ~ Å Å• In the last 50 years, rates of depression in the U.S. have increased tenfold, and continue to rise (rates among the Amish are far lower).Depression is also a result of our mobility and isolation. Until the industrial era, most people spent their entire lives in stable communities, and formed long-term social bonds with the people around them. Before the hell of automobiles, daily life included pleasant face-to-face encounters with others. Before the hell of glowing screens, people spent little time sitting alone.Luckily, technology has a daffy response for any problem. It~f~c~ â ~ Å â„cs far easier to develop techno solutions than social solutions. Rather than attempting the social challenge of creating a way of life that isn~f~c~ â ~ Å â„çt so lonely and dreary, technology can simply chase away depression and anxiety with happy pills.

It's easier to build new road systems than it is to convince people to give up their cars. It's easier to provide life-saving surgeries than it is to encourage people to vacate their couches and eat a healthy diet. The Huesemanns harbor special loathing for the medical industry. It's extremely expensive, and remarkably ineffective. Intelligent, low cost preventative care is not the focus. New treatments are constantly being developed. The dead generate no profits, so we keep very sick people alive on machines; we transplant organs. Death must be delayed by any means necessary, regardless of cost. "If it can be done, it should be done." We need to remember that old age and death are normal and natural. The last section of the book provides the theoretical solutions to our predicaments. This plan requires world leaders that will eagerly cooperate in rapidly and radically reconfiguring the way we live and think. It requires a humankind that is spiritually connected to nature, people who abhor pollution and mindless consumption, folks willing to make enormous sacrifices in order to ensure the wellbeing of future generations of all species. Energy will be renewable, non-renewable resources will be shunned, and all wastes will be safely biodegradable. The Huesemanns warn us that the transition might not be easy.

This is one of the most influential books I have read in a long time. The research and presentation really helped me understand the technological paradigm we are in and how it has brought us to the mess we are in today. I would recommend this to anyone who thinks that technology is the sacred calf it is presented to be.

This is one of the best overall analyses of technology I've read. For a more thorough look at the culturally-mediating aspects of technology, there is no better than C.A. Bowers. The Anarchist Library also contains quite a few essays on technology. John Zerzan is another brilliant writer. And Richard Heinberg demonstrates how the belief in "green energy" is a sham.

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