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To Save Everything, Click Here: The Folly Of Technological Solutionism



Synopsis

A New York Times Notable Book of the Year In the very near future, "smart" technologies and "big data" will allow us to make large-scale and sophisticated interventions in politics, culture, and everyday life. Technology will allow us to solve problems in highly original ways and create new incentives to get more people to do the right thing. But how will such "solutionism" affect our society, once deeply political, moral, and irresolvable dilemmas are recast as uncontroversial and easily manageable matters of technological efficiency? What if some such problems are simply vices in disguise? What if some friction in communication is productive and some hypocrisy in politics necessary? The temptation of the digital age is to fix everything—from crime to corruption to pollution to obesity—by digitally quantifying, tracking, or gamifying behavior. But when we change the motivations for our moral, ethical, and civic behavior we may also change the very nature of that behavior. Technology, Evgeny Morozov proposes, can be a force for improvement—but only if we keep solutionism in check and learn to appreciate the imperfections of liberal democracy. Some of those imperfections are not accidental but by design. Arguing that we badly need a new, post-Internet way to debate the moral consequences of digital technologies, *To Save Everything, Click Here* warns against a world of seamless efficiency, where everyone is forced to wear Silicon Valley's digital straitjacket.

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Customer Reviews

Snarky? Check. Contrarian? Check. Demanding? Check. That's enough checks for me: most books

don't go that far. So, to be blunt: whatever its flaws, this book deserves to be widely read and argued about. Is it perfect? Hell no. Morozov doesn't know when to stop and he is occasionally too full of himself to be enjoyable; at times, this book reads like "Imagine That: Some People Are Wrong on the Internet About the Internet." (Morozov, of course, would say that this last sentence is pure nonsense, for "the Internet" doesn't exist. Okay, Professor!) He's lucky his relatives are no Internet theorists - or he would destroy them as well (that's a Pavlik Morozov joke right there!) The book somehow manages to stay extremely funny (Morozov has a great eye for the ridiculous and the surreal; his epigrams are hilarious - especially the Franny Armstrong quote comparing soccer and the Internet) and also very serious (too serious at times; there's way too much theory in it - it could easily lose some Dewey and Giddens, not to mention of that other enfant terrible, Bruno Latour). There's a certain schizophrenic flavor to this text: after all, here's an Internet pundit writing a biting manifesto against Internet punditry. Morozov's critique is both of substance that underpins much Internet thinking - it overlooks deeply political and moral questions and only focuses on efficiency and innovation - and of its style - it presents the Internet as a coherent and revolutionary force, a theoretical move that we have taken for granted for far too long.

The computer revolution has affected humanity more forcefully than anything since the industrial revolution. Among the prominent effects of such profound shifts is an appalling anesthetization of thinking capacity. Roughly, the old ways don't work any more, and the new aren't developed enough to work properly. The upshot is a helpless stasis, in which two sides sputter meaninglessly at each other. Intellectual adherents of the traditions into which they were born--virtually everyone with a brain--have no choice but to react to the novelties with backward looking resistance. But champions of the new rarely know what they're talking about, having both dismissed everything ever written previously, but also failing to notice that they have no concepts to celebrate the new except advertising slogans and vapid tosh. They, too, though they serve up bring jargon-rich enthusiasm, have no real understanding of what is happening. Enter Evgeny Morozov. This book is a scathing attack on advocates of "the Internet," which Morozov invariably and rightly puts in scare quotes, because its champions celebrate a sinister chimera. It is a careful and thoughtful analysis of how we do and can think, of how can formulate our problems in order to solve them. The connection of these two aims is the heart of the book. Morozov makes a formidable and depressing case for a crazed, cheerleaderly numbness in our time, in which enthusiasm for technological means makes us virtually incapable of understanding their relation to real and possible ends. At the least, he annihilates the case for cyber utopias and technological optimism, through convincing

demonstrations that they are poorly argued and factually groundless.

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