

# Book review: 'Technology vs. Humanity'



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Reading renowned futurist Gerd Leonhard's "Technology vs. Humanity" is like drinking out of a firehose or eating a particularly luxurious meal: fulfilling yet overwhelming, and ultimately the highlight of your day.

I loved this book.

It serves as a warning that humanity is standing at a precipice, and that the development of technology will erode our collective sense of humanity if we, capital W, don't hit pause, step back, and consider the effects of our forward charge into the future.

"I am convinced the groundwork for the future of humanity - positive or dystopian - is being laid here, today," he writes.

The opus is a giant record-scratch on the Walt Disney World kind of thinking, illustrating there's a darkness to every dream, and that all "magic truly does come with a price." Particularly fascinating is his foray into the future if we get it wrong. By 2028, "free will is only for the rich," he predicts. That terrifying result could be our immediate future. Gulp.

Indeed, there's something for everyone in this book; an "entry point" for every readers' persuasion that better helps connect us to the subjects at hand. Get fired up about religion? Gerd does too. Leonhard argues that tech's breakneck development will change how we think of God. Love a good dystopian thriller? SO. DOES. GERD. In fact, he warns that those science fiction movies we devour could be closer to science fact if something doesn't change.

One of his effective argumentative tricks is almost passive-aggressively breaking his own words with unrelated block-text quotations from other thinkers. Their ideas magnify his own, and he knows it. You can almost see Gerd off somewhere sipping tea, saying, "well, don't take my word for it, take Tesla's or Picasso's or DeSouza's."

This simple device is particularly effective when he begins his discussion on the increasing preeminence of the Internet of Things. Bridging the paragraphs between the current state of IoT tech and his predictions from the future is a nugget from Sophocles: "Nothing vast enters the life of mortals without a curse." Shots fired. It's moments like these that he heightens the all-too-real drama and grounds his eventual predictions. No, we're not just hearing from an enthused futurist; we're hearing from a man who echoes, with greater sharpness, the thoughts from some of the world's greatest thinkers.

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While he's vested in the actual answers, he's more concerned that you're asking the right questions – or asking the questions at all. One finishes the book both breathless with possibility and deflated with discouragement.

While these “big questions” and perspectives can be overwhelming at times, their presence invites engagement more than most other books I've ever read. I'm usually a pen-in-hand reader, but with “Technology vs. Humanity,” my copy's margins were absolutely littered with scribbles, counter-queries and responses.

The book is not about providing answers, although he does give the occasional societal diagnosis and provide some ideas to get it right, like his 15 “daring Shall Nots.” Ultimately, it becomes about being on “Team Human,” and his work is more concerned with getting the people talking.

In classic Gerd style, he leaves us with another question: “What will you do to further the conversation in your organization, community, family, and friendship circles?”

Privacy and security pros, the floor is yours.

*Editor's Note: Futurist Gerd Leonhard will discuss the future of human-machine interactions and the subsequent privacy questions they raise during a keynote at the IAPP Europe Data Protection Congress 2016 (<https://iapp.org/conference/iapp-europe-data-protection-congress/sessions/?id=a191a00000tATVAA2>) in Brussels on Nov. 7-10.*

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