

The Second Machine Age: Book Report by Grace Van Farowe

Works Cited

Brynjolfsson, Erik, and Andrew McAfee. *The Second Machine Age: Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies*. W. W. Norton & Co, 2016.

Summary

The book compares the digital revolution to the Industrial Revolution of the 1800s. It uses Moore's Law to explain the rapid economic growth since the rise of computers. Our cheap, powerful technology creates a bounty of information and data. But it has also contributed to economic inequality. Digitization can lead to monopolies, since everyone has access to the same resources online. It also means the loss of many high paying, low-skill jobs that machines can do easily.

But the authors argue that although this bounty may temporarily put people out of work, it will eventually create new opportunities. They recommend that the United States should invest more in education, incorporating technology and higher expectations. They believe in the power of the collective, wanting to lift people out of poverty and educate them well. They argue that crowdsourcing from people with a variety of backgrounds is the best way to solve scientific problems. Looking ahead, the authors conclude that technology growth will bring challenges, but ultimately, if we make the right choices, more opportunities for human creativity and connection.

Quotes

"When technology advances too quickly for education to keep up, inequality generally rises."

"There is no better resource for improving the world and bettering the state of humanity than the world's humans—all 7.1 billion of us."

"Work saves a man from three great evils: boredom, vice, and need." – Voltaire

My perspective

In its examination of economic justice and data science, I think this book fits in with our class themes. I appreciated that instead of trying to make grand predictions for the future, the authors acknowledged the role of our choices. One critique I had of the book is that it didn't sufficiently address the problem of data privacy. The book's perspective is somewhat utilitarian, with economic growth and human progress seen as the ultimate good. However, from a value ethics perspective, I think contentment is an important virtue we need to incorporate into our worldviews.