

MUST-READ: Jonathan Sperber’s *The Age of Interconnection*:



The first review I have seen:

**Gavin Jacobson:** [How the world turned global](#): *Jonathan Sperber’s The Age of Interconnection surveys the second half of the 20th century but fails to explain the ideas that shaped it:* “To impose a master concept on a period between 1945 and the Millennium that eludes more rhapsodic description— an extensive panorama of the global trends and realignments that shaped the six decades that followed the Second World War.... Scientific and technological developments during the two wars— determined the social trends, economic institutions and industrial policies in the period that followed. What was different about the second half of the 20th century, in Sperber’s account, was the depth and speed of political, economic and informational exchanges that criss-crossed the globe, —integrating far-flung continents and countries of very different levels of economic development, social structures, and political systems—. Global uniformities and interconnections were forged by design—. Smartly defined at the outset, the analysis subsequently dissolves in a bath of granular detail. Brute empiricism has won an expensive victory over both synoptic vision and, presumably, wider readership—. Those in the market for minutiae such as crop breeding, Asian stewardesses, or international sales of Tupperware will find *The Age of Interconnection* useful; those looking for overarching theories or conceptually rich accounts of the modern order, as found in the macrosociology of Michael Mann or the world-system analysis of Immanuel Wallerstein, will find little revelation. Sperber’s — reverence for *The Transformation of the World*, JÄ¼rgen Osterhammel’s 1,000-page opus on the 19th century—. Sperber shares Osterhammel’s view that it isn’t possible —eto fix the dynamic of an epoch in a single schema—. And what of neoliberalism? The term itself, as well as —oliberalism—, appears only once in the book, a striking absence given its dominance over the thought-world of the West for the last half century...

This is a —he did not write the book that I would have written!— review.

Here’s my thumbnail excerpt from Sperber:

**Jonathan Sperber:** [The Age of Interconnection: A Global History of the Second Half of the Twentieth Century](#): —Imagining the Era—. 1. The rate of global economic and population growth over the years 1950—“ 73— greater than at any previous time—. 2. In 1950, the United States was the only country in the world with at least 250 privately owned automobiles per thousand people—. By 2000, there were twenty-four countries—. 3. In the five years after the end of the Second World War, one person in thirteen in the world was a refugee. 4. About one-tenth as many people were killed in wars of the second half of the twentieth century as during the two World Wars—. 5. The decolonization of Asia and Africa— saw the end of the largest colonial empires in human history. 6.— Human presence in space has been limited to low earth orbit—. 7. As late as 1960, atmospheric CO2 levels were little above their preindustrial values—. 8. By 2000, there were more women university students than men—. 9. In 1960— commercial passenger aircraft were propeller planes; by 1970— jets. 10—. antibiotics— DDT, and— mass vaccination— reduced infectious disease so drastically in the quarter century after 1945—. 11. In 1995, there were only sixteen million users of the Internet—. Five years later— 361 million—. How [can] all these— be understood as part of a broader historical process, and not merely as a succession of disconnected headlines[?]—

As I have said, I remember one coffee with Berkeley colleagues where all three of us agreed we would each give a limb to write something as great as Jonathan’s *Karl Marx: A 19th-Century Life*.

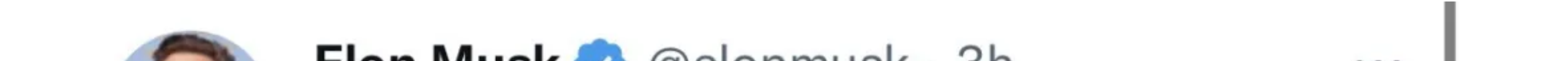
This book is not quite so good. I am not so sure that there can be a thematic unity for the period 1950 to 2000. But, if there can be, Jonathan’s decision to make it —interconnection— appears to me to be the most fruitful theme to explore.

And so I blurred it: —A truly brilliant, gripping, and readable history of the 1945-2001 world, making a very persuasive case that globalization is the main thread for economics, politics, and sociology in moving toward not utopia but at least a world in which a smaller proportion of us are in dire want and desperate fear.—

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ONE IMAGE: Elon Musk Did Nazi This Coming!:

But he really should have—





**Elon Musk**  @elonmusk · 3h

I hope that the people of **Brazil** are able to resolve matters peacefully



16.5K



12.1K



124.7K



**Elon Musk**  @elonmusk · Dec 14, 2022

Replying to [@elonmusk](#) [@conexaopolitica](#) and [@VitalikButerin](#)

Twitter may have people on the **Brazil** team that are strongly politically biased



1,353



3,071



15.8K



**Elon Musk**  @elonmusk · Dec 3, 2022

Replying to [@OzraeliAvi](#)

I've seen a lot of concerning tweets about the



I've seen a lot of concerning tweets about the recent **Brazil** election. If those tweets are accurate, it's possible that Twitter personnel gave preference to left wing candidates.



15.9K



52.3K



239.4K



Elon Musk: Sufficiently stupid to buy Peter Theil's line that to be pro-democracy is to be "apolitically biased". And sufficiently stupid to believe that, as a plutocrat, kleptocrats regard him as their friend rather than their prey.

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## ONE VIDEO: Christy Romer's Presidential Address:

Christy Romer: [AEA Presidential Address](#)

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## Very Briefly Noted:

- Jonathan Koren:** "This episode of NPR's Planet Money has an absolutely wild ending. The episode feature the reporter reading children's books to 3rd graders in an Ohio school. The stories were screened by the school district, and a district official sat in on the class. The final story is Dr Seuss's Sneetches. The district official cuts the story off, because she's afraid it's talking about how racism is bad. Think about that! *The Ohio Republican Party has decided that "all of us here are Americans" is an un-American thing to say.*
- Martin van Creveld** (1982): [Fighting Power: German & U.S. Army Performance, 1939-1945](#): "The [Nazi] Army [made] a deliberate choice to maintain at all costs that which was believed to be decisive to the conduct of war: mutual trust, a willingness to assume responsibility, and the right and duty of subordinate commanders at all levels to make independent decisions and carry them out! *I really want a very good sociologist to teach me about "institutions" in the sense of how they with their performative excellences and incapacities absorb and train "rapidly absorb and train "individuals and persist over time.*
- Tom Chivers:** [Three Amigos & Goldilocks](#): "Kevin McCarthy... made a series of concessions to his critics.... The most globally important vote comes in September, if McCarthy lasts that long: whether to raise the limit on U.S. government borrowing.... Failing to increase it could trigger a limited default, throwing the world economy into chaos! *Were I a Republican "moderate", I would hold up the Rules Package for three days until I got my own Secret Protocol!*
- Rana Faroohar:** [Hyper-efficiency is bad business](#): "Southwest shows management by numbers has gone too far! *I am not sure if it is "management by numbers" as, rather, invulnerability to certain kinds of disruptions, and a failure to have gamed-out in advance how they would recover from them.*
- Mike Sington:** "In a "speech" at Mar-a-Lago, psycho ex-president Trump claims President Biden "convinced Putin to go into Ukraine"! *In a sense, yes: Biden's policies convinced Putin that last winter was his last chance to reabsorb Ukraine into Muscovy. This was, I think, a genuine use-it or lost-it "Thucydides trap" (even though naming it after Thucydides is mostly fake.)*
- Dan Hon:** "Ken MacLeod's *Beyond the Hallowed Sky* was a quick enjoyable read, first in a trilogy. Quietly resigned as to its explicable unavailability as an ebook in the US despite coming out in November 2021 in the UK! *Mamma did not teach Bradford to read the first volume of any trilogy before the third volume is out.*
- Julian Sanchez:** "Deleted the app a while back, but still poking my head in at Twitter every few days and hoo boy is it giving off late-stage MySpace vibes! *I am not seeing this. Maybe my Twitter feed is overcurated?*
- Brian Katulis:** [Why Biden Should Build New Coalitions to Support America's Foreign Policy](#): "America's global engagement offers the best option to make Americans more secure and prosperous! *Well, yes. But the only politically viable way forward is to focus not on globalization, but on freeworldization..*
- Daniel Rasmussen:** [Venture capital's reckoning looms closer](#): "Valuations on holdings will have to converge sooner rather than later with listed tech sector! *Why do they have to? This is a kind of thing that happens only immediately after the top two levels of any organization I've been forced to resign in disgrace.*
- Howard Schneider:** [Fed has 'difficult' call to avoid overdoing rates shock, Romer says](#): "Tough for the U.S. central bank to avoid overdoing it with higher-than-needed interest rates, a top economic adviser in the Obama White House said after a fresh review of Fed policy since World War Two! "We are just now entering the window where the effects might start to be noticed" Christina Romer! told a national gathering of economists late on Saturday! *yes. Of course. But the little birdies are all telling me that the median member of today's FOMC does not appear capable of understanding the magnitude of all the tightening that is still in the pipeline..*

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## As:

This strikes me as substantially premature. Throwing huge amounts of money at the creation of communities of engineering practice is likely, in the end, to create a quality of its own. The question, I think, is whether the Chinese government has the will and the resources to persist. And to the extent that there are a few clearly visible pathways to technological development—the extent to which things are like rocket science—the odds of China's success may well be better than Noah thinks:

**Noah Smith:** [China's industrial policy has mostly been a flop](#): "Not the juggernaut that people thought!. China's leaders got the idea that they needed to throw resources at favored industries!. The amount of money China was throwing around had become much bigger (in absolute terms or relative to GDP) than anything Japan or South Korea had ever spent! focused on *leapfrogging* the U.S. and its allies in new high-tech fields... [Made in China 2025](#) initiative.... China still doesn't look on track to achieve dominance.... AI... aerospace... [top robot makers](#).... China's bid to dominate the IT sector was quashed when Xi Jinping decided he [didn't really like the IT sector](#). [However,] China is on track to [dominate the electric vehicle industry](#), and is an important player in railway equipment!. And of course, the biggest disappointment has been the semiconductor industry.... China's *desire* to make its own chips increased. But desire doesn't equal reality. A lot of the money that China's government was hurling at the semiconductor industry seemed to wind up in the pockets of corrupt grifters!. Mass production of high-end chips is still not happening!

The possibility that Microsoft may be able to solve the LLM "hallucination" problem and so disrupt search in a way that Google cannot even attempt to do is, I think, a live one. Otherwise, I think this is premature. We really do not know enough about what these technologies will be to even begin starting to guess how individual companies will take advantage

or be challenged by them:

**Ben Thompson:** [AI & the Big Five](#): “Apple... “Smart companies try to commoditize their products” complements “Stable Diffusion is remarkable... because the model is surprisingly small.... Apple, to its immense credit, has seized this opportunity.” Meta! I think that AI is a massive opportunity for Meta and worth the huge capital expenditures.... The long-term solution to ATT, though, is to build probabilistic models by massive fleets of GPUs.... ATT hurt Meta more than any other company but in the long run it should deepen Meta’s moat. This level of investment simply isn’t viable for the also-rans in digital advertising!. Google.... And yet... there aren’t any actual products.... Generative AI may, in the specific context of search, represent a disruptive innovation instead of a sustaining one.... I’m not calling the top for Google; [I did that previously](#) and was [hilariously wrong](#)!. Microsoft... seems the best placed of all.... Bing! is like the Mac on the eve of the iPhone: yes it contributes a fair bit of revenue...

I so do wish. Maranatha! Maranatha! Maranatha!:

**Dan Shipper:** [The End of Organizing](#): “Note taking is building a relationship with a future version of yourself”. For a long time, the way we’ve tried to make this relationship work is by creating organizational systems. The best way to make sure future versions of ourselves had the right notes at the right time was by constructing Rube Goldberg machines of tags, notebook hierarchies, and bi-directional links. But ultimately, the organizing solutions we’ve built are brittle. We build and abandon new systems all the time, and rarely, if ever, go back to look at old notes. Paying for a new notes tool is like signing up for a gym membership on January 1. You know you’ll abandon it, but the money you spend soothes your anxiety about not making the most of what you have. AI changes this equation. When you have intelligence at your disposal, you don’t need to organize.

I think there is an implicit assumption inside here that Tyler needs to examine: "reading" is not one thing. I there are several very different processes that take place between the ears, depending on the kind of thing that one is reading. And I do not think we know enough about how we acquire the ability to make these different processes work. Putting a copy of Plato in front of somebody is not sufficient:

**Tyler Cowen:** [How AI will reshape politics, education, creativity, & pet ownership](#): “Reading Plato, Kant, or Adam Smith gives you a sense of a vision and big-picture thinking that the AIs won’t be able to give us for some while “ maybe never. [If] simply scanning the internet for facts, the AI might give you a very good digest and you’ll then seek out the radically original big-picture thinking. ChatGPT and other devices are smart in a way humans are not. So you have to up your estimate on the possibility of other kinds of intelligences being quite impressive. ChatGPT gets smart in large part because it has so much training data. [In terms of] just having access to a lot of training data in your environment, it seems a lot of animals, plants, etc. have that. So your estimate about how easy it is for intelligence to evolve should go up somewhat. That means the number of intelligent aliens out there should be higher than it was a few months ago.

As I said above, the “moderates” in the Republican caucus need to make it very clear to Kevin McCarthy that for him job number one is helping them get reelected in their swing district in two years, not legislating “since that is not going to happen” and not appeasing the Handmaid Caucus. Holding up the Rules Package for three days until they get their own Secret Protocol seems the best way to do that:

**Jake Sherman & John Bresnahan:** [Punchbowl News AM](#): “The first test of the Speaker Kevin McCarthy era will come tonight as House Republicans try to pass their rules package for the 118th Congress. It should get through, but after last week’s [excruciating fiasco](#) on the floor, House Republicans can’t take anything for granted. There’s also a secret three-page addendum that McCarthy and his allies hashed out during several days of grueling negotiations. Tony Gonzales (Texas) and Nancy Mace (S.C.) complain; McCarthy gave up too much. Moderates feel like they need to stand up to GOP leadership’s catering to conservatives now or else they’ll get steamrolled for the next two years. Furthermore, there are potential cuts to defense spending as part of the deal with McCarthy’s opponents, which rankles hawks. Social programs will get slashed by an ever bigger margin, maybe \$100 billion or more. Vulnerable Republicans will have to vote for these cuts knowing they won’t go anywhere in the Senate.

Supercool! Underlines how little we know, still, about materials science:

**David L. Chandler:** [Riddle solved: Why was Roman concrete so durable?](#): “Researchers have assumed that the key to the ancient concrete’s durability was based on one ingredient: pozzolanic material such as volcanic ash... shipped all across the vast Roman empire to be used in construction... described as a key ingredient.... [Also] millimeter-scale bright white mineral features... lime clasts... "not found in modern concrete formulations, so why are they present in these ancient materials? Hot-mixed concrete that incorporated both ancient and modern formulations, deliberately cracked them, and then ran water.... Within two weeks the cracks had completely healed and the water could no longer flow...

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