



Not So Fast: Thinking Twice about Technology

By Doug Hill

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There's a well-known story about an older fish who swims by two younger fish and asks, "How's the water?" The younger fish are puzzled. "What's water?" they ask.

Many of us today might ask a similar question: What's technology? Technology defines the world we live in, yet we're so immersed in it, so encompassed by it, that we mostly take it for granted. Seldom, if ever, do we stop to ask what technology is. Failing to ask that question, we fail to perceive all the ways it might be shaping us.

Usually when we hear the word "technology," we automatically think of digital devices and their myriad applications. As revolutionary as smartphones, online shopping, and social networks may seem, however, they fit into long-standing, deeply entrenched patterns of technological thought as well as practice. Generations of skeptics have questioned how well served we are by those patterns of thought and practice, even as generations of enthusiasts have promised that the latest innovations will deliver us, soon, to Paradise. We're not there yet, but the cyber utopians of Silicon Valley keep telling us it's right around the corner.

What is technology, and how is it shaping us? In search of answers to those crucial questions, *Not So Fast* draws on the insights of dozens of scholars and artists who have thought deeply about the meanings of machines. The book explores such dynamics as technological drift, technological momentum, technological disequilibrium, and technological autonomy to help us understand the interconnected, interwoven, and interdependent phenomena of our technological world. In the course of that exploration, Doug Hill poses penetrating questions of his own, among them: Do we have as much control over our machines as we think? And who can we rely on to guide the technological forces that will determine the future of the planet?

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Editorial Review

Review

Lively, fast moving, always entertaining, *Not So Fast* offers a grand overview of the extravagant hopes and dire warnings that accompany the arrival of powerful new technologies. Blending the key ideas of classic and contemporary thinkers, Doug Hill explores the aspirations of those who strive for the heavens of artifice and those who find the whole enterprise a fool's errand. This is the most engaging, readable work on the great debates in technology criticism now available and a solid contribution to that crucial yet unsettling tradition. (Langdon Winner *author of Autonomous Technology: Technics-out-of-Control as a Theme in Political Thought and The Whale and the Reactor: A Search for Limits in an Age of High Technology*)

This is the technology criticism I've been waiting for?aware of the history of technology criticism and the history of changing attitudes toward technology, and at the same time attuned to contemporary developments. *Not So Fast* is readable, meticulously sourced, and, above all?nuanced. I recommend it for technology critics and enthusiasts alike. (Howard Rheingold *author of Tools for Thought, The Virtual Community, Smart Mobs and Net Smart*)

Doug Hill's *Not So Fast* has to be one of the five best books on technology I've read over the past decade. Hill has a remarkable command of the technology creators, analysts, and critics, such as Ellul, Heidegger, Kurzweil, Gates, Jobs, Mumford, Borgmann, and McLuhan. He approaches technology from several helpful angles. His prose is clear, convincing, and often droll! *Not So Fast* must be part of any reflection on our culture and future. (David W. Gill, Professor of Workplace Theology & Business Ethics, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, President, International Jacques Ellul Society)

Not So Fast addresses the primary questions of the day: how can we construct a coherent story about what is happening to us? And what can we do about it? Anyone interested in the future of the human project will benefit hugely from Doug Hill's lucid performance. (James Howard Kunstler *author of Too Much Magic, The Long Emergency and The Geography of Nowhere*)

Not So Fast reflects, in addition to Doug Hill's consummate skill as a writer, his deep knowledge of the history and the philosophy of technology. His reflections are grounded in that knowledge and at the same time are original and profound. I've worked and traveled in the highest reaches of the tech world for more than twenty years and I still learned much from this book. (Allen Noren, Vice President, Online, O'Reilly Media)

Never have I experienced such a probing, in-depth analysis of the push-and-pull of technology as a driver, determining force, savior or disease of our species. (Roger Cubicciotti, former chair, Center of Innovation for Nanobiotechnology, North Carolina Biotechnology Center; Visiting Scholar, Department of Physics, Wake Forest University)

It's crucial?even as we sin?ever deeper into our mediated world?that we pay attention to the technology engulfing us. This book helps draw the baseline that we're leaving behind, and perhaps will slow down the flight from reality. (Bill McKibben *activist and author, Enough, The Age of Missing Information and The End of Nature*)

This book is the most comprehensive, provocative, and entertaining review of technological thought, expression, impact and controversy that I have yet seen. Written in a remarkably straightforward and open

style, and seemingly without personal axes to grind, Doug Hill provides details and insight into the evolution of technology over the last millennium, while focusing on the debates, pro and con, that shaped many stages of recent development. The book is more than just a discourse; it's an informal encyclopedia of perspectives, predictions, debates and consequences of our society's technologic evolution; the upsides, and perhaps more-so, the downsides; and is more comprehensive and efficient in these explorations than anything that has preceded it. And yet it is easy reading, personable, and charming. An extraordinary achievement. (Jerry Mander, Founder and Chair of the International Forum on Globalization and author of *Arguments for the Elimination of Television; In the Absence of the Sacred; and The Capitalism Papers – Fatal Flaws in an Obsolete System*)

Not So Fast is a really fine piece of work. I wish I'd written it. Anyone who might want to reflect on the implications of more than three generations of scholarly criticism of technology should read the book. The same goes for any scholars who have been thinking about technology and who desire to see how their work may have been more publicly appropriated?or, indeed, who may wish to deepen their own understanding of what they have been doing. Doug Hill is a solid independent scholar in the best sense: A Lewis Mumford for our time. (Carl Mitcham Colorado School of Mines and author, coauthor, or editor of *Thinking through Technology: The Path Between Engineering and Philosophy; Bibliography of the Philosophy of Technology; The Encyclopedia of Science, Technology, and Ethics; and Research in Philosophy and Technology*)

Technology is a troubling and confusing force in contemporary culture, and it's good to see Doug Hill discuss it so calmly and clearly. His book is special in avoiding the rigorous and severe arguments of philosophers and other academics and in being both firm in its views but relaxed in its attitude. The reader hears the voice of a very well-informed writer without being bullied with all that knowledge. There's good reason to believe the book will reach an audience that has been neglected and that it will help to advance the public conversation on technology that is so necessary and so lacking. (Albert Borgmann Regents Professor of Philosophy at the University of Montana and author of *Crossing the Postmodern Divide, Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life, and Holding on to Reality*)

Almost everyone today acknowledges that serious questions surround the myriad technologies that inhabit our lives. We need a way to form our own opinions about the relentless advance of technology and the role we want our devices to play in our lives, the lives of our children, and the future of our societies. Doug Hill, a fine journalist and writer, has given us an indispensable tool for doing this. His knowledgeable and well-crafted new book, *Not So Fast: Thinking Twice about Technology*, offers a penetrating yet ultimately heartening view of this fast and furious technological terrain, taking us back, sometimes far back, then bringing us forward to fully face our most intimate concerns about technology in the twenty-first century. (Flo Conway and Jim Siegelman authors of *Dark Hero of the Information Age: In Search of Norbert Wiener, the Father of Cybernetics*)

I have read carefully Doug Hill's *Not So Fast*. Insightful, well informed and well written, it should provide the general educated public with an excellent initiation to the problems of our technological society. I hope it will be soon translated into French, so I could recommend it to scholars, students and friends. (Daniel C  r  zuelle President, Soci  t   pour la Philosophie de la Technique (France))

Doug Hill's *Not So Fast: Thinking Twice About Technology* presents a rich history of the questions raised and reasons given for bringing more aspects of the biological and cultural worlds under technological control. I highly recommend it. (Chet Bowers Professor Emeritus, environmental studies, University of Oregon and author of *Let Them Eat Data and The False Promises of the Digital Revolution*)

Doug Hill's book *Not so Fast* is not a criticism of technological innovation and enterprise, but rather a

careful and well-thought-out advisory on the unpredictable effects of technology on human activities and culture. This exceptionally interesting book not only contains an exceedingly diverse set of examples of how technological outcomes can differ from what is intended and expected, but it also contains a very interesting review of how wrong the predictions and advice of 'technological visionaries' can be. Anybody who is interested in the unexpected consequences of technological innovation should consider this book an important contribution to their library. (Theodore A. Postol *Professor Emeritus of Science, Technology, and National Security Policy, Massachusetts Institute of Technology*)

About the Author

Doug Hill is a journalist and independent scholar who has studied the history and philosophy of technology for more than twenty-five years. His work has appeared in numerous national publications, including the *New York Times*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Atlantic*, *Salon*, *Forbes*, *Esquire*, and the blog "The Question Concerning Technology." He is coauthor of the bestseller *Saturday Night: A Backstage History of Saturday Night Live* and lives in Philadelphia.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Heather Jones:

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