

21045 Technology Will Destroy Us

National Review, Opinion, January 23, 2021

Tech-immersed partisans are increasingly reluctant to confront the features of political reality that are resistant to their own desires.

As the 21st century progresses, the conflict between Left and Right will fade into relative insignificance in comparison with the conflict between man and machine.

You don't have to envision the emergence of SkyNet or some other form of futuristic A.I. ripped from the pages of a science-fiction novel to see how this is going to work. The technological disassembly of the human spirit is already at an advanced stage in the West, as a cursory glance at our politics makes clear.

A curious symmetry between the most online contingents of the Left and the Right has emerged over recent years. The more time any given conservative or progressive partisan spends immersed in media — whether social or traditional — the more those partisans tend to resemble one another in certain key respects. They become febrile and enraged when confronted with facts that challenge their convictions in even minor ways. Their sensitivity to the moral complexity of life is numbed.

The January 6th riots definitively showed that the blizzard is a bipartisan one. The willingness with which Donald Trump's most devoted supporters have embraced utter delusion rivals (and in some cases surpasses) anything of a similar sort we've seen on the left.

The people who've been driven to distraction by their own media engagement are victims, in a sense, though not of dark money or of Dominion voting systems. To understand why this is the case, we really have to understand the technological revolution that took place during the 18th and 19th centuries.

Technology allows human beings to shape reality in such a way that it conforms to their own needs and desires. Our primal ancestors were confronted everywhere and at all times by the basic indifference of the world to their own existence.

The industrial revolution led to a quantum leap in technological advance. We seemed to accomplish more — shaping the world to suit us — with each passing decade than we had in the previous 10,000 years.

The Internet has allowed us to subjugate information to our own desires much in the same way that older technologies allowed us to master the elements.

Our collective “liberation” from the intractable and indifferent realities of the world is being ceaselessly spun out by our devices and their algorithms.

This process is leading us to become increasingly intolerant of any state of affairs that doesn't express and execute our own desires.