

perspective somewhat one-sided. Although he acknowledges some positive aspects of reform efforts, his overall tone is highly critical, which may not resonate with all audiences. Furthermore, while his policy recommendations are well-argued, they may be seen as idealistic and challenging to implement in the current political climate.

“The Fantasy Economy: Neoliberalism, Inequality, and the Education Reform Movement” is a significant contribution to the discourse on education policy. Neil Kraus offers a rigorous and critical examination of how neoliberalism has shaped public education, highlighting the resulting inequalities and proposing a path forward. This book is essential reading for educators, policymakers, and anyone interested in understanding the complex dynamics of education reform in the United States.

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Homo Numericus: The coming ‘civilization’

By Daniel Cohen.

Cambridge: Polity, 2024. 172 pages, £20.00.

Homo Numericus by Daniel Cohen explores the profound impacts of the digital revolution on society, reflecting on various issues before looking ahead. The book opens with a discussion of an episode from the TV series *Black Mirror* where AI can resuscitate the dead, setting the stage for examining the societal impacts of digital transformation. In Part One, Cohen discusses how human productivity is enhanced by technology, exploring themes like “Digital Morality,” brain-machine interfaces, and the dismantling of traditional power structures. Part Two, titled “The Return of Reality,” examines the clash between digital illusions and real-world crises, stressing the need for balance between digital advancements and real-world challenges. In his conclusion, Cohen highlights how social media, intended to dismantle hierarchies, actually creates fragmented societies and “collective individualism,” weakening traditional social cohesion and increasing social and political anomie. He advocates for reinforcing unions, political parties, and traditional institutions to maintain stability in the digital age.

Cohen extensively outlines AI’s transformative potential and limitations, noting its lack of common sense and emotional intelligence despite advanced capabilities. He addresses ethical challenges in integrating AI into society and stresses the need for humans to specialize in creativity, emotional intelligence, and ethical reasoning. Digital platforms, Cohen argues, exacerbate social and political polarization by creating echo chambers, where algorithms reinforce existing beliefs and exclude diverse perspectives, undermining social cohesion

and democratic processes. He also addresses the addictive nature of social media, likening it to hard drugs. The constant need for updates and notifications can lead to compulsive behavior, negatively impacting mental health and well-being. The phenomenon of fear-of-missing-out or “FOMO” further exacerbates this issue, creating anxiety and stress.

The book’s narrative can feel scattered, as it rapidly jumps from historical data on energy use, geographical implications, psychological theories, to sociopolitical commentary within a few paragraphs. This scattered approach contrasts with the more focused discussions on digital technologies and their immediate societal impacts. Books like *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* by Shoshana Zuboff and *Weapons of Math Destruction* by Cathy O’Neil cover similar topics but focus more narrowly on specific issues. The book tends to focus primarily on Western society, and while Cohen discusses potential solutions, some areas might require further exploration, beyond the book’s scope. The author frequently adopts a dystopian perspective on modern society, contrasting with other authors who emphasize the benefits of AI, such as increased productivity and more free time, which Cohen also mentions. The discussion could have included topics like restructuring society through universal basic income and eliminating unproductive jobs as potential outcomes of increased productivity, which are commonly discussed (Chakravorti, 2023; Ferguson, 2024).

Cohen’s discussion of modern dating, transformed by platforms like Tinder, is particularly interesting. He argues that these platforms turn romantic relationships into more immediate and transactional interactions, prioritizing superficial attributes over deeper connections, fostering a competitive and individualistic approach to relationships, and leading to an existential void and diminished empathy and meaningful bonds. Cohen also uses pop culture references effectively, citing *Black Mirror* to illustrate societal pressures and surveillance, *I Am Legend* to highlight the isolating effects of technological and societal collapse, *Game of Thrones* to emphasize the looming threats of climate change, and *Elysium* to depict the exacerbation of social inequality through advanced technology. Some of Cohen’s points are slightly contentious, such as the claims that social media erodes deep thinking and analytical reasoning, and that AI lacks common sense and emotional intelligence. However, these capabilities may develop in the near future.

Homo Numericus appeals to a diverse audience interested in the intersection of technology, ethics, and society, offering a nuanced perspective on the challenges and implications of the digital age. In what turned out to be his final work, Cohen provides a wide-ranging and deeply knowledgeable examination of digital technologies’ impacts on society, ethics, and human behavior.

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