

Out of Control Book Summary, by Kevin Kelly

by Allen Cheng

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1-Page Summary of Out of Control

Overview

I can imagine myself in 1994, having just heard of the Internet. I would have been amazed at how much it has changed life in 20 years. But Kevin Kelly's predictions about that technology are amazing and he seems to be a psychic medium who could predict all those developments with remarkable accuracy.

This book is required reading for the cast of The Matrix, including Keanu Reeves. It also explains why artificial intelligence should scare us and how credit cards should have disappeared in the last 20 years. It even explains how a computer program could prove that Darwin didn't get it all right when he described evolution through natural selection.

Big Idea #1: The future of technology will see the merging of natural and artificial characteristics.

Think back to the year 1994. If you were alive then, you may remember how technology was not as advanced as it is now. There weren't social networks or camera phones, and the internet had just begun to catch on with people.

Back then, scientists and technologists were already asking the same questions we ask today about technology.

One way to drive technological progress is by learning lessons from nature. Artificial intelligence is one area in which we can apply these lessons. For example, if you program a machine to build a car door, it will be able to repeat that task over and over again without being reprogrammed; however, it cannot do anything else unless you reprogram it.

In nature, we find far more complex “technology” than in man-made machines. For example, the human brain learns new things and evolves based on what it experiences. This is known as vivid logic, and if we want to improve artificial intelligence (AI), we need to emulate this vivid logic in machines too. Yet

learning from nature is just one lane in a two-way street: we can also add elements of technology to nature by enhancing natural systems with the help of technology.

Bioengineering is one example of this phenomenon. We can use it to modify plants and animals in a way that benefits mankind. For instance, we can breed cows so that their offspring produce more milk.

Even more, we can see how nature and technology are converging in bionic vivisystems. A great example of a natural vivisystem is a beehive, which has the ability to learn and adapt but isn't an individual organism itself.

Big Idea #2: To take advantage of natural principles in technology, humanity must relinquish control.

Many of today's technologies require a lot of supervision. However, as we begin to merge artificial and biological systems, it will become clear that humans must give up some control. Why? As technology becomes more advanced and adapts to nature, the latter will be in charge because it is at its core the foundation of all life on earth.

Nature is more efficient than man-made systems. For example, nature recycles nutrients from dead plants and animals in a way that's better than any artificial system. In order to take advantage of the efficiency of natural processes, we must be willing to relinquish control over our lives. We must think like shepherds who guide their flock instead of acting as iron-fisted managers trying to control every single sheep. Such an approach would also allow us to develop machines according to three principles: autonomy (the ability for machines to act independently), creativity (the ability for machines invent new ways perform tasks) and adaptability (the ability for machines learn).

One of humanity's main challenges for the 21st century will be to let artificial systems develop in a way that follows natural principles.

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