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Book Review. Susskind, J. (2019). Politica viitorului. Tehnologia digitală şi societatea [Future Politics: Living Together in a World Transformed by Tech]. Bucureşti: Corint Books

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Abstract: This book includes analysis to help understand how digital technologies will influence our political system. "Future Politics: Living Together in a World Transformed by Tech" [Politica viitorului. Tehnologia digitală şi societatea] covers the theoretical methodology for addressing the future of political ideas, the concepts of power, freedom, democracy, justice, transparency, and postpolitics. The book presents the impact of digital technologies on the relationship between the individual and the state. We strongly recommend the book to anyone interested in political science.

Keywords: *politics; digital technologies; political ideas; digital life.*

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Introduction

The book "Future Politics: Living Together in a World Transformed by Tech" by British author Jamie Susskind, published at Oxford in 2018, is recommended by the London School of Economics and Political Science Review of Books as one of the 10 of the best social sciences books of 2019 (Deller, 2019). Named by the Guardian as "an attempt to disassemble the fundamental concepts that underpin political life – justice, liberty, democracy, equality, property – and put them back together again in the context of a tech-driven revolution" (Behr, 2018), the book received the 2019 Estoril Global Issues Distinguished Book Prize (Chandler, 2019). Head of Promotion at Oxford University, Jamie Susskind is an author and lawyer who conducted research on technology and politics at Harvard University. Susskind is also the author of "**The Digital Republic: On Freedom and Democracy in the 21st Century"** (2022), and has written in the *New York Times*, the *Financial Times*, the *Guardian*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *New Statesman*.

The hypothesis from which the book starts is that "when a society develops different technologies in the field of information and communications, we must also expect political changes" (Susskind, 2019, p. 32). The book is based on the question: "how will revolutionary digital technologies – information and communication technologies – influence *our* political system?" (Susskind, 2019, p. 33). While noting the influence of technology development on political life, Jamie Susskind underlines it is necessary to modernize our political ideas. The author hopes that through this book he will contribute to the creation of an intellectual framework that will help us reflect critically on the political consequences of digital technology using the ideas and methods of political theory.

The world of digital life

In Part I, consisting of four chapters, the author identifies the syntagm *the world of digital life* "a dense, overcrowded system, that unites people, advanced machines and abundant data in a network of great complexity and finesse" (Susskind, 2019, p. 43). Jamie Susskind develops "a vision of the future with three defining elements" (Susskind, 2019, p. 35): *increasingly advanced systems*, *increasingly integrated technologies*, and *increasingly quantified society*. Chapter 1 "Increasingly advanced systems" presents two technologies: Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the exponential growth of

computing power. Chapter 2 "An increasingly integrated technology" argues that life will evolve ""within a network crowded with "intelligent" people and things, interconnected, with barely perceptible differences between man and machine, online and off-line, virtual and material"" (Susskind, 2019, p. 57). The author predicts five basic trends of digital transformation, digital technology becoming "more *widespread*, more *connective*, more *sensitive*, more *constitutive* and more *immersive*" (Susskind, 2019, p. 58).

Jamie Susskind looks at how social activity will be observed and recorded in the form of data (Chapter 3 "An increasingly quantified society"). Companies and the political authorities will have the power to make digital maps of people's lives that could have profound implications for control. Chapter 4 analyses theoretical tools to address the challenges of the world of digital life. Susskind tries to find a suitable definition for politics for the XXIst century and examines political concepts such as power, freedom, democracy and justice. The author underlines the difference between the meanings that linguistic communities give to concepts: "Political language is flexible: concepts are subject to change depending on their use by the linguistic community" (Susskind, 2019, p. 97). Susskind combines three methods of assessing political principles and theories: conceptual analysis, normative analysis and contextual analysis. For addressing the future of political ideas, the author uses a theoretical methodology that comprises: making a number of predictions about the future, seeing what light existing political ideas might cast on the future, then, if these concepts are inadequate, developing a new political vocabulary that will help to describe the implications of digital life on politics.

The power of the future

Part II is structured in five chapters that analyse the three forms the power of the future will take: *force* (Chapter 6) *surveillance* (Chapter 7) and *perception control* (Chapter 8). In Chapter 5, the author clarifies his definition of power and examines the relationship between power and digital technology. Susskind underlines "*code is power*: it determines us to do things that we would otherwise not do, using force, coercion, influence and manipulation" (Susskind, 2019, p. 115). Chapter 6 "Force" argues the legitimate use of force reserved for the state and law enforcement authorities will be subject to three important changes: the *digitalisation*, the *privatization* and the *automation* of the force. Chapter 7 "Supervision" emphasizes that five aspects of people's ability to supervise each other will be different in the future*: a society easier to investigate*, *intimate surveillance*, *non-perishable information*,

predictable behaviour, and *a life easier to evaluate*. In the chapter dedicated to "The control of perception" the author explains digital technology filters news, the search for information, and our immediate sensory experiences. This can cause the risk of a distorted perception of the world: "Filters hide the very perspective needed to keep an eye on the powerful" (Susskind, 2019, p. 174). In Chapter 9 "Public power and private power", Susskind argues that two groups will benefit the most from the power of technology: political authorities and big tech companies.

The implications of technology for freedom, democracy, justice, and transparency

In Part III, which contains two chapters, the author shows the implications of technology for freedom. Surveying the relationship between individuals and the superconsolidated State, Chapter 10 underlines digital technologies can have both positive and negative impacts on freedom. Digital technologies could offer new possibilities in terms of freedom. However, the technology will facilitate the emergence of the superconsolidated state marking the tendency towards totalitarianism. Susskind outlines that ""Perhaps a system based on "wise constraints" will help us maintain a generally satisfactory level of freedom in the world of digital life"" (Susskind, 2019, p. 213). Chapter 11 deals with the relationship between individuals and large technology companies. In Susskind's opinion "It is as if the agora had been privatized and bought by an Athenian oligarch, which gave him the power to dictate the rules of the debate, to say who can speak and for how long and to decide what topics are out of place" (Susskind, 2019, p. 217). Considering we need a new set of concepts that can explain the different approaches to freedom in the future, Jamie Susskind proposes some: digital libertarianism, digital liberalism, digital confederalism, digital paternalism, digital moralism and digital republicanism.

Part IV, consisting of two chapters, examines the future of democracy, how people can govern the world of digital life (Susskind, 2019, p. 240). The chapter dedicated to "The dream of democracy" (Chapter 12) analyses classical democracy and democracy after the Internet. Chapter 13 "Democracy in the future" focuses on five different models of democracy that we may encounter in the world of digital life, each model bringing with it its own challenges and opportunities: deliberative democracy, direct democracy, *wiki* democracy, data democracy and artificial intelligence democracy.

Part V, structured in five chapters, is dedicated to the future of justice. Susskind shows the algorithms will play a central role in social justice: to determine people's access to jobs, financial products, consumer information, pricing establishment (Chapter 14) and to identify and order people in social hierarchies (Chapter 15). Chapter 16 "Algorithmic injustice" underlines justice will largely depend on the algorithms used and "The responsibility to create a world in which the code is a generator of chances, not of injustice lies with the *people*" (Susskind, 2019, p. 332). Chapter 17 covers three reactions to technological unemployment: treating labour as a limited resource, ensuring people's right to work, and trying to reject automation altogether. Susskind wonders if technological unemployment could replace the paradigm of work. In Chapter 18, dedicated to the concept of property, the author deals with the "cyclone of wealth", "the inequality between a very small rich elite and a poor majority amplified endlessly" (Susskind, 2019, p. 332), and presents six possible changes to the private property paradigm.

Part VI is organized in two chapters. Chapter 19 "Transparency and the new separation of powers" argues that, to avoid being at the mercy of the overconsolidated state and of technology companies, at least two types of regulations seem to be necessary: transparency regulations in relation to algorithms, and regulations in order to break up concentrations of power. Chapter 20 "Postpolitics" presents "politics *after* the new digital world" (Susskind, 2019, p. 407).

Instead of conclusions

An inspired call for a change in the way we conceive politics, the book "Future Politics: Living Together in a World Transformed by Tech" reveals "We will have to imagine together again what it means to be free or equal, what it means to have power or property, and even what it means for a regime to be democratic" (Susskind, 2019, p. 13-14). Susskind argues the book leaves untouched entire portions of political life, same as the ideas outside the Western philosophical tradition (Susskind, 2019, p. 39). However, the six parts of the book divided into twenty chapters, the 100 pages of notes, and the 50 pages of bibliography structure a very broad theoretical framework for the political consequences of digital technology. A very interesting publication, the volume estimates the threats of new technologies on politics will be the consequences of people's choices: "Until politics disappears or becomes something entirely different, the fate of freedom, democracy and social justice is in our hands" (Susskind, 2019, 412).

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