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# Geek Heresy: Rescuing Social Change from the Cult of Technology

*Kentaro Toyama*

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## GEEK HERESY

RESCUING SOCIAL CHANGE  
FROM THE CULT OF TECHNOLOGY

KENTARO TOYAMA

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**Kentaro Toyama : Geek Heresy: Rescuing Social Change from the Cult of Technology** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Geek Heresy: Rescuing Social Change from the Cult of Technology*:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. A must read for a lot of different groups/individuals By R.L.D. What I found amazing about this book was the breadth and depth in the treatment of this subject. Toyama's life experiences in Japan, US, India, Ghana, Harvard, Yale, Michigan, Microsoft, etc add so much to the feeling of validity to the research discussed. He raises a lot of good questions related to tech and problem solving, education and

psychology/motivations, leadership and solutions. A very readable and thought-provoking book. The book should be a go-to reference for a large group of educators, tech entrepreneurs, NGO, research institutions, among many others. Would also make a good textbook for HS or college.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Need to focus technology for social good.

By Technology realist Kentaro has addressed the key issue of where and how technology contributes to human development. Having earned post-graduate degrees in physics and mathematics from two of the top universities in America, and having worked as a senior research engineer at Microsoft, he is in a position to make sense out of what advancement in technology means to the majority of the world population — the poor. Today we must recognize that our greatest technological breakthroughs, confined mostly to the material realm, offer little or no answers in solving mankind's problems. Kentaro's exposure in the social arena with NGOs and poverty programs in India, Africa and elsewhere has placed him in an authoritative position to discuss what is needed by way of human intervention to make life better for the rich and the poor alike. An excellent thoughtful book.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Excellent.

By Customer A thoughtful book. One of the best I've seen dealing with the interaction of technology and people. I'd like to hear more from Kentaro Toyama.

In 2004, Kentaro Toyama, an award-winning computer scientist, moved to India to start a new research group for Microsoft. Its mission: to explore novel technological solutions to the world's persistent social problems. Together with his team, he invented electronic devices for under-resourced urban schools and developed digital platforms for remote agrarian communities. But after a decade of designing technologies for humanitarian causes, Toyama concluded that no technology, however dazzling, could cause social change on its own. Technologists and policy-makers love to boast about modern innovation, and in their excitement, they exuberantly tout technology's boon to society. But what have our gadgets actually accomplished? Over the last four decades, America saw an explosion of new technologies — from the Internet to the iPhone, from Google to Facebook — but in that same period, the rate of poverty stagnated at a stubborn 13%, only to rise in the recent recession. So, a golden age of innovation in the world's most advanced country did nothing for our most prominent social ill. Toyama's warning resounds: Don't believe the hype! Technology is never the main driver of social progress. *Geek Heresy* inoculates us against the glib rhetoric of tech utopians by revealing that technology is only an amplifier of human conditions. By telling the moving stories of extraordinary people like Patrick Awuah, a Microsoft millionaire who left his lucrative engineering job to open Ghana's first liberal arts university, and Tara Sreenivasa, a graduate of a remarkable South Indian school that takes children from dollar-a-day families into the high-tech offices of Goldman Sachs and Mercedes-Benz, Toyama shows that even in a world steeped in technology, social challenges are best met with deeply social solutions.

"High-tech insider Kentaro Toyama's compulsively readable manifesto will change minds about all those new technological quick-fixes for poverty. From previous claims for radio and TV to today's claims for broadband, he convincingly shows that technological solutions are neither so new nor so quick. Technology does not solve problems; people do, Toyama reminds us. He balances his refreshing skepticism about technological utopias with inspiring faith in the motivation and creativity of human beings." --William Easterly, professor of economics, NYU, and author of *The Tyranny of Experts*

"Everyone from field staff and managers to researchers and funders will benefit from his unique perspective; geeks and non-geeks, alike. Finally, we have a book that can help temper our technology addiction with an approach guided by critical thought and practical application." --Trina Gorman, Monitoring and Evaluation consultant

"If you find yourself even remotely optimistic about technology and development, you should read this book." -- Chris Blattman, Associate Professor of Political Science International and Public Affairs at Columbia University

"It is notable... when a techie insider steps outside the tent to chastise his tribe at book length -- and has the gall to both criticize and dedicate the book to his former boss, Bill Gates." -- Anand Giridharadas, *The New York Times*

Winner of the 2016 PROSE Award in Business, Finance Management

"It is notable... when a techie insider steps outside the tent to chastise his tribe at book length — and has the gall to both criticize and dedicate the book to his former boss, Bill Gates. Kentaro Toyama, a computer scientist who once ran a lab for Microsoft Research, seems determined to burn his bridge to the technology world with *Geek Heresy: Rescuing Social Change from the Cult of Technology*... The book takes a spike-studded tire iron to the efforts by technology entrepreneurs and their enablers to reimagine how we eat, learn, heal, govern and battle poverty." —Anand Giridharadas, *New York Times*

"In this incisive book, Toyama cures us of the manic rhetoric of digital utopians and reinvigorates us with a deeply people-centric view of social change. ... *Geek Heresy* is a heartwarming reminder that it's human wisdom, not machines, that move our world forward." —National Geographic Online

"Everyone working in any facet of education and educational nonprofits needs to read *Geek Heresy: Rescuing Social Change From the Cult of Technology*; put down whatever other books you're reading—you are reading, right?—and get a copy of this one." —Seliger Associates