

# “If Mark Zuckerberg Were Never Born, Would the World Really Be Worse?” - Joel Kotkin

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## SUMMARY

*The discussion explores the potential societal impact had Mark Zuckerberg never existed, questioning the role of tech moguls like him and their influence on culture and humanity. The conversation delves into the concentration of wealth and power in the tech industry, the implications of technology on human interaction, and the philosophical underpinnings of modern tech leaders.*

- The concentration of wealth and power among a few tech companies poses risks of neofeudalism.*
- Many tech leaders lack a deep understanding of history and American institutions, impacting their decision-making.*
- The conversation critiques the current tech culture, suggesting it prioritizes distraction over meaningful problem-solving.*
- Concerns are raised about the impact of technology on children and the challenges of managing screen time.*
- The discussion contrasts past tech founders with current leaders, highlighting a shift from innovation to bureaucratic control.*
- The potential dangers of a secularized society embracing technology without strong human values are emphasized.*
- The conversation references dystopian literature, likening current trends to themes in "Brave New World" and "1984."*

If Mark Zuckerberg was never born, would the world be worse? I'm trying to figure out why that would be the case. Um, that's a macob way to put it. >> I mean, >> I mean, he's weird and kind of a robot, but you know, is he a demon? I'm not sure. >> I'm not I'm not saying he's a demon. I'm not a I'm not a Catholic. [laughter] Um, you know, I'm I'm not, you know, I don't think I think these people do things.

>> Is he a force of evil? I mean, maybe he is a force of evil. I you know I just think that what what we've had is we've elevated somebody whose world vision is oh yeah you'll have your AI companion and you know and and you know obviously you have the AI girlfriend and there or the AI you know nurse doctor or I'm going to go in the metaverse where I can be a gladiator in in in ancient Rome and I can l spend three hours doing that. I don't think that's very productive for the society.

>> Okay. brings us to okay this the neofudalism what is it what is neutralism and do you still feel like we are we're in danger of it >> I think we're further along on it than I when I wrote the book >> so what is it lay it out >> okay one it's a tremendous amount of wealth concentrated in very few hands by control of certain industries which have taken on oligo are like igopies like you know if you look at percentage of search percentage of no it

changes here and there operating marketing systems. I mean, you're down to about, you know, outside of the Chinese alternatives, you got about seven or eight companies that are pretty dominant >> um with financial results and the and the dangers there are not just what these companies do, it's the amount of money they have in their in their nonprofits and particularly when you get the the widows or ex-wives of these people who have \$40 billion like >> Lauren Paul this Chan Zuckerberg forward these sorts of things >> and they have unlimited money. They can do anything they want. They can give money to, you know, you look at, you know, I think the Gates Foundation gives money to groups that that are basically saying that STEM is racist and, you know, this sort of insane stuff that these, you know, and I'm convinced a lot of them never read a book of history.

The original Silicon Valley guys who I was able to interview including Bob, they read a lot of them read history. Don Valentine who was one of the lead investors in Apple was a history buff and we would talk about history that would you know they knew what had happened in the past. I think these geeks know to use a Yiddish word bupkus. They know they know nothing. If I bet if you took the top 10 CEOs and asked them a question about the Constitution, they couldn't answer it. I I would be shocked if they actually knew anything about American institutions, about about American political history, you know, and and and of course, many of them were not brought up here and they were educated and brought up abroad and then educated in American universities who are dedicated to the destruction of America.

>> Name names on this. Who we talking about? There's not that many of them. We can name them. >> All right. I mean, it's clear, you know, and and I and I, you know, Bezos, I know u extremely brilliant guy, you know, they each have different characteristics. I mean, Bezos, um, but they all have the same, they want to control every industry that they can possibly control. I mean, that's, you know, whether it's entertainment or health. So, you have Bezos. Bezos is, you know, sort of trying to be sort of modern gilded agent, you know, with a \$500 million yacht and his, you know, his uh well constructed uh girlfriend or wife, I should say. Um the, you know, Elon is obviously a nut. Um brilliant, but a nut. And even >> is that a fair way to put it?

>> Well, let me say everybody who's ever worked for him says the same thing. So, >> what does it mean? What why is he a nut? you know, it could, you know, having what 13 children from different women, uh, you know, taking certain drugs that, you know, I mean, but, you know, maybe that's, you know, geniuses were always like that. Always a little weird. Um, and and he's he's certainly a genius. You know, Bezos is a genius, but Musk is a genius on a different level.

>> The the guys running Google and and Apple, they're just, you know, they're just operat high-end operat. >> What does that mean? Other words, you know, they're they're bureaucrats who roasted the system. Now, the >> what about L Sergey Brin and Larry Page, the founders of Google. How do you think about them? >> You know, they're you know, guys with a brilliant idea, but uh but don't be evil has now become very evil. So um >> as I understand it, one of the motivating forces behind the creation of open AI by by Elon and I and I think Sam Alman was I think Elon had conversations with I think it's Larry Page in which Paige was basically saying to favor the continuation of humanity was speciesism and that we should bring about a AI like the robot should replace us and it's Okay. If they replace us and we >> I hadn't heard that one, but uh >> so and and this one has is

sort of in that direction.

>> Speciesism that you know why there's a kind of like it's it's all Asberger spectrum behavior. It's >> no and anyway, keep going. >> But that's a you know, so you know, if you go through the the the list, they they they have a certain ideology. I think Elon because he's a founder and because he builds things, he's he's different than than the rest of them. Uh >> he's kind of a founder, >> right? Well, SpaceX is pretty much >> Did he found SpaceX?

>> It pretty much is >> like because he didn't found Tesla, >> right? Right. But anyway, they they're his company, so you can't >> I mean, he's he's I'm not trying to take away from him, but there is this little bit of like other stuff going on. But but I think that the these are people who you know I think um um Jonathan Saxe a former um rabbi for you know for the UK he said he said you know they're engineers they look at the world in a very sort of you know here are measurable results and you know we do this that happens the other parts of human existence they I don't think they really get and they don't quite understand that what they're doing let's say and and And and I don't know if they care or they don't care. You know, having 8-year-old kids on on on cell phones is really a bad idea. I mean, I can tell you even at the college level, now my partner doesn't let me do this, but I do it in my own classes. Um I uh I say first day, no phones, no computers. And they said, "Well, how do I take notes?" Well, you know these things called pens. In another conversation, you said that you you had interactions you had interactions with Steve Jobs.

Yeah. As part of >> just one one briefing. >> I'm a huge fan of Jobs and and whenever I bring this up, people in the audience like he's a terrible person. Why what's wrong with you? >> Well, he he he struck me as an arrogant to be frank, but there was a lot about him. >> But he was brilliant. >> He was brilliant. He was um >> Well, [snorts] yeah. what what what you you drew a contrast between jobs and this new era of tech founders.

>> Well, [laughter] I mean I think you almost have three eras. You have the founders of the digital age, you know, Trey Big, um, uh, Jobs, uh, you know, the the early semiconductor guys. Um, and Packard and, you know, Noise, you know, those those people, they were the founders and they created this new thing. After them came the era what I would call the MBA era when when essentially most of the tech money went into you know selling stuff social media and that was very so where the original VCs that I interviewed tended to be engineers themselves. The next group were MBAs. Harvard MBAs probably have destroyed more companies than any any group in history. But um and my the guy I do give my uh do the AI classes in Harvard MBA. So we were I always give him crap about that. But but rightly so.

>> Right. So you know so you you had that group and that was where it was a lot of consolidation. It was generally offshore virtually everything. Nothing got >> which time frame are you? >> This is really um >> the two early 2000s. early 2000s would be probably, you know, when you really started seeing the commercialization of the internet. >> Yeah. Post.com bust where out goes pets.com. But hey, eBay, Amazon, these are real and off we go.

>> Right. So there's and now I'm what I'm thinking is there may be a a third wave which will probably be less

oriented to uh just software but more into building things space related medical related >> and and things that where you're using technology to actually solve problems as opposed to to distract people which is what we've been doing. And that's these young and not just young but you know people certainly young by my standards but people in their 30s and 40s who are starting these new companies building things um and yeah and they have a very mental different mentality and I think if they have a hero it's Elon Musk >> where how do you think about Peter Teal?

Well, I've had lunch with Peter. Um, I think he's a little ideologically out there and, you know, sort of I don't see a great human vision there particularly. Um, and I I guess now he's into this uh thing about Satan or >> the Antichrist. >> Antichrist. >> He's doing like a four four-part lecture series on the Antichrist. >> Yeah. Tim Dylan had a good >> Yeah, I had a good bid on this on Rogue and he's like, you know, so I'm into uh I'm into like military contracting and mass surveillance technologies and I'm really into the Antichrist. [laughter] It's like, no, that's a little interesting.

>> You you sound a little like the Antichrist. [laughter] >> Did you see the Ross Doat interview with Peter? >> No. >> You really got to watch that. >> He Ross asks him, "Do you want humanity to continue?" and and and Peter stammers on it on ant saying yes and then and Ross points out like this is not this is not this shouldn't be a hard one and he continues to um I' I've met Peter a couple times I uh I don't know him well or anything he's a really he's interesting and scary but also like orthogonal in ways that are hard because he criticizes a lot of this culture that you're talking about in the valley >> um he's the one that said you laid out this idea that we have this stagnation where all the energy in tech and Silicon Valley was dedicated. He's like, "We wanted flying cars and instead we got 140 characters talking about Twitter."

>> Um, so he's a he is a complex character. There's a lot of people on both sides, left and right, that are like that think him and his companies are forces of darkness. Well, well, you know, I mean, I I I think that obviously having capacity to defend the country is probably not necessarily bad. Um, I, you know, I just find a lot of them to be just lacking humanity. There's just there's a gene somehow. Maybe they got an extra gene and they lost the gene along the way. The sort of the sense of humanity is is just not there. Right.

>> What do you mean by that? What do you mean by humanity? like how how are how do regular people live? Why do we have children? Why do we I mean if if you think you're not sure about humanity and you want to have robots like I don't know that doesn't seem very appealing to me. Um you know I mean the the the whole idea of being a human being in large part is having a family passing on your traditions to the next generation. you know, you know, I'm very, you know, happy that my girls have taken up the tradition. Actually, my younger is much more religious than I am. Um, and and I and I think that that, you know, to break everything down into technology.

I'll tell you, I did a show um I don't think I don't know if I don't think it ever hit the air, but uh Kenberg and and Spielberg were doing a show on the future. So I was there with Kerszswile and a bunch of other techies and I was like out there by myself like you know Kerszsw >> like why the hell did you have me show up? >> Well they I and it turned out I was the only one who said well I don't think information technology is the solution to many

problems and like you know like we I had just come back from India and Kerszswell said well you I was in Davi and it's pretty awful there.

>> I've been to Davi actually. >> It's the biggest slum in the world. Mhm. >> It's it's the it's the uh the backdrop for the movie Slum Dog Millionaire. >> So, I spent a week >> in there for my documentary with Arthur Brooks. So, >> yeah. So, I was saying, "Oh, well, but they have they have information technology." And and I say, "Yeah, but they're have a terrible diet. They don't live very long. They have I mean, all sorts of tremendous problems. and the fact that they could look at a Facebook video doesn't seem to be really the solution to their fundamental problems.

I you know and I felt that there was this sort of wanting to replace humans as much as humanly possible and then this notion of essentially building people with machines. And by the way, they may be right. I mean, when I'm writing all this stuff, I may be prophetic about bad stuff. It's not what I want. It's but I think it's it's in it's it's happening and I think the technoids both the progressive technoids and the conservative technoids aren't all that different on those issues.

Yeah, it's this is um I'm with you that these are there there's peril there's peril in these technologies. There's peril in the impact on our on our kids on our families. My wife and I have we adopted a teenager from South America and we are facing this totally different set of challenges around screen time management because it's actually it's hard to do in general but it's easy with your own young kid because you can just turn it all the off. But you're, you know, we brought someone into our home and he's a great kid and it's going great, but he's old enough to be like, well, I I I'm know what I'm doing. I I like, so like we're trying not to be too restrictive, but at the same time, he doesn't really know what he's doing. And the internet is like a dark, horrendous place filled with exploiters.

And I like I open up the privacy settings on Facebook and I want to put Mark Zuckerberg in prison. >> Yeah. >> Like I want to protect my adoptive son from creeps. And I open up the dashboard back and it's like this has more obviously obfuscating complexity meant to keep me from protecting my kid, >> right? than um than than like architecture software, >> right?

>> Like my home architecture software is less complicated than the back end of the privacy settings of Facebook, >> right? >> And that just makes me filled with rage and feel like these are not good actors in our society. >> Definitely. But then that's also not fair because at the same time they aren't they're nobody has to use Facebook and they this is these are voluntary private enterprises although the involvement of the CIA in a lot of this makes that also not entirely true but like I I believe in free enterprise like I believe in innovation and so I'm very I'm very conflicted about all of this. Well, you should be because like a lot of the tech stuff, it's making, you know, it it is some tremendous advantages. So, the question and this is what I'm working on now is it's again I keep going back. It's molecular. It's at the very bottom who we are, not just the technology. If we're crappy people with crappy values and we have powerful technology, that's really bad. and and and and the question is how do we create an environment where people you know um feel that they they they they don't need to escape all the time where they have you know they have real understanding of human beings. I mean, I think a lot of what's happening, for instance, with people beginning to go back to church is just to have access to other people,

you know? I mean, the the, you know, this this this there's a um and I think if we have a totally secularized society with a huge percentage of population with that's not married, doesn't have kids, and and then they embrace this technology, it's going to be very toxic.

>> It's a brave new world. Ex. It's some horrible chimera of 1984 in a brave new world. >> Yeah. I mean it's, you know, I I taught a whole class on Brave New World. So um you know um and I think I think in many ways it's the most prophetic and if we get to where he goes and where some of the technoids are going which is to essentially create you know change the gene pool where there they vats um where we just create people to fit whatever needs we have. I don't know. I mean it it it it's you know there's a lot of that and a lot of his writing about class the writing about about the the the uh uh the sort of happy surveillance you know you you know you you you know you it was it brave new um 1984 was sort of Stalinism.

>> Yeah. Um I would say uh there's a little more California in Brave New World. If you like this clip, you should check out the full video and all the other great content we've got at Dad Saves America. So, be sure to hit the like button, subscribe, and ring that bell so you won't miss our new stuff as it drops each week. [music]