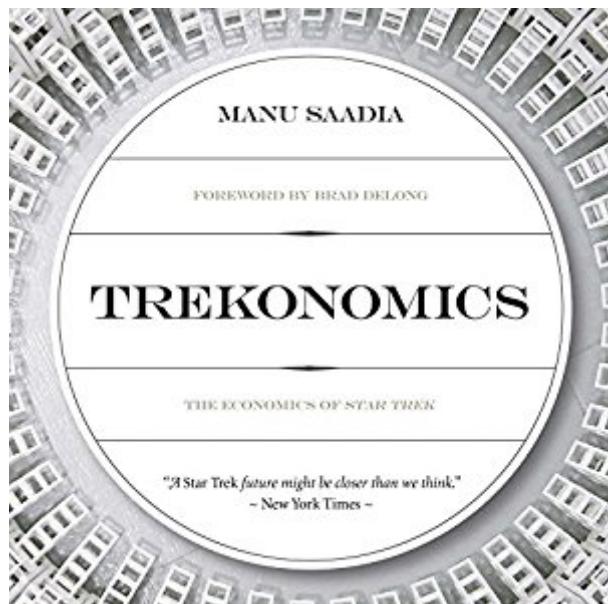


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Trekonomics: The Economics Of Star Trek



Synopsis

What would the world look like if everybody had everything they wanted or needed? *Trekonomics*, the premier book in financial journalist Felix Salmon's imprint *PiperText*, approaches scarcity economics by coming at it backward - through thinking about a universe where scarcity does not exist. Delving deep into the details and intricacies of 24th-century society, *Trekonomics* explores post-scarcity and whether we, as humans, are equipped for it. What are the prospects of automation and artificial intelligence? Is there really no money in Star Trek? Is *Trekonomics* at all possible?

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 8 hours and 21 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Audible Studios

Audible.com Release Date: August 16, 2016

Language: English

ASIN: B01JK09F3I

Best Sellers Rank: #52 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Business & Investing > Economics #145 in Books > Business & Money > Economics > Theory #405 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Pop Culture > General

Customer Reviews

If you love Star Trek, or economics, or both (like me), this book is right up your alley! Manu Saadia explores the idea of a post-scarcity society and what will occupy our time when capitalism becomes a thing of the past.

If you're looking for a technical manual detailing how economics works in the world of Star Trek then you will be disappointed. But if you want to see a future as bright as Roddenberry's dream then this is a good read. The author lays out cogent theories as to how economics work in a world of post scarcity and near zero human labor. He draws parallels to the challenges we face today with automation in manufacturing and distribution. How are resources and goods to be distributed? What is to motivate us if not the 9 to 5? Should money matter in a world of plenty? These are the questions raised and the answers attempted in this book. I enjoyed it and I hope you do, too.

As a life-long Trekkie, I always wondered about the economics of the Federation and Star Trek universe. Saadia provides interesting insights into the utopian future that's free of conspicuous consumption. The future is wonderfully boring, free of want and full of possibilities of self-development. Unfortunately, I don't think he fully reconciled that the Federation must exist alongside economies that do not share its systems or values. Nevertheless, an interesting thesis.

I was excited about this book, and extremely disappointed. First, as other reviewers have noted, he doesn't actually delve into how the economy functions. He touches on various aspects, then moves on without explaining anything except occasionally an episode of Star Trek he feels like criticizing. And he even contradicts himself (e.g., are people motivated by self-improvement or some kind of base arrogance? And why does it have to be one thing? Can't we be nuanced about this?). Second, his tone is unbearably negative and intellectually dull. He criticizes everything from Star Trek plots and their foundation in other science fiction to technologies he clearly doesn't understand, even theoretically. Is the replicator more valuable than a transporter because the transporter just does one thing? Can you imagine what it would mean to be able to transport from San Francisco to Beijing in the blink of an eye? That would change everything. Maybe a replicator is more valuable, but does it always have to be one is better than the other? Saadia is very black and white, very critical, and strangely married to negative imaginings of how the Star Trek future would work. Should we be excited about the pursuit of humiliating one's intellectual opponents in the pursuit for top reputation? What? Unfortunately, Saadia substitutes thoughtful and interesting exploration of this topic for negative, nasty black and white portrayals...and lots of personal opinion. Third, this is a book of tangents. We touch on economic issues, and then Saadia goes off on some story about this or that Star Trek episode or this or that friend of his. Name-dropping much? Fourth, speaking of name-dropping: Saadia doesn't come across as a Star Trek fan at all. I guess he is one. I'll trust him on that, but he spends an awful lot of time criticizing Star Trek and name-dropping Star Trek references (just like when a person drops the name of this or that famous person they supposedly spend time with, it feels false and unnatural the way Saadia uses Star Trek references), and he even gets some nasty details wrong amidst his outlandishly narrow-minded claims about a high-minded, open-minded future. For example, a reference to Picard's nephew: "No doubt, like many of us, he will wholeheartedly embrace the replicators [when he grows up], and all that comes along with them." (p. 70). Does anyone else cringe when they read that? Yes? Good. René will never get a chance to wholeheartedly embrace anything as an adult. He will, however,

dead. So, that's awful as a Star Trek reference, and it's also stupid as a claim. The idea that the older people are married to less technology while the younger ones will inevitably embrace it is intellectually shallow. First of all, those older people grew up with lots of technology they're not using. It's not like talking about our grandparents. RenÃƒÂ© is interested in technology and space; those are good reasons to expect he may embrace replicators...not just that he's a kid or he's normal and his parents are relics of a bygone era. Fifth, Saadia uses reporter-style sound bites that, in the end, don't follow from what he's just argued or is about to argue. Dramatic, sure. Accurate, no. These sound bites usually conclude sections, but similarly over-dramatized and inaccurate claims are used throughout. One example of a ridiculous exaggeration for the purpose of effect is this kind of phrase, utilized at several points:

ÃƒÂ¢Ã ¬Ã Å“the abolition of human laborÃƒÂ¢Ã ¬Ã Å• (p. 66). Human labor hasn't been abolished. It *isn't* unnecessary to survival and so on, as he claims over and over again (and then contradicts in a few side notes). Sure, replicators are great, but we see them malfunction relatively frequently; that alone is sufficient reason to understand that labor is still absolutely necessary. Without it, some malfunction, solar flare, alien virus, or act of sabotage would have disabled every replicator in existence within a few decades. Someone has to maintain them. Even if we assume absolute minimum labor, human labor to assemble replicated parts (including for shelter) and maintain the replicators would be absolutely necessary. Furthermore, unless the universe is 100% peaceful, human labor for the purpose of protection and defense advancements would still be necessary for survival. To be fair, I only made it through page 92, at which point I couldn't stand another second of his negative, nasty tone and complete avoidance of saying anything useful. I skimmed the rest, and didn't see anything different, but I'll give him the benefit of the doubt he apparently can't bear to give anyone else but his pals and say that maybe I missed something. In the end, this book was a vast disappointment. I'd like someone who has respect for this optimistic future (minimally you should write about an optimistic future with an optimistic tone!), who can seriously think through some of the economic systems and trade-offs necessary to operate this system (as another reviewer noted, you can't just do everything; who/what decides which ships are being built?), and is willing to explain this with respect for the reader's desire to truly seek this future...to write a new *Trekonomics*. So, here's hoping that the legacy of this book will be to inspire someone else to write a better one. Or maybe even to inspire a discussion with input from many sources of how this could work in the real world...so that we can build our own Star Trek future.

Life is what we make it. Our species is capable of evolving beyond the selfishness & rugged individualism made popular by Ayn Rand's evil sophistries. This book outlines the vision of a future which can indeed be actualized. It's a way out of our present dysfunctional socioeconomic status which is unsustainable and toxiferous to us and other species and the environment.

The Federation is post scarcity, post currency? I've always wondered about this. How does it work? How did it evolve to this? What do people do all day? This book attempts to address these issues of how the federation works because our society might be facing similar problems sooner than any of us think

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