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The Emotion Organon. Dr. C. Mason, 2024 (ISBN 979-8-8501361-9-2)

In The Emotion Organon, Dr. Cindy Mason artfully synthesises a new body of medical literature on emotion and the body to elucidate how this understanding of human biology, termed the 'emotion organon,' can be used to improve and enhance our current technologies. Drawing on many years of working with artificial intelligence (AI) technology at institutions such as Stanford University, NASA, and the University of California, Berkeley, Dr. Mason describes the “ruboff” that we feel from our technologies and the new science that explains their effects on our bodies and minds. Currently, our interactions with technologies often lead to stress and negative impact on our health and valued relationships with friends and family.

Dr. Mason takes the strong position that this rub-off is something we must pay close attention to because of our increasingly close relationship to technology, especially AI technologies. Her stance draws not only from research, but from her experience in clinical practice as a compassion therapist at Stanford Hospital. She has observed how a patient’s health responds in unexpectedly positive ways in the presence of supportive emotions.

Over the past three decades the world has benefited from a bloom of new human science research that explains how the body can benefit from emotions by the release of oxytocin. Her book summarizes this for the reader and points to some of the key applications of that research, such as the design of digital social environments and positive immersive experiences such as video games and virtual reality. Dr. Mason argues that while computers, robotics, and other digital devices are not inherently bad, they could be vastly better for us – if we design them using new human science discoveries.

One of the most impressive medical discoveries described in the book is the positive connection between our immune system and a kind voice. Music is also a great healer of the body, and a fascinating area for future research. Another discovery described in the book is the causal relationship between the growth of new heart tissue and the experiences of love and kindness. Given that heart disease is the number one cause of death, globally, this is significant.

If we change our expectations of what technology can do for us, we can change our understanding of what health is and how it might be supported and promoted through every digital interaction we experience.

The Emotion Organon urges us to imagine a future where these human science discoveries are part of everyday digital society. The myriad of technologies we encounter could be more user- friendly if designed to recognise and support our wellbeing. This concept extends beyond human-centred design, UX-design, inclusive design, or design justice. This idea has already taken off in video gaming and virtual reality, and some are already applying these ideas more broadly to search engines and web page design. Existing technologies can be designed to sense, assess, replicate, and promote our positive emotions, such as joy, happiness, contentment, and social connection. They can have feedback loops to enable continuous improvement in response to our needs as individuals, communities, and societies.

The world is currently alight with conversations about equity and inclusion and the way technologies do not serve all of society well. It is not only the content of the digital information we access that affects us; the interactions themselves are often cold and instrumental. The material in Mason's book suggests they don't have to be that way, and if we are aware of the emotion organon and make use of this knowledge, we can go back to the drawing board to design healthier technologies, that are infused with human science.

As a health researcher in the U.K., it feels only natural that we expect our nurses, doctors, care support workers, and other professionals to treat us fairly, avoid causing harm, and safeguard our personal data— so why do we tolerate software, applications, and devices that frustrate us, stress us out, make us feel sad or bad, divide us, or disadvantage certain groups? During the pandemic, many of us grew to spend increasing amounts of time with technology, and the trend has continued. Now that the acute danger of Covid-19 has reduced, for most of us, we need to ensure that our technologies are not a risk to our health and wellbeing.

An emotion-biological innerspace"perspective on the impact of digital technologies adds new depth to current global efforts to regulate the acute safety risks of AI by highlighting the real risk of opportunity loss. A good digital society can harness technologies designed to promote our individual

biology and collective humanity. The chronic risks of technologies wearing us down and eroding societal resilience must also be acknowledged and addressed now. These are also important safety risks that are moving slowly under the radar with widespread and serious consequences for human lives.

The idea that technologies can support our biology and humanity is not merely' cute' or nice to have' —it signifies a fundamental shift in thinking and programming capabilities towards creating a new era of technologies that consider our biology (the "post-Oblivatronix" era). Following Dr. Mason s observations and thorough research, the book argues for expanding the basis of technologies from efficiency and information to engaging with evidence on how technologies can support pro-social activities and human wellbeing, or even healing in the body. Technologies can embody compassion and generate it if we understand how compassion works(termed compassion literacy").

The human science discoveries in Mason's book give us the incentive and the science to change for a more positive interaction and better quality of life. The medical science presented in The Emotion Organon means that more complex technologies built with biology in mind, such as empathetic virtual reality experiences, positive psychology apps, and companion robots, could promote societal wellbeing at an unprecedented scale.

This book is not only for technologists and computer scientists. It should be on the reading lists of any post-secondary course covering digital society, digital engagement, digital health, AI, machine learning, digital engineering, digital marketing, gaming, technology design, computing or systems development, IT management, or other digital-related topics. Young people will be most affected by these issues; hence teachers and educators should use the insights in this book to raise awareness and expectations about what future technologies can achieve. The next generation needs to know they are not confined by the ways we have previously thought about technologies and the positivity they can bring to us.

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