

Discussion Questions for *Power and Progress: Our Thousand-Year Struggle Over Technology and Prosperity*, by Daron Acemoglu and Simon Johnson

1. The book is largely a critique of the “productivity bandwagon” view of economic change. What is that? (Introduction and Prologue)
2. Focusing on the auto industry, the authors maintain that the impact of new technology on productivity and wages is far different today from what it was in the Henry Ford era. Discuss. (Chapter 1)
3. What general point does the story of Ferdinand de Lesseps illustrate? For students of economics, how can you tell that the authors are departing from conventional free-market economics? (Chapters 1 & 2)
4. How do those with the most “power to persuade” get and keep that power? Do you agree with the authors’ concern about today’s “technocratic approach to democracy”? (Chapter 3)
5. Did any of the historical chapters substantially change your view of the era discussed? (Chapters 4-7 and abstracts)
6. The authors assert that “digital technologies became the graveyard of shared prosperity.” Why haven’t the new technologies had a more positive impact on productivity and wages, and what economic vision has contributed to this? (Chapter 8)
7. The authors’ theory of technology leads them to a position on artificial intelligence that is neither utopian nor dystopian, neither “AI will enrich us all,” nor “AI will destroy us all.” What do you think of their critique of AI as it is developing so far? (Chapter 9)
8. “Democracy Breaks” explores the connections between digital technologies and authoritarian government. Which do you think is the bigger problem, authoritarian leaders using technology for their ends, or technology elites using government for their ends? (Chapter 10)

9. The authors advocate a new progressive movement that would aim to alter the narrative and change norms, cultivate countervailing powers, and develop policy solutions. Is there anything you particularly like or dislike in their recommendations? (Chapter 11)

Evaluation:

1. Disliked, couldn't get into
2. OK, but nothing special
3. Liked, a good read
4. Really liked
5. Loved it, fabulous