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# Paths of Fire

*An Anthropologist's Inquiry  
into Western Technology*

ROBERT M. ADAMS



PRINCETON

# Paths Of Fire An Anthropologists Inquiry Into Western Technology

**Robert McC Adams**



## **Paths Of Fire An Anthropologists Inquiry Into Western Technology:**

**Paths of Fire** Robert McC. Adams, 2012-09-17 Technology perhaps the most salient feature of our time affects everything from jobs to international law yet ranks among the most unpredictable facets of human life Here Robert McC Adams renowned anthropologist and Secretary Emeritus of the Smithsonian Institution builds a new approach to understanding the circumstances that drive technological change stressing its episodic irregular nature The result is nothing less than a sweeping history of technological transformation from ancient times until now Rare in antiquity the bursts of innovations that mark the advance of technology have gradually accelerated and now have become an almost continuous feature of our culture Repeatedly shifting in direction this path has been shaped by a host of interacting social cultural and scientific forces rather than any deterministic logic Thus future technological developments Adams maintains are predictable only over the very short term Adams s account highlights Britain and the United States from early modern times onward Locating the roots of the Industrial Revolution in British economic and social institutions he goes on to consider the new forms of enterprise in which it was embodied and its loss of momentum in the later nineteenth century He then turns to the early United States whose path toward industrialization initially involved considerable technology transfer from Britain Propelled by the advent of mass production world industrial leadership passed to the United States around the end of the nineteenth century Government supported research and development guided partly by military interests helped secure this leadership Today as Adams shows we find ourselves in a profoundly changed era The United States has led the way to a strikingly new multinational pattern of opportunity and risk where technological primacy can no longer be credited to any single nation This recent trend places even more responsibility on the state to establish policies that will keep markets open for its companies and make its industries more competitive Adams concludes with an argument for active government support of science and technology research that should be read by anyone interested in America s ability to compete globally

**Paths of Fire** Robert McC Adams, 1996-01-01      **Global Ecology and Unequal Exchange** Alf Hornborg, 2012-03-29 In modern society we tend to have faith in technology But is our concept of technology itself a cultural illusion This book challenges the idea that humanity as a whole is united in a common development toward increasingly efficient technologies Instead it argues that modern technology implies a kind of global zero sum game involving uneven resource flows which make it possible for wealthier parts of global society to save time and space at the expense of humans and environments in the poorer parts We tend to think of the functioning of machines as if it was detached from the social relations of exchange which make machines economically and physically possible in some areas But even the steam engine that was the core of the Industrial Revolution in England was indissolubly linked to slave labour and soil erosion in distant cotton plantations And even as seemingly benign a technology as railways have historically saved time and accessed space primarily for those who can afford them but at the expense of labour time and natural space lost for other social groups with less purchasing power

The existence of technology in other words is not a cornucopia signifying general human progress but the unevenly distributed result of unequal resource transfers that the science of economics is not equipped to perceive Technology is not simply a relation between humans and their natural environment but more fundamentally a way of organizing global human society From the very start it has been a global phenomenon which has intertwined political economic and environmental histories in complex and inequitable ways This book unravels these complex connections and rejects the widespread notion that technology will make the world sustainable Instead it suggests a radical reform of money which would be as useful for achieving sustainability as for avoiding financial breakdown It brings together various perspectives from environmental and economic anthropology ecological economics political ecology world system analysis fetishism theory semiotics environmental and economic history and development theory Its main contribution is a new understanding of technological development and concerns about global sustainability as questions of power and uneven distribution ultimately deriving from the inherent logic of general purpose money It should be of interest to students and professionals with a background or current engagement in anthropology sustainability studies environmental history economic history or development studies

**The Social Context of Technological Change** Andrew J. Shortland, 2016-12-16 The technological capabilities of the ancient world have long fascinated scholars and the general public alike though scholarly debate has often seen material culture not as the development of technology but as a tool for defining chronology and delineating the level of interactions of neighboring societies These fourteen papers arising from a conference held in Oxford in September 2000 take the approach that technology plays a vital role in past socioeconomic systems They cover the Near East and associated areas including Greece Crete Cyprus Anatolia the Levant Mesopotamia and Egypt from the end of the Middle Bronze Age to the Late Bronze Age 1650 1150 BC a period when many technological innovations appear for the first time *Contemporary Issues in Food Supply Chain Management* Jane Eastham, Luis De Aguiar, Simon Thelwell, 2017-05-31 A holistic view of the factors affecting sustainability public health poverty security and production within the food supply chain With contributions from international experts in the field it takes particular emphasis on growing populations and the deployment of agricultural land for uses other than food production **Strange Sounds** Timothy D Taylor, 2014-01-02 In *Strange Sounds* Timothy D Taylor explains the wonder and anxiety provoked by a technological revolution that began in the 1940s and gathers steam daily Taylor discusses the cultural role of technology its use in making music and the inevitable concerns about authenticity that arise from electronic music Informative and highly entertaining for both music fans and scholars *Strange Sounds* is a provocative look at how we perform listen to and understand music today **Technology: A World History** Daniel R. Headrick Professor of Social Sciences and History Roosevelt University, 2009-02-25 Today technology has created a world of dazzling progress growing disparities of wealth and poverty and looming threats to the environment *Technology A World History* offers an illuminating backdrop to our present moment a brilliant history of invention around the globe Historian

Daniel R Headrick ranges from the Stone Age and the beginnings of agriculture to the Industrial Revolution and the electronic revolution of the recent past In tracing the growing power of humans over nature through increasingly powerful innovations he compares the evolution of technology in different parts of the world providing a much broader account than is found in other histories of technology We also discover how small changes sometimes have dramatic results how for instance the stirrup revolutionized war and gave the Mongols a deadly advantage over the Chinese And how the nailed horseshoe was a pivotal breakthrough for western farmers Enlivened with many illustrations Technology offers a fascinating look at the spread of inventions around the world both as boons for humanity and as weapons of destruction

OUR FRAGILE WORLD: Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Development - Volume II M. K. Tolba, 2001-08-23 This publication Our Fragile World Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Development presents perspectives of several important subjects that are covered in greater detail and depth in the Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems EOLSS The contributions to the two volumes provide an integrated presentation of knowledge and worldviews related to the state of Earth's natural resources social resources institutional resources and economic and financial resources They present the vision and thinking of over 200 authors in support of efforts to solve the complex problems connected with sustainable development and to secure perennial life support on The Blue Planet These contributions are holistic informative forward looking and will be of interest to a broad readership This volume presents contributions with focus on the Economic and Institutional Dimensions of Sustainable Development in two sections KNOWLEDGE TECHNOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT Knowledge Technology and Management Economics Finance and trade POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT Policy Issues Institutional implications Regional Analysis

*The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are So Rich and Some So Poor* David S. Landes, 1999-05-17 New York Times Bestseller Readers cannot but be provoked and stimulated by this splendidly iconoclastic and refreshing book Andrew Porter New York Times Book Review The Wealth and Poverty of Nations is David S Landes's acclaimed best selling exploration of one of the most contentious and hotly debated questions of our time Why do some nations achieve economic success while others remain mired in poverty The answer as Landes definitively illustrates is a complex interplay of cultural mores and historical circumstance Rich with anecdotal evidence piercing analysis and a truly astonishing range of erudition The Wealth and Poverty of Nations is a picture of enormous sweep and brilliant insight Kenneth Arrow as well as one of the most audaciously ambitious works of history in decades

The Petrine Revolution in Russian Culture James Cracraft, 2009-07-01 The reforms initiated by Peter the Great transformed Russia not only into a European power but into a European culture a shift argues Cracraft that was nothing less than revolutionary The author of seminal works on visual culture in the Petrine era Cracraft now turns his attention to the changes that occurred in Russian verbal culture

**Glassmaking in Renaissance Venice** W. Patrick McCray, 2017-03-02 The transformation of the Venetian glass industry during the Renaissance was not only a technical phenomenon but also a

social one In this volume Patrick McCray examines the demand production and distribution of glass and glassmaking technology during this period and evaluates several key topics including the nature of Renaissance demand for certain luxury goods the interaction between industry and government in the Renaissance and technological change as a social process McCray places in its broader economic and cultural context a craft and industry that has been traditionally viewed primarily through the surviving artefacts held in museum collections McCray explores the social and economic context of glassmaking in Venice from the guild and state level down to the workings of the individual glass house He tracks the dissemination of Venetian style glassmaking throughout Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and its effects on Venice s glass industry Integrating evidence from a wide variety of sources written documents such as shop records and recipe books pictorial representations of glass and glassmaking and the careful physical and chemical analysis of glass pieces that have survived to the present he examines the relation between consumer demand and technological change In the process he traces the organizational changes that signified a transition from an older and more traditional manner of artisan manufacture to a modern factory style manner of production

People, Plants and Genes Denis J Murphy, 2007-07-19 This book provides a comprehensive interdisciplinary overview of human plant interactions and their social consequences from the hunter gatherers of the Palaeolithic Era to the 21st century molecular manipulation of crops It links the latest advances in molecular genetics climate research and archaeology to give a new perspective on the evolution of agriculture and complex human societies across the world Even today our technologically advanced societies still rely on plants for basic food needs not to mention clothing shelter medicines and tools This special relationship has tied together people and their chosen plants in mutual dependence for well over 50 000 years Yet despite these millennia of intimate contact people have only domesticated and cultivated a few dozen of the tens of thousands of potentially available edible plants This limited domestication process led directly to the evolution of the complex urban based societies that have dominated much of human development over the past ten millennia Thanks to the latest genomic studies we can now begin to explain how when and where some of the most important crops came to be domesticated and the crucial roles of plant genetics climatic change and social organisation in these processes Indeed it was their unique genetic organisations that ultimately determined which plants eventually became crops rather than any conscious decisions by their human cultivators The book is aimed at a wide audience ranging from plant specialists such as geneticists molecular biologists and agronomists to a more general readership of archaeologists anthropologists historians and others who wish to explore the complex processes that have shaped the often crucial relationships between plants and human societies over the past hundred millennia

**Knowledge And Civilization** Barry Allen, 2018-02-15 Offers a new original way of framing questions about knowledge Knowledge and Civilization advances detailed criticism of philosophy s usual approach to knowledge and describes a redirection away from textbook problems of epistemology toward an ecological philosophy of technology and civilization Rejecting theories that

confine knowledge to language or discourse Allen situates knowledge in the greater field of artifacts technical performance and human evolution His wide ranging considerations draw on ideas from evolutionary biology archaeology anthropology and the history of cities art and technology *Machines We Trust* Marcello Pelillo,Teresa Scantamburlo,2021-08-24 Experts from disciplines that range from computer science to philosophy consider the challenges of building AI systems that humans can trust Artificial intelligence based algorithms now marshal an astonishing range of our daily activities from driving a car turn left in 400 yards to making a purchase products recommended for you How can we design AI technologies that humans can trust especially in such areas of application as law enforcement and the recruitment and hiring process In this volume experts from a range of disciplines discuss the ethical and social implications of the proliferation of AI systems considering bias transparency and other issues The contributors offering perspectives from computer science engineering law and philosophy first lay out the terms of the discussion considering the ethical debts of AI systems the evolution of the AI field and the problems of trust and trustworthiness in the context of AI They go on to discuss specific ethical issues and present case studies of such applications as medicine and robotics inviting us to shift the focus from the perspective of a human centered AI to that of an AI decentered humanity Finally they consider the future of AI arguing that as we move toward a hybrid society of cohabiting humans and machines AI technologies can become humanity s allies The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World Walter Scheidel,Ian Morris,Richard P. Saller,2007-11-29 In this the first comprehensive survey of the economies of classical antiquity twenty eight chapters summarise the current state of scholarship in their specialised fields and sketch new directions for research They reflect a new interest in economic growth in antiquity and develop new methods for measuring economic development often combining textual and archaeological data that have previously been treated separately **Connectivity in Antiquity** Oystein S. LaBianca,Sandra Arnold Scham,2016-04-08 Today s politicians argue that the more connected societies are the less danger they pose to global stability But is this a new idea or one as old as history itself Trade routes as far back as prehistory were responsible for the exchange of ideas as well as goods leading to the rapid expansion of states and empires Connectivity in Antiquity brings together a team of influential scholars to examine the process of globalization in antiquity The essays examine metallurgy social evolution economic growth and the impact of religious pilgrimage and range across the eastern Mediterranean Syria the Transjordan south Yemen and Egypt Connectivity in Antiquity will be of value to all those interested in the relationship between antiquity and modern globalisation **Reorienting the 19th Century** Andre Gunder Frank,Robert A. Denemark,2015-10-23 Andre Gunder Frank was a path breaking scholar in several disciplines over an illustrious and contentious 50 year career First amongst his many important works is the book ReORIENT Global Economy in the Asian Age which sought to correct a Euro centric world view of the development of the global political economy Frank passed away in April 2005 while working on this new book a sequel to ReORIENT In this book Frank shows many of the myths of European

industrialisation hegemony and capitalism which have hidden the fact that Asia remained a serious power not just into the 18th century as Frank himself argued in 1998 but well into the 19th century as well. When Frank passed away his colleagues rallied to finish this book and it is presented here as his final major statement. *Desolate Landscapes* John F. Hoffecker, 2002. John F. Hoffecker provides an overview of Pleistocene or Ice Age settlement in Eastern Europe with a heavy focus on the adaptations of Neanderthals and modern humans to this harsh environmental setting. Hoffecker argues that the Eastern European record reveals a stark contrast between Neanderthals and modern humans with respect to technology and social organization both of which are tied to the development of language and the use of symbols. *Desolate Landscapes* will bring readers up to date with the rich archaeological record in this significant region and its contribution to our understanding of one of our most important events in human evolution: the rise of modern humans and the extinction of the Neanderthals. *The Internet: Its Impact and Evaluation* David Nicholas, Ian Rowlands, 2003-09-02. The Proceedings of an international forum held at Cumberland Lodge Windsor Park 16-18th July 1999 organised by City University and sponsored by Aslib, The Association for Information Management, The British Library and News International. The purpose of the conference was to explore methods for evaluating the Internet's many features and functions, assess the impact of the Internet in strategic areas of human endeavour, so providing us with an understanding of the way that the Internet is fashioning the world we live in, identify the key information and communication principles, ideas and concepts that are emerging as a result of the spread and development of the Internet, and put down an agenda for future Internet research and collaboration. Contents: The challenge, unstable knowledge, unstable times, Three dimensional impact, a case study of electronic government, Joining up information and learning, Newspapers and the net, peaceful coexistence or fight to the death, The impact of the Internet on the ownership of information, Impact of the Internet: some conceptual and methodological issues, Studying the impacts of the Internet without assuming technological determinism, The relevance of information retrieval research for the evaluation of the WWW, From bibliometrics to cybermetrics, Web metrics: too much data, too little analysis, Surveying the global diffusion of the Internet, Tracking and evaluating the global information consumer, Evaluating the net as a local information resource. *US Defence Strategy from Vietnam to Operation Iraqi Freedom* Robert R. Tomes, 2006-12-13. *US Defence Strategy from Vietnam to Operation Iraqi Freedom* examines the thirty year transformation in American military thought and defence strategy that spanned from 1973 through 2003. During these three decades, new technology and operational practices helped form what observers dubbed a Revolution in Military Affairs in the 1990s and a New American Way of War in the 2000s. Robert R. Tomes tells for the first time the story of how innovative approaches to solving battlefield challenges gave rise to non-nuclear strategic strike, the quest to apply information technology to offset Soviet military advantages, and the rise of decisive operations in American military strategy. He details an innovation process that began in the shadow of Vietnam, matured in the 1980s as Pentagon planners sought an integrated nuclear-conventional deterrent, and



culminated with battles fought during blinding sandstorms on the road to Baghdad in 2003. An important contribution to military innovation studies, the book also presents an innovation framework applicable to current defence transformation efforts. This book will be of much interest to students of strategic studies, US defence policy and US politics in general.

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