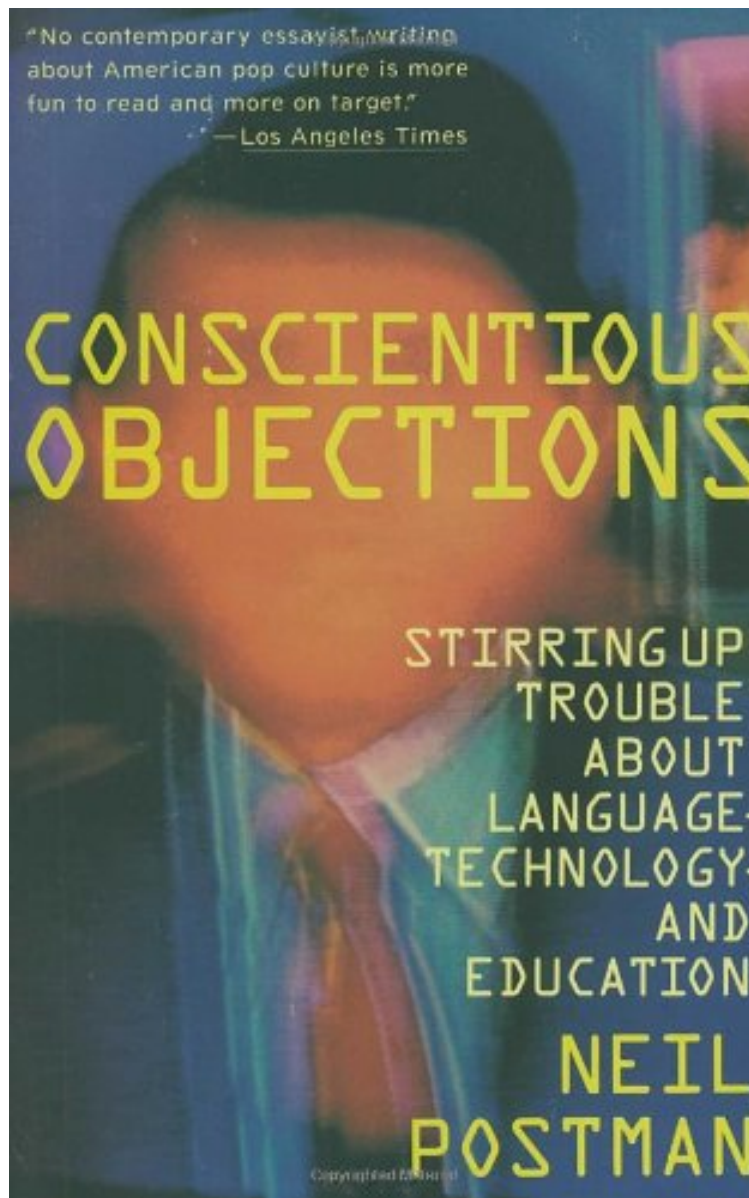


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Conscientious Objections: Stirring Up Trouble About Language, Technology and Education

Neil Postman

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Neil Postman : Conscientious Objections: Stirring Up Trouble About Language, Technology and Education before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Conscientious Objections: Stirring Up Trouble About Language, Technology and Education:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. A perfect place to begin with Neil Postman

By D. D. This book of essays and articles nicely consolidates the different themes that Postman wrote about over the years. Most of the ideas here are further detailed and explored in his single topic books, such as his flagship book on television **AMUSING OURSELVES TO DEATH** and **TECHNOPOLY**. Certainly the material here will be familiar terrain to Postman veterans, but there are a few gems that still make it worthwhile. I initially refrained from buying this book because much of it was pre-published material and I'd assumed familiarity from what I'd already read in his other books. However, selections like "Alfred Korzybski" and "My German Question", in which Postman describes a 1985 trip to Germany he was commissioned to take and write about were fantastic new material. But for a reader new to Neil Postman this is the perfect book. No one will agree with everything they read in this book. I certainly don't. The thing is, there's a voice here of a sort that I just can't find in today's culture critics. It's an entirely human voice, one still dubious about the ceding of formerly human domains to technology. One that isn't going to speak to you as a statistical amalgam of ideas or vaguely take you for granted as a political opponent or ally. One of the reasons that I think Postman's books are even more important now than they were 20 or 30 years ago is that he so perfectly documents his portion of our transition from a literate to electric society. As time passes we obviously have less people speaking who were around before certain technological changes took place. The younger generations are often unaware of their new environment and it's effects as anything but compulsory or even natural. His books were written to bring this continuing transition back into our consciousness, and they were written in a language meant to communicate with everyone. They aren't pleas to unreachable policy makers, but egalitarian messages to the only people capable of affecting real change - individuals. But on to the content..."The Naming of the Missiles" and "Megatons for Anthromegs" managed to be both poignant and funny. "My Graduation Speech" is classic Postman. "Social Science as Moral Theology" is as timely today as ever. In a society that reveres science the way it once revered religion, the stakes are clear for those who would be known as scientists. While the question of whether a sociologist, psychoanalyst or psychiatrist is a scientist may initially seem like a mere matter of branding, this essay makes it clear that it's really an issue of perceived authority. Postman clearly sees plenty to learn in Freud, Jung, Marx and the like, but makes the case that not just any new interpretation of civilization or nature qualifies as science. A scientist's claims **MUST BE FALSIFIABLE**. There is a certain degree of scrutiny that a claim must be subjected to, and if it is unable or unavailable to be subjected to such then it isn't science. Obviously, some such distinction is necessary for the mere existence of science. Postman consequently refers to the social scientists as "storytellers", just as Joseph Campbell called them "mythmakers". However this is not at all pejorative. In fact, he claims that this distinction should have no bearing on the usefulness of their work, only the context in which it's regarded. He makes a point to include media ecologists **SUCH AS HIMSELF** (for the the reviewer claiming he hypocritically used the same methods). He devotes an entire paragraph to this, so I'm not sure how a reader could miss it. Both current "liberals" and "conservatives" may find themselves irked by "The Conservative Outlook". Liberals because the mere word has become auditory poison, and conservatives because Postman's conservative approach to technology bears little resemblance to what the word has come to mean by 2012. In my opinion Postman probably would have been better off abandoning that word and all of it's bloated connotations, even back in 1988. Marshall McLuhan once remarked in a letter that, in the television age, one thing that politics will not tolerate is ambiguity. Every issue becomes increasingly polarized, increasingly entrenched. This piece is a speech to Austrian conservatives about the effect of television on a culture unused to it, a subject that will require some imagination for those of us born after 1975 or perhaps even earlier. It was a call for a reevaluation of following the lead of American culture that obviously never happened. Check your red state/blue state goggles at the door and the real issue will magically appear. Does anyone write this precisely and deliberately anymore? Postman repeatedly proves that all that's often needed to excavate clarity is more context than our current mass media is willing or capable of providing. Despite writing his books exclusively on a legal pad with a regular old ink pen, his sentences and arguments have a lean and natural structure that so many 21st century writers seem incapable of for all the word processing software in the world. Yes, very often the things he says seem intuitive or obvious, but if we're honest with ourselves they are also frequent indicators of just how far we can deviate from that common sense, individually and as a "rational" society. I can imagine those in social science fields or committed technocrats feeling condescended by Postman's views. That's something to suss out in the subject matter of the book, but we should keep in mind that the more invested we are in something, the more difficult it is to keep an open mind about it. What no one will feel condescended by is his language. He has a rare gift for communicating complex ideas clearly and simply from a removed perspective that the specialists and experts are too close to see. We all, even the political right, have quite a bit invested in the progressive vision, the entertainment and convenience ever awaiting us in technology, the narratives of our respected academics, etc. At the core, I think that's what generates most of Postman's detractors. Very few are interested in the hard work and probable suffering that would come from a serious alteration of any of these things. That is if restructuring or replacing them is even possible, which it may not be. But then again, are we just helpless little automatons? Postman says no.

31 of 32 people found the following review helpful. A Great Introduction to Neil Postman

By Jeff Bennion This book contains essays and chapter excerpts from most of his other works (though not the later ones like *Technopoly* and *The End of Education*). Neil Postman is one of

the keenest and most articulate of that species I call the "cultural hand-wringers". I'm very sympathetic to the arguments he makes, though sometimes I think he may be a bit too dire. I've read everything he's written that I can get my hands on, and all of it has been a total delight. (I'd steer any Postman fans to Robert Hughes _The Culture of Complaint_ for similarly keen, delightful, and refreshing take-no-prisoners denunciations) Since so much of his work is a complaint about how form (e.g. TV) has coopted function, I hardly think Postman himself would approve of this kind of recommendation, but he's so much fun to read even if you *don't* agree with him that it's worth the effort anyway. But watch out: he's so persuasive and passionate with his arguments, you'll probably end up doing so no matter how well-armed you are against it. Two essays that have stuck in my mind: "The German Question" where he ponders what the Holocaust consciousness will mean to postwar Germany, and "The Small Screen" where Postman is invited to write something nice about television for once. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. often funny, and deeply meaningful reflections on what makes us ...By Harry A. Kiesel This is another of Postman's delightfully written, often funny, and deeply meaningful reflections on what makes us human, and on society as a humanly created entity. I've read most of the books he's written and this is the one I enjoyed the most. Postman is an academician but without the pompousness and intentional linguistic snobbery that so often occurs and this is refreshing. I have often been told and believe that an idea that cannot be put into plain language that even the uninitiated can understand is an idea that is not understood. Postman Is an example of one who, perhaps unwittingly, adheres to this principle.

In a series of feisty and ultimately hopeful essays, one of America's sharpest social critics casts a shrewd eye over contemporary culture to reveal the worst -- and the best -- of our habits of discourse, tendencies in education, and obsessions with technological novelty. Readers will find themselves rethinking many of their bedrock assumptions: Should education transmit culture or defend us against it? Is technological innovation progress or a peculiarly American addiction? When everyone watches the same television programs -- and television producers don't discriminate between the audiences for Sesame Street and Dynasty -- is childhood anything more than a sentimental concept? Writing in the traditions of Orwell and H.L. Mencken, Neil Postman sends shock waves of wit and critical intelligence through the cultural wasteland.

From Library Journal In a delightful series of pungent essays (some originating as talks), Postman takes on a variety of contemporary cultural phenomena including television (and its deleterious effects), language, the crisis in education, politics, and social "science," to list a few. The concluding piece, "My Graduation Speech" (offered freely for use), is alone worth the price of the book, but Postman's keen observations and thoughtful concerns are equally apparent throughout. Readers of his earlier works (Teaching as a Subversive Activity , Amusing Ourselves to Death , and The Disappearance of Childhood) will also applaud this. Highly recommended to academics and the general public. Suzanne W. Wood, SUNY Coll. of Technology, Alfred Copyright 1988 Reed Business Information, Inc. "Postman is that rare social critic whose commentary on the current state of American culture and education is a funny as it is throughout and well argued...a provocative collection." -- The New York Times Book "Postman uses cogent arguments, sharp needles and gentle humor to challenge readers to change their ways of thinking ... delightful." -- St. Louis Post Dispatch From the Inside Flap In a series of feisty and ultimately hopeful essays, one of America's sharpest social critics casts a shrewd eye over contemporary culture to reveal the worst -- and the best -- of our habits of discourse, tendencies in education, and obsessions with technological novelty. Readers will find themselves rethinking many of their bedrock assumptions: Should education transmit culture or defend us against it? Is technological innovation progress or a peculiarly American addiction? When everyone watches the same television programs -- and television producers don't discriminate between the audiences for Sesame Street and Dynasty -- is childhood anything more than a sentimental concept? Writing in the traditions of Orwell and H.L. Mencken, Neil Postman sends shock waves of wit and critical intelligence through the cultural wasteland.