



The Engines of Our Ingenuity: An Engineer Looks at Technology and Culture

John H. Lienhard

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A million people tune in twice each week to hear John H. Lienhard's radio program "The Engines of Our Ingenuity." Now Lienhard has gathered together his reflections on the nature of technology, culture, human inventiveness, and the history of engineering in this fascinating new book.

The Engines of Our Ingenuity offers a series of intriguing glimpses into technology--as a mirror, as a danger, as a product of heroic hubris. The book brims with insightful observations. Lienhard writes, for instance, that the history of technology is a history of us--we are the machines we create. Indeed, our very first technology, farming, which demanded year-long care, dramatically changed the rhythms of human life and the course of our history. We also learn that war does not necessarily fuel invention (radar, jets, and the digital computer all emerged before World War II began), and that the medieval Church was actually a driving force behind the growth of Western technology (Cistercian monasteries were virtual factories, putting water wheels to work in wood-cutting, forging, and olive crushing). Lienhard also illuminates the unpredictable nature of the inventive mind, leading us through one fascinating example after another. Thomas Edison and Nikola Tesla, for instance, were highly passionate, even combative figures, while the almost invisible Josiah Willard Gibbs, living a quiet, outwardly uneventful life, was probably America's greatest scientist.

Lienhard ranges far and wide with stories of inventors, mathematicians, and engineers, telling the story of the canoe, the DC-3, the Hoover Dam, the diode, and the sewing machine. The result is less history than autobiography--for the autobiography of all of us is written in our machines.

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