Reinventing Knowledge: From Alexandria to the Internet by Lisa Wolverton

Internet Is Not A Great Leap Forward In Reinventing Knowledge

A dazzling intellectual history of the West served up with verve and insight by two brilliant young historians. Here is an intellectual entertainment, a sweeping history of the key institutions that have organized knowledge in the West from the classical period onward. With elegance and wit, this exhilarating history alights at the pivotal points of cultural transformation. The motivating question throughout: How does history help us understand the vast changes we are now experiencing in the landscape of knowledge? Beginning in Alexandria and its great center of Hellenistic learning and imperial power, we then see the monastery in the wilderness of a collapsed civilization, the rambunctious universities of the late medieval cities, and the thick social networks of the Enlightenment republic of letters. The development of science and the laboratory as a dominant knowledge institution brings us to the present, seeking patterns in the new digital networks of knowledge. Full of memorable characters, this fresh history succeeds in restoring the strangeness and the significance of the past.

My Personal Review:
Edit of 29 August 2008: Am adding a couple of images to help clarify the importance of actually understanding new ways of creating, sharing, and leveraging knowledge. YES, the Internet has led to an order of magnitude or more knowledge creation and sharing but NO, it has not led to a dramatic change in the definition of knowledge or the role played by knowledge.

With a tip of the hat to SALON and book reviewer Laura Miller, whose review can be found at the URL in the comment, I want to add this book to those I recommend for the growing body of citizens who are truly skeptical of the Internet as a panacea, and suspicious of Google and other "snake oil" vendors.

Use the "see inside the book" feature just under the book cover above to examine details provided by the publisher.

Bottom line: we are entering a period when the "wealth of networks" may reinvent knowledge, but having read and reviewed The Necessary
Revolution: How Individuals And Organizations Are Working Together to Create a Sustainable World only to be stunned at the end with its discussion of how many non-human primates are learning 500-1000 human words in sign language, I am now convinced, from a system of systems perspective, that the next big leap in reinventing knowledge will be not the emergence of smart mobs, armies of davids, the power of us, but rather, when Pierre Tielhard de Chardin's noosphere becomes a reality, and all living things have co-equal standing "in communion" with one another.

The nicest thing I can say about this book, other than to recommend it, is to link to other books that support the thesis the book presents: the Internet is NOT the big leap forward.

See also:

In the Absence of the Sacred: The Failure of Technology and the Survival of the Indian Nations
Silicon Snake Oil: Second Thoughts on the Information Highway
The Future of the Internet--And How to Stop It
The Age of Missing Information
Society's Breakthrough!: Releasing Essential Wisdom and Virtue in All the People
The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom
The Biodiversity Crisis: Losing What Counts (American Museum of Natural History Books)
The First Idea: How Symbols, Language, And Intelligence Evolved From Our Primate Ancestors To Modern Humans

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