

Technology and Alienation: Examining Themes in 21st-Century Dystopian Fiction

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In the age of being always connected, the question comes to mind: Do we become more united by technology, or is technology irreversibly tearing us apart? This is the question that runs throughout *The Circle* (2013) by Dave Eggers, a landmark read in the genre of dystopian fiction of the 21st century that explores the price of being immersed in technology everywhere. The novel traces the rise of Mae Holland in a powerful technology firm that espouses radical openness at the cost of privacy and uniqueness. The importance of the issue also consists in its dramatic lesson of the alienating potential of uncontrolled technological utopianism, which seems to be more topical in the world of surveillance. In *The Circle*, technology is portrayed as a source of deepening alienation, which places people alienated from themselves, their communities, and anything that is genuine, in the case of privacy, perhaps with its pretense of connectedness, social coercion to peers with regard to surveillance, and ultimately constriction of human will.

Illusion of connection, which ultimately negates the real relationship between people, is one of the main means with which *The Circle* reveals technological alienation. The company has encouraged complete social activity as being socially coercive rather than liberating. Mae, getting into the culture of *The Circle*, gets hit with all the messages telling her that she is at fault for not being online. The satirical story of Eggers about the so-called "PartiRank" system calculates the social value through engagement (Eggers, 2013, p. 58). This shows that technological inclusiveness is bogus and that complicated human interactions have been simplified to numbers, and that there is a fear of being evaluated continuously. Also, the company motto, which is followed, is called "Sharing is caring," which imposes a community utopia that punishes secrecy (Eggers, 2013, p. 167). When Mae refuses to allow total

transparency initially, she is chastised as being selfish. This explains how corporate surveillance liberalizes the commodification of personal experience, masked in the name of connection. The novel by Eggers, therefore, cautions against manufactured social stresses by technology, which appear to alienate individuals from their true community in favor of obedience as performance.

In addition, *The Circle* portrays technology as a means of surveillance that regulates conformity and robs individuals of privacy and self-alienation. Surveillance brings self-censorship and the loss of interiority. In the novel, the small cameras in a program called “SeeChange” make all purely transparent (Eggers, 2013, p. 40). Eggers reveals how being under constant surveillance affects the behavior of Mae; she turns hyper-vigilant, showing off an ideal image. This corresponds to panopticism as postulated by Michel Foucault, where visibility serves as a kind of discipline that internalizes power. Critique reveals that this is enforced transparency that drives Mae out of her wishes onto the stage of performance. Moreover, surveillance brings in fear and discourages uprising. Even the friend, Mae, of Mercer eventually self-destructs under the constant surveillance of the Circle in a dark reminder of the atrocity of living without shadows. The tragedy emphasizes the ethical implications of such a trade, emotional security imposed on civil freedoms, hinting at the surveillance society that detaches people from moral responsibility and appropriates inhumanity. In its turn, the narrative provided by Eggers warns of the fact that technological surveillance turns social life into the sphere of control, wiping out the prerequisites of true selfhood.

Lastly, *The Circle* describes the future that technology promises as a danger to human agency and accountability. The mission of completion that Circle proposes is the availability of all the knowledge, denying the element of choice. Personal freedom comes to an end as Mae decides to accept the provision that requires everyone to use the said company systems. The

novel provides the example of Mae when she betrays her former boyfriend, Mercer, and her family, to serve the interests of the Circle, which is why technological obsession removes the good line. It shows that in the dystopia created by Eggers, technology not only makes alienation possible but necessitates it as the cost of utopia. The risks of technological determinism in the real world could also be found in the vision of the Circle. Under the logic of surveillance capitalism, human behavior is predictable and controllable, as the logic of surveillance capitalism it removes moral complexity. In *The Circle*, this rationale translates to absolute results, and the readers are therefore faced with the foreignness of humans making judgments of algorithms.

In conclusion, *The Circle* is an interesting work showing the powerful effects of technology, however seductive in its universality in relationships and knowledge, as a force of alienation, distancing people not only in meaningful relationships but also in their inner selves and moral independence. With its gruesome depiction of a world controlled by surveillance and forced transparency, the novel by Eggers becomes a warning of the 21st century, making us wonder whether our technological dreams are worth the payoff.

References

Eggers, D. (2013). *The Circle*. Vintage Books.

