



Ego: The Game of Life

Frank Schirrmacher

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Twenty-five years after the end of the Cold War, a new Cold War is being waged in our societies. During the Cold War a theoretical model of man was developed by economists and the military, an egotistical being interested only in his own benefit and in duping his opponents to achieve his ends: a modern homo oeconomicus. After his career in the Cold War ended, he was not scrapped but adapted to the needs of the twenty-first century. He became the ringmaster of a new era of information capitalism. He sought to read, control and influence thoughts; to predict, price and eliminate risks. Today stock-market trading is guided by him. He uses computer algorithms and Big Data to build up detailed pictures of our preferences and then suggest and sell goods to us. The model has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. We are no longer the masters of our own fate. The Game of Life runs without us.

Schirrmacher traces the progress of this extreme rationalization of social life from the Cold War games of the 1950s Rand Corporation to the stock-market trading techniques that brought about the financial crash of 2008, showing how these developments were interwoven with the rise of game theory, rational choice theory and neoliberal economics. The state and politics increasingly submitted themselves to the logic of computerized game theory and an economicistic view of the world, evading real decision-making in the process. In this brave new world individuals, alone in front of their computers, may think they are constructing a reality of their own choosing, but in fact they are being manipulated all along by others who are setting the rules of the game.

This international bestseller by one of Germany's most distinguished journalists is a powerful indictment of a way of thinking that has become pervasive and threatens to undermine not only parliaments and constitutions but also the sovereignty of the individual to be the person he or she wants to be.

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