URL: https://ecorner.stanford.edu/clips/two-dogmas-of-tech-entrepreneurship/

Referring to her book Trampled by Unicorns, Techstars CEO Maëlle Gavet diagnoses what she believes to be two of the most dangerous dogmas prevalent in the current tech entrepreneurship ecosystem: the belief that self-regulation is sufficient, and the belief that unfettered A/B testing on human beings is the optimal route to success.

Transcript

- When you stand back from all the individual challenges 00:00:05,380 that you've explored in the book, are there one or two problems that you see as particularly like, really deep and really troubling? - Yes, there are a few.. 00:00:16,530 I would say at a macro level, because as you pointed out, I do speak about a lot of individual challenges and individual problems that exists throughout the tech industry.. But if we take a step back and really talk about a macro level thing, I would say there are two that for me are deeply ingrained challenges that I'm hoping we're going to make progresses on.. But I don't know if we are as much as I think we should.. The first one is this deeply ingrained belief, especially in Silicon Valley, that governments are useless and that self-regulation is the only way to go.. And I find that idea incredibly dangerous.. One, because self regulation has never worked for any industry ever.. And the almost hubris that goes with that, this ego that goes with, oh, we're different, we're going to be able to self-regulate ourselves.. And this idea that democratically elected governments are something that we should be ignoring feels to me, incredibly shortsighted.. In particular, because if you look, I have a humanities background, I studied history and philosophy and these kinds of things..

If you look at what has made Western societies so successful, my view, my interpretation is that it's been this really good balance we've been able to find.. Especially I would say over the last hundred years between entrepreneurial capitalism and democratically elected government that were pushing a certain vision of society and a certain vision of life and implementing guardrails and this balance, which by the way, wasn't always easy to keep.. But that balance that we have been able to maintain, in different ways in Europe versus North America but still is what has allowed us to create such prosperous societies in my opinion.. And I think we find ourselves in a place right now where a lot of tech companies have been arguing for a really long time, though they're starting to change a little bit, their tune.. Have been arguing for a really long time that they can self-regulate and that governments are just making so many mistakes, which I find particularly ironic when you look at the number of massively destructive mistakes this same tech companies have been been making.. And so there's almost like an idea of, there are two different set of rules for tech companies, which should be allowed to iterate and make mistakes and learn from their mistakes and another set of rules for government that should get it right from the get-go and shouldn't be allowed to iterate.. And if you'll allow me, there is another problem, I think, which is actually touching on what I've just described, which is this deeply ingrained belief.. I don't even know if it's a belief because I'm not sure it has been expressed in a way that people understand that this is how we operate in tech.. Is this idea that we can test our way out of problems.. So this famous AB testing approach that most tech companies operate with where you have a problem and you test two solutions and you look at which one gets the best response, and then you move into the next one..

And so you AB test everything, every decision that you make, which in theory is amazing, it looks like we don't have to use a lot of brain juice.. Let's just test stuff.. The issue is that it basically implies that we're going to make a lot of mistakes until we get to the solution.. And more importantly, it assume that it's absolutely okay to use human beings as guinea pigs.. The tech industry is the only industry that runs tests on billions of people without any control.. And we, as tech leaders, not only are comfortable with that, we are actually proud of it.. We're like, look at how many tests we are running in parallel to make sure that we get to the right idea.. And so to me, like these are two very deeply ingrained issue around self-regulation and this idea that it's okay to test, to use human being to AB test everything.. We would probably be in a very different position right now, if we had, earlier on, had conversation about whether these two beliefs are the right one...