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Our planet's future is too often described in terms of doom and despair. However, there is another perspective that is not only positive, but credible, too.

The World We Made describes a planet that is green, fair, connected, and collaborative. Based on extensive research, leading environmentalist Jonathon Porritt reveals how we can achieve a genuinely sustainable world by 2050 if we act immediately. Part history, part narrative, *The World We Made* describes the key events, technological breakthroughs, and lifestyle revolutions that could transform our planet, covering topics as wide-ranging as 3D printing, personal genomics, urban agriculture, and the digital landscape. The book's innovative ideas are brought to life with futuristic photographs, infographics, and hand-drawn sketches, while an extensive index provides the tools and tips needed to prepare for what's ahead.

The World We Made is essential reading for anyone interested in preserving our planet. All royalties will support the work of Forum for the Future, one of the world's leading sustainable development non-profits.

The World We Made: Alex McKay's Story from 2050 Details

Date : Published October 8th 2013 by Phaidon Press (first published October 7th 2013)

ISBN : 9780714863610

Author : Jonathon Porritt

Format : Hardcover 320 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Environment, Sustainability, Science

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From Reader Review The World We Made: Alex McKay's Story from 2050 for online ebook

Cherie says

B+ Really great idea - what would the world be like in 2050 if governments and people actually started caring about the environment, creating policies to protect the planet instead of destroy it? WONDERFUL, and I wish the future would be this.

Anna says

This was just what I needed to recover from reading about the Eastern Front of the Second World War. To balance the horrors of the past, consider the positive possibilities of the future. Porritt's book is a future history, purportedly written in 2050 by a UK school teacher. The format is that of a multi-chapter school report or textbook - which might make it sound less fun than it is. I found the text engaging and the images appealing. 2050 as envisioned here is by no means perfect and the relatively stable world has been arrived at via serious disasters; extreme weather, famine, and antibiotic-resistant TB outbreaks. Nonetheless, this is Porritt's best case scenario. The world has turned away from fossil fuels and an obsession with GDP growth. Carbon emissions have fallen very significantly and ecosystems are recovering, whilst people live longer, happier, and more meaningful lives.

Although I enjoyed the future history, the book isn't complete until you've also read Porritt's notes and references on each chapter at the end. This really emphasises the distance society and politics has to travel to reach a better 2050, whilst retaining a cautious optimism about the possibilities. Moreover, Porritt admits to a certain techno-utopianism that I found throughout the book. Of course, it is easier to colourfully portray technological developments in comparison to political and cultural changes. The politics of the book are cautiously radical, despite a certain ambivalence about China's regime. Although I don't personally agree with the strength of opposition to nuclear power advanced in the book, it's a perfectly defensible perspective. Everyone has a slightly different vision of how a better future might work. The most important thing is to consider that such a future is possible, rather than falling into the fatalism of 'climate change is too expensive to deal with, so let's just ignore it and wreck the planet until we die'. It makes a nice change to find some cautious optimism, backed with detailed suggestions. The main quibble I have with the book is the over-use of the phrase 'got it sorted'. This is an uplifting and encouraging read, definitely recommended if the media and politics are giving you a creeping sense of fatalism about climate change. The future needn't be disastrous.

Bronwyn Hegarty says

I like the concept but I couldn't finish the book because the scenarios feel too optimistically-imagined. I prefer stuff to be real, and based on fact, and it probably is well researched. But! It was too feel good and in that way far too unrealistic. Society is no way going to change that much in 50 years, and maybe never. It needs more grit to capture my interest.

Kevan says

A coffee-table book, written from the year 2050, by a fictional community college prof called Alex McKay. Through relatable made-up pictures, sketches, notes, stories, journal entries, he explains the world as he lives in it, from way out there in the future. He walks through advances in medicine, transportation, housing, energy and more that has changed since our time. It's such a cool concept, one of the most "relatable" works about futurism that I've encountered. It doesn't alienate, or strike fear, or cause too much optimism, or rely too much on technology.

In some sense, I feel the author didn't go far enough...some of these breakthroughs, I see being possible within the next 10 years, not the next 30-40. I also found the book a little hard to "read" conventionally, and a little hard to "flip through" like a traditional coffee-table book: the subject matter is so smart, and the format so clever, that it's almost overwhelming. (That may have been compounded by the fact it was a library book, and other books I'd loaned out at the same time were competing for my attention. Perhaps keeping this book around your house for a year or so could help the right time to arise to digest it).

J.G. Follansbee says

This review originally appeared on Joe Follansbee's blog.

We live in a time of pessimistic artistic visions of the future. TV viewers and readers flock to the dystopian worlds of a zombie-infested *Walking Dead* or Margaret Atwood's *Maddaddam* trilogy, which foresees a wrecked climate, out-of-control superbugs, and extremes of wealth and privation. The popularity of these fantasies reflect, at least in their depiction of climate change, a reaction to the finger-wagging by scientists and activists angered by humanity's failure to address the problem. Wallowing in a dark universe massages a Calvinistic guilt in media consumers helpless to do anything about these overwhelming problems.

The opposite was true a generation ago, at least on television, when the fictional vision of the present and future was relentlessly optimistic. In *Star Trek*, Captain Kirk ventured forth from a 22nd century utopian Earth free of war, poverty, and disease. The characters may fight monsters or aliens, but human impulses were fundamentally good, and everything turned out well in the end. If the depicted culture faced something like global warming, people came together and fixed it without much fuss. That's the case in a new book by leading environmentalist Jonathan Porritt, who harkens to a time when the future was non-threatening, even exciting. In *The World We Made: Alex McKay's Story From 2050*, published by Phaidon, Alex McKay, a fictional teacher living in 2050 Great Britain, recounts how the human race finally understood the dangers facing the planet and made the choices necessary to fight and reverse climate change, while taking swipes at poverty, disease, unemployment, and other chronic problems. In *The World We Made*, the end of the world is not nigh.

The book's concept is almost identical to Edward Bellamy's influential 1888 novel *Looking Backward*, a staple of high school literature courses in the U.S. Bellamy tells the story of a young 19th century man who falls into a deep sleep a la Rip van Winkle and wakes up in Boston in the year 2000. He learns about all the technological and societal changes that have taken place in the previous century. The heart of *Looking Backward* is a utopian economics that commentators call "marxist" or "socialist." *The World We Made* is neither, but it definitely leans left, an attitude that will drive conservatives and libertarians mad, particularly its call for new taxes on wealth and transactions, increased regulation of carbon, and the elimination of overtime work. Those same conservatives ought to pay close attention to Porritt's prediction that China will become a premier force for environmental good. With its aggressive attitude toward planning, Porritt sees the country overcoming its horrendous environmental degradation, as witnessed by the sickening air pollution

plaguing its major cities today. In contrast, the U.S. trails the rest of Porritt's world, though it eventually catches up.

Cover image for The World We Made Technically fiction, The World We Made is better understood as "speculative non-fiction." We know very little about the narrator, Alex McKay, beyond a few personal details. Dialog and conflict are almost non-existent. The main emotion is relief, as in, "We dodged that bullet." The full-color images always have sunshine and smiles, and the graphs always show things getting better. A number of unnamed research assistants regularly exclaim, "What were they thinking?" when discussing the poor choices made in the years before humans got religion on sustainability. It may be a stimulating read, but it isn't storytelling.

Knee-jerk skeptics will find something to mock on every page, such as a claim that humans will always perform certain rote tasks, such as disassembling electronics for recycling, because robots couldn't be made smart enough. Porritt needs to spend time in a room of teenage robotics engineers to understand his mistake. But cynics would be missing Porritt's point. He's arguing that the enormous problems faced by Earthlings are solvable. Most of the tools already exist, if only people work up the will and the sense of urgency to pick up the tools and use them. The World We Made will encourage people who want to work toward a positive future.

Tim says

Jonathon Porritt apparently wrote this book in an attempt to counter the extreme pessimism in some quarters about our prospects of avoiding damaging climate change. He wanted to put forward a more optimistic view of our future, focusing on what we could achieve if we really put our minds to it. It's an easily accessible fictional account, written in fifty short sections, telling how by 2050 we have tackled, more or less successfully, the challenges that undoubtedly face us in the coming decades. Though I share Porritt's optimism over the possibilities that technology could offer us, the political and social changes he puts forward as part of his story seem far fetched. Though I'd love to believe they could happen, it seems very unlikely. With his story predicated on these changes, the optimistic vision he sets out looks fatally flawed. I ended up more despairing, rather than hopeful by the time I'd finished the book.

Krysti says

This book is a summary of what the world would be like in 2050 if we put in place most of the betterment strategies that we know of today. A lot of the predictions deal with public policy which seem the more unlikely of the changes. I wouldn't be surprised though if some of the plagues and famines come about in the next few decades.

I could see myself buying this book if only for the bibliography in the back that lists sources for all of the current technologies we have at our disposal.

Eswar says

This book is extremely inspiring and encouraging. In a post-2008 period where doom-and-gloom scenarios of the capitalistic world and climate change are all that you hear, the fictional narrator of this book looks

back from 2050 to describe how humans have banded together to fight various crises and embrace technological disruptions to make the world a better place.

The story and viewpoint of how the first half of the 21st century has developed is remarkably consistent and extremely well thought out. Not only are the strengths and weaknesses of existing technologies analyzed to project a reasonable scenario of where the world will be, but new business models, ways of life and philosophies are purported as the backbone to a better 2050.

The book maintains that there will be much in the form of youth (and even geriatric) discontent, climate change horror stories and other conflicts, but stands by the view that only when we are pushed against the wall do we as humans push back and innovate all the way (and that's also when the politicians become effective).

Not only does Jonathon Porritt talk about renewable energy, but also new types of currency, digital manufacturing and other innovative trends. Of course, the issue with this type of book is that in five years if things do go a different way, people may just reject the ultimate end goal of the book.

However, the point is that there is a bright future and we can get there through recalibrating the symbiosis between capitalism and sustainability. Balancing nature's books (and not our own).

Isaiah Ptaszynska says

This book was a good spin on traditional books that display our future in a negative light. It showed positive outcomes on the world in the year 2050 if we all did our part. Such outcomes are clean and efficient energy as well as technology breakthroughs.

Joan Huyser-Honig says

You've probably read dystopian novels that seem at least plausible and certainly distressing. By contrast, *The World We Made* is fiction that could be nonfiction--if ordinary people mobilize for the common good. The book is set in 2050 in the U.K. and is arranged as weekly reports from a history prof and his students. They look back to the year 2015 and describe changes in agriculture, food, and water; economics and finance; energy; society and cities (including spiritual militancy); and much more.

Every weekly report includes photos, diagrams, and other visuals to help readers imagine the key events, technology breakthroughs, and lifestyle revolutions that lead to a better future. The real author, Jonathon Porritt, is the founder director of Forum for the Future, so he's well-versed on emerging technologies.

I keep thinking about the report on the Enough! Movement that started in 2018, led by young people around the world, including those who'd graduated from college but couldn't find jobs and those who were tired of political timidity in dealing with climate-induced disasters.

Jeremy S says

Part science fiction, part fantasy, and part harrowing reality, *The World We Made: Alex McKay's Story from 2050* is a devious good time. What Jonathon Porritt does so immensely well, is make the reader forget that you don't currently live in the future. A collection of "research" based journal entries, take the reader on a trip into a world we could just so happen to create. And while not all of Porritt's (or Alex's if you will) prophecies seem plausible, could this not be a testament to the instillment of a capitalism based doctrine that we have been used to for so long. I will not rant about the politics of everything, but what Porritt (Alex) is trying to do, is force us to see where we could be if we start pushing to make a difference now. This world, while at times fantastical, is not unimaginable. There are no flying cars or ray guns, but in their place are nano-bugs surging through our bloodstreams, notifying our doctors of a possible issue milliseconds after detection, a belief in preventative medicine which is further based in the realities of today.

First, I should describe this simplicity that is the book's layout. It is a research journal, written by the fictional character Alex McKay who is looking back on his fiftieth birthday at the time since the millennium. Every "journal entry" is broken into a topic that pertains to something that has changed in our world over the past fifty years. The book is mainly focused on sustainability and climate change, but Alex does not step away from talking of politics, economics, sickness and medication, and in doing all of this, he maintains a strong belief that even when things seem the worst, there is always hope. Sentiments like these seem to be lost as of late, as I have pointed out in other articles. It would seem some authors are getting around to understanding that when we push the 'doomsday' scenario down people's throats, our response is to just shut off, and not listen. Hope brings us together, coming together gives us empathy for each other, and empathy allows us to change.

In a few instances "Alex" refers to Africa; their struggles in poverty, their "agricultural triumph," and their land usage. He spends one section specifically devoted to talking about "feeding the world," and goes into detail:

"Nitrogen fixing was always the special preserve of legumes - peas, beans, clover and so on. Bacteria called 'rhizobia' lodge in their roots and draw in nitrogen from the atmosphere, turning it into useful nitrogen compounds. In return for the nutrients they need, the bacteria provide the plants with their own supply of nitrogen-based fertilizer. Symbiosis at it's best!"

This is common knowledge to some, and it is one of the things that adds such a vast amount of credit to the book: research and sources. Porritt is not just dreaming up a future world, but at the end of the book, goes back through each and every article and lists actual sources for the information he used to synthesize the future. Of course there are leaps, but he is not basing this off of his own wild imagination, he is using current fact and scientific projections as a precursor. To give you an example he follows the previous quote by saying that twenty years of research has lead people to "nitrogen fix" crops of other plants such as wheat:

"Nitrogen fixing split the organic movement down the middle - especially as another bunch of scientists at John Innes had also achieved extraordinary breakthroughs via completely conventional cross-breeding methods, producing varieties of wheat that flower that much earlier in the year, and increase yields by up to 25 percent. But NF [nitrogen fixed] wheat worked, with no impact on the environment, let alone on human health. By 2040, the use of nitrogen fertilizers on wheat crops had fallen by more than a quarter. It continues to decline, even now."

While I was reading *The World We Made*, I was also reading a book called *My Age of Anxiety* by Scott Stossel. While not directly connected, a chapter came up where Stossel mentions "ages of anxiety" or periods in time when that generation feels an anxious burden because of the affects of a changing world. The fears have always changed with the times, but the interesting case that is made is that there really was no "anxiety of the ages" before the feudal era, when farming and many other changes overruled the hunter-gatherer lifestyle. Since then, Stossel argues, we have constantly been in a flux of changes in our societies, attributing to our mental illnesses. How this connected to *The World We Made*, for me especially, is that there are so

many of us who see what is happening in our world, can see the changes that should be made, but our anxieties of the future hold us back, and keep us working towards "business as usual" (as both books put it). Whether it is pipelines destroying the coast of Northern BC or roads dissecting the African Savannah, we feel powerless to change things because we are just one person, and doom and gloom always wins out.

Jonathon Porritt (and Alex McKay) refused to follow this pattern of behaviour. He speaks of doom in the book, but he is also letting us see the future as it could be. He talks of the high death tolls during climate induced natural disasters, he talks of the trillions of dollars spent on water, health and well being, and aid relief, and he is not averse to pulling in anyone from politicians to religious leaders to berate them in as nice a fashion as possible, or congratulate them, for helping this world. What *The World We Made* did so beautifully was made you look past the doom, into the future, and say to yourself, "Ok, this is going to be really hard, some of us won't make it, what now?" Porritt gives you all the answers, relays all the relative information, and even though at times, I sat picking at holes that I saw personally, I wondered to myself if those moments of disbelief in Alex McKay's future world occurred because I too (while doing my part as best I could) just can't see past my own "age of anxiety" into a future that looks very different in many ways as ours does now. How can you imagine large chains of grocery stores like Walmart and Superstore not existing, being replaced by local co-operatives? And yet, I have a flyer in my mailbox reminding me of the return of the Surrey Farmers Market every weekend coming up, and my wife has informed me of the reopening of our favourite local organic farm for the season, where prices are actually cheaper overall, and completely lower our carbon footprint. How can I argue that capitalism works, when in practically every outcome it is completely unsustainable by research that far exceeds just one man's prophetic vision? It would appear that change is upon us, whether we knew it or not, and that while the ideas may seem absolutely science fiction, Jonathon Porritt gives us the hope (and factual backup) we need to know they aren't. They are the pathways to our future if we can simply look past today alone, and into a void which currently exists in our world.

Veronica says

Incredibly thought provoking, this book looks at the optimistic view of what our world could be like in 2050 if we were to actually get our act together and start to really make a difference. Porritt makes a lot of interesting points, meaning it will get harder and harder to read as time passes and politicians continue to disregard the facts regarding climate change. If you're an environmentalist who still hopes for a better future, this book gives some reason to still look forward to a society based on collaboration and sustainability, a positive change from the doom and gloom of my Climate Change lectures at university.

Peter says

My verdict: Interesting. It is a fictive non-fiction book. A history teacher, moving on to a new job and doing a last project with his class: Writing down the history of the last 50 years and how the world has changed. The twist: He does this project being 50 years old in the year 2050.

I am sure if you take this book apart and look at the technical details and figures and things you will find many things which might not make sense. Which might not be possible like this. But the book really reads like a non-fiction book about the last 50 years history. It is a perfect write. No literature highlight.

I like this book because it is a positive book. It describes a world where a lot - not all - of our problems of today have been fixed. I would love to live in the world described in this book. Will we ever? I don't know.

The main roadblock I see is in the human mentality. A lot of solutions described in this book rely on us humans waking up, putting our drive for profit aside and fixing stuff. Will this ever going to happen?

I gave it 4 stars just simply for a book well written and a book which makes hope.

Sivananthi T says

This was an excellent piece of advocacy, set as a diary from our future. What Porritt a committed and ardent environmentalist has done, is shown how the world can be if we are just able to give up slightly the world as it is ...

bkwurm says

Read this with great anticipation. After all, it was highly acclaimed as a positive vision of our future, one in which we overcame or were in the process of overcoming the problems of climate change, over population, climate change, dependence of fossil fuels, etc,...

Coincidentally, the world managed to actually make progress on climate change with 195 countries voluntarily agreeing to reduce carbon output, an outcome the author said only took place in 2020. Of course, the conference he imagined was one where the agreement was binding while the Paris 2015 one would only be binding if 55 countries producing 55% of the greenhouse gas ratified it.

But I found the book depressing. The world envisioned seemed smaller, with everyone living in small inward looking communities. Yes, the electrical grid is worldwide and yes, the internet connects everyone but travel, at least, leisure travel, seemed to be nearly non existent with everyone preferring virtual trips. The book describes a couple travelling the entire Via do Compostela in their own home on walkers while surrounded by videowall projections of their route.

That account just sounded depressing and is certainly not what I would consider an advance.

But that said, given the amount of time spent in virtual worlds, this might actually come true.

Another factor that contributed to my impression of an inward looking world was the absence of any mention of space exploration. It seems the author's idea of utopia is a global population satisfied with the limits placed upon it by earth's resources and content to remain within those limits. Something human seems to have been lost.
