
BOOK REVIEW

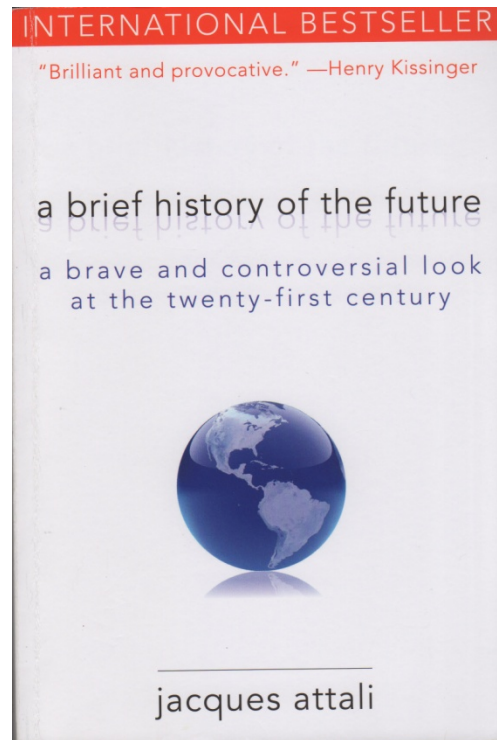
"A Brief History of the Future" by Jacques Attali

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Jacques Attali is an economist, historian, cultural critic, and corporate strategist. A French presidential adviser for finance and economics for many years, he cofounded and served as the first president of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. He lives in Paris, France.

The back cover of the books says this: "What will planet Earth be like in twenty years? At mid-century? In the year 2100? Prescient and convincing, this book is a must-read for anyone concerned about the future. Never has the world offered more promise for the future and been more fraught with dangers. Attali anticipates an unraveling of American hegemony as transnational corporations sever the ties linking free enterprise to democracy. World tensions will be primed for horrific warfare for resources and dominance. The ultimate question is: Will we leave our children and grandchildren a

world that is not only viable but better, or in this nuclear world bequeath to them a planet that will be a living hell? Either way, he warns, the time to act is now."

Positing that history flows in a single, stubborn, and very particular direction toward man's progressive liberation, the author projects that course with surprising results.

Before mapping out the future, Attali grounds his chronology in patterns he perceives in history and in the past. At the center of these patterns stand impulses that have persistently fostered democratic governance and marketplace economics — in thirteenth-century Bruges, in sixteenth-century Genoa, in nineteenth-century London. In Attali's analysis, Los Angeles emerges as the nexus of capitalist democracy today.

However, Attali anticipates an unraveling of American domination as transnational corporations perilously sever the ties linking free enterprise to democracy by creating a polycentric empire of commerce that dissolves traditional nation-states. If this process plays out as scripted, nomadic enterprises will enrich a few while immersing many. World tensions will then be primed for the horrific warfare of armies, mercenary and religious, fighting for resources and dominance. Merciless jihadists have already deployed for such a struggle.

He therefore predicts that the mercantile order that prevails today will exhaust itself within a generation or so and be replaced by a unified and stateless global market — a super-empire controlled by an innovative class of selfish hyper-nomads. This super-empire will lead to extreme imbalances of wealth and poverty that will cause its collapse by 2050 — perhaps accompanied, as suggested, by a round of planetary warfare. Humanity will emerge chastened from the wreckage and erect a utopia of hyper-democracy led by a class of trans-humans — a new breed of altruistic citizens of the world (in today's world for example, he cites Melinda Gates and Mother Teresa as trans-humans). These trans-humans will usher in a new economy of altruism, of free availability, of mutual giving, of public service, of the general interest. Their objective will be to improve the world's lot. These altruistic individuals will give rise to what are called relational businesses. Today, such examples would include The Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders, Greenpeace and World Wildlife Fund.

The first portion of this book covers the historic rise and fall of previous economic empires. It is not necessarily riveting reading, but it is informative. For avid historians, it will be a nice refresher on the past.

However, the author uses this beginning to offer a base for his theory. As in all of the

future books, the information presented is a best guess of what may happen. The viewpoint presented is a bleak future with hope existing only in the distant future, which lies beyond our life expectancy. Of course, every generation thinks it will be the last. And it is easier to focus on the negative.

The author goes all out in his futurist view in this book, courageous for a person with many responsibilities and reputation to consider. It's a practical approach in leading you from the basics of history, so you can naturally integrate the future as a part of the continual history.

It takes the myth out of futurism, which is probably the point of this book. This book lets you see the current economic-geographical-political history in a long range, diluting the emotional reaction of people who want to believe that this way of life will last forever.

A readership anxious about the trajectory of world events will find much here to ponder — and debate.

(Dr Darryl is a clinical and organizational psychologist as well as a credentialed executive and personal coach. He is also an author, international speaker and university lecturer. Dr Darryl assists people to find their strengths and reach their goals. Further information on Dr Darryl can be accessed from www.DrDarryl.com.)