

Book Review

Jennifer L.

Title	: <i>What We Owe the Future : A Million-Year View</i>
Author	: William MacAskill
Publisher	: Basic Books, New York
Year	: 2022
Pages	: 494
Price	: Rs. 393.00

This book of analytical research with substantial examples and comprehensive chronology exemplifies the essential human efforts in bringing the best environment for the future generation. Decoding the vast human history from engineered pathogens to technological stagnation, William MacAskill, a Scottish Ethicist and a Professor at Oxford University persuades the present humanity to think long-term. The concern for the long-term future should be at least one of the priorities which includes the reduction of fossil fuels and decarbonisation. He doesn't suggest undergoing sacrifices for the betterment of the future but being rational in our actions. Insisting that a wonderful future is not a fantasy, these little humanitarian attempts are worthy which would definitely pave the way to "eutopia".

The book has five parts – The long view, the trajectory changes, the safeguarding civilisation, Assessing the end of the world and taking action. He positively influences the readers to comprehend the huge responsibility behind the unseen, unpredictable big future. The first part resounds the value of the future comparing it to the preserved eternity of ancient art. As the past leaves its strong footprints in the period of history, a framework is essential to construct the future for the survival of civilisation. The second part incorporates the renowned philosophies of Confucius, Legalism, Anti-authoritarian ideas of the Daodejing -the Zhuangzi and the Mohists. The technological advancements of Artificial Intelligence count the course of the future. The ideology of 'The Paradox of Tolerance' is related to the act of moral value systems which would persist for a longer period under

the right conditions. The author quotes George Orwell's *1984*, Katharine Burdekin's *Swastika Night* and John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* for ethical reflections. Living in a period of plasticity, he suggests that the world should be led to better values with a better structure.

The third part explores the various ways that society has adopted in cases of a pandemic outbreak, cold war and Spaceguard (Warning system of Earth-bound threats from Space). So far, the populace has also witnessed biological engineering and nuclear power war. MacAskill presents that the only solution to safeguard civilisation is to reduce the severity of the next world war. He illustrates the renewal and resilience of human beings despite the historical civilisational collapses like the Western Roman Empire, the Black Death, the Bombing of Hiroshima in 1945 and the Vietnam war. The highly optimistic author appreciates the environment-friendly governments in forming climate pledges, which echo the longtermism. It is declared that the present modern age holds a civilisational interregnum after the astonishing efflorescence of the Islamic Golden Age, Renaissance, Industrial revolution and scientific discoveries. The innovative past progress has made forthcoming advancements difficult. The world seems to be in technological stagnation since the 1970's. The growth of an economy and technological progress are interdependent. Hence, he states that the generation of moral ideas with the reduction of extinction and technological stagnation would ensure a better future.

The fourth part begins with Derek Parfit's opinion of moral concern and suffering. Concentrating on population ethics is one of the goals of longtermists. Health, infrastructure and social protection are the factors of people's happiness. The well-being of society depends on one's conscious experiences constructing one's identity, neutrality and period of transitivity. He cautions us about the suffering of farmed cattle, caged hens and farmed fish too. The deep philosophies of Bertrand Russell and Fyodor Dostoevsky dovetail with the ideology of moral convergence. The pragmatist in the fifth part places the possibilities of taking action to create the best future. The practices like cleantech innovation, biosecurity, pandemic and General disaster preparation, effective waste management, political activism, spreading good ideas and having children form the major goals of longtermism to build a stable, happy futuristic eutopia. The book is a constant reminder of three important actions namely to take good actions, build up options and learn more.

This work is an exhortation of morality propelling the values of self-cultivation and moral refinement in mind improving the quality of future

people's lives in imminent actions. Even though humanity is like the imprudent teenager with hasty decisions, MacAskill suggests opting for high-impact decisions. History is usually a molten glass with shifting perspectives and it adopts different values. He wants every single being on Earth to exercise wisdom and person in choosing the path of longtermism notwithstanding its risky voyage.