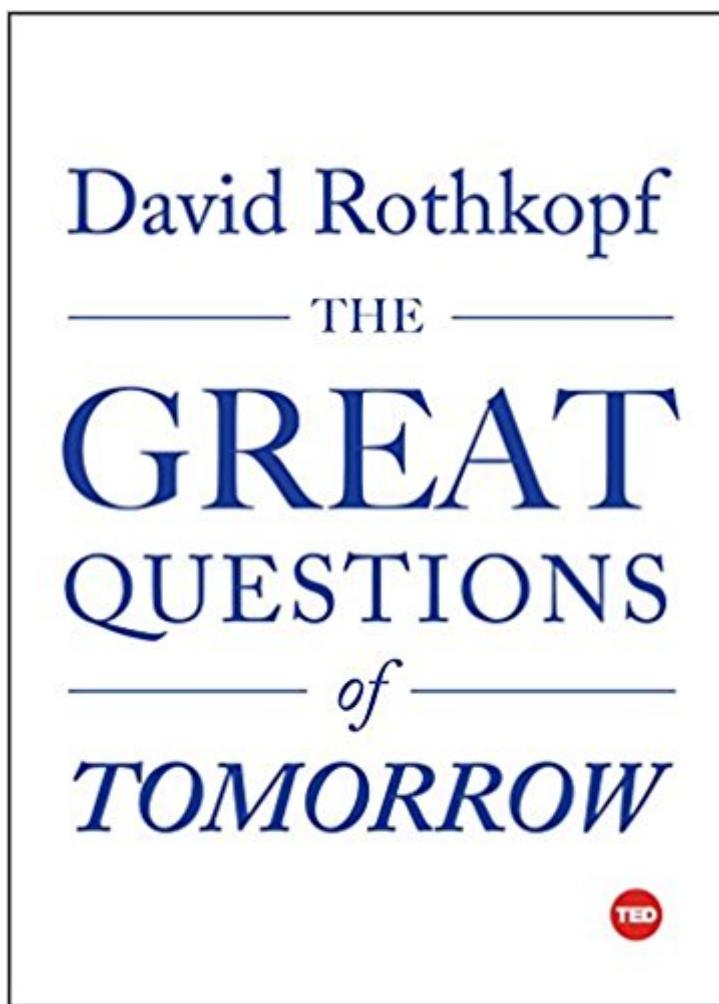


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# The Great Questions Of Tomorrow (TED Books)



## Synopsis

We are on the cusp of a sweeping revolution— one that will change every facet of our lives. The changes ahead will challenge and alter fundamental concepts such as national identity, human rights, money, and markets. In this pivotal, complicated moment, what are the great questions we need to ask to navigate our way forward? David Rothkopf believes in the power of questions. When sweeping changes have occurred in history—the religious awakenings of the Reformation; the scientific advances of the Age of Exploration; the technological developments of the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution—they have brought with them, not just new knowledge, but provoked great questions about how we must live. With the world at the threshold of profound change, Rothkopf seeks the important questions of our time—ones that will remake the world and our understanding of it. From the foundational questions: "Why do we live within a society?" and "What is war?" to modern concerns such as "Is access to the internet a basic human right?" The Great Questions of Tomorrow confronts our approach to the future and forces us to reimagine fundamental aspects of our lives—identity, economics, technology, government, war, and peace.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

David J. Rothkopf is CEO and Editor of the FP Group, where he oversees all editorial, publishing, event, and other operations of the company, publishers of Foreign Policy Magazine. He is also the

President and CEO of Garten Rothkopf, an international advisory company specializing in global political risk, energy, resource, technology, and emerging markets issues based in Washington, DC. He is the author of numerous internationally acclaimed books, including *The Great Questions of Tomorrow*, *Power, Inc.*, *Superclass*, and *Running the World*. He writes a weekly column for *Foreign Policy*, a regular column for *CNN*, and is a frequent contributor to *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Financial Times*, *CNN*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and many others.

The Great Questions of Tomorrow 2> 2> If we sense that such changes are coming, we have an urgent responsibility to ourselves, our families, and our communities to prepare for them. How do we begin to address these massive shifts in nearly every facet of our lives? How can we begin to prepare for changes that are of a scope and substance that may be greater than any faced for twenty generations, some that may be so great that they force us to reconsider our most fundamental ideas about ourselves and our world? And how can we shift our focus away from the old, comfortable formulations about how societies are organized and operate, what they look like, who should lead them, and what course corrections are essential? Asking the right questions is where to begin. And, if we look to the history of epochal changes, we can see common characteristics among them that can help us understand what those questions are. 3> It is an irony of life that, when our senses are most attuned to the events transpiring around us, real perspective is most elusive. Later, even as memory plays its tricks on us, nature affords us the compensatory blessing of context. While we may not remember every bit and piece of what happened, we gain a clearer perspective through the passage of time. Imagine that you lived during the fourteenth century. It would be very hard to have much long-term perspective. During the outbreaks of the plague, survival was the only priority. And of course, as bad as it was, the plague was hardly the only concern. The Little Ice Age was beginning. The Great Schism was dividing the Catholic Church. Mongol rule was ending in the Middle East. The Hundred Yearsâ€“ War had begun. Dynastic upheaval in China ushered in the beginning of the Ming Dynasty. The Scots were fighting for independence (some things never change). Much as it is today, Christian Europe and the forces of Islam were in conflict, resulting in the Battle of Kosovo in 1389. With the advantage of hindsight, we can see that every one of the shocks that rocked the era led not just to substantial progress, but to reordering of the basic way in which society was viewed. In the wake of the human losses of the Black Plague, labor became more valued, and a middle class began to emerge. Trade flows, which may well have brought the plague to Europe from Asia, also led to the exchange of new ideas and materials, to economic and intellectual growth. The nature of work and how we thought of

economics began to change. A weakened Church began to be challenged by reformers. States began to emerge in forms like those we know today. Ultimately, within a few hundred years of the change, principalities gave way to nation-states, which in turn were locked in a power struggle with the Catholic Church. The nature of governance had also been transformed. Universities and scholarship began to take root and spread in new ways. Education for commoners, beginning with literacy, began to spread. Combining the rise of the middle class and the needs of new governments to win support from other powerful members of society, the seeds of more democratic government were planted in places like Europe, themselves predicated on a changing view of the rights of individuals and of states, the role of law, and the nature of communities. With new technologies of navigation and new networks of roads, not only did societies interact with each other differently, thus instigating changes in cultures, but so did the nature of warfare. Navies grew more important, and gunpowder and other new technologies of fighting ushered in the end of the reign of knights and local warlords. With governments and political systems changing, substantial shifts in the nature of the diplomacy required to resolve such conflicts also took place. In other words, while the average citizen of the fourteenth century saw struggle and chaos, changes were afoot that would redefine how people thought of themselves, who they were, what a community was, and of the nature of basic rights, of governance, of work and economics, of war and peace. To understand the future and how it would be different from the past, it would therefore have been essential to consider the questions associated with such changes. To ask in the context of the changing world and to ask again, amid what was to follow: how does all this change how I view myself, my community, my rights, my government, my job, and the way the world works around me? During another such time of upheaval, we too would benefit from considering similar questions because, once again, the coming changes will be profound. Of course, asking the right questions, and getting the right answers, is easier said than done. We have loads of biases. We expect the world will confirm those biases, and we mishear and misread events around us as a result. We expect the future to be like the past. (After all, we live in a world in which 85 percent of the time the weather tomorrow is the same as the weather today.) We are also harried and so busy reacting to the demands of the moment, much like the average citizen of the fourteenth century dealing with war and plagues and climatic catastrophes, that pausing to get to the root questions often seems like an impossible luxury, and one we are ill-prepared for. This last point is also important. If we don't understand the technologies or other forces at play in changing our world—be they the burgeoning sciences of the early Renaissance or the neural networks or cyberthreats of today—then how can we possibly understand what is to come? Furthermore, if those who are

supposed to lead us don't understand the changes, they can't ask the right questions either. What's more, they typically have a vested interest in resisting the questions. The status quo got them where they are, and they have a strong interest in preserving it. For example, the predisposition of our political leaders to seek to capitalize on the fears of the moment to advance their self-interested desire to cling to power regularly leads us to keep our eyes on yesterday's headlines rather than on the horizon. Fearmongering is not only exploitative and, by the way, plays right into the hands of some, like terrorists, who seek to promote fear. it is also a potentially fatal distraction from the bigger risks associated with potential coming changes for which we are ill-prepared.

I know some of this from personal experience. In the late 1990s, I founded a company devoted to using the power of technology to help top policy makers and business leaders get the answers they needed. My proposition was that now, thanks to the Internet, we can use sophisticated tools (this was before Google) to find any answer you need. Seemed like a gold mine. It was not. Why? Because what we discovered was that the big problem in most organizations was not finding the answers, it was getting our would-be clients to figure out the right questions. I've spoken to many top intelligence officials who acknowledge that they have the same problem in the US government - vast apparatuses with huge resources devoted to gathering information, but real problems when it comes to arriving at the questions that might make those people and satellites and computers useful. One current top intelligence official said to me, "Asking the right question is the biggest challenge we face. People typically let the immediate past shape their questions - how do we avoid another shoe bomber is an example, when that's not a risk that we're likely to face. Or they let their area of expertise and their desire to be useful shift their focus. This is kind of the when-all-you-have-is-a-hammer-everything-looks-like-a-nail problem, and it leads people who feel the future is drone warfare to ask questions that end in answers that require drone warfare. Or, to choose an example, it leads people who have spent much of their adult lives fighting Saddam Hussein to ask questions after 9/11 about his role, even though he didn't have one. And that did not turn out well. So, in the end, Hamlet had it wrong. "To be or not to be" is not the question. The question of questions is, "What is the question?" In this respect, history tells us to start with the basics, the foundational questions that we have for too long taken for granted. There are questions like: "Who am I?" "Who rules?" "What is money?" "What is a job?" "What is peace?" and "What is war?" One lesson is that the more profound the

changes, the more basic the questions we should be asking; it is the simplest and most direct questions that cut to the fundamental issues of life, that resist nuance and evasion and rationalization more effectively. A question like “Who am I?” can lead to questions about how we derive our identity and, in a connected world, how that and our view of communities is likely to change. The answers to those questions can lead us to question whether our old views and systems of governance for communities will work as well in the future, or whether they need to be changed. And they will also raise questions about the role of technology in helping to implement those changes, in creating other kinds of communities, good and bad, driven by our search for identity that might also impact our lives in profound ways. While there are, as always, a few bright minds out there pioneering new ways of thinking and starting to ask the right questions, it is the responsibility of all of us as citizens to see the questions raised here or in similar discussions as more than intellectual exercises. Our futures depend on getting this right—as individuals, as communities, as nations, and as a civilization. We should not be afraid of this task either, even though many of us have a natural fear of the unknown. You cannot be intellectually rigorous in your analysis of where we have been without coming to the conclusion that where we are going will be a better place. Rather than the fear that seems to have suffused so much of our discussion of the recent past, the fear that is exploited as a tool by so many leaders, it is my deeply held belief that asking the right questions about tomorrow’s world and looking for those who are helping us to arrive at the answers is a certain path not only to greater understanding of the massive changes to come but also to greater optimism about the world we are bequeathing to our children and grandchildren. In the end, at least, that is the message I think my father was trying to convey to me that summer afternoon in 1973, and it is certainly the one that he, like his innovative colleagues at Bell Labs, and a lifetime of study have left me with. Thanks to human ingenuity, most of the changes history has brought, large or small, whether they seemed catastrophic in the moment or not, have ushered in progress in its many forms and led us to the better world in which we live today—a world in which people live longer, are better educated, are healthier, have access to more opportunities, are wealthier, and have every reason to be happier than any prior generation in history. If we can keep that in mind, then perhaps not only will we not shy away from these questions, but approach their answers with real imagination, not only wondering what might be possible, but by helping to make better outcomes more likely by considering them and becoming their champions.

I became a fan of Rothkopf listening to his podcast, "The ER" (Editor's Roundtable) which he

recently left, and in which he hawked this book. He is a compelling observer of our current times and has a formidable CV from which to inform readers regarding the relationship of political leaders to current (and past) events. His thesis in this book (highlighted by numerous readers of the kindle edition) is that we are living in "...the day before the Renaissance. An epochal change is coming...[while] many of those in positions of power and their supporters are ... actively trying to cling to the past". He focuses largely on electronic technology, the internet, big data, bitcoins and the like while ignoring some of the other megachanges we see around us. Global warming is mentioned once. Almost nothing is said of genomics where Crispr-cas9 may change biology itself including the human code. Exoplanets are missing. I agree with Rothkopf that we are watching an internet/digital revolution unfold that will change everything and he certainly highlights many of the societal trends that will be transformational. However, this book could have been better, especially with some more concrete examples of the transformation already here. Were transnational hackers working on our election, not just the Russians? What are the longer term implications of the silk road website? Will gene drive mosquitoes eliminate an entire species? There is more to this epochal change than the social/political focus he brings to light. Nevertheless, the book is a well-reasoned call to step back from the day to day news and ponder what lies in store for humankind on spaceship earth.

**BRIGHT, BUT MISSES THE REALLY FATEFUL QUESTION**  
The author recognizes that "Our futures depend on getting this [the right questions] right" as individuals, as communities, as nations, and as civilizations (p. 13). To my regret this book fails in doing so. It discusses intelligently some "surface" questions and mentions by the way some deep ones. But it ignores the fateful ones. Some troubling issues are well diagnosed. Thus, it recognizes the inadequacy of contemporary politicians, stating correctly that "many of those in position of power and their supporters are so actively trying to cling to the past we can almost hear their fingernails clawing at the earth as they try to avoid accepting the inevitable and momentous changes to come" (p. 9); "They aren't asking the right questions. Typically, they don't even know what the questions are" (pp.51-52); "Without a change in the knowledge level of our legislators and executive-branch officials our programs will be obsolete (p. 66); and "in Washington, DC, and in many other capitals around the world, you have the wrong people dealing with the wrong problems at the wrong time in a system that is designed to discourage them from doing any

different (p. 68). The book's suggestion to move to e-governance and better uses of Internet cannot do more than improve the citizen-government interface. Following the valid diagnosis, I would expect much more, such as discourse on moving from populistic to quality democracy and bringing forth a much improved genre of political leaders, but these imperative needs are not taken up. There may be much to learn from Singapore on this matter, but the book refers only to Singapore's eCitizen Portal (p. 58), which is nice but of secondary importance compared to what really matters. The book mentions serious issues posed by human enhancement, stating succinctly "What would become of social and economic divides if [human enhancement] were not available equitably? (Let's be honest: it is very likely won't be) (p. 30). This should lead to suggestions on imposing limitation on deep enhancement and rationing it according to some equitable criteria widely accepted as fair. But the book limits itself to mentioning the importance of philosophers and philosophic reflection (pp. 45, 47), which is void of contents unless radical treatment are put on the table, such as a modern quasi-democratic version of "Platonic rulers." The author correctly criticizes contemporary economic science, overreliance on GDP etc. (pp. 70-74). But he focuses on "the eventual move towards a virtual banking world" (p. 77) and similar "surface" issues, missing in chapter 5 on economics the three really basic socio-economic issues: robotization, sure to completely transform employment (only referred to by the way as "a world in which human labor will be seen in a much different light," p. 81); equity, which requires radical redistribution of capital and restrain of extreme income disparities (again, honored only with a side question "Can we create new ways to ensure equity?" p. 83); and the power of capital making much of politics into plutocracy (well discussed in a 2013 book by the same author). Chapter 6 on war follows the same pattern. Leaving aside doubtful statements, such as "The potential for devastating conflict between major powers is greater than ever before" (p. 85), the treatment of cyber warfare and military-political uses of internet is enlightening. But very disturbing is total neglect of the much more catastrophic potentials of mutated viruses produced by fanatics in kitchen laboratories, up to endangering humanity. Leaving aside philosophical, theological and spiritual questions, however important for the future of humanity, I can imagine three really fateful ones which should be at the center of a book on "The Great Questions": What is going to trouble most humans? What may cause major catastrophes, up to endangering the continuous existence of the human

species? And how must the world be governed to cope with such questions? These are ignored. Having enjoyed and benefited from earlier writings of the distinguished author, I have no explanation for this omission. Professor Yehezkel Dror The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

This little essay mostly observes tendencies with small futuristic considerations being likely wrong. Most of his ideas on democracy involve wishful thinking. E-governance is not our most significant problem. It's two party grip on political selection of candidates. He observes American decline and loss of world wide influence with more naive wishful thinking policies. The same can be said of his idea that charity is more cost efficient when direct, eliminating bureaucracy of government eg. Social Security form the equation. Government bureaucrats are in full control, never to change. Why would they ever give up power? There's the cogent observation that the relationship between economic growth and better opportunity has broken down. Rothkopf blames big companies. It's easier to hate big business than to moderate government policy. The claim that big business controls government looks approvingly on government influence being for sale. What is money is better answered by economists like Milton Friedman. That GDP not good measure of prosperity is hardly original. He is right about new economic theories. We can be sure that most will be meaningless double-talk. That war will be fought on the web is also not a very original prediction.

A clear easy to understand book on how to look for the possibilities of the future. It will give you something to think about and is free of political arguments of who is right and wrong. Just what the past tells us might happen in the future and what we can do to consider our options.

.... but starting at the end of the first third it becomes less and less convincing. The author lost focus of the qualifier "great" in the title. He got more and more into the minutia of today's problems without finding the the great question.

A well-written, concise guide to the vital questions humanity must ask itself. This quick read will make you think deeply about the essential questions with which we are faced. I would highly recommend this book to anyone who is interested in politics, governance, foreign policy, or economics.

A simple book that raises to the consciousness how the things that we take for granted have already changed greatly.

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