

# Gore goes beyond climate change in 'The Future'

"The way we think about the future has a past," Al Gore writes near the beginning of his new book, "The Future: Six Drivers of Global Change."

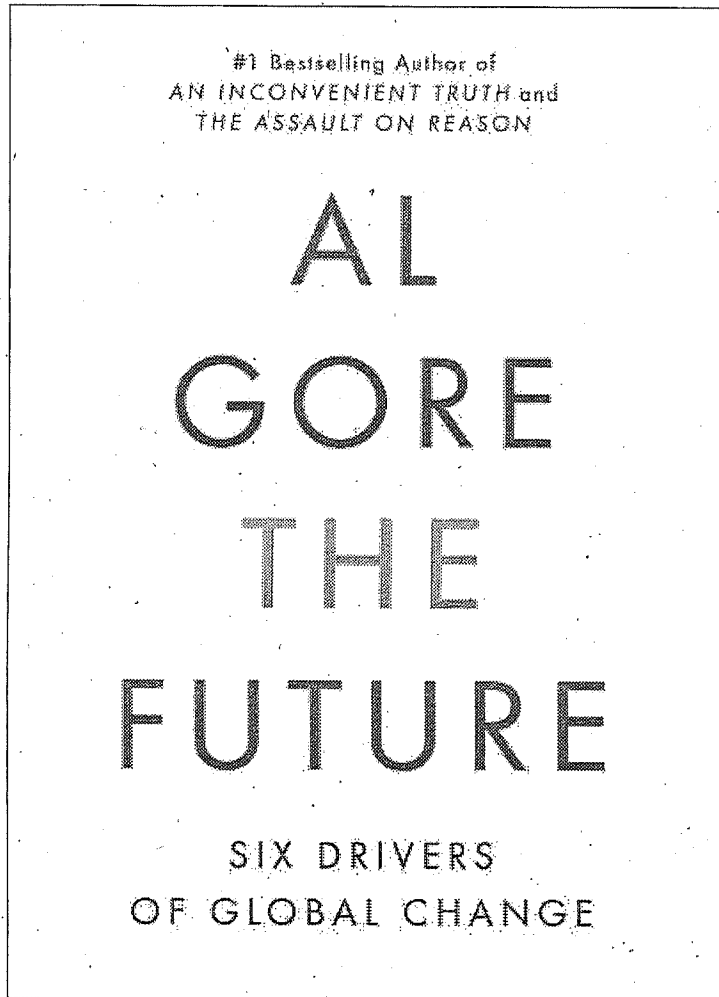
"The crushing disappointments that are so often part of the human condition have sometimes led to crises of confidence in the future, replacing hope with despair," the author continues. "But most have learned from their life experiences and the stories told by their elders that what we do in the present, when informed by knowledge of the past, can reshape the future in objectively better ways."

A 2007 Nobel Peace Prize recipient, Gore is co-founder and chairman of Generation Investment Management. He is also chairman of the Climate Reality Project, a nonprofit devoted to dealing with environmental crises. Gore served four terms in the House of Representatives and was elected to the Senate twice before serving as President Bill Clinton's vice president. He is the author or co-author of twelve previous books, including "An Inconvenient Truth, Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit," "From Red Tape to Results: Creating a Government That Works Better and Costs Less" and "Common Sense Government."

As might be expected given the scrutiny anything Gore writes will inevitably receive, "The Future" is meticulously researched, with 143 pages of source notes at the conclusion of the eight chapters that comprise the main text. Many readers will no doubt assume the book is primarily about climate change; they would be completely wrong. Although the author discusses climate change throughout the tome – and at 558 pages that is an accurate description of Gore's latest project – the book is actually a lot more comprehensive in scope.

"The idea of making truly meaningful collective decisions in democracy that are aimed at steering the global machinery we have set in motion is naive, even silly, according to those who have long since placed their faith in the future not in human-hands, but in the invisible hand of the marketplace," Gore argues. "As more of the power to make decisions about the future flows from political systems to markets, and as ever more powerful technologies magnify the strength of the invisible hand, the muscles of self-governance have atrophied."

Irrespective of where you are on the political spectrum, there is no denying Gore is an intellectual of the first order. Rather than simply pontificating on policy, he is much more interested in providing the empirical evidence that supports his primary thesis. Although the entire book is intrinsically engaging, I found two chapters to be especially fascinating. In "The Global Mind," the author describes how still-evolving technologies have created a kind of universal consciousness in which



"The Future: Six Drivers of Global Change," by Al Gore. New York: Random House, 2013. 558 pages, \$30.00 (hardcover).

all the world's inhabitants are increasingly linked in ways that would have been unimaginable less than 50 years ago.

"The emerging field labeled 'Big Data,' one of the exciting new frontiers of information science, is based on the development of new algorithms for supercomputers to sift through voluminous new quantities of data that have not previously been seen as manageable," Gore explains. "The dominant information system now being used by the world as a whole – the Global Mind – has an inherent unifying imperative, just as the printing press helped to unify nations in the era in which they were born."

The other chapter I found particularly intriguing was "The Reinvention of Life and Death." Here Gore describes how quantum advances in genetics, biotechnology and neuroscience are radically altering our understanding of what it means to be human and giving us an unprecedented means of intervening and redirecting our own evolutionary trajectory.

"As with many of the startling new advances in the life sciences, the design and creation of artificial life-forms offers the credible promise of breakthroughs in health care, energy production, environmental remediation, and many other fields," Gore observes. "One of the greatest challenges facing democracies in this new era is how to ensure that policy decisions involving cutting-edge science are based on a clear and accurate understanding of the science involved."

Gore's confidence in the ulti-

mate capacity of science to solve our most pressing social, cultural and economic problems virtually leaps off every page. And even though I generally share his enthusiasm for empirical problem-solving, I sometimes feel he uses data to compensate for an overly simplistic notion of the subject matter he is attempting to illuminate. Technology is indeed transforming the world in fundamental and extraordinary ways, but like many of his contemporaries, Gore tends to marginalize perspectives not aligned with his preferred bias.

The author believes humanity is at an inflection point. "The decisions now confronting the world as a whole cannot be made by any single nation or small group of nations," he continues. "For several decades, when the United States made up its mind, the world followed the U.S. lead. Now, however, along with digital information, the power to shape the world's future is being dispersed throughout the globe."

"Human civilization has reached a fork in the road, we have long traveled," he concludes. "The world community desperately needs leadership that is based on the deepest human values."

Regardless of whether you see Gore as a genius, prophet, charlatan or opportunist, chances are you will find "The Future" a good read. In the very least, you will have a greater appreciation of why he is so passionate about the causes he sees as important.

— Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.