



The FUTURE AND ITS ENEMIES: The Growing Conflict Over Creativity, Enterprise, and Progress

By Virginia Postrel

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Today we have greater wealth, health, opportunity, and choice than at any time in history. Yet a chorus of intellectuals and politicians laments our current condition -- as slaves to technology, coarsened by popular culture, and insecure in the face of economic change. The future, they tell us, is dangerously out of control, and unless we precisely govern the forces of change, we risk disaster.

In *The Future and Its Enemies*, Virginia Postrel explodes the myths behind these claims. Using examples that range from medicine to fashion, she explores how progress truly occurs and demonstrates that human betterment depends not on conformity to one central vision but on creativity and decentralized, open-ended trial and error. She argues that these two opposing world-views -- "stasis" vs. "dynamism" -- are replacing "left" and "right" to define our cultural and political debate as we enter the next century.

In this bold exploration of how civilizations learn, Postrel heralds a fundamental shift in the way we view politics, culture, technology, and society as we face an unknown -- and invigorating -- future.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Virginia Postrel smashes conventional political boundaries in this libertarian manifesto. World-views should be defined not by how they view the present, she says, but the future. Do they aim to control it, as many conservative reactionaries and liberal planners want to do? Or do they embrace it, even though they can't know what lies ahead? Postrel (editor of *Reason* magazine) firmly places herself in this latter category--the dynamists, she calls her happy tribe--and urges the rest of us to sign up. The future of economic prosperity, technological progress, and cultural innovation depends upon embracing principles of choice and competition. The downside of this philosophy, Postrel readily notes, is that it doesn't allow us to manage tomorrow by acting today. And that's exactly the point: we shouldn't want to. A future constructed by an infinite number of individual decisions, made privately, is one she believes we should encourage. *The Future and Its Enemies* is at once intellectually sweeping and reader-friendly; it has the potential to join a pantheon of books about freedom that includes works by Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman. --John J. Miller

From Library Journal

Postrel, editor of *Reason* magazine, believes that conflict between stasists (who urge control and favor the status quo) and dynamists will shape the future. In her opinion, the greatest threats to the future are efforts to shape it in advance. She believes in minimal controls, those necessary to create a framework for cooperation in which private property is respected. The topics she covers include technology, the environment, and urban planning. Postrel criticizes those who strive to re-create a simpler past or to thwart competition; specifically, she opposes William Greider (*One World, Ready or Not: The Manic Logic of Global Capitalism*, LJ 1/97), who sees footloose capitalism as a danger. Her defense of the right to experiment is convincing, but it goes too far: Postrel seems to believe the status quo should yield to any proposal for change, ignoring the rights of people to enjoy the results of their own successful experiments. Nevertheless, her book is recommended as a thought-provoking look at an important subject. A.J. Sobczak, formerly with California State Univ., Northridge

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From [Booklist](#)

Postrel wants us to replace "left" and "right" political categories with "stasists" and "dynamists." Who are they, you ask? Stasists include radical environmentalists, Pat Buchanan, supporters of big government programs, and technophobes. Postrel also calls them reactionaries. Dynamists are learners, experimenters, risk-takers, entrepreneurs, and subscribers, perhaps, to her libertarian magazine *Reason*. So this is her dynamist manifesto, support for whose ideological precepts is offered in dozens of critical examples of our government at work. Stasis, she argues, is a successor outlook to the technocratic vision that dominated post-World War II public policy. Its premise is that there is "one best way" to do something, whether it's regulating fish-and-game seasons or designing a national health scheme, such as the Clintonites' ill-fated project. In contrast to such technocratic rule-making, Postrel proposes that her dynamist world would emphasize local knowledge, trial-and-error approaches, and beach volleyball, which, she argues, epitomizes the dynamist world. An off-beat treatise for serious politicos. *Gilbert Taylor*

Users Review

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