

Hale, Thomas. *Long Problems: Climate Change and the Challenge of Governing Across Time*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. x + 241 pages. Hardcover, \$29.95.

Certain dilemmas facing the world will last many subsequent generations into the future. Unfortunately, governments and the humans who run them are prone to short-term actions. The present book examines why that is the case and then furnishes strategies and tools for tackling perpetual or long-term problems, using climate change as the main issue of analysis.

Author Thomas Hale is a Professor of Public Policy at Oxford University's Blavatnik School of Government. His previous four books have focused on transnational economic and environmental topics. Hale serves as chair of an expert peer review group for the UN's Race to Zero campaign, which works with non-state entities to reduce carbon emissions. The alignment of the text includes seven chapters and two appendices.

Chapter 1 serves as a general introduction in that it presents the main argument, defines problems, and outlines the sequence of the text. According to the author, long-term problems are more prevalent due to the scale and speed of scientific and technical developments, as well as to changing social beliefs about the future. Because the time between the cause and effect of certain challenges is measured in decades and centuries, the rules of the game must be changed to accommodate new strategies. Too, the tools and scope of analysis must be widened.

Chapter 2 and Appendix #2 delineate the drawbacks of long problems. Threats like climate change are difficult to manage when governments and societies overall are programmed for short-term fixes. There are many reasons for this disconnect, including brief terms for revolving government officials, the inability to mobilize resources before a crisis, and general uncertainty about the future. There is also the phenomenon of "acceleration," described in Appendix #2 as the quickening of long problems in which the impacts are felt sooner.

Chapters 3 through 5 furnish a plethora of approaches for confronting long problems

successfully. In Chapter 3, Hale promotes the value of establishing future decision-making procedures within governments and organizations. He also identifies experimentation as a unique method for forecasting and preparing for events. In Chapter 4, the author discusses ways in which governments and organizations have created means to represent future-oriented concerns. One of those strategies is to mobilize activists, particularly youth. In Chapter 5, Hale recommends several methods by which institutions can prepare for the future and combine durability with flexibility to solve persistent issues.

The various tools available to social scientists for studying long-duration dilemmas are covered in Chapter 6. Together with traditional ways to analyze questions, the author suggests increased utilization of unique tools such as modeling, simulations, and even storytelling.

In the final chapter, Hale summarizes previous information, which together proposes a bold institutional agenda for addressing climate change and other long problems” (p. 168). Additionally, in a section of Appendix #1, he advocates for the type of forward-thinking moves in science and technology that the United States government exhibited at the outset of the 1950s. While there are fault lines to avoid, there is also hope of what human endeavor may yet achieve” (p. 182).

Three general types of publications deal with the subject of the present book. The first type includes research concerned with planning for the future in a broad sense. Along these lines, Adam Kahane (2012) explains the benefits of scenario planning; Ari Wallach (2022) posits steps to avoid short-termism, and Mats Larsson (2023) proposes to use information and space technologies to drive the implementation of new discoveries. The second type of publication comparable to the current text seeks to mitigate climate change in the future, whether through diverse means (Paul Hawken, 2021); by way of effective, sustainable development

(Filipe Duarte Santos, 2021); or through net-zero carbon emission proposals (Matthew Hampshire-Waugh, 2021; Jeffrey Rissman, 2024). Finally, a third type of text related to Hale's book assesses how to meet long-term energy deficiencies by taking a multidisciplinary approach (Daniel Spreng et al, editors, 2012).

Hale's book furnishes a balanced picture of the promise and perils inherent in battling perpetual problems. It is well-researched with a multitude of multinational examples, a function of the author's extensive international background and research expertise. Hale incisively links notable political documents declaring universal values with changes in moral views and eventual reforms.

The book possesses a few shortcomings. First, organizationally, the material found in the appendices could have been integrated into the earlier chapters. Second, the author downplays the value of the contemporary media for transforming the future agenda. Clearly, the media has a vital role, both in highlighting near-term problems before they become more unmanageable and in calling out climate deniers.

Overall, this treatise is necessary reading for historians and futurists alike.

References

Hampshire-Waugh, Matthew. 2021. *Climate Change and the Road to Net-Zero*. Crowstone Publishing.

Hawken, Paul. 2021. *Regeneration: Ending the Climate Crisis in One Generation*. Penguin Books.

Kahane, Adam. 2012. *Transformative Scenario Planning: Working Together to Change the Future*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Larsson, Mats. 2023. *How Building the Future Really Works: From Information Technologies to Power Production and Electromobility—What Society Needs To Take the Next Leap Forward*. Self-published.

Rissman, Jeffrey. 2024. *Zero-Carbon Industry: Transformative Technologies and Policies to Achieve Sustainable Prosperity*. Columbia University Press.

Santos, Filipe Duarte. 2021. *Time, Growth and Technology: How Humans and the Earth are Responding*. Springer.

Spreng, Daniel, Thomas Flueller, David L. Goldblatt, and Jurg Minsch, editors. 2012. *Tackling Long-Term Global Energy Problems: The Contribution of Social Science*. Springer.

Wallach, Ari. 2022. *Longpath: Becoming the Great Ancestors Our Future Needs—An Antidote to Short-Termism*. HarperOne.

Samuel B. Hoff, Ph.D.

George Washington Distinguished Professor Emeritus of History and Political Science

Delaware State University

Dover, DE