

2030 - Technology That Will Change the World
van Santen, Khoe, Vermeer

A disappointment. Few useful insights, no investment ideas, unknown "experts", December 31, 2010

This review is from: 2030: Technology That Will Change the World (Hardcover)

This book comes out of the Netherlands and is relentlessly rooted there, in worldview and in choice of experts.

It is alarmist, about global warming among other things. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Control has come under criticism this past year for overreaching -- letting their strong belief that global warming is a danger cloud the purity of their science. van Santen, Khoe and Vermeer go even further, raising specters of "tipping points" that can cause ocean levels to rise by tens of meters. They are off the scales. In this sphere they repeatedly cite one expert, Hans Joachim Schnellhuber, who one finds through Wikipedia is the founder of the Potsdam Institute on Climate Control, for a plethora of scary hypotheses.

This tactic is repeated throughout the book. Find a single quotable "expert" and use him to death. I read fairly widely, and I had not heard of any of their experts. While I admire the Netherlands, I believe that a lot of good science is done outside their borders. I am skeptical that they find all of their world-class experts so close to home.

The graphs are not especially well chosen. To demonstrate that cars in general are getting heavier and less fuel efficient, they focus on one market where it is true (Europe) and track three given models over time. Of course -- auto manufacturers generally allow a given model to creep upmarket over time. Much better would be statistics on all cars manufactured. It would show the same trend direction, but not as strong.

The authors are in love with Africa. If only Africa could obtain Internet connectivity, those fertile brains could be put to use as programmers, solving knotty problems for Europeans, Chinese and Americans. 'Scuse me, but if this were true, I expect we would see some evidence by now... outsourcing to SoWeTo instead of, say India. There is a lot of wishful thinking.

Lastly, I am a technology investor. I thought they might have some insights. Name some companies. Acquaint me with new developments. Alas, not a one. A lot of talk about general trends, such as making chemical plants smaller, the end of Moore's Law, etc., but no actionable ideas what might be done about them.

When you write a book, you have to imagine your target audience. This book is so superficial, so driven by idealism, and so parochial that I imagine that audience to be perhaps Dutch high school children. I have no idea why The Economist gave it a review.