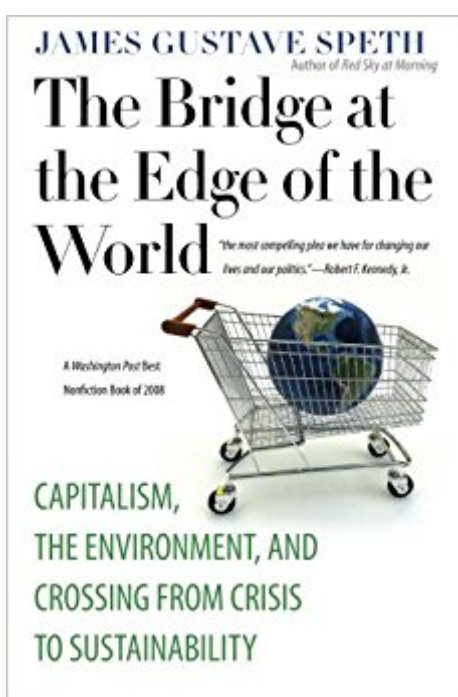


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The Bridge At The Edge Of The World: Capitalism, The Environment, And Crossing From Crisis To Sustainability



Synopsis

How serious are the threats to our environment? Here is one measure of the problem: if we continue to do exactly what we are doing, with no growth in the human population or the world economy, the world in the latter part of this century will be unfit to live in. Of course human activities are not holding at current levels—they are accelerating, dramatically—and so, too, is the pace of climate disruption, biotic impoverishment, and toxification. In this book Gus Speth, author of *Red Sky at Morning* and a widely respected environmentalist, begins with the observation that the environmental community has grown in strength and sophistication, but the environment has continued to decline, to the point that we are now at the edge of catastrophe. Speth contends that this situation is a severe indictment of the economic and political system we call modern capitalism. Our vital task is now to change the operating instructions for today's destructive world economy before it is too late. The book is about how to do that.

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Customer Reviews

Acclaimed environmentalist Speth asserts that our capitalist economy, with its emphasis on continuous robust growth, is at loggerheads with the environment. He minces no words as he writes that "to destroy life as we know it, all we have to do is—keep doing exactly what we are doing today." Observations from nineteenth-century naturalists, such as Audubon writing about the passenger pigeon, reveal humanity's failure to understand the repercussions of environmental destruction, a lack of foresight now exacerbated by the

whirlwind demands of modern consumerism. Quotes from economists, political philosophers, and technology experts offer "erudite analyses" of a realization set out in Bill McKibben's "Deep Economy" (2007) and "now gaining momentum: a society's slavish devotion to economic growth does not allow for critical environmental protections. We need look no further than the controversial Kyoto Protocol, Speth reminds us, as evidence. If Americans do not rein in spending, only one result is assured. If we do not learn to consume less, we will consume the biosphere itself in our binge." --Colleen Mondor --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

"Contemporary capitalism and a habitable planet cannot coexist. That is the core message of *The Bridge at the Edge of the World*, by Gus Speth, a prominent environmentalist who, in this book, has turned sharply critical of the U.S. environmental movement. . . . This book is an extremely probing and thoughtful diagnosis of the root causes of planetary distress." --Ross Gelbspan, *Washington Post Book World* "With candor, cadence and clarity, Speth presents a compelling case for prompt action, making this book a must-read on the subject. Protecting the environment needs not just an overhaul of institutions, but of values and mindsets, he says. . . . He argues that we must now choose between two paths: one leading to destruction, the other to a bridge that would help us cross to safety. Like an evangelist, Speth draws not just on facts, but anecdotes, quotes, even poetry to make his point." --Le-Min Lim, *Chicago Tribune* "Speth laments the tortuously slow pace of environmental activism in the face of the near-calamitous decline of species, soils, forests and oceans, and the dangerous advance of global warming. . . . But the challenges are too grave to wait for a new president. Speth's book makes it abundantly clear: Start ourselves, while (hopefully) there's still time." --Neal Peirce, *Washington Post Writers Group* "Contemporary capitalism and a habitable planet cannot coexist. . . . This book is an extremely probing and thoughtful diagnosis of the root causes of planetary distress." --Ross Gelbspan, *Washington Post Book World* "With candor, cadence and clarity, Speth presents a compelling case for prompt action, making this book a must-read. . . . Like an evangelist, Speth draws not just on facts, but anecdotes, quotes, even poetry to make his point." --Le-Min Lim, *Chicago Tribune* "A highly respected environmental leader, Speth has come to the conclusion that our capitalist market economy depends on growth in material production at levels that cannot continue without destroying the earth's natural support system. His book makes a strong case for redefining the aims of the economy; but the path forward, especially as developing nations aspire to Western standards of living, is far from clear. He believes the environmental movement as well as

the government is failing to lead the way to essential change." — Leslie Carothers, Wall Street Journal "With candor, cadence and clarity, Speth presents a compelling case for prompt action, making this book a must-read on the subject." — Bloomberg News "James Gustav Speth . . . leads us to a bridge at the edge of the world — an epic transformation of the way we live, produce, and consume. This is a fantastic, highly topical and potentially important book. It should widely be read, and translated into other languages." — Udo E. Simonis, Environmental Information + Environmental Policy "The Bridge at the Edge of the World may be the most concise analysis of the current state of the natural world and what might be done about it." — Brooke Williams, Planet News "Acclaimed environmentalist Speth asserts that our capitalist economy, with its emphasis on continuous robust growth, is at loggerheads with the environment. He minces no words as he writes that to destroy life as we know it, all we have to do is 'keep doing exactly what we are doing today.'" — Booklist "In his severe indictment of our stewardship of the planet, Speth says all we need to do to destroy the Earth is to continue what we're doing now: overproduce and overconsume. He presents a scary compendium of all the damage we have inflicted. . . . But he's smart enough to know that if the market economy is a big part of the problem, it has to be a big part of the solution. . . . The book is a wide-ranging synthesis of many ideas in the realms of economics, politics, and ecology, and calls for some profound changes in the way the economy and political institutions are governed." — Peter Hadekel, Montreal Gazette "The Bridge at the End of the World lays out a harsh future and strong prescriptions for changing the way we do business, conduct politics and treat the environment. . . . Speth believes that the world economy's obsession with growth and consumerism will lead to disaster. . . . What is needed, Speth argues, is a radical change in the economic system that takes into account the environmental costs of doing business and refocuses society on building more sustainable ways of living." — David Funkhouser, Hartford Courant "Speth lays out the scientific consensus about climate change and ecological stress with authority. Global warming, he notes, has a terrible momentum. . . . [This book] is an excellent quick survey of global climate and ecological management at present. . . . [Speth's] aim is to improve the quality of life, foster social solidarity, and restore our connectedness to nature by making corporations accountable to society at large." — Brian Thomas, New Leader "James Gustave Speth, wrote the book The Bridge at the Edge of the World because he's worried about our future and he's right. We should all be very worried. . . . This book, both for its brilliant articulation of the worlds' current system and, as Speth calls it, the 'crisis of capitalism,' is an important addition to your bookshelf. And it's sufficiently easy to read and accessible that it's a great gift for just about anybody!" — Thom Hartmann,

buzzflash.com"Speth pulls no punches. He offers a sharp, sometimes lacerating critique of the movement he helped establish, saying it has become swamped under 'environmental impact statements' and 'total maximum daily load' regulations. . . . His solution is to forge a new 'environmental political movement,' in which initiatives in human rights, social justice, politics, and the environment all work toward the same goal: a healthy planet that can fulfill the needs of all humanity. . . . [Speth says] 'the environmental community needs to become a political reform group.' It's a call we're hearing with increasing frequency, but this time it comes from a uniquely authoritative voice." — Molly Webster, onearth Magazine (NRDC)"Speth is a maestro conducting a mighty chorus of voices from a dozen disciplines all of which are calling for transformative change before it is too late. The result is the most compelling plea we have for changing our lives and our politics. And it is a compelling case indeed." — Robert F. Kennedy, Jr."Honest, insightful, and courageous. Dean Speth draws on his formidable experience and wisdom to ask why we are failing to preserve a habitable Earth. His conclusions are cogent, revolutionary, and essential." — David W. Orr, Paul Sears Distinguished Professor of Environmental Studies and Politics, Oberlin College. Author of *Design on the Edge* and *Earth in Mind*"When a figure as eminent and mainstream as Gus Speth issues a warning this strong and profound, the world should take real notice. This is an eloquent, accurate, and no-holds-barred brief for change large enough to matter." — Bill McKibben, author, *Deep Economy* and *The Bill McKibben Reader*"An extremely important book both for what it says and for who is saying it. The steady tran

The view from the Bridge at the Edge of the World is inspiring. Dean Speth offers hope if you are willing to work hard to make the world a better place for humans and all other life. He challenges the cultural values that lead us to avarice and greed and insists that we can do better, we can do much better. We can rise up to become proper stewards of the Earth. As a four decade environmentalist he is disappointed with the limited successes of the environmental movement. The movement has not even held its ground though it has won a few hard-fought battles. Dean Speth is a lawyer and educator who is dedicated to keeping humans from fouling the planet so that it is no longer viable to life as we know it. His foes have been greedy capitalists and corrupt politicians. He raises an important question about America, are we more in love with democracy or more in love with capitalism. The United States Constitution honors democratic rule but does not place the capitalist dogma above democracy. I agree with Dean Speth that this is a tough battle facing those who desire to change our values so we again love democracy as much as we did during the Revolutionary War.

Speth suggests that those who cannot see the view from his imaginary bridge are unable to see the best future available for humanity. Those who cannot see this view are destined to continue along the path that is now destroying the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the soil that grows our food. Those without the vision to see from this bridge are taking us down a dangerous path that spells catastrophic results. Purchase this book. Study the extensive footnotes. Give a copy to a friend who also loves democracy more than capitalism.

This is one of the best books I have read in a long time. These days most environmentally focused literature tends to focus on the pending doom of our seeming disregard for the environment as judged through our actions. It's obviously easy to forget about the big picture consequences of the sum of our societal actions and easy to dismiss our personal impacts due to our relative smallness, so literature that hits on the major unintended consequences is always a somewhat welcomed wake up call to the most of us who tend to forget about our personal carbon imprints. This book however takes the much needed step further. After the sensationalism fades and the reality of our predicament settles in more thoroughly we find the next (and more important) step a lot less clear. How do we enact policy that will either directly or indirectly affect our actions to alleviate the mounting problems. This book does not take the naive approach of hoping that people will invariably join together and consciously act in more costly fashions for the sake of the planet- it is too easy to act locally for individuals and that is taken more as an axiom. It describes environmental problems as arising as a mixture of fixable economic phenomena. In particular the concept of trying to measure the price of negative externalities is discussed in detail to try to force a repricing of polluting industries to take this into account such that goods and services are priced on a fully inclusive basis rather than excluding externalities. He also addresses tragedy of the commons type situation. He concludes many of the environmental issues as being market failures based on local incentives being the guiding ones versus national and global, and this lack of accountability for externalities fundamentally needs to be addressed. This can also be a coordination problem with corporations jumping jurisdiction so that the solution might require global over national policy solutions. Obviously solutions are not simple but the origin of the incentive problems are quite well explained and subsequently can be fairly easily understood, then the framework for potential solutions is outlined. The other aspect that is discussed is overconsumption. I agree in spirit with a lot of this, and clearly overconsumption has taken the US to a very difficult place, but this aspect of the book is more of a call for re-alignment of values. This is approachable through policy (consumption tax etc) but harder than trying to fix market failures as it's more subjective and harder

to convince those without that anticonsumption is in their global interest. Furthermore approaching anticonsumption on a graduated framework would be exceptionally difficult to monitor. All in all this is the sort of book that should be read by all (in particular policy makers) and I hope that more literature approaches the issues the way this book does. Namely looking at it from first- articulating all the risks, then the reasons for the evolution of the problem, finally, means to fix the problems on a sustainable basis via realignment of incentives. This is one of the books that for me has made me rethink a lot of very foundational issues both personal and political (after reading much environmentalist literature which did not have nearly the same effect), and I would expect this to have the same effect on most. For all of that, I highly recommend.

I am reading this book and finding that it is very informative and look forward to completing it.

a good book by a worthy scholar but unrealistic in its expectations

Very well written, although I would have preferred more elaborate seedbeds of transformation. That is where goals and designs are needed. The system failures are well-known and well-documented; a shorter summary would have worked. The second section on transformations could have been expanded to include social and religious areas. I had concerns about the discussion of market changes and wanted more about capitalism as an anti-market force.

Speth places his faith in the ability of future generations to learn from the mistakes of past carbon generations and be proactive about conserving what we have and not wasting what remains.

The book was alright. A lot of the chapters felt repetitive.

Loved it!

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