

# Book Review: Tomorrow's Lawyers: An Introduction to Your Future (2nd Ed.) by Richard Susskind

*In the second edition of **Tomorrow's Lawyers: An Introduction to Your Future**, Richard Susskind provides a concise and up-to-date account of the mid- and long-term future of the legal profession. This is a finely crafted work that not only reflects on the potential new horizons of legal practice, but also asks us to consider how such transformations can make our society a more just and fair one, writes Anton Moiseienko.*

**Tomorrow's Lawyers: An Introduction to Your Future. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Richard Susskind. Oxford University Press. 2017.**

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Richard Susskind OBE is known as one of the UK's foremost commentators on the law and technology and [the future of the professions](#) in a post-industrial, technology-driven society. In the second edition of *Tomorrow's Lawyers: An Introduction to Your Future*, he aims to provide a concise and up-to-date account of what the future holds for the legal profession. The result is a cogent, finely crafted work that is imaginative but not in the least sensationalist. While Susskind's matter-of-fact style does not make for a page-turner, it is effective in making his points clearly and persuasively.

The focus of *Tomorrow's Lawyers* is the legal profession in a mid- and longer- term perspective, i.e. the 2020s and beyond. In twenty years' time, when the careers of today's starters will reach their heyday, Susskind predicts that the outlook of legal practice will have changed beyond all recognition (84). The performance of routine tasks will be increasingly automated, and more and more jobs will involve managing legal processes by breaking them down into smaller tasks and applying technological solutions to achieve maximum cost-effectiveness. The delivery of legal services will shift online and computerised web-based services will displace lawyers unless truly bespoke advice is necessary. Cheaper and more convenient Online Dispute Resolution will expand access to justice, at least in so far as low-value disputes are concerned. Finally, as artificial intelligence and big data analysis capabilities evolve, lawyers will be pressed to either use their expertise for designing tomorrow's legal machines or do the jobs where human involvement comes at a premium (188).

Not all areas of practice will be equally affected by these developments. For instance, the way barristers and trial lawyers ply their trade may change as Online Dispute Resolution takes hold, but fundamentally their work will remain the same (65). By implication, the same must be true with regard to judges or prosecutors – the futuristic vision of a justice system powered by robots is not what *Tomorrow's Lawyers* envisages, at least not expressly. However, Susskind's argument is that the volume of truly bespoke legal services that require individual attention should not be overestimated, especially in the face of technological advances.

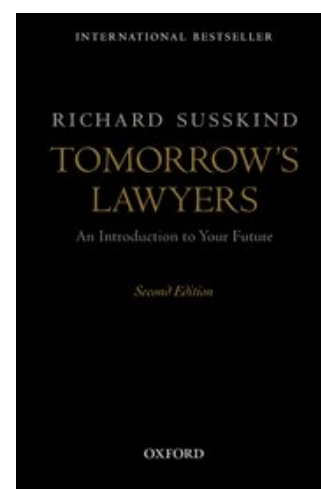




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Interestingly, the drivers of change are not limited to new technology. It is but one of the three factors that, according to Susskind, will shape the legal marketplace, the other two being the more-for-less challenge – i.e. the financial pressures imposed by large businesses on their lawyers to streamline and rationalise their working processes – and the liberalisation of the profession, whereby other businesses (such as the ‘Big Four’ accounting firms) begin to do some of the work traditionally reserved for qualified lawyers. In other words, the story Susskind tells is not only that of exciting technological advances, but also of the developments in the legal business, and as such it will be of much greater interest to an aspiring or practising lawyer than to an intelligent layperson.

Susskind’s astute analysis of the commercial realities that determine the outlook of the legal world raises the question of whether they are truly irreversible. This issue is addressed throughout the book in passim, and it is here that it becomes apparent that in reality *Tomorrow’s Lawyers* has two layers to it. Most of it is written as a down-to-earth, business-like exposition of what young lawyers should do to prosper, who will employ them and what law firms should do to keep abreast of the evolving legal world. Behind this surface there lies another layer: namely, an argument that changing the way lawyers do their business is in fact worth fighting for.

For instance, in one chapter, Susskind writes about the power and responsibility that in-house general counsels working in large corporations have to compel law firms to abandon some inefficient practices of the past, such as hourly billing. Moreover, as the closing two pages of the book emphasise: ‘the future of legal service is not already out there, in some sense pre-articulated and just waiting to unfold’ (195). Rather, it is up to the public and the legal profession to act and ensure that the predictions of experts are either borne out or falsified.

For what my own view is worth, the last several pages of *Tomorrow’s Lawyers* are its best part. In only several sentences, they shift the perspective dramatically and ask the reader to think about how a transformation of legal services can make our society a more just and fair one. Right at the end of the book, Susskind introduces a distinction between those lawyers who act as benevolent custodians of the law and those who are rather like its jealous guards. ‘The law is no more there to provide a living for lawyers’, he writes, ‘than ill health exists to offer a livelihood for doctors’ (195). How the practice of law can be developed to better serve the public is therefore the underlying question behind much of what Susskind writes about, rather than the important but relatively narrow issue of how young lawyers should navigate the market to find their dream job. Once this big question is articulated, the book as a whole takes on a different complexion and the profound importance of its subject matter becomes readily apparent. All in all, in spite of the occasional dryness of its style, *Tomorrow’s Lawyers* is an excellent starting point for those who wish to think about the issues it addresses.

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*Note: This review and interview gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Review of Books blog, or of the London School of Economics.*