

Some readings for a climate crisis

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The growing evidence that there is something utterly wrong with the climate makes it more and more unnecessary to make efforts to convince sceptics that we are amidst a climate crisis or, as the Spanish legislation states, a climate emergency. The term 'climate change' might be too weak for, indeed, as a mean of the changing states of the weather, climate itself always changes and has changed –a lot– through the eons by natural causes. Nevertheless, there is currently no doubt that the human-caused alteration in the chemical composition of the atmosphere, by means of greenhouse-effect gas emissions and land-use changes, is the cause of a global warming and a climate change at a pace never experienced by *Homo sapiens* all along its existence.

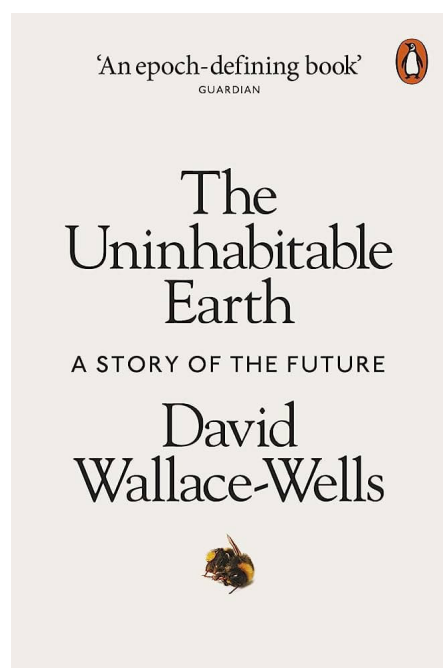
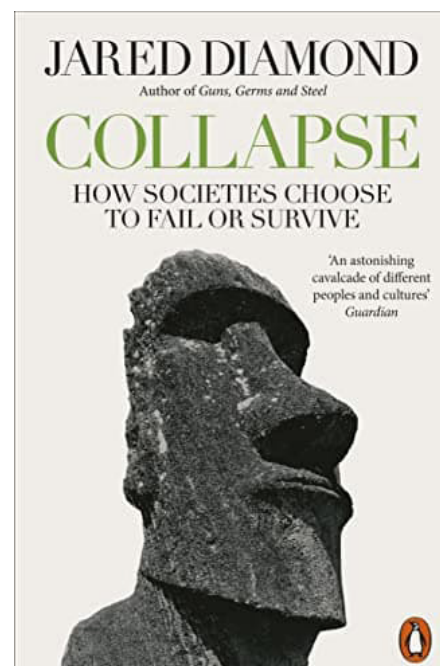
The changes are impacting all the components of the climate system: weather, oceans, ice caps, and biosphere and, hence, all the human economical activities depending on and related to them. All these elements are now imbalanced and that is how the term of climate crisis, as we will discuss later, is much more suitable to describe the current and, undoubtedly, future challenge that humanity must face. The thorniest issue is that humans are both the most affected and also the only cause of the problem, and worst effects mitigation and damage-control are in their hands, but the most effective solution is cutting emissions as much (ideally, completely) and as soon as possible. This solution means dismounting the way society has dwelled, and prospered, and multiplied as never before, since the Industrial Revolution, and transitioning to a sustainable way. This process is already in motion, but has to face huge resistance forces, driven by inertia and by powerful interests.

The Assessment Reports of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC), its Sixth report recently issued in 2022, are by far the most authoritative, contrasted and comprehensive source to learn about the irreversible changes imposed to the climate system and about the projections for the rest of the century according to different socioeconomic pathways. These reports, though, are lengthy (nearly 8,000 pages) and sometimes very technical, meaning that there are more accessible readings (apart than the own Summary for Policymakers included in the Assessment Reports), some of which we are going to review here.



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Starting by a modern classic of 2005, not directly related with climate change or the climate crisis, although it perspires through its pages, *Collapse*, by the veteran and renowned geographer Jared Diamond is a thorough and long reflection along the causes that make human societies fade and, eventually, disappear. By studying famous cases such as Rapa Nui/Easter Island, the Middle Age Viking settlements in Greenland or the Maya civilization, Diamond establishes how both external and internal causes, together with the application of wrong or ill adapted solutions –in a changing context, what worked before can no longer work or can even make things worse–, are behind the ruin and decline of many societies along History. There are obvious lessons to be learned for the current climate crisis.

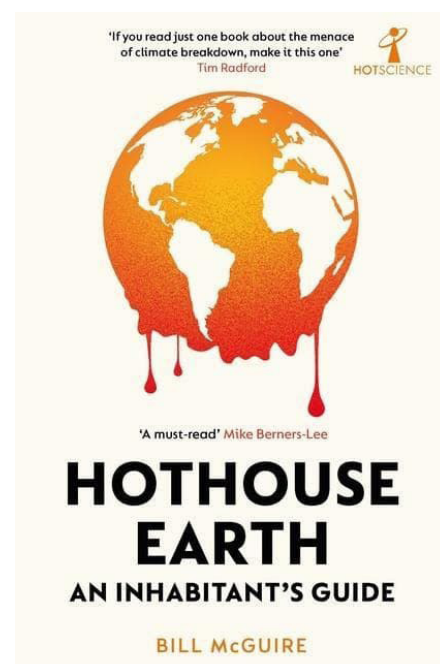


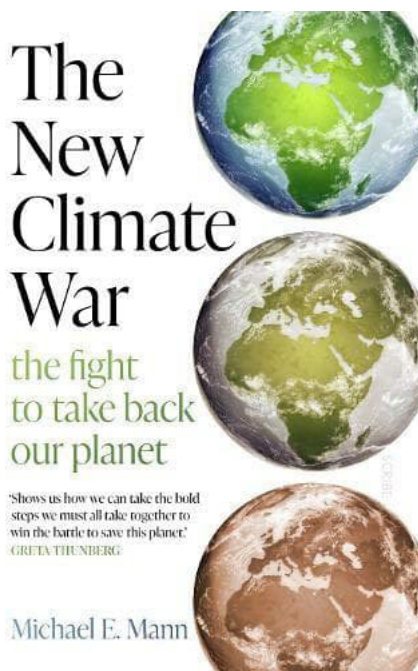
More focused on the matter-at-stake is *The Uninhabitable Earth: a story of the future of 2019*, by the journalist David-Wallace-Wells, who makes a review of the potentially more devastating effects of the climate breakdown: cascade effects, sea-level rise, political conflicts and economic collapse. Even though the intentions of the author are based on rising awareness on the importance of taking action now to avoid the worst effects of climate change later, no doubts an impending need, his reiteration on focusing on the worst consequences, some of which are mentioned but with a low degree of consensus between the thousands of IPCC contributors, can create an undesired effect on the reader. More on this, later.

conceptual idea of the former book: raise awareness to try to keep global warming below 1.5 °C, the pre-industrial mean temperature, but is more centred on the facts and the consensual projections. It is a short, focused and easy to read book.

The next book reviewed here is *The New Climate War: the fight to take back our planet*, by the prominent meteorologist Michael E. Mann, of 2021. Mann, with a direct and sometimes confrontational style, explains how it is the collusion of interests between oil companies, petro-states and some political and media groups that has made climate change mitigation go slower than needed. This is made by propagating hoaxes on the scientific solidity of climate change science, on the effects observed and on blocking consensus in the many Conferences of the Parties (COPs) devoted to develop binding agreements among states to reduce emissions and mitigate climate change.

Another way to delay the energy transition is setting the responsibility of the emissions on the personal behaviour of individuals and not in state regulations which would be binding for all sectors of the economy. Obviously stating the importance of more sustainable personal ways of life, Mann sets the example of the 4% reduction of emissions during the COVID-19 lockdown as the demonstration that it would not be just our





personal responsibility the one that would save us from the worst effects of the climate crisis. A much deeper intervention from state and multilateral actors is needed to de-carbonize our future.

Mann, as well as McGuire, praises the importance of movements such as Fridays for future, led by Greta Thunberg and her generation, who will live through worse years of this crisis, to ask for accountability from those responsible for not acting quicker. They, together with the growing effects already present, have created a change of tide in global opinion, corporations and most governments, that is starting to have an impact in emissions rates and in setting this crisis at the centre of world policies. Mann also criticizes what he calls 'doomists', and sets the article by Wallace-Wells as a perfect example. This kind of literature, which he labels as 'climate-porn', can lead to inaction by demoralising and by thinking that it is too late to avoid our fate. It is not, and although probably at a slower pace than the one desirable, society is already on it.

In this more positive line, the last book reviewed here, *Values*, of 2021, by the former Governor of the central banks of Canada and England and current UN Special Envoy for Climate Action and Finance, Mark Carney sets the focus on the need for reformulating the values behind Economy. With the examples of the Global Financial Crisis of 2008, the COVID-19 Crisis and the Climate Crisis, Carney elaborates a fascinating discourse on how to build value for all, with leadership, fairness and responsibility. It was Pope Francis who inspired Carney, in a reception to central bank governors, making the comparison of wine, which is a good complement of food and has a moderate quantity of alcohol that enlivens the mind and enriches the senses, and grappa, which is wine distilled and only has alcohol. The Pope made an analogy between Humanity and markets, which are humanity distilled, and challenged leaders to turn grappa back into wine and make more human markets and Economy that should be essential tools to navigate these crises. As they are created by a crisis of values, *Values* is Carney's answer to this challenge. There is hope.

