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Electronic Green Journal

Title

Review: Preparing for Climate Change

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/45r9g4g6>

Journal

Electronic Green Journal, 1(35)

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Publication Date

2013

DOI

10.5070/G313516303

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Peer reviewed

Review: Preparing for Climate Change
By Michael D. Mastrandrea and Stephen H. Schneider

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Mastrandrea, Michael D. and H. Schneider, Stephen, *Preparing for Climate Change*. A Boston Review Book. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2010. 112 pp. ISBN: 9780262014885. US\$14.95/£10.95. Hardcover, alkaline paper.

"Climate change is inevitable, but disaster is not."

My first impression, when I got *Preparing for Climate Change* in my hand, was how small and cute it is. The whole book is just over hundred pages and the actual text is a mere ninety pages loosely lay out over small pages. Thus, reading the book takes only around an hour. This is not to dismiss this book; it is a decent and easy to approach introduction to one of the most important concerns regarding the survival and well-being of humankind.

The book opens with a reminder that there is now overwhelming scientific evidence for human-caused climate change. The remaining uncertainties are about how severe the warming and its impacts will be. This is again dependent on future socioeconomic development and policy decisions that affect emissions: "The policy task, then, is to manage the uncertainty rather than wait an indefinite period to try to master it." (p. 9) It then briefly discusses the functioning of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which publishes every five to six years its assessment report presenting the best approximation of a global scientific consensus on climate change science.

The first chapter gives a brief overview about how the greenhouse effect works, why the planet is warming, and how scientists are making models to project future climate change. The second chapter reminds the reader that in the long run, climate change is not just a computer projection. Indeed, many of the types of problems discussed in the IPCC reports can be witnessed in their early stages today. This includes devastating events such as the 2003 European heat wave—now linked to the premature deaths of some 50,000 people. The third chapter reminds the reader that the climate problem is filled with deep uncertainties in both likelihoods and consequences that are unlikely to be resolved to a high degree of confidence before we have to make decisions about dealing with their long-term, and potentially irreversible, implications. In other words, the only sound global policy is to act now based on the available evidence.

The main appeal of the book, its compactness, is also its main drawback. The authors devote less than twenty small pages to the main subject of the book, preparing for climate change, before they rush to the final concluding chapter, where they suggest a new way to access vulnerability. They manage to sort out the common misconception that mitigation and adaption are trade-offs, as if pursuing one would deflect attention and resources from the other. Fortunately, there is a growing recognition that the two policies must be complementary: "what cannot be prevented through mitigation must be adapted to; what we cannot cope with by adaption, we must prevent." (p. 63)

I like the concept of the Boston Review Books-series: "accessible, short books that take ideas seriously" [<http://bostonreview.net/books>]. I must admit though that I am not sure who will benefit from this particular book in the series. It could perhaps serve as an introduction to the subject for someone without prior knowledge of climate change, if such persons still exist. In its brevity, however, it does not provide any new information for people already aware of the problem. Certainly it will not convince hard-line climate skeptics, but probably nothing will.

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Electronic Green Journal, Issue 35, Earth Day 2013, ISSN: 1076-7975