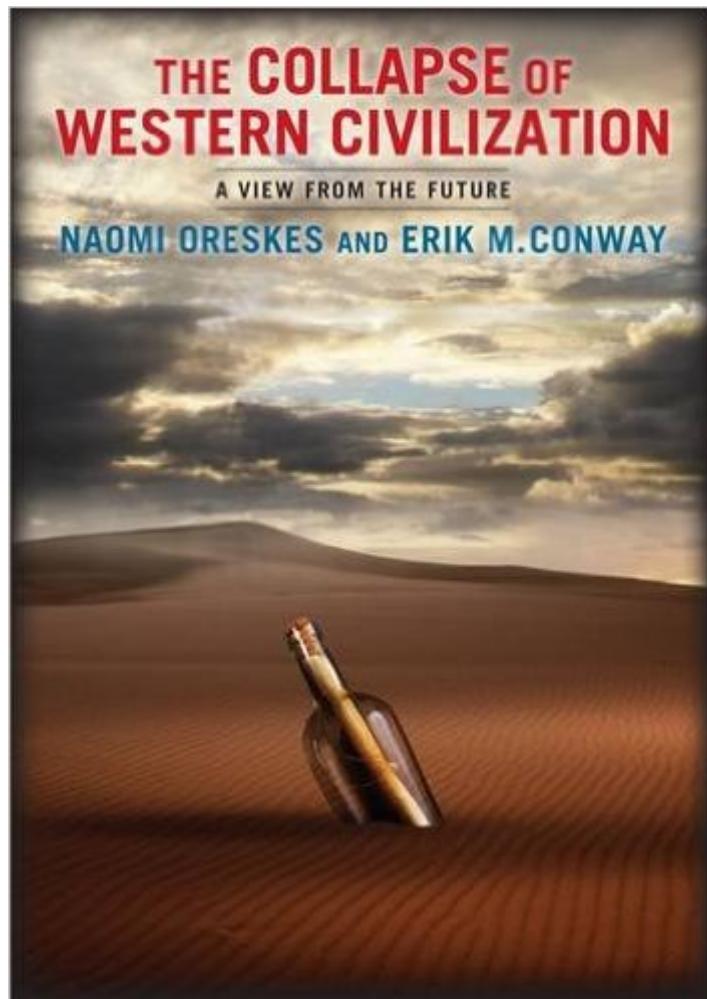


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The Collapse Of Western Civilization: A View From The Future



Synopsis

The year is 2393, and the world is almost unrecognizable. Clear warnings of climate catastrophe went ignored for decades, leading to soaring temperatures, rising sea levels, widespread drought and finally the disaster now known as the Great Collapse of 2093, when the disintegration of the West Antarctica Ice Sheet led to mass migration and a complete reshuffling of the global order. Writing from the Second People's Republic of China on the 300th anniversary of the Great Collapse, a senior scholar presents a gripping and deeply disturbing account of how the children of the Enlightenment—the political and economic elites of the so-called advanced industrial societies—failed to act, and so brought about the collapse of Western civilization. In this haunting, provocative work of science-based fiction, Naomi Oreskes and Eric M. Conway imagine a world devastated by climate change. Dramatizing the science in ways traditional nonfiction cannot, the book reasserts the importance of scientists and the work they do and reveals the self-serving interests of the so-called "carbon combustion complex" that have turned the practice of science into political fodder. Based on sound scholarship and yet unafraid to speak boldly, this book provides a welcome moment of clarity amid the cacophony of climate change literature.

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Customer Reviews

A pair of fine historians with strong science backgrounds have written a disturbing short book/extended essay. As a lifelong fan of speculative fiction, I've read many stories of world-scale disasters. Their future dystopia seems all too plausible, if the USA continues to stall instead of

leading. A country settled by people willing to invest in the future for their descendants, whose Founders included two fine scientists and educators of the time (Franklin and Jefferson), invested broadly in education and research and willing to spend 35 years building the Interstate Highway system ... ought to be able to do better, and if we can, the worst can be avoided. The Netherlands does water planning on century scales, good to emulate. They're building more floating homes. Oreskes and Conway correctly identify the biggest challenge as political rejection of science. Ironically, this was affirmed again after the book was done, just a few weeks ago, as the US House of Representatives wanted to stop the Pentagon from using the National Climate Assessment or IPCC reports in its plans. Do they really think it's a good idea to keep the Navy from thinking about #4 Norfolk/San Diego, #3 Pacific island bases, #2 Arctic geopolitics, or #1 fact that Karachi, PK is at sea level? That's like telling the Cold War military to ignore radiation effects as nonexistent.

Politicians may specify rejection of strong, inconvenient science, but the laws of physics do not care. We have so far avoided the 1950s/1960s most worrisome doom, nuclear war, known to have immediate dire consequences. The challenge of limiting climate change damage to a level survivable by modern civilization** is the longer-than-election-cycle lag time from action (or its lack) until the results. Reworking the world's energy infrastructure is a huge, but necessary undertaking, but requires persistent effort over many decades by many people. Humans have done that before. It is hard to see how the future gains from losing Miami, New Orleans, Shanghai, and many other sea-level cities ... but 50-100 years from now, the residents will have no time machines to come back and stop the problem when needed. They will be stuck. As it stands, we've missed the choice between Good and Bad, but still have choice between Bad and Worse. In the book, Western civilization delayed until the choice was Worse and Awful and got more of the latter. People should read the book, but not count on specific technology breakthroughs. Such do happen sometimes, and researchers are working hard in Silicon Valley and elsewhere, but back in Bell Labs, we always said "never schedule breakthroughs" because even we couldn't. I thought the book's breakthrough was a bit of a "deus ex machina" akin to "Dyson trees" to produce a future that was bad, but still had historians. But I guess that's less unlikely than kindly advanced aliens who take pity and magically fix things. Anyone who doubts the findings of climate science might attend AGU meetings or university lectures where one can hear good scientists and ask them questions, read some good books, learn enough science to take action. That science is no less strong than medical research establishing smoking/disease connection. (Compare IPCC and Surgeon General reports.) Rejecting climate science is like making sure kids start smoking by age 12 because medical researchers are all wrong, it's good for the economy and even if the kids fall ill 50 years from now, surely there would

be a miracle cure for cancer. People don't need to share political beliefs to accept the science, recognize the problem and argue for solutions they find acceptable. The Greenhouse Effect and Conservation of Energy exist, and so we are headed for a temperature range above any seen in recorded history, with massive population and infrastructure dependent on that range. The book's future path is somewhere between Worse and Awful. We don't have to go there, but the clock keeps ticking.==="That wasn't my list, but that of a very senior Navy admiral when asked about climate worries.. #1 Karachi surprised me until I thought about it. Karachi is largest city in PK, which already gets floods or droughts, uses Himalayan water along with quite a few other countries, has nuclear weapons and less-than-stable government. Given increasing pressure from climate change, what could possibly go wrong? Senior military people tend to be pretty pragmatic and this is the sort of thing that worries them.**Not everyone understands the complexity and potential vulnerability of modern high-tech supply chains. Put another way, in a world as climate-stressed as the one envisioned by Oreskes and Conway, it's unclear that billions of people would have smartphones, Internet access and use of weather satellites.

This book should be read by anyone interested in the future of our civilization during the lifetime of our children and grand-children. It should be read by scientists who are trying to warn us of the coming catastrophe from climate change. It should be read - but won't be - by the politicians and the economic top 1% who are unable to comprehend, or simply don't care, that they will be the major cause of almost unimaginable suffering to humanity, all for the sake of living the high-life for a decade or two. Oreskes and Conway are very perceptive historians who bring a strong understanding of science to their writing. The book is written from the imaginary perspective of an historian from 2393 discussing the reasons for the collapse of Western civilization during the 21st century. I found the style of writing to be compelling. The book isn't describing a wildly speculative possible future (apart from compressing time by assuming a rate of sea-level rise that is at the extreme upper end of predictions) - it has strong elements of inevitability unless humanity takes dramatic action. The study of history is terribly important. Thinking about what future historians will say about our current epoch gives an excellent perspective. Oreskes and Conway have important lessons for us on the inevitable failure of the free market, as well as issues with how physical scientists should reconsider their addiction to the 95% confidence limit and how they should show more appreciation for the biological and social sciences. The book concludes with a Lexicon of Archaic Terms, a very interesting interview with the authors, and extensive notes. The illustrations show the effect of many metres of sea level rise on familiar coastlines. If you haven't done so

already, read the authors' earlier book "Merchant of Doubt". Now go out and make sure that the future is brighter than Oreskes and Conway predict. There is still time to turn things around. Although New York is lost.

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