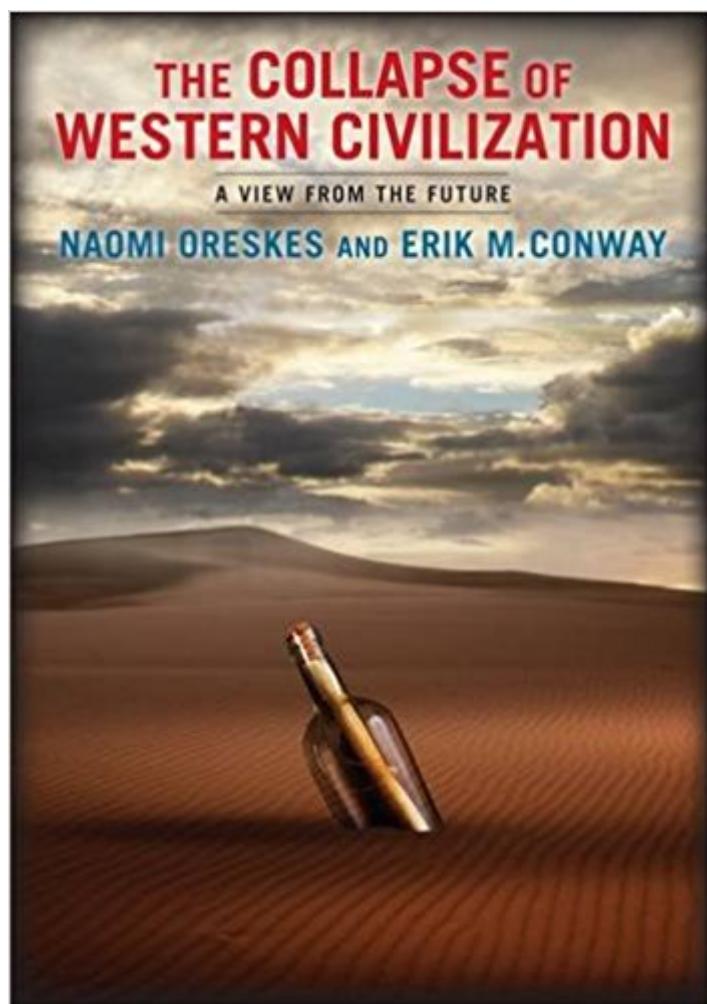


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# The Collapse Of Western Civilization: A View From The Future



## 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A much-needed antidote to the "AGENDA 21" nonsense promulgated by Glenn Beck and the far right, Oreskes and Conway provide us with a glimpse of the dystopian future we may ACTUALLY face should we fail to heed the warning of the world's scientists regarding the looming climate

change crisis. (Michael E. Mann, director, Penn State Earth System Science Center, and author of *The Hockey Stick and the Climate Wars: Dispatches from the Front Lines*)Oreskes and Conway's startling and all-too-plausible history of the century to come is in the spirit of George Orwell and Aldous Huxley and all the writers who have turned to prophecy in the attempt to ward off an oncoming disaster. Witty in its details and disturbing in its plausibility, this is an account of the Long Emergency we're entering that you will not soon forget. (Kim Stanley Robinson, author of *Shaman*, *2312*, *Science In the Capital*, and the *Mars* trilogy)A chilling view of what our history could be. Ignore it and it becomes more likely. Read this book, heed its warning, and perhaps we can avoid its dire predictions. (Timothy Wirth, vice chairman, United Nations Foundation, and former U.S. Senator and Member, U.S. House of Representatives)Regret, Oreskes and Conway argue, is an equal-opportunity employer. Yes, climate change will be a nightmare for environmentalists. But global warming also threatens free marketeers, because unabated, it guarantees big government intervention. And that's the great service of this short but brilliant parable: it creates bipartisan empathy for our future selves. From that gift, perhaps we can summon the will to act today. (Auden Schendler, Vice President, Sustainability, Aspen Skiing Company)Provocative and grimly fascinating, *The Collapse of Western Civilization* offers a glimpse into a future that, with farsighted leadership, still might be avoided. It should be required reading for anyone who works or hopes to in Washington. (Elizabeth Kolbert, author of *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*)The scenario portrayed in this valuable little book is scarily possible. It would be apt if readers took action to keep it from, you know, happening. (Bill McKibben, founder 350.org)Packed with salient science, smart speculation and flashes of mordant humour. (*Nature*)This science-historical fantasy is thought-provoking, but is it prescient? (*Scientific American*)[A] must-read... What is science fiction today will someday be the history of real, live people -- billions of them. Kudos to Oreskes and Conway for finding a creative way to talk about the immoral choice we are making today and how those billions of people will suffer for it. (*Climate Progress Blog*)Though short, *Collapse* provides a detailed examination of how we've failed our environment and a call to action to save what's left. (*Discover*)The authors' creative attack, ahead of the 2014 U.S. midterm elections, on those who today deny climate change and advocate a hands-off approach by government, is what makes this work a must-read in the politics of climate change. Its gift -- the real reason why everyone should read it -- is that it gives us an opportunity to imagine the world as our grandchildren will encounter it. (*Haaretz*)... Oreskes and Conway have carved out a new space for historians to use their knowledge of alternative pasts to help imagine alternative futures. (*Public Books*)A gripping and deeply disturbing account; 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. *All Things Environmental* (*All Things Environmental*) Excellent; *The Collapse of Western Civilization* is a very readable and effective way of communicating the catastrophic implications of where we are heading under the climate crisis. (Climate, People & Organizations) Oreskes and Conway do justice to the full seriousness of climate change. That seems to me prime among the many values of their book; For all its dispassion the book is a call to arms. (Hot Topic) Oreskes and Conway's book contains potent, thoughtful analysis... (Huffington Post) *The Collapse of Western Civilization* illustrates the potential dangers from climate change, which can help readers think more clearly about the risk management choices society faces. The book may also encourage scientists to reflect on their role in society. If it helps scientists engage more effectively with the public by focusing on the key strengths of science, the book could help improve a flawed political system and enhance the potential for all branches of science to further benefit society. (Paul A. T. Higgins Issues in Science and Technology)

Naomi Oreskes is professor of the history of science and affiliated professor of Earth and planetary sciences at Harvard University. Her 2004 essay "The Scientific Consensus on Climate Change," cited by Al Gore in *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), led to op-ed pieces in the Washington Post, the Los Angeles Times, and the San Francisco Chronicle, and to Congressional testimony in the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. With Erik Conway, she is the author of *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*. Erik M. Conway is a historian of science and technology employed by the California Institute of Technology. He recently received a NASA History award for "path-breaking contributions to space history, ranging from aeronautics to Earth and space sciences," and an AIAA History Manuscript Award for his fourth book, *Atmospheric Science at NASA: A History*.

Just so you know, I am a PhD marine scientist and I have been studying and teaching environmental science, including climate change, for over 20 years. One of the biggest problems with scientific discoveries is that scientists seldom publish their work in a forum or a form that is accessible or understandable to the non-scientific community of voters, policy makers, et al. This short book/long essay by Naomi Oreskes and Eric Conway is a fantastic addition to the conversation on climate change and its potential effects. If you are looking for a sci-fi novel, look elsewhere. If you are looking for an overview of what climate change or climate science is, look

elsewhere. But if you are interested in considering intersections between science, communication, business, history, creative thinking and climate change then this little book is for you. FYI, this is not a light version of "Merchants of Doubt" (also a fantastic read). This book is instead, a way to consider the path we are on and seem determined to stay on with respect to climate change regardless of what science discovers and which actions it recommends. The writing is clear and concise, but not what I'd call brilliant though the ideas presented are. We are on a downward slope and have been for decades when it comes to climate. We know the causes of climate change. We know the effects, current and future if we don't change. This book outlines much of what science can predict with confidence. The one criticism I have is that the authors resort to a techno-fix for climate change rather than letting it run its course. Perhaps the alternative was simply too bleak to imagine...5 stars. Important message...should be read by everyone

Delightful read if one may be allowed to use that particular adjective when the subject is so grim. And the authors, two science historians coming from the best universities in America (Harvard and the California Institute of Technology), managed the feat of making serious analysis read like fiction. A real page-turner. Yet it's not fiction, far from it. The book is in fact reviewing what's wrong with our society, pin-pointing with deadly accuracy the reasons why we are unable to stop our "civilization" from rushing to "collapse". This is a book that should be taken seriously by anyone concerned with our future, and in particular by our political leaders. The idea of analyzing what is happening in the climate change debate from the standpoint of the future (the book is purportedly written by a future historian located in China in 2393) is particularly effective as it gives a neutral, balanced voice to the whole account. And it is refreshingly novel. The fact that it is short (a mere 100 pages) no doubt also helps. This is both a powerful read and a wake-up call. I found the arguments particularly convincing and being an economist, I especially liked the twist they put on economic concepts, for example, Hayek's and Milton's "neo-liberalism" calling it "market fundamentalism" (indeed, those theories are ideologies rather than scientific) or "gross national product" amusingly described as an "archaic" concept. The humor is there but it is ultimately very dark humor. The message is clear. If we don't do anything, if we don't reverse engine and control gas emissions, we are doomed and why this is so is masterfully demonstrated. Many factors are at play and the authors pull them together in a compelling way, using the detached tone of a future historian who is puzzled by the fact that Western Civilization could not avoid collapse in spite of its remarkable advances in science and technology. The reasons for our failure to address climate change are clearly analyzed and deconstructed - and suddenly, reading this brilliant essay, I began to feel like the Mayas must have

felt when decades of unexpected drought destroyed their civilization, causing economic collapse, local wars and social chaos. Just like in the case of the Mayas, the reasons we are failing are all linked to each other - to global warming of course, but more importantly, to the way we handle it (or rather do not handle it - we simply deny it's there). The book is at its best in explaining exactly why we deny climate change, in pointing to the "internal" causes, things that lay at the heart of our civilization, things that made it once great and that are now causing its fall - like, for example, "reductionism" which is the idea (that began in Descartes' time) of solving large problems by breaking them down into smaller, more "tractable" elements. The approach has proved powerful to advance knowledge but as the narrator coldly remarks "reductionism also made it difficult for scientists to articulate the threat posed by climate change, since many experts did not actually know very much about aspects of the problem beyond their expertise." As a result, scientists did not speak in a single voice, climate change continued to be denied, fueled by the interests of the "carbon-combustion complex" - another witty take on Eisenhower's famous "military and industrial complex" - and political leaders thought they had more time to address it than they really had. Other contributing factors are also identified, such as over-reliance of scientists on the concept of statistical significance (also termed an "archaic"!) - something that had never occurred to me before and yet totally makes sense. And this is yet another reason why I loved this book: the authors managed to shed new light and come with new insights on an argument, climate change, that I tend to consider "closed", in the sense that I can't imagine what more could be added. There are only two aspects I regret, one, is the reference to just one climate fiction novelist (there are many, climate fiction is a brand new genre and rapidly rising with the likes of Margaret Atwood) but of course, the authors have a right to their own likes and dislikes in fiction; the other, is the premature burial of the United Nations following the collapse of international talks on climate change at some point in the mid-21st century. Personally, I view such a collapse totally unlikely - the United Nations are here to stay, they are indispensable and most likely to preside over the collapse of our civilization rather than being buried before... But those are minor details and don't detract from the main strengths of this excellent book, which is to unravel the puzzle of climate denial. Highly recommended.

If we continue current policies then the devastating effects of global warming are certain. According to science. But maybe the person reading this does not believe in science. We do not know with certainty exactly when the warming will arrive, there is a range of likely times, and this book has it arriving relatively early within the range of probabilities. If we are lucky it will arrive later, but the science clearly says that it will arrive. And when it arrives the effects on our civilization will be really

bad. As bad as shown in this book. The most important part of "The collapse of western civilization: a view from the future" is the explanation of why we are not responding to this danger, a response that would NOT be too costly and that would in fact protect the very values that are put forward as reasons not to respond. I strongly recommend this outstanding and important book. Especially for those who think they will reject its message.

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