



Stolen Future, Broken Present: The Human Significance of Climate Change (Critical Climate Change)

David A. Collings

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This book argues that climate change has a devastating effect on how we think about the future. Once several positive feedback loops, such as the melting of the Arctic icecap or the drying of the Amazon, cross the point of no return, the biosphere is likely to undergo severe and irreversible warming. Nearly everything we do is premised on the assumption that the world we know will endure into the future and provide a sustaining context for our activities. But today the future of a viable biosphere, and thus the purpose of our present activities, is put into question. A disappearing future leads to a broken present, to a strange incoherence in the feel of everyday life. Most discussions of climate change guard us from this realization; this book takes it seriously. Where many argue that the current crisis serves as an opportunity for transformation, it acknowledges that we are virtually out of time to act, even though we must do so. Where many describe a possible transition to a new energy economy, it points out that such an economy, however necessary, would still impose an enormous human footprint on the Earth's ecosystems. Where many explore how to alter our practices in a gradual process within the existing national and international political systems, it argues that our reliance on them shows that we consider the market, and those systems, to be more real than the biosphere itself. Finally, where many examine the consequences of our actions for our grandchildren, it suggests that climate change has already damaged our own lives. We thus face the unprecedented challenge of salvaging a basis for our lives today – not by turning away from these dark realities but by facing them and, through that process, to discover surprising possibilities for ethical and emotional resilience. That basis, this book argues, may be found in our capacity to assume an infinite responsibility for ecological disaster without condemnation or nostalgia and, like the biblical Job, to respond with awe to the alien voice that speaks from the whirlwind. By owning disaster and accepting our due place within the inhuman forces of the biosphere, we may discover how to live with responsibility and serenity whatever may come. Drawing on contemporary research in climate change, political history, literary studies, philosophical ethics, cultural theory, the history of science, and a/theology, this book brings them together in a comprehensive and bracingly honest assessment of our current dilemma.

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