



This changes everything: Capitalism vs. the climate

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This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate. Naomi Klein. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014. 576 pp.; £20.00. ISBN: 9781451697384

It is hard to know how to approach the phenomenon that is Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything: Capitalism Vs. The Climate*. In case you've been living in a remote cave for the last 12 months, this is the book that came out in September 2014 to rave reviews in the world's major newspapers, which has been serialised on the front page of *The Guardian* over several days, and which has both left-wing commentators and even some conservatives singing its praises. There is also a documentary film coming out to accompany the book and sell out presentations by the author around the world linked to climate activist events. So this book comes with huge media fanfare and expectation.

Klein is well known as a journalist and author who has devoted her life to activist politics. Making her name with the bestseller critique of consumer culture *No Logo* (Klein, 1999), followed by the equally powerful *The Shock Doctrine* (Klein, 2007), her journalistic skills and critical political insights have recast public debates about contemporary capitalism and its consequences. However, as Klein notes in the Introduction to this book, she was something of a latecomer to climate change, characterising her lack of engagement as part of the more general social denial most people in affluent society practice on this issue. We all live busy lives, climate change is so big and so confronting that it is much easier to put it to one side, blame others, or slip into a convenient assumption that its either not 'a thing' (hello climate change deniers!), or if it is, someone else (government, business, environmentalists) will fix it.

As she describes it, her epiphany with climate occurred during a lunch with Bolivia's ambassador to the World Trade Organization, who set out the huge potential wealth transfers that would be needed from developed to developing economies in order to radically reduce greenhouse gas emissions. As Klein (2014) explains,

I began to understand how climate change—if treated as a true planetary emergency akin to those rising flood waters—could become a galvanizing force for humanity, leaving us all not just safer from extreme weather, but with societies that are safer and fairer in all kinds of other ways as well...It is a vision in which we collectively use the crisis to leap somewhere that seems, frankly, better than where we are now. (p. 7)

This linking of climate change to a broader critique of corporate capitalism and global and social inequality builds on Klein's arguments in her earlier books but also provides a way to overcome the often sterile debate over climate change which ignores the profound social, political and

economic implications of our current situation. Indeed, one of the really big themes in the book is that climate change isn't simply an environmental or 'green' issue, it is in fact the issue which defines human society this century. That is because, as Klein emphasises, the climate crisis is intimately intertwined with the political-economy of neoliberal capitalism. While fossil fuels laid the path for the development of capitalism during the Industrial Revolution some 250 years ago, the climate consequences of this technological pathway only became evident from the 1950s via escalating consumption, population and globalised hyper-capitalism.

Indeed, as Klein argues in Part 1 of the book, our current climate predicament is a product of particularly 'bad timing'. While the science of anthropogenic climate change was well established, it was not until the late 1980s that it really burst onto the political scene. However, just as climate change was gaining political recognition, neoliberal capitalism emerged triumphant across the Western world. Market fundamentalism, the winding back of government regulation and the dominance of the multinational corporation under so-called 'free trade', provided the ideal context for the escalation of humanity's greenhouse gas emissions. Indeed, as Klein and others have noted, despite the growing scientific consensus of a climate crisis, the neoliberal corporate response has been to confect public doubt over the science, lobby and corrupt the political system, and push the accelerator further to the floor in the pursuit of profit and economic growth.

At 500 plus pages, this is a weighty tome packed with detail and huge in scope. The first half of the book provides a masterful dissection of the fundamental conflict between neoliberal capitalism and the environment. Here, Klein critiques free market fundamentalism, conservative politics, climate change denial, corporate opposition to environmental regulation, the conflict between international trade agreements and renewable energy, the global outsourcing of carbon emissions and our civilization's terrible history of natural resource exploitation. Klein skilfully interweaves her observations of particular events as hooks into deeper themes. So in Part 1, she describes her attendance at a Heartland Institute conference at which participants celebrate climate change denial and the free market system. As she goes on to explain, the visceral political divide that has emerged over climate change is not an outcome of faulty communications but rather an ideological conflict over the future of capitalism. If political conservatives were to accept that the vast majority of climate science is in fact correct 'then their entire crusade to morally redeem capitalism has been for naught' (Klein, 2014: 40).

Climate change is also an expression of our deeper attitudes towards nature, particularly a view that we are somehow separate from the environment we live within, evident in the philosophy Klein (2014) characterises as 'extractivism', 'a nonreciprocal, dominance-based relationship with the earth, one purely of taking' (p. 169). This is well set up in Chapter 5 in relating the tragic history of the Pacific island of Nauru, which has been literally dug up by foreign mining companies for its rich phosphate reserves. The story of Nauru—a 'disposable country' in which local people have lost everything in the corporate pursuit of mineral riches, links to the broader theme of how capitalism relies upon so-called 'sacrifice zones'; parts of the world and communities we are willing to give up as a necessary cost in the pursuit of greater material wealth and profit. It also connects with a more fundamental view of ourselves as a species, and how since Francis Bacon and the Scientific Revolution, we have sought to control nature and bend it to our will. In a marvellous depiction of the harnessing of fossil fuels in the Industrial Revolution, Klein (2014) quotes James Watt, the inventor of the coal-fired steam engine: 'Nature can be conquered ... if we can but find her weak side' (p. 173).

In Part 2 of the book, Klein shifts tack to explore our piecemeal efforts to date in 'solving' climate change. For instance, Chapter 7 provides a well-targeted critique of 'green billionaires' like Richard Branson who seem particularly skilled at playing the environmental card as a way of developing the next opportunity to turn a buck. Geoengineering, particularly its more

extreme variants such as stratospheric sulphur injection, are also dissected and again Klein does this marvellously by juxtaposing her description of a geoengineering confab organised by the Royal Society in a stately Georgian mansion with the realisation that one of the outcomes from such an intervention would be to cast large parts of Africa into unending drought. The vignette comes to a surreal conclusion when the climate scientists and boffins have to share the mansion with a group of rowdy Audi executives celebrating their latest sales successes!

Nor do environmental groups escape criticism. In particular, 'Big Green', the large environmental non-government organisations (NGOs) which have bought into a neoliberal agenda of market mechanisms and close business alliances, are a particular target of attack. This analysis is embedded in the shameful example of The Nature Conservancy, which ran its own oil and gas wells in a Texas reserve it had created to protect an endangered bird species which later became extinct.

In the third part of the book, Klein's focus shifts to the social movements and grassroots organising that are now emerging in response to climate change and the rush to exploit non-conventional fossil fuels via deep-water oil drilling, tar sands processing, mountain-top mining and coal and shale gas 'fracking'. Characterised as 'Blockadia', Klein details the diverse local campaigns that have emerged around the world as farmers, villagers and Indigenous communities rise up in resistance to the destruction of their local environments. As she summarises,

More and more, these communities are simply saying 'No'. No to the pipeline. No to Arctic drilling. No to the coal and oil trains. No to the heavy hauls. No to the export terminal. No to fracking. And not just 'Not in My Backyard' but, as the French anti-fracking activists say: *Ni ici, ni ailleurs*—neither here, nor elsewhere. In other words: no new carbon frontiers. (Klein, 2014: 335)

Once isolated and divided, Klein demonstrates how broader social movements now provide connections in linking local destruction and extreme weather with broader global climate concerns. Blockadia, Klein argues, offers our best hope of politically challenging the fossil fuels forever imaginary in that while historically 'sacrifice zones' were remote and forgotten places easily ignored by the affluent consumers of Western economies, in the rush to scrape the bottom of the oil barrel, everyone now is potentially in a sacrifice zone. This hints at an inherent contradiction of late capitalism in that the seeds of resistance, and perhaps even revolution, lie in the revelation that we are indeed consuming ourselves to death. Perhaps the best example of this countervailing power is in the extraordinary recent success of the fossil fuel divestment movement started by NGO 350.org which in a relatively short time has been able to begin the process of de-legitimising the fossil fuel industry.

For some, this focus on social movements and local protest as our best hope in averting catastrophe is overly optimistic and even downright unrealistic. For instance, Elizabeth Kolbert (2014) has reflected on the very real problem of getting affluent consumers to engage with the real implications of reduced affluence and declining economic growth:

... when you tell people what it would actually take to radically reduce carbon emissions, they turn away. They don't want to give up air travel or air conditioning or HDTV or trips to the mall or the family car or the myriad other things that go along with consuming 5,000 or 8,000 or 12,000 watts.

There is much truth in this criticism, and Klein (2014) herself acknowledges the pervasive influence of neoliberal ideology in which 'we are nothing but selfish, greedy, self-gratification machines' (p. 62). While I am also sceptical that we can undertake the decarbonisation of our global economy at a pace and scale sufficient to avert environmental catastrophe, one can't help but admire Klein's innate faith in the human spirit, local solidarity and her ability to chart the growing groundswell of

local opposition to the excesses of environmental degradation. Given pretty well all current 'solutions' to the climate crisis seem insufficient, Klein's commitment to grassroots mobilisation at least prioritises local democracy and communitarianism in a world obsessed with markets, individualism and consumption.

This is a book targeting a general audience and some academics may be underwhelmed at the lack of deeper conceptual theorising. However, while critical social and organisational theorists will be familiar with many of the issues Klein canvasses (capitalism, neoliberalism, environmental degradation, social movements, poverty and inequality, Indigenous rights), *This Changes Everything* brings these issues together within a powerful polemic of integrated political advocacy. At a time when academics are told to demonstrate their social impact and contribution to economic well-being, Klein's argument that climate change is an 'issue' like no other forces us to reconsider such conventions and our very sense of being. In the climate-shocked world we are now entering, much of what we take for granted will be up for grabs. This raises interesting questions about the role of universities and academia as established economic and organisational models are undone, political processes and discourses upturned and established ways of life banished by the physical and social chaos of an increasingly unstable climate.

Overall, *This Changes Everything* is a huge, ambitious and fascinating book addressing the most important issue we now face as a species. It is a book targeted at a broad popular audience, and judging by its listing on the *New York Times* bestseller list, it is succeeding in this task admirably. The style of the book is easily accessible, and Klein has a real knack for finding small, local stories that resonate to the much bigger issues. This is a book that should be read by everyone with an interest in climate politics, the contradictions of capitalism and our increasingly precarious existence on this planet.

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Christopher Wright

The University of Sydney Business School, Australia

Pragmatism and organization

American Pragmatism and Organization: Issues and Controversies. Edited by M. Kelemen and N. Rumens. Farnham: Gower, 2013. £65.00. ISBN 1409427862.

Classical pragmatism appears to be experiencing a minor revival in contemporary organization and management studies, inspired by the so-called new third wave of neo pragmatist theorizing associated especially with Rorty (1979) and Putnam (1997). When scholars appeal to an organizational imagination that would seek to illuminate the personal troubles of the employee, the influence of Mills' (1959) pragmatist-inspired sociological imagination is suggested (Mir and Mir, 2002). Dewey's (1940) conception of participatory democracy has been revived in the fields of public administration (Evans, 2000) and ethics (Jacobs, 2004). More generally, the Editors of