



Naomi Klein. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014. 576 pp. \$30.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4516-9738-4.



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The highly respected journalist Naomi Klein's excellent and important book, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate*, is about the environmental imperative for systemic economic and social change. The change needed, according to Klein, is radical, dramatic, massive, revolutionary, evolutionary, profound, and fundamental. Klein is passionately trying to inspire a powerful global movement before it's too late. Klein writes, "what we're talking about is transforming everything about the way we live on this planet.... Faced with a crisis that threatens our survival as a species, our entire culture must change.... We need to change how we live, how our economies function, and even the stories we tell about our place on earth.... Climate change is both a terrible threat and also an opportunity.... In the next decade we need a massive mobilization larger than any in history" (pp. 1-5). Klein succeeds at identifying our economic, political and cultural chains, which is necessary, she writes, if we are to have any chance at breaking free.

Unfortunately, Klein's analysis and recommendations, although generally accurate, are fatally flawed. Her critique about the failures of capitalism and the urgency of the climate crisis are accurate, but the environmental crisis and war for survival are likely worse than she is willing to report, which should only give people and organizations even more urgency for revolutionary action. Overall, *This Changes Everything* is far more than just an extremely well-written expose of the climate crisis. Specifically, the necessary changes involve energy, economics, agriculture, and culture (although Klein does not use this categorization).

Energy

Emissions reductions are a top priority. There has to be dramatic cuts in emissions, about 10 percent per year—and society must be completely off fossil fuels by 2050 or else the climate crisis will continue spiraling out of control, creating even more famine, more state failure, more social chaos, and threatening the very existence of civi-

lization and *homo sapiens*. It's important to recognize that famine, state failure, and social chaos are already being felt as a result of increasingly frequent and severe weather disruptions as a result of climate change and that this is not only an issue for the future.

One of Klein's biggest arguments is that this energy transition has to be carefully managed—primarily by the government and civil society, and not by profit-seeking corporations—and integrate environmental needs into the economy. This will change everything about how we produce and consume and how we travel and live. The current economic system that does not take into account the environment in which it operates is, by definition, psychotic: it is severely disconnected from external reality, valuing the destruction of the environment and itself as a short-term benefit. There have to be strict rules and limits against extracting and burning coal, oil, and other fossil fuels. Extraction of tar sands, shale, and offshore drilling in the Arctic should be banned completely, immediately. Banks and energy companies will have to forfeit trillions of dollars (approximately thirty trillion) of future earnings by leaving the vast majority of proven fossil fuel reserves in the ground. And these are prescriptions are not just Klein's progressive wish list, but globally recognized "inconvenient truths."

The inconvenient truth for capitalism is that climate change means that either capitalism is dismantled quickly and thoughtfully or collapses under its own failings, taking the whole world with it. The biggest issue preventing the dramatic changes necessary in the economic system is that change is unfavorable to the powerful economic and political elite who currently write the rules and enjoy the most benefits at the expense of the 99 percent, the environment, and future generations.

Klein says that we need to "replace" fossil fuels—which is a very controversial claim because it is uncertain that this is possible. She refers

readers to Mark Jacobson and Mark Delucchi's *A Plan for a Sustainable Future: How to Get All Energy from Wind, Water and Solar Power by 2030* (2009) and the National Renewable Energy Laboratory's (NREL's) *Renewable Electricity Futures Study* (2012). Jacobson's plan is for 3.8 billion wind turbines, 1.7 trillion rooftop photovoltaic (PV) systems, 90,000 large-scale solar power plants, and 5,350 large-scale geothermal plants, among thousands of other decentralized renewable energy installations. Locally owned, smaller-scale public utilities are definitely essential, but not necessarily at this scale. Efficiency, conservation, and reduced energy demand should play a much bigger role.

These alternative energies are another type of industrial "extractivism" at the heart of the climate crisis. What Klein omits is that "renewable" energy necessitates huge amounts of mining and fossil fuel consumption, in part, because they are dependent on massive amounts of concrete and steel. Furthermore, many experts are legitimately concerned about the physical constraints on rare earth elements' ability to meet the demand. The critics of widespread renewable utopia, exploring numerous other problems, include Ozzie Zehner's *Green Illusions: The Dirty Secrets of Clean Energy and the Future of Environmentalism* (2012) and James Howard Kunstler's *Too Much Magic: Wishful Thinking, Technology, and the Fate of the Nation* (2013). An honest look at renewables also demands consideration of "return on energy invested" (ROEI) because it still takes a tremendous amount of fossil fuels to mine the resources, produce, distribute, and maintain these "renewable" technologies. Unfortunately, Klein does not address these important constraints. It is possible to overcome these constraints, but assuming this puts us perilously close to Klein's warnings against the all-too-common magical thinking that technology will save us. The reality is that there must be a dramatic reduction in energy consump-

tion. However, this is not inconsistent with a dramatic rise in people's standard of living.

A big part of the cultural shift is a shift in perspective and realizing that consuming less energy is necessary for increasing our standard of living. Although high-energy lifestyles, like high incomes, are currently seen as necessary for a high standard of living, people's happiness does not actually increase after a certain baseline. And that baseline is lower than most people realize. In the United States, people are generally four times above that baseline—consuming about twenty to twenty-five tons of greenhouse gases per person per year compared with many countries with better standards of living that consume less than five tons per capita. Using less energy for food, housing, and transportation can cause dramatic increases in people's health, increases in local community participation and community relationships, increases in energy savings, increased income and good jobs, and numerous other benefits. Hopefully it will not require an "authoritarian" eco-dictator—an idea that fuels the existential angst of conservatives more than climate change—for people to be happier, live longer, and be more sustainable—as described by David Shearman and Joseph Wayne Smith's *The Climate Change Challenge and the Failure of Democracy* (2007).

The other major problem is that Klein's policy changes are inconsistent with the severity of the crisis that she describes. She first writes, quite convincingly, how a 2°C rise in global temperatures compared to the pre-industrial baseline "now looks like a utopian dream," citing dire warnings by an extremely conservative World Bank of a 4°C (7.2°F) rise by 2100, which is "incompatible with any reasonable characterization of an organized, equitable, and civilized global community" (p. 13).

Despite telling us that the 2°C goal is arbitrary, insufficient, and unrealistic, Klein contradicts herself, later saying that "keeping warming

below 2°C" means we must be "almost completely weaned from fossil fuels before 2050" (p. 146). It is most worrisome that Klein bases her recommendations for change on this 2°C "utopian dream." This explains Klein's confounding assertions such as how "we need to return to a lifestyle similar to the one we had in the 1970s" (p. 91). Klein's prescription for change is not commensurate with the magnitude of the problem—the "unbearable reality that we are living in a dying world" (p. 139). Thus, in a very big way, Klein's policy conclusion reflects the same denialism of the Right and inadequate proposals of the Left that define her thesis.

This 2°C (3.6 °F) mark is important because the world has already warmed about 0.85-1°C and the world's governments have unanimously agreed that temperatures should not be allowed to pass this 2°C limit. So, 2°C represents both an ambitious global target and also a level that is "beyond dangerous," and therefore not ambitious enough (p. 13, citing Kevin Anderson's *Beyond Dangerous Climate Change* [2011], reporting that "2°C now more appropriately represents the threshold between 'dangerous' and 'extremely dangerous' climate change").

Even worse, Klein reports that other notoriously conservative and high-profile groups, the International Energy Agency, and PricewaterhouseCoopers have issued reports projecting a rise of 6°C (10.8°F) by 2100. This apocalyptic 6°C estimate, which would likely leave the world uninhabitable, factors in the methane being released from arctic permafrost, making this a more accurate prediction. However, even these 6°C models do not account for other significant sources of arctic methane, reported by Nafeez Ahmed's *Seven Facts You Need to Know about the Arctic Methane Timebomb* (2013). Not accounting for this and several other expected tipping points that are possibly already beyond the "tipping point," undermines the quality of Klein's climate analysis, and thus, her economic analysis.

In this way, Klein is vulnerable to the same criticism that she levels at the environmental organizations that refuse to consider adequate responses “and instead advocated for green products ... that are so weak or high risk that it's magical thinking” (p. 210). One of Klein's major points, however, is that “while the Heartland Institute recognizes that climate change is a profound threat to our economic and social systems—and so denies its scientific reality—, environmentalists have maintained that climate change requires only minor tweaks to business-as-usual—and therefore allow themselves to believe in its reality. It's not clear who is more deluded” (p. 210). I fear that Klein herself is just as deluded by the allure of green tech, conveniently ignoring its dark side, including the massive deployment of concrete, steel, rare earth minerals, and so on.

As an example of how fast this issue changes for the worse, Klein reports that “we can only burn 565 gigatons” out of the 2,795 gigatons (Gt) of identified fossil fuel deposits and assets “on the books,” being planned for exploitation (p. 148). However, just months after this book was published, the UN issued a warning that the global carbon budget is only 275 Gt (Nov. 2014).

Economics

One of Klein's major points is that a competent government is necessary to help rapidly implement the necessary changes through decentralized public works projects. This change would create millions of good jobs, especially in the energy and agricultural sectors. Part of this process is divestment from dirty energy and investment in thousands of co-ops, worker- and community-owned businesses, nonprofits, and municipal initiatives. Creating a new economy involves community investment funds and socially oriented banks, credit unions, and union pension funds. Dramatic economic changes are necessary because, among other similar findings, the landmark *Stern Review* (2006) found that climate

change is “the greatest market failure the world has ever seen” (p. 70).

This process of fixing the economic system and enlarging the public sphere involves a decentralized renewable energy infrastructure, mass public transit, zero-carbon public services and infrastructure, bigger safety nets, preparing for climate shocks, preparing to ration crucial resources like water and arable land, and relocating millions of citizens out of hazard zones. Klein writes, “during good times, it's easy to deride ‘big government’ but during disasters, most everyone loses their free market religion and wants help from [the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)]” (p. 107). Klein then reports the dramatic increase in the severity and intensity of natural disasters and the necessity for significant investments in preparedness.

The change should be financed, Klein writes, with a \$50 per ton carbon tax that would raise \$450 billion per year; phasing out fossil fuel subsidies to save \$775b/y(!!!); a low-rate financial transaction tax to raise \$650b/y; closing tax havens to raise \$30b/y; a 1 percent billionaires tax to raise \$46b/y; and slashing military budgets 25 percent to free up \$325b/y. This is over \$2 trillion annually, enough to finance the energy transition (pp. 114-15). Klein enthusiastically emphasizes that taxing the rich and removing fossil fuel subsidies are among the most popular policies.

However, another major point is that the U.S. government has comprehensively failed to deal with this catastrophe and is currently unwilling to enact the necessary policies. In fact, all of the major governments in the world are “failing to meet pledges, missing targets, and breaking promises. The catastrophic result of all this obfuscation and procrastination are emissions that are over 60% higher in 2013 than they were in 1990, when negotiations toward a climate treaty began in earnest” (p. 10).

A pessimistic but perhaps more honest look at the relationship between the failure of capitalism

and the climate crisis is described by David Shearman and Joseph Wayne Smith's *The Climate Change Challenge and the Failure of Democracy* (2007). It is tempting to think that Klein is naive about the nature of democracy and the potential for a powerful enough movement to overcome the plutocracy and corporatocracy, and implement the necessary changes to overcome the "suicidal throes of addiction" (p. 144).

Capitalism

Obviously, Klein's major thesis is that capitalism has catastrophically failed and that dealing with climate change necessitates dealing with extreme inequality. Capitalism is described by Klein as being focused on aggressive growth, greed, profit, free trade, market fundamentalism, corporate deregulation, and export-focused production. "This model is driving us beyond the boundaries of the atmosphere and ocean, toward civilization-threatening tipping points. It requires heavy-duty interventions: bans on polluting activities, subsidies for green alternatives, penalties for violations, taxes, public works programs, and reversals of privatizations.... The central ideological battle of our time is whether we need to plan and manage our societies to reflect our goals and values or whether that can be left to the free market" (pp. 38-40). Klein cites Karl Marx's recognition of capitalism's "irreparable rift" with "the natural laws of life itself" (p. 181). Capitalism is at war with the environment, Klein writes, and it is essential to reimagine the world outside of capitalism.

Klein never sufficiently defines her terms, leading critics to say that her adversary is not actually capitalism itself, but the current manifestation of extreme neoliberal capitalism. Joseph Bower et al.'s *Capitalism at Risk: Rethinking the Role of Business* (2011) offers a working definition of market capitalism whose features include private ownership of personal and enterprise assets; adequate provision of physical security for life and property; the sanctity of private contracts; a banking system that provides sound currency; prices

set by independent enterprises; and free trading among nations. Important facilitating conditions include an educated population, good public health, an effective legal system, and effective and accountable government.

Klein does an excellent job at explaining how, in the climate context, capitalism has not adequately provided physical security for life and property, has not provided the sanctity of social contracts, and has mispriced energy, as well as how free trading among nations is a fundamental problem. Klein does not attack capitalism on the grounds of private ownership of personal assets, but does argue for the socialization of energy utilities. Unfortunately, Klein misses the opportunity to discuss the oil-backed USD "petrodollar" currency situation as being a central part of "capitalism vs. the climate."

Klein also explains how the population is not sufficiently educated about the issue, having been swindled by corporations and the government. She also emphasizes the need for better public health care; the systemic failure in the rule of law—because the fossil fuel industry has essentially bought the political system and has money to burn; and, perhaps most critically, how we are without an effective or accountable government. Thus, Klein (almost) comprehensively destroys the capitalist ideology. Klein's point is clear: the legitimacy of capitalism and its free market ideology have been thoroughly discredited, and given the environmental crisis, there is an existential urgency for a widespread movement to implement comprehensive reforms.

Agriculture

Throughout the book, Klein talks about the necessity for localized agriculture. The changes that Klein recommends include increasing food stocks, building resilience to drought and flooding, reducing the demand for animal products, producing "climate ready crops," a zero-waste system, rationing, and self-sufficient rural farming, perhaps based on the successful victory gar-

den program (reporting how three-fifths of the United States was growing victory gardens in 1943, producing 42 percent of fresh-vegetable consumption, p. 17). The key is an expanded, decentralized, and self-sufficient farming system, which should be incentivized for ecosystem restoration, low-energy farming, and being part of an renewable energy cooperative.

Compared to the industrial average, Klein emphasizes the holistic agroecology and permaculture approaches that can increase yields 80 to 120 percent through intercropping, green manures, sequestering carbon in the soil, and other practices that create better resilience to extreme climate impacts and buffer communities against impending price shocks in the globalized food system. Other features of this agricultural system include food sovereignty, democratic control, preventing fuel crops from squeezing feed crops, and protecting the water and soil fertility cycles. This agricultural system, Klein emphasizes, is part of the needed shift in worldview based on regeneration and renewal rather than domination and depletion.

Klein's agricultural analysis underestimates its significance. She reports that global agriculture produces about 20 to 30 percent of global greenhouse gases, while other expert analyses report that the agricultural sector is responsible for over 50 percent and could potentially be about 80 percent of the solution in terms of greenhouse gas sequestration and also in terms of the economic importance. This is explained by books such as Richard Oppenlander's *Food Choice and Sustainability* (2013).

Although Klein does advocate reducing the demand in animal-based agriculture, a complete ban on industrial animal agriculture is a higher priority than a ban on coal mining, considering the environmental and economic imperatives. Klein undermines her intellectual courage, integrity, and credibility by refusing to personally commit to or advocate a plant-based vegan diet

when this is the single most important issue related to climate change and cultural change. She therefore makes herself vulnerable to the same attacks of "staggering hypocrisy" that she levels on others. The critically important cultural issues of food are addressed by Will Tuttle's *The World Peace Diet: Eating for Spiritual Health and Social Harmony* (2005).

Furthermore, Klein writes, "The truth is leaking out, with prisoners chanting 'We are not animals'" (p. 167). The fact is, humans are animals and statements like this reflect a denialism that is highly damaging to the consciousness of the movement. Klein's passionate fight for rights and equality is limited to the human sphere, which limits her impact. Sentiments like this are "speciesist"—reflecting an arbitrary supremacism and discrimination morally similar to racism and sexism. Admittedly, this quote is taken out of context, but the hubris of humanist philosophy (promoted by Klein's nemesis, the University of Chicago) is intimately tied to Western civilization's exploitation, violence, colonialism, extreme inequality, environmental destruction, and, ultimately, anti-humanist way of life that threatens the very existence of humans. Saying that "we are not animals" reflects Klein's blindness—and the movement's blindness—to the critical importance of humankind's exploitative relationship with non-human animals and nature, which Klein herself identifies as being a fundamental issue. Klein has a fantastic criticism of the failure and hypocrisy of the big environmental groups' complicity in fossil fuel exploitation. However, her expose is arguably only 50 percent complete, ignoring the environmental movement's appalling track record with respect to animal agriculture, more fully exposed in the documentary *Cowspiracy* (2014).

Culture

"Fundamentally," Klein writes, "the task is to articulate not just an alternative set of policy proposals but an alternative worldview to rival the one at the heart of the ecological crisis—embed-

ded in interdependence rather than hyper-individualism, reciprocity rather than dominance, and cooperation rather than hierarchy” (p. 462). Cultural change is paramount. We need stories about our place on an Earth that is endowed with divinity, deserving of respect and reverence and more than a little fear. We need myths that bring us beyond the gods of economic growth, the altar of hyper-consumption, the worship of self-indulgence, and the obsession with cheap money and energy. We need a new narrative, vision, and worldview that embraces cooperation, compassion, reinvention, communitarianism, egalitarianism, and spirituality.

We need a radical ecology, Klein says, based on the scientific and Eastern beliefs about the interconnectedness of all life and the Native American cosmology that sees all living creatures as our “relations.” We need to move beyond the hubris and overconfidence that we can be free from nature and are masters who control, dominate, and conquer. We need to give up industrial luxuries. We need a leap in human consciousness. We need a lifestyle that values meditation, local food, the rhythms of natural systems, and indigenous culture and traditions. “The process of shifting cultural values is difficult and central” (p. 462).

What’s needed, Klein argues, above all, is a mass movement, a widespread mobilization, a united world, and a robust coalition of trade unions, students, public sector workers, activists, immigrants, and everyone—*fast*. We need to build organizational networks across the world to orchestrate sustained efforts. We need to demand and create political leadership independent of the powerful corporations. We need to demand long-term planning, strategy, focus, and clear deadlines. We need to reinvent the collective, the communal, the commons, and the civic body. However, I fear that Klein is underestimating the cultural barriers to this transition, described in detail in the excellent book by Stephen Gardiner, *A Perfect*

Moral Storm: The Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change (2013).

Klein sacrifices a good number of trees convincing the reader that society needs to stop thinking that we will be saved at the last minute by some billionaires or incredibly risky geoengineering. Klein also spends a great deal of time emphasizing the importance of indigenous rights, and arguing that the First Nations in Canada are at the frontlines of the war. Klein describes the U.S. “blockadia” movement, trying to prevent pipelines, fracking, and other fossil fuel developments.

One of Klein’s chapters is “Love Will Save this Place.” She writes, “demonstrations were not primarily about anger or hatred. It had been about love—a collective and deeply felt expression of love for their breathtaking part of the world” (p. 341). However, Klein also writes how “fear is what binds together the southeastern Montana cattle ranchers with the Washington State communities fighting coal trails and export terminals.... It’s threatening their survival” (p. 346). (Let’s ignore the fact that cattle ranching is one of the primary causes of climate change.) Tragically, Klein appears to forget her own advice and later describes how “I realized that I had become so convinced that we were headed toward a grim ecological collapse that I was losing my capacity to enjoy my time in nature. The more beautiful and striking the experience, the more I found myself grieving its inevitable loss—like someone unable to fall fully in love because she can’t stop imagining the inevitable heartbreak” (p. 419). Like most writers, including David Roberts (*Hope and Fellowship*, 2013), Klein’s investigation into the climate crisis is a journey along the delicate balance between optimism and pessimism. *This Changes Everything* is an invitation for communities to have that conversation about how to make drastic and dramatic changes, for a more profound reorganization of life. That’s why she is important. Klein’s conclusion about catalyzing com-

munity engagement is wise advice firmly grounded in “the power of ferocious love” to make the seemingly impossible possible. It’s time for a revolution.

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