

BOOK REVIEW

**No Planet B Available! A review of “The Climate Book: The facts and solutions” by Greta Thunberg.**

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We face a number of critical ‘grand challenges’ that threaten our future as a society and even as a species (Howard-Grenville et al., 2014; Kuhlmann and Rip, 2014; George et al., 2016; Aguilera, Aragón-Correa & Marano, 2022; Krammer et al., 2023). Among them, climate change<sup>1</sup> appears to be both the most daunting and the most pressing one. In addition, the longstanding and increasingly growing pressure from environmental changes is starkly contrasted by the slow and inconsistent responses from world governments. Enter *The Climate Book*: a timely and powerful plea for humanity to urgently address the impending crisis of climate change, a masterfully curated volume by Greta Thunberg, the world’s youngest, most famous and relentless, environmental activist. This book aims to serve as a go-to educational resource for all climate related issues. Thunberg’s powerful and impassioned voice reverberates throughout the book, urging us to confront the stark reality of our planet’s fragile state, and redefine our relationship with the natural world for the sake of future generations. While the book employs the ‘tell it like it is’ patented style of Greta Thunberg to make a substantive and urgent case for radical change, it also remains cautiously optimistic about our ability to listen to the science and act decisively before our window of opportunity closes.

Speaking of science, in *The Climate Book* Thunberg follows her own advice and puts together a collection of around 100 bite-size essays by climate experts -essentially, a who’s who line-up of scientists and community leaders – to tell us the “biggest story in the world” (p.42, line 33). This massive effort follows an intuitive five-part structure that educates the reader on the main tenets of climate change: ‘How climate works’; ‘How our planet is changing’; ‘How it affects us’; ‘What we’ve done about it ‘ and ‘What we need to do now’. Each sub-section is punctuated by a summary with a hefty dose of examples written by Thunberg. Her anger and frustration over decades of lies, inaction, and broken political pledges are ubiquitous throughout the book, urging us to avoid repeating past mistakes in an endless loop: “*We fail to connect the dots*”(p.128); “*So they knew. The world knew.*” (p.20, line 31); “*No one was held accountable. No headlines. No front pages. The focus was gone. Again. This is exactly how you create a catastrophe.*” (p.93, lines 21-23); “*It gives me no pleasure whatsoever to keep calling out the bullshit of our so-called leaders* ”(p. 201, lines 8-9).

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<sup>1</sup> Long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns. While these changes can occur naturally, since 1800s human activities have been identified as the main drivers of such changes through burning of fossil fuels.

Part 1 provides an accessible, yet comprehensive, overview of the Earth's climate system by drawing upon existing scientific knowledge from authoritative sources (such as the reports from IPCC - The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) to explain the role of the atmosphere and the significance of greenhouse gases in regulating Earth's temperature. Part 2 provides an overview of the current state of Earth's climate system and the impact of human-induced global warming on different aspects of the natural world and human society. "*The science is as solid as it gets*" (p.21, line 12) says Thunberg highlighting the link between human activities and greenhouse gas concentration as well as the importance of tipping points and climate feedback loops. Moreover, the climate consequences are both radical and irreversible: according to Thunberg, a "*snowball [of events] has been set in motion*" (p.73, line 3) by our "*ongoing slaughter of nature and biodiversity*" (p.91, lines 36-37), a new reality where rapid change, extreme weather events, and negative consequences for both eco-systems and humans will be the norm.

In turn, Part 3 explores the social consequences of climate change (from illnesses, vector-borne diseases, or resistance to antibiotics to human wellbeing, access to water and resources, and climate conflicts) and their disproportionate (unequal) impact on vulnerable groups (e.g., children, women, elderly, indigenous people, or low-income communities), prompting Thunberg to boldly state that "*the world has fever*" (p.132) but "*we are definitely not all in the same boat*" (p.157, lines 30-31). Part 4 takes stock of the past and present actions to address this problem. However, Thunberg sees the climate crisis as a result of decades of inaction and denial by the governments, corporations and media that have been influenced by the fossil fuel industry and its lobby groups. As such, she remains sceptical of politicians' ability to develop the radical response needed for tackling this crisis. Finally, Part 5 discusses possible future solutions and actions. Thunberg's view remains that both individual, societal and global efforts are all needed if we are to succeed<sup>2</sup>. From changing lifestyles, to supporting local products and marginalized communities, getting involved in climate campaigns, or educating others on these issues, "*we can no longer pick and choose our actions – we need to do everything we can*" (p.327).

Besides serving as a vital knowledge hub on climate change, the *Climate Book* weaves also into its fabric various interdisciplinary ideas around sustainability, thereby presenting some interesting research avenues for Business Ethics scholars both at the macro and micro levels. Some of these issues are discussed directly by Thunberg, while others emerge from the interplay between the book and extant cross-disciplinary literatures on environmentalism. For starters, climate change presents by default a confluence of complex issues involving both fairness and responsibility of different individuals, nations, organizations, and generations (Böhm et al., 2022). Subsequently it is a 'perfect moral storm' that brings

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<sup>2</sup> She gives some first-hand examples coming from her native Sweden: *flygskam*, or 'flight shame', a concept which has made many people reconsider using long-haul flights to reduce their carbon footprint, as well as *folkbildning* (free, general, public education on a subject) which she identifies as the driver of her environmental activism.

together multiple ethical challenges in a mutually reinforcing manner (Gardiner, 2011) and illustrating powerfully some of the prominent struggles behind our collective climate fiasco.

First, the *failure of global cooperation* to reduce carbon emissions follows a prisoner's dilemma game, where all countries seek to maximise their individual benefits rather than focusing on collaboration to achieve this massive outcome (i.e., stop and revert climate change). This is driven by a multitude of factors from our historical cosiness with fossil fuels (pp.219-223) to the inherent inequalities in terms of resources (pp.183-186) and desire to profiteer through loopholes (pp.210-213) and disinformation (pp.29-31). On top of these, nationalism and geo-political supremacy struggles have stymied repeatedly global efforts for decarbonization. Thus, pursuing countries' individual strategies leads to an inferior equilibrium compared to the collaborative outcome scenario (Wood, 2011), and a *gridlock* for action that has stalled any meaningful progress on tackling climate change over the last decades (Hale, Held, & Young, 2013). All these complex, fluid issues have yet to be engaged by research in a meaningful way.

Second, the *failure to account for international and intergenerational effects and assign responsibility*, despite the direct link between the severity and cumulative nature of the climate problem and its negative impact on future generations, raising disputes between developed and developing nations regarding their responsibility and global re-distribution of resources and wealth (Shukla, 1999). The book posits that justice and equal rights are paramount for solving this crisis (p.42). Yet, reality is much different with issues like environmental racism (pp.162-164), climate refugees (pp. 165-168) and overall injustice (p.161) still the status quo. And while poorer countries bear the bulk of this weight (e.g., Bangladesh-p.161; Caribbean- pp.169-171 or Sahel -pp. 171-174) little has been done in terms of resource redistribution (p.405) or reparations (p.410) both in the policy and academic realms.

Finally, our historical *inability and unwillingness to place (moral and financial) value on nature* which has been conducive of resource depletion, pollution, and environmental degradation as factors of production in framework focused on chasing perpetual economic growth (Daily et al., 2000). Instead, we should embrace sustainability through more holistic approaches (e.g., Kate Raworth's 'Doughnut Economics' model<sup>3</sup>) that provide a better balance between social and economic rationales. Mending our relationship with Earth (p.415) appears to have become a vital prerequisite for our survival, from tackling acidification and warming of oceans (pp.84-85) to reinstating and supporting the role of Amazonian forests as the planet's green lung and a natural barrier for the spread of diseases (p. 101). We seem to have forgotten all of nature's benefits to people (pp.107-108) for the sake of agricultural scale and efficiency, and this skewness is untenable. All these areas present important, inter-disciplinary

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<sup>3</sup> The Doughnut model is an attempt to provide an alternative (more balanced) economic model for development and growth compared to the current policy paradigm that focuses on endless growth. The model factors in both social foundations for humanity (identified as sustainable development goals) and accounts for our limits, i.e., the planetary boundaries in place (identified by earth systems scientists as mandatory for planetary stability).

and policy-pertinent avenues for research targeting sustainability, equity, and balanced long-term development of our planet.

Moreover, the book identifies some ‘micro’ level climate challenges for the Business Ethics research. Thunberg reinforces repeatedly the idea that businesses have a *moral responsibility to act sustainably* (Kolk & Van Tulder, 2010) by reducing their carbon footprints and shifting their operations towards non-polluting and more circular practices. It also highlights *the social responsibility of businesses* (Besio & Pronzini, 2014) through which corporations can develop and implement proactive measures to support policies and initiatives that promote sustainability. Yet, there is a gap in our understanding on how moral and social aspects of responsibility influence corporate practices and market outcomes (Ha-Brookshire, 2017; Carroll, 2021). Lastly, we need *radical transformation of businesses*, in particular how a business is managed and the types of incentives behind its conduct, e.g., acknowledgment of the problem, strategic responses and targets, stakeholder engagement, and policy support. Thus, examining the effect of SDGs<sup>4</sup> in the multi-stakeholder business dialog, the drivers, types and outcomes of sustainable business-societal practices, and the value propositions of business transformations to meet climate change and sustainability demands, are all fruitful research domains that warrant interesting and policy-relevant insights for future business ethics research (Sebhatu & Enquist, 2022).

Without a doubt, a much needed and valiant effort, the *Climate Book* provides through its chapters a comprehensive and clear overview of the climate crisis to the reader by employing powerful metaphors and examples to substantiate its theses. Nevertheless, given the sheer breadth, depth, urgency, and immutable nature of climate consequences, it also leaves the reader feeling deeply overwhelmed. In this regard, one would welcome more discussion around potential technological solutions for tackling various aspects of climate change (e.g., carbon capture, geoengineering alternatives, nuclear power, wind, solar, etc.). However, the book does under-deliver in this area, despite its massive size. In contrast, it does provide informative statistics and graphics on both the effects and projected costs of mitigating climate change<sup>5</sup>, while exposing the denialism, greenwashing, and hypocrisy exhibited by many politicians and media outlets<sup>6</sup>. As such, it does a great job on explaining the urgency and severity of the climate crisis (“*winning slowly is the same thing as losing*”, p.327 line 27) but fails short again to provide any positive or inspiring glimpse into a successful sustainable transition. Finally, Part 5 also includes also a ‘to-do’ list which, to some extent, can be translated into

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<sup>4</sup> Sustainable Development Goals are a set of seventeen interlinked objectives developed by United Nations (UN) to serve as a ‘blueprint for future peace and prosperity for people and the planet’.

<sup>5</sup> In part 3, Eugen Linden acknowledges the massive difficulties in putting a price tag on such a complex issue with multiple and often unseen and unpredictable ramifications; nevertheless, he provides some estimates of these economic costs, i.e., \$69 trillion (for 2 degrees of warming) and misplaced funding (e.g., in 2020 governments spent \$5.9 trillion subsidizing fossil fuels).

<sup>6</sup> A recent example of this is the COP28 conference held in November 2023 under the presidency of United Arab Emirates (Sultan Ahmed Al Jaber), which was also intended to be used as a platform for signing new oil and gas deals (Rowlatt, 2023).

practical recommendations for different stakeholders. Unsurprisingly, Thunberg sees the solution to climate change as a multi-level and bottom-up effort, one that relies most heavily on individuals (i.e., to educate themselves, change diets, lifestyles, and consumption patterns, embrace activism, etc.) and societies as a whole (i.e., to improve norms and values vis-à-vis nature and disadvantaged groups, pressure governments to act, legislate, invest in science, public transport, pressure media to engage, etc.) to drive any substantive responses to the climate emergency. Greta ends with a universal call to arms by arguing that we have to take ownership of our future, as “*hope is taking action*”(p. 421, line 7).

**Word count:** 2,084

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