

Review: Climate Change: The Science, Impacts and Solutions

By A. Barrie Pittock

Reviewed by Elery Hamilton-Smith
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Pittock, A. Barrie. *Climate Change: The Science, Impacts and Solutions*. Melbourne, Australia: CSIRO Publishing, 2009. xvi + 350 pp. 2nd edition. ISBN 9780643094840. AU\$49.95, paper.

This is indeed a comprehensive book which is, quite remarkably, both passionate and objective.

Certainly at this point in time, there is a great debate, often inadequately informed, about many aspects of climatic change. There are even those who claim there is no climatic change! But there is little excuse for those who deny change or fail to accept that wide scale action by all governments is a vital priority. In writing from his long experience in climate research and his critically inquiring mind, Pittock provides the most comprehensive text which succeeds in examining all aspects across the whole world.

There is no other text which rivals its depth of summary and quality of critical analysis. The evidence presented draws on not only recent experience, but from the last 10,000 years. Of course, there are inevitably some uncertainties about the future, simply because environmental changes are dynamic, ubiquitous and continuous. But it is clear that there are high probabilities of many risks and we can already witness many of these occurring before our own eyes both earlier and on a larger scale than was generally anticipated.

I particularly value the thorough review of various mitigation strategies which might be adopted. Pittock combines his scientific understandings of these strategies with a realistic appreciation of the economic, social and political processes and forces which will shape decisions and expedite or impede implementation of programs. I thoroughly examined this section of the book from the perspective of my own lifetime of experience at the decision-implementation interface.

Probably the greatest challenge is to bring about greater equity on the international level. The appalling exploitation and oppression of the African continent means it is extremely vulnerable to changes in climate. The risks may become even worse as the rich nations continue their long-standing pattern of exploitation and irresponsibility towards the African continent. Only a truly massive move to greater equity can genuinely save most countries and peoples of the continent. But the forces of inequity are both external and internal. Within this unhappy situation, the internal forces of inequity are probably the most powerful and the least likely to change.

This is probably the best available reference for decision-makers. I have a great admiration for it but it opens the door to both hope and desperation. I try to persist in my sense of hope and optimism. But at the same time, I cannot escape an underlying fear that the normal processes of human greed, particularly by the powerful, will continue to damage our prospects for the future.

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