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BOOK REVIEW: CLIMATE – CHALLENGED SOCIETY

Martina Šinkovičová*

DRYZEK, J. S., NORGAARD, R. B., SCHLOSBERG, D.: *Climate – Challenged Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 169 p. ISBN 978-0-19-966010-0.

The authors of *Climate – Challenged Society* have decided to provide basis for intelligent thought and collective action in conditions of inevitable persistence of the climate challenge with no once-and-for-all solution identified. All three of them have worked on environmental issues for several decades and they together co-edited *The Oxford Handbook of Climate Change and Society*, the book that presents an analysis that draws on the best thinking on questions of how climate change affects human systems, and how societies can, do, and should respond. **John S. Dryzek** is Australian Research Council Federation Fellow and Professor of Political Science in the Centre for Deliberative Democracy and Global Governance at the Australian National University. He is the author of a number of books on democracy and environmental politics. **Richard B. Norgaard** is a Professor Emeritus of Ecological Economics in the Energy and Resources Group at the University of California, Berkeley, the first chair and a continuing member of the Independent Science Board of CALFED (California Bay-Delta Authority), and a founding member and former president of the International Society for Ecological Economics. He is considered one of the founders of and a continuing leader in the field of ecological economics. **David Schlosberg** is professor of environmental politics in the department of government and international relations at the University of Sydney. Schlosberg is author of *Defining Environmental Justice and Environmental Justice and the New Pluralism* and co-author of *Green States and Social Movements*, all with Oxford University Press. Known for his work in environmental politics and

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theory, he has held visiting appointments at the London School of Economics, Australian National University, and Princeton University.

This book issued by Oxford University Press can be described as an original and accessible work and serves as a challenging introduction to the challenges that climate change presents and how societies can respond. It synthesises and uses forward-looking scholarship on the variety of social, economic, political, and philosophical issues surrounding climate change. What is highly attractive about this book is the fact that the treatment is introductory and the book is written “*with attitude*”. The content of reviewed book starts with a reflection on science, public opinion, and policy making, with attention to organised climate change denial. The book then moves to economic analysis and its restrictions; different types of policies; climate justice; multilevel analyses of governance; and the challenge of an emerging era of “*Anthropocene*”. The conclusion then reflects the prospects for fundamental evolution in ideas, movements, economics, and governance.

Reviewed book is at first introduced in the short preface and then divided into eight chapters whereby every chapter is then composed of further sections dealing with particular topics. Chapter 1: *Climate's Challenges* provides an introduction and specifies particular questions that oriented inquiry of presented book. First chapter investigates questions of time and progress, provocatively indicates that further human progress does not fit natural realities and complements that climate change challenges people to rethink the whole narrative of progress. It also tries to find an answer to what all is part of “*climate challenged society*”. At the same time, authors outline main topics of following chapters through the reflection of society's ability to adapt to changes because, according to authors, if we examine social, political, and economic systems as they have developed over the past few centuries, they are highly adapted to deal with three kinds of problems: war, economy, and welfare. Climate change is then an altogether different kind of a problem that seems to demand a degree of large-scale, collective, multi-faceted, coordinated, persistent, public-spirited, self-sacrificing, and crucially anticipatory response of a kind never really seen before in human affairs. Action though still needs to be informed by understanding – and authors hope to provide this kind of understanding in this book, not only because responding to climate change is going to be a permanent feature of the human condition, but also because of recognition of climate change's omnipresent, pervasive, permanent, and encompassing character.

Chapter 2: *Constructing Science and Dealing with Denial* analyses at the beginning progress achieved in science concerning climate-change, since 1896 till the present time and identifies a number of propositions on which there exist a broader agreement. It also deals with what can happen when climate science encounters powerful vested interests and confronts established ways of life. Subchapter named *The communication and reception of science* concludes that people are quite capable of accepting the reality of damaging anthropogenic climate change on the one hand, but not letting that knowledge have any influence on the other hand and introduce the logic of this filtering process which is described not only through lens of politics, but even through lens of culture and religion. Consequently, they explain the concept of organised denial, power of media influence and varieties of scepticism and denial. Chapter terminates with motive inherent in statement that there are enough uncertainties and variations in the content of the science to provide ammunition for the critics and in parallel, the high degree of environmental controversies also causes that science loses its monopoly of neutral authority over questions of knowledge, and becomes politicised, whether scientists themselves like it or not.

Chapter 3: *The Costs of Inaction and the Limits of Economics* starts with an anecdote: *the costs of climate change, like proverbial "death and taxes", are inevitable*. In connection with the economics the book propose several topics that cannot be named other than thought provoking, mainly in context with idea of investing in whatever has the highest returns for helping humanity and follow-up effort to reveal these priorities. Economic costs and moral obligations then result in what authors call "*a perfect moral storm*", an intellectual struggle composed of modern natural science, instruments of economics intertwined with ethical issues. As stated ad finem economists should not be, according to authors, allowed to have the last word, for they are in the process of learning and rethinking themselves when dealing with costs of action and inaction in the field of managing climate change responses.

Chapter 4: *Actions that Promise and Practices that Fall Short* talks about concepts of mitigation and adaptation as about two ways of actions responding to climate change. As this chapter concludes, mitigation and adaptation to a somewhat lesser degree operate in a territory of policy instruments that ought to work in theory, but have a rough time in political practice. These instruments may be useful, but only in context of political-economic systems that can overcome some of pervasive problems identified on various levels of analyses. In sum, this part of the book looks at the importance of adaptation, especially in

light of current global failure to advance on mitigation front. Chapters that follow subsequently address also what these systems could look like.

Chapter 5: *What's Just?* Chapter with question mark in its name also begins with lot of compelling questions. Climate change crystallises questions that pervade many global issues, thus providing a crucial arena for thinking about how to pursue justice in general. This chapter also looks for the answer to question of how we use justice to frame social responses to a climate-challenged world. Authors propose for consideration key dimensions of climate justice as they were identified in UNFCCC agreement in 1992. They examine the idea of “*common but differentiated responsibilities*” in two different ways of understanding climate justice. The first is a matter of correcting historical injustice and the second one is a way of looking at equality at present. The historical approach presented in this section acknowledges that the same developed nations that have benefitted from two centuries of unregulated emissions are now those most capable of acting, due to their advantage in their economic, technological and governance infrastructure, but authors propose also another point of view and show that historical approach is not as simple as it seems and open the questions of current equity. What is beneficial for present discourse is reframed picture of climate justice debate that is offered here. In addition, chapter opens also debate concerning “*development questions*” of human rights challenged by climate change, and also deals with the topic of our new reality in which all human rights and needs depend on an environment that can sustain them. What can be seen as contribution brought by authors is the importance to understand relationships between basic rights, basic human needs, and their dependence on environmental condition. Justice does remain a key challenge to climate-challenged societies and represent also an important standpoint for perspectives of future environmental security.

Chapter 6: *Governance* talks about the possibility that climate change requires radical reworking of the very nature of governance. Chapter begins with an attempt to explain why and how governance matters. Firstly, it discusses impact of national governments, then moves to aspects of reforming global governance and continues with assessment of the so-called networked governance. It identifies two reasons why states are currently not delivering when it comes to emissions reductions, whereby the first is a collective action problem and the second one is that developed states are products of history in which they had to perform particular functions and environmental conservation has never been a core priority because it seemed that states could survive quite

well without it. What could be an interesting contribution of this chapter is the notion that one link applicable in future would be to see the environment as a matter of national security. When talking about global governance, as it results from this chapter, it is necessary to point out that there is no global government, on this issue or any other, but there exists a global regime or a set of governance arrangements. In this part of the book we can take a look also at some governance reform proposals such as forming the “clubs”, respectively coalitions of willing; creating a “Climate Council”; or pursue other types of more disaggregated strategies. Existing governance networks then give hints about what might be done, and might be effective, thus providing some resources for contemplation of more thoroughgoing governance reconstruction to which authors return later in Chapter 8. Ending of this section lies in statement that reconstructing governance for a climate-challenged society remains a major task.

Chapter 7: *The Anthropocene* is a presentation of a less stable and more dynamic global environmental system named “*Anthropocene*” to which this part of book is dedicated. Authors explore some profound implications of this new age. Chapter 7 talks about entering this period, about boundaries and limits already defined, and continues with possibility for human beings to become major agents of environmental change which could be able to “*take the reins of a spooked horse*” of climate change. As described in this section, it might be possible to start with some general principles of good environmental management. As an example can serve to look forward rather than back, to understand and to work with natural systems, to plan for complexity and to be willing to reflect on knowledge shortcomings as we take control over trajectory of Earth systems. What should be highlighted in this part of the book is the premise about ecological rationality, put differently – to rework dysfunctional human systems, be they market that operate as though nature has value only as an input to production; administrative hierarchies that cannot recognise local and temporal variation in problem conditions; or international regimes that seem incapable of delivering decisive outcomes of any sort.

Chapter 8: *Transition, Resilience, and Reconstruction* chapter ends this stimulating reading with an effort to examine several potentially complementary approaches to respond to the challenges of climate change. Authors group innovations under social resilience, new thinking about economics – new materialisms, new movements that embody this way of thinking, and new forms of governance whether a “*polycentric approach*” or a conception of “*energetic*

society”, trying to indicate that transition is already being lived, as mentioned in this chapter, if only on margins of societies so far.

In conclusion I evaluate this book positively and with my attitude refreshed with climate-challenged thinking. As it was stated several times, this book was written with an attitude and I consider this way of presenting climate change questions quite useful and refreshing. There are no easy answers to climate change challenges, while the questions are still present and more urgent. This book was not meant to answer them; reader can even have a feeling of accumulation of questions as he/she finishes reading. As **Dryzek, Norgaard** and **Schlosberg** toss in climate-challenged society is going to require many linked initiatives, rather than one big response. As wished by the authors to provide plenty of resources for intelligent thinking - as they have made an attempt to connect scientific knowledge to democratic society, to think about limits to conventional economics connected with ethical issues, to unmask a variety of instruments for mitigation and adaptation, to show the importance of thinking about climate justice, and, finally, to expose the deficiencies of existing forms of governance and to demonstrate thinking in ecologically rationale terms how to negotiate with “*Anthropocene*” - nothing else can be reviewed than that in this regard they have succeeded.

Climate-challenged society can be seen as a kind of a self-fulfilling prophecy, with two possible outcomes. The only way how to resist the negative aspects of causal nexus between beliefs and actions is to spread awareness, explain various positions and provoke intelligent thinking. Not everything was possible to express in this subtle book, what was missing was for example inclusion of environmental security topics in broader terms or a more intense and detailed description of what forms of responses to climate change threats already proved results, but the main aim of the book was fulfilled – to encourage thinking about possible and as it seems inevitable climate change impact on the society.