

Book Review

**Charles Eisenstein, 2018, *Climate: A New Story*,
California, North Atlantic Books**

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Theoretical and practical dimensions of environmental politics constitute a topical debate. A story in this regard is that global warming is not the main threat to the biosphere, and that clean energy is not the highest priority response. This is new in that and it is unconventional as not a popular theory and praxis of environmentalism. This new story is owed to Charles Eisenstein, one among the Watkins' 2022 list of the 100 Most Spiritually Influential Living People – spiritual teachers, activists, authors and thinkers who change the world.

It is better to read this story after watching the many YouTube documentaries and commentaries on it. There are 12 well-crafted main chapters with titles like —A Crisis of Being^{ll}, —Beyond Climate Fundamentalism^{ll}, —A Bargain with the Devill, —An Affair of the Heart^{ll}, and —Bridge to a Living World^{ll}. The new story has a bold and strong ecologise-thesis as follows: there is no climate crisis in terms of global warming per se. Instead, there is a 'climate derangement', caused primarily by the degradation of ecosystems worldwide. This degradation is by way of the draining of wetlands, the clear-cutting of forests, the tillage and erosion of soil, the decimation of fish, the destruction of habitats for development, the poisoning of air, soil, and water with chemicals; the damming of rivers, the extermination of predators, and so on and so forth.

Through the disruption of the carbon cycle, the water cycle, and more mysterious, interconnected and unquantifiable Gaian processes, these activities degrade the resiliency of the ecosphere (biosphere), leaving it unable to cope with the additional greenhouse gases emitted through human and animal activity. The result may or may not be continued global warming, but it is certain to bring increasingly wild fluctuations not only in temperature but also, more importantly, in rainfall. This is a diagnosis not easy to digest to begin with.

Standard or dominant climate theory gives primacy to CO₂-induced radiative forcing as the cause of climate change, relegating ecosystem degradation to secondary status. Radiative forcing or the greenhouse effect due to fossil fuels consumption warms the atmosphere by only a little over 1 degree Celsius for each doubling of CO₂. That by itself gives little cause for alarm. What is actually alarming is the potential amplification of this heating through a host of positive feedbacks. And these depend much more on biological processes than we have realized. When biological systems are degraded, they lose their ability to adapt to changing climate and to maintain stable conditions under which they can thrive. Climate derangement will continue even if we stop emitting carbon, and it will bring calamity even if average temperature remains constant. This is so because the Earth is a living body, not a machine, and we have been destroying Earth's organs and tissues.

So, our first priority is absolutely to protect and preserve anything that is still in a pristine condition like the Amazon or the Congo, and any other rainforests, wetlands and areas of the ocean that are still relatively pristine. Our second priority is to regenerate damaged ecosystems. And our third priority is to stop poisoning the Gaian tissues by stopping the pollution of PCBs, the heavy metals, the radioactive waste, and the industrial pollution that have penetrated every living cell now on Earth. The last priority would be cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

I appreciate the above thesis not because I am a specialist in the subject as a scientist or an ecofeminist/environmental feminist or a spiritual master. My intuition or sixth sense draws me to the sense and sensibilities about human wellbeing as a function of planetary wellbeing, which is the crux of Eisenstein's thesis.

This book conveys the on-going dying of life on this planet, and how we can save its biosphere by extricating ourselves from its society and economy of ecocide. The wisdom that —life creates the conditions of lifel, which is integral to the Gaian belief system, underscores Eisenstein's plan of action.

The bone of contention is that the current rhetoric and policy about climate change is still heavily influenced by the geo-mechanical view, which sees Earth as a fantastically complicated wonderful machine. This view leads us to believe that if we could tinker with the air/fuel mixture of our diesel engine, we could get it running properly. Its paramount issue, thus, becomes —levels of greenhouse gases.

In the contrasting view upheld by the author, Earth is a living organism. Each biome, local ecosystem, and specie contributes in unique ways to the health and resiliency of the whole; they are organs and tissues of the Gaian organism. Gaia is the name of the Greek Earth goddess. All beings—plants and animals, soil, rivers, oceans, mountains, forests, etc., deserve respect as alive, sentient subjects and not mere THINGS. Any damage to the integrity of the planet or the beings on it inevitably damages human beings as well, whether or not the causal pathways for that change are visible. Similarly, a healthy planet will benefit from the physical and spiritual health of humanity. The psychic climate comprising our beliefs, relationships and myths is intimately connected to the atmospheric climate. Likewise, the political climate and social climate are co-resonant with the

atmospheric climate. The purpose of humanity is to contribute, with love, our gifts to the beauty, aliveness, and evolution of Earth.

Given this Living Planet or Gaian view, Eisenstein wants us to courageously do the following things to achieve carbon drawdown without making carbon the primary framing issue. We have to promote land regeneration as a major new category of philanthropy: fund demonstration projects, connect young farmers to land, and help farms transition to regenerative practices (and not geoengineering). We have to provide public funding and government support for this transition as well by shifting agricultural subsidies away from conventional crops. We have to institute a global moratorium on logging, mining, drilling, and development of all remaining primary forests, wetlands, and other ecosystems. We have to expand the land protected in wildlife refuges and other reserves. When possible, we have to enlist local and indigenous people in protection efforts to align their livelihood with ecological health. We need to establish new ocean marine reserves and expand existing ones, with the goal of placing a third to half of all oceans, estuaries and coastline into no-take/no-drill/no-develop sanctuaries. In the rest of the oceans, we have to establish strict bans on driftnets and bottom trawling. We surely need to ban disposable plastic bags for retail purchases. And we have to phase out plastic beverage containers in favour of a reliable bottle infrastructure. We have to reconstitute the World Bank and the IMF to serve ecological healing rather than development. We will have to start by declaring the Amazon and the Congo rainforests as global treasures, purchasing the external debt of countries where the rainforests grow, and cancelling the debt at a rate equivalent to the potential income from now-banned logging, mining, and drilling in those areas. We have to promote afforestation and reforestation projects globally with an emphasis on ecologically appropriate native species. We need to establish an —eco-corps‖ to address youth unemployment and restore ecological health by planting trees,

building water retention features on public land, deconstructing dams, etc. We need to change building codes, sanitation codes, and zoning regulations to allow higher density development, tiny homes, composting toilets, agriculture wastewater treatment, etc. We have to nullify all land use covenants that prohibit vegetable gardens. We also have to reintroduce and protect keystone species such as beavers, wolves, and cougars (in North America). We have to carry out water restoration projects worldwide through water retention landscapes (swales, ponds, check dams, etc.), regenerative grazing and horticulture and the strategic removal of dams, canals, and levees. We need to relocalise the food system and promote economic localization generally, first by nullifying free trade treaties and replacing them with ‘fair trade treaties’ that protect local economic sovereignty. We will have to institute a negative interest financial system through international agreement to impose liquidity fees on bank reserves, along with complementary measures such as land taxes and other anti-speculative taxes. We also need to apply pollution taxes to make companies internalize the social and ecological costs of toxic waste, radioactive waste, air pollution, and water pollution. We need to impose a deposit system for most manufactured goods so that manufacturers have an incentive to create durable, repairable products with easily recoverable materials. Finally, we need to turn away from pesticides and demilitarize society as the military serves nothing but the paradigm of domination through force.

Thus, Eisenstein’s activist agenda suggests an almost infinite lot of work for us to do. How we can execute this by a worldwide countermovement of credible politics against the vested interests of the status quo and the environmentalists not in tune with this new story, is not discussed at length by the author, though.

To conclude, there are two interesting takeaways from this book. First, —green should not mean only —low carbon. Second, the —Living Planet view or the conscious ensouled planet view posits

an intimate link between human and ecological affairs, much contrary to modern biological science. These views call for a multidimensional healing response for restoring planetary health, by opening the questions, —What are we for?, —Why are we here? Charles Eisenstein admits that he does not know the answers to these questions and that we must start by asking them. Everyone must read this book, reflect on it and participate in environmental politics.

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