

The Betrayal of the Future. Tipping Points in the Earth's Climate

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Theme: [Environment](#)

A species which has invented combustion, electromagnetic radiation and nuclear energy orders of magnitude more powerful than its own physical potential, needs to be perfectly wise and in control lest it is overwhelmed by these powers.

As tipping points in the Earth's climate amplify, including hurricanes, snow storms and wildfires, it appears to be beyond human power to contemplate the consequences of four degrees Celsius warming within less than a couple of centuries, a collapse of civilization and the demise of billions. The consequences of global warming have been underestimated as many cannot bring themselves to look at the unthinkable.

This reticence has penetrated the scientific disciplines themselves, as indicated by James Hansen, the prominent climate scientist, in his papers "*Scientific Reticence*:"

A Threat to Humanity", "Dangerous Scientific Reticence". Hansen states: "Several years ago I wrote a paper (Hansen, J.E., 2007) on scientific reticence, naively thinking that drawing attention to the phenomenon might ameliorate its incidence. Specific reference then was to likelihood of large sea level rise, which also is a central topic in our current paper (Ice melt, sea level rise and superstorms: Evidence from paleoclimate data, climate modeling, and modern observations that 2°C global warming could be dangerous). However, here I address a broader issue of scientific reticence, because, I believe, the affliction is widespread and severe. Unless recognized, it may severely diminish our chances of averting dangerous climate change."

The IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change), while documenting the best scientific evidence by competent scientific authorities, has underestimated the consequences of global warming in its summaries for policy makers, in terms of:

1. Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets melting rates
2. Sea level rise rates
3. Linear vs increasingly variable projections of temperature rise.
4. The fast rising incidence of fires
5. Arctic warming-triggered permafrost melt and methane release.

Publication of climate updates in the mainstream media has become subject to barriers. Climate exhaustion has set-in, with journals commonly reluctant to accept science-based articles, often on the pretext they are "too complicated", although publishing economic modelling papers and computer technology papers which are just as complex or more.

Most poignant is the reluctance of the political classes to listen to the science, an attitude that is bound to be considered criminal and worse by those who survive the climate

calamity.

In his book *“Defiant Earth”* Clive Hamilton states: *“Many intellectuals in the social sciences and humanities do not concede that Earth scientists have anything to say that could impinge on their understanding of the world, because the “world” consists only of humans engaging with humans, with nature no more than a passive backdrop to draw on as we please. The “humans-only” orientation of the social sciences and humanities is reinforced by our total absorption in representations of reality derived from media, encouraging us to view the ecological crisis as a spectacle that takes place outside the bubble of our existence” and “So today the greatest tragedy is the absence of a sense of the tragedy. The indifference of most to the Earth system’s disturbance may be attributed to a failure of reason or psychological weaknesses; but these seem inadequate to explain why we find ourselves on the edge of the abyss” and “Yet the Earth scientists continue to haunt us, following us around like wailing apparitions while we hurry on with our lives, turning around occasionally with irritation to hold up the crucifix of Progress.*

In his book *“First and Last Man”* Olaf Stapledon describes a planetary civilization which, once aware of the ultimate fate of its planet, plunges into depression, distinct from the oblivious mindset of a majority of contemporary humans.

With this perspective, the failure of humanity to cope effectively with the unfolding climate calamity constitutes its Achilles heel. Further than attributing this failure to mercenary contrarians and to conviction-free politicians, this failure resides with the majority, bar the few courageous individuals who protest in front of mine gates and in small boats on the ocean. It is these people, rather than the comfortable elites, who are carrying the torch of humanity.

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