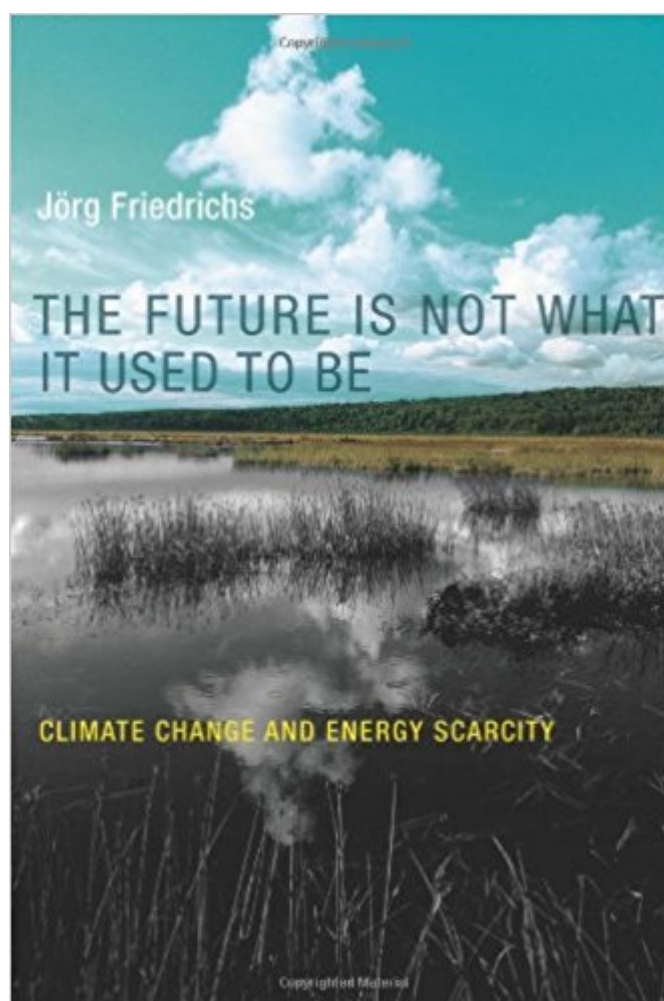


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The Future Is Not What It Used To Be: Climate Change And Energy Scarcity (MIT Press)



Synopsis

The future is not what it used to be because we can no longer rely on the comforting assumption that it will resemble the past. Past abundance of fuel, for example, does not imply unending abundance. Infinite growth on a finite planet is not possible. In this book, Jürg Friedrichs argues that industrial society itself is transitory, and he examines the prospects for our civilization's coming to terms with its two most imminent choke points: climate change and energy scarcity. He offers a thorough and accessible account of these two challenges as well as the linkages between them. Friedrichs contends that industrial civilization cannot outlast our ability to burn fossil fuels and that the demise of industrial society would entail cataclysmic change, including population decreases. To understand the social and political implications, he examines historical cases of climate stress and energy scarcity: devastating droughts in the ancient Near East; the Little Ice Age in the medieval Far North; the Japanese struggle to prevent "fuel starvation" from 1918 to 1945; the "totalitarian retrenchment" of the North Korean governing class after the end of Soviet oil deliveries; and Cuba's socioeconomic adaptation to fuel scarcity in the 1990s. He draws important lessons about the likely effects of climate and energy disruptions on different kinds of societies. The warnings of climate scientists are met by denial and inaction, while energy experts offer little guidance on the effects of future scarcity. Friedrichs suggests that to confront our predicament we must affirm our core values and take action to transform our way of life. Whether we are private citizens or public officials, complacency is not an option: climate change and energy scarcity are emerging facts of life.

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Customer Reviews

I loved this book. It is very well laid out, well written, concise, and covers a great deal of ground with a combination of erudition and self-assured elegance. The arguments are well-made and substantiated. (Stephen Quilley, Department of Environment and Resource Studies, University of Waterloo) This is a very welcome contribution to the public debate on climate change and peak oil. It contains sharp and attractively formulated insights, which should help to increase support for an urgently needed, effective international climate agreement. (Jeroen C. J. M. van den Bergh, ICREA Research Professor, Deputy Director of the Institute of Environmental Science and Technology, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, and Professor of Environmental and Resource Economics, VU University Amsterdam) This book discusses the 'twin' challenges of energy scarcity and climate change, and it does so in a way that gets deeper than most books. Its sections on the dissemination of knowledge and the moral questions concerning the two issues are novel, as is Friedrichs's take on major historical transitions and how they can be applied to contemporary energy scenarios. (Benjamin K. Sovacool, coauthor (with Marilyn A. Brown) of *Climate Change and Global Energy Security: Technology and Policy Options*) Jürg Friedrichs explains with clarity and force how industrial civilization is imperiled by climate change and energy scarcity -- and why we probably won't act until it is too late to forestall fatal disruption and massive suffering. A sobering and salutary portrayal of an unfolding tragedy. (William Ophuls, author of *Plato's Revenge: Politics in the Age of Ecology and Immoderate Greatness: Why Civilizations Fail*) *The Future Is Not What It Used to Be* provides a potent antidote to wishful thinking about the scale of global problems and a brutally honest high-level assessment of humanity's failure to act. For pessimists there is much to confirm one's world-view and insight into how to avoid the traps of despair or denial. For optimists the book is a gruelling but ultimately enlightening experience. Falling into the latter camp, I found the book a dark masterpiece. A sober check against reckless hope, it contains a message that anyone interested in civilisation's long-term future needs to hear. (Robin Lovelace *Environmental Values*) This is a rare find among the many books written about climate change over the years, one that explores how humans are not only depleting natural resources but also -- because of how the world has changed -- are naive to assume the kind of transitions that have occurred between climatic eras can ever happen again. Through an astute and well-reasoned argument, Friedrichs -- citing past cases in which climate stress was exacerbated by energy scarcity -- takes a systematic

look at how infinite growth is not possible and how -- rather than just shifting from one energy market to another -- the support structure for the industrialized world itself could be in danger of collapse. Whether or not you want to believe civilization itself is on a collision course with a destiny it cannot yet see or predict, this Oxford University scholar's work is chilling, mind-bending and creatively forward-thinking, without being sentimental. It offers a perspective that goes well beyond floods, hurricanes, and a warmer planet. (Citation from the Rachel Carson Award, given by the Society of Environmental Journalists) This book, subtitled *Climate Change and Energy Scarcity*, is an important challenge to conventional thinking. (The Quarterly Review of Biology)

Jörg Friedrichs teaches at the University of Oxford in the Department of International Development.

Friedrichs' builds on earlier works describing the current planetary overshoot we are in by detailing how earlier civilizations dealt with environmental change and energy scarcity. He also presents an informative analysis on why human behavior so strongly turns to denial as a coping mechanism which makes taking any collective action to address climate change and energy scarcity very difficult. Excellent read for policy makers and activists. A good companion book for Dr. Brian Czech's "Supply Shock" and Richard Heinberg's "End of Growth".

This paper expands on what Friedrichs covered in his 9-page 2010 journal article "Global energy crunch: How different parts of the world would react to a peak oil scenario" in *Energy Policy*, where he covered the three very different ways North Korea, Cuba, and Japan reacted to sudden oil shortages. If you are wondering about how the future may unfold out of curiosity or to prepare for it, then read this book. It is a very rare, very hard to find book that isn't ridiculously and unjustifiably optimistic.

It was enlightening to get a European perspective. I enjoyed reading citations with Scandinavian names I couldn't pronounce with the two little dots above the o's.

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