

# Reassessing Climate Change

*Comments by Allen Edwards regarding his book in progress - August 2019*

I have, in various ways, been a climate activist for over 30 years. During that time I have studied essentially all aspects of the issue, but focused on efforts to arrest the warming before humanity committed the world to catastrophic climate collapse. In my activism, I have come to firmly believe that humanity could only arrest the warming if we, the members of the developed economy – the primary generators of greenhouse emissions – took personal responsibility and committed to taking our personal greenhouse emissions to zero.

In this work I have researched and analyzed, written, and spoken – always advocating personal responsibility as a starting point (and, of course, eventually moving on to collective and political responsibility). As of last spring (the spring of 2019) I continued to pursue this effort.

Late in the spring I started reading about the concept of deep adaptation to Climate Change. (See the research of Jem Bendell and others) This caused me to review the works of climate research I've collected over the past 32 years, emphasizing those from the past 15 years or so, and with particular attention to research from the last year. My conclusion (largely agreeing with Bendell and others) is that we have socially and economically, if not physically, committed to a level of near term warming that will very likely push the world into a cascade of irreversible tipping points that will in turn push us to catastrophic climate collapse.

This conclusion has led me to reassess my position on climate action in the following ways:

- First, I can no longer in good conscience advocate for aggressive greenhouse gas reductions (for example cutting global emissions in half by 2030 and to zero by 2050) on the premise that this will lead to arresting the warming. I no longer think this premise is true, and have no interest in deceiving people about it.
- Second, I believe that our governments and our society have proven themselves incapable of the radical action that might give the world a chance to avoid climate collapse (at a minimum, this would require cutting greenhouse gas emissions to zero in less than 10 years, and probably need to be in 5 years or less). Doing this would require such a radical transformation that societal collapse would likely result, independent of climate change itself.
- I believe this leads us to an utterly dismal dilemma – Militate for radical action on greenhouse gas reduction, realizing it will likely lead to near term chaos (within the next 2 to 10 years), or continue our current track on greenhouse gas emissions (or perhaps some program of climate gestures) that will likely lead to a more complete collapse in the longer term (within the next 10 to 30 years) when the physical manifestations of global warming visit in earnest.
- Note: this conclusion is somewhat different and more articulated than Bendell's, but leads to the same end – societal collapse. We could, of course, push ourselves into societal collapse for reasons unrelated directly to climate change (neo-nationalism, trade wars, nuclear war, etc) but that is another matter.

How does this translate to my personal outlook – after all, I have spent over 30 years researching and advocating for climate action: In no way does this mean that I let myself, or

anyone else off the hook as to the damage our emissions are causing. I have always and still believe that we have a moral obligation reduce our emissions – we owe it to the victims of our excesses. Even though cutting our personal emissions will not stop climate collapse, we still have a personal moral obligation to do so. After all, it may reduce the impacts in some small ways; and, in any event, we should not be party to the combination of self-indulgence and complacency that is leading to ecological and societal collapse.

And, even more firmly, I believe that I/we have a moral obligation to help the victims of climate collapse. Up till now, these have mostly been in the backwaters of the third world – relatively easy for us to ignore even as their lives are devastated. But the collapse will increasingly visit our region in the coming years. People there and here will need refuge.

This all has led to major changes in my thinking, and I am still processing. An article I recently read felt the world was on the verge of a situation where “Revolution or Collapse” were our only options. I think this begins to sum where I am, except that I think the two are not mutually exclusive. I am torn between wanting to scream and shout, versus runing and hiding.

I wish I could offer hope for a climate solution, but I honestly can't. I wish I could offer a plan of action, but I'm still working on that. This all is worthy of deep discussion. You may not believe me – that's fair and fodder for conversation. You may, but not want to think about the consequences – but they will come to you eventually. I truly hope you know of an approach that will save us. Or maybe we can discover one together.

Last thought: I still believe we can find hope, but not where most of us are looking for it. Our world is dramatically changing, We have lost the opportunity to save the world we've known and need to accept and prepare for drastically changed new one.

Respectfully, Allen Edwards