

The Fossil-Fuelled Climate Crisis: Foresight or Discounting Danger

By

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Fossil fuels have been the energy source powering modern societies, currently providing 81% of the world's energy. However, fossil-fuelled practices of huge oligopolistic companies and of eight billion people generate greenhouse-gas emissions causing costly global warming. These externalized costs to the atmospheric commons used as a carbon dump constitute an enormous environmental debt to be paid by future generations in disasters and costs of disaster preparedness and adaptation. This book shows how my social closure framework based on monopolisation, exclusion, and usurpation can be integrated with Shove's social practices framework and the externalities framework of environmental economists and sociologists to analyse the accelerating treadmill of carbon-polluting fossil-fuelled practices. It investigates how environmental social closure involving the appropriation of biophysical resources including carbon sinks by the present generation, disproportionately benefiting some of its members, results in excluding latecomers and other species from such benefits. Latecomers consist of poor individuals, poor societies, and future generations. The global biophysical environment, particularly the atmosphere, is a medium carrying social relations of monopolisation and exclusion across space and between generations over time. Priority given to near-term economic benefits to the exclusion of long-term costs, which are discounted, results in social closure embedded in culture, practices, and physical infrastructures. Usurpation is led by environmental movements, impact scientists, social democratic governments, and nature whose biophysical dynamics strike back, with fossil-fuelled global warming unleashing intense wildfires, hurricanes, flooding, etc. The book examines environmental regulations as undermining monopolisation, and deregulation as strengthening monopolization. The second half of the book assesses solutions to the fossil-fuelled climate crisis. This includes Beck's hypothesis of emancipatory catastrophism and his analysis of the staging of risk. It explores whether reluctance of carbon polluters, big and small, to modify fossil-fuelled practices and pay the full cost of fossil fuels upon use through carbon taxes, etc., motivates reliance on future just-in-time technological remedies, conceptualized as "faith 2.0 in the mastery of nature". It analyses technological solutions and socio-technological solutions. It argues that scientific knowledge of the climate crisis abounds concurrently with ignorance of it, and demonstrates the importance of translating the language of climate science into everyday units and analogies to give the population a practical understanding of it. The book concludes with three possible energy futures and relates them to whether foresight or discounting danger will prevail.