

Andrew T. Guzman, *Overheated: The Human Cost of Climate Change*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013, 280p.

Guzman's essay stems from a simple observation: "public debates about climate and climate change often do an exceptionally poor job of presenting and considering what we do know about the science" (ix). Through a synthetic discussion of the human costs of climate change, Guzman contributes to fulfilling this communication gap. The result is a simple story about how climate change threatens some of our most basic institutions, and our selves. Its main target appears to be an educated American audience.

Guzman makes no mystery of his political project. By helping to make climate science accessible to a wider audience, he calls his compatriots to take political action: "[i]f you are convinced of the need to act, the next step is to press your elected leaders to do so" (p. 229). The project is important. One cannot over-emphasize the role that the American voters are bound to play as a new commitment period is being negotiated. As long as Guzman develops a balanced argument solidly informed by science, this political project does not undermine the quality of the book as scientific popularization.

Thus, Guzman must in general be commended for achieving a subtle balance between scientific rigueur and a powerful political argument. The style of the essay, in particular, is limpid. The book is replete with comparisons that make complex ideas easily understandable to a non-specialist audience, yet generally without betraying scientific concepts.

The treatment of such a broad set of issues in a synthetic book necessarily calls for a selection of information: clarity means that some scientific debates and some nuances are eluded. Guzman, trained as an economist and a lawyer, also makes no mystery that part (most?) of the book was written outside of his "comfort zone" (x). On the other hand, such impartiality allows him to wander freely through different scientific fields.

The book starts with two introductory chapters that present our basic knowledge on the physical impact of climate change. The four following chapters discuss four ways climate change impacts us: through sea-level rise, droughts, violence, and health. Lastly, the final chapter asks "where do we go from here."

The overall message is just as grim as it is bound to be – the topic certainly does not invite a "feel-good book" (p. 211). Reasons for limiting greenhouse gas emissions are compelling, but yet, mitigation efforts – although not as insignificant as Guzman may seem to suggest – are clearly insufficient. Guzman devotes some attention to climate skepticism, reflecting the irrationality of arguments that American media and political debates continue to convey, arguably under the influence of industrial lobbies.

However, one may regret Guzman's frequent reliance on journalistic rather than scientific sources. The forecast of a "world of refugees," in particular, is at odds with the current scientific consensus that the notion of "refugee" is fundamentally misleading. Beside, Guzman makes no distinction between internal and international displacement, and omits to differentiate temporary migrants from permanently displaced persons. As a result, the comparison between environmentally-induced migrants and Cambodian refugees is not really convincing.

Other arguments may be insufficiently nuanced. Assessing that "drought can trigger conflict" (p. 139), with the example of the war in Darfur, borrows from an overly alarmist tone that does not serve the argumentative purpose of the essay. Similarly, announcing that "refugee camps and cities overwhelmed with migrants fleeing climate change and its impacts" (p. 181) will catalyze global pandemics that could possibly kill all of us is largely an extrapolation from the existing science. At least, the references cited in the chapter on health do not evidence any similar argument in the peer-reviewed scientific literature.

Among other evident approximations, it is highly doubtful that “the forced movement of people because of rising seas resembles the movement prompted by World War I” (p. 196) – referring to the deployment of American troops that brought the “Spanish” flu to Europe. In fact, plenty of empirical studies show that most environmental migrants remain within the borders of their own state.

Interestingly, Guzman identifies the possible reactions that one can have in front of such a grim message. For lack of easy fix, denial is an appealing reaction. Guzman fairly denounces “pixie-dust strategies” such as “hiding under the covers” (p. 214), and calls for “grown-up strategies” (p. 221). This is arguably the place where Guzman, a Professor of Law, could be expected to be in his “comfort zone.” Paradoxically, however, the expeditious treatment of the international governance of climate change is the weakest section of the essay. The last pages leave the reader under the impression that climate change mitigation is *the* response to climate change. Yet, as certainly as mitigation is necessary, it cannot come without an equal international cooperation to promote adaptation.

This shortcoming is linked to the Americano-centric position taken by Guzman. Rationally, climate change mitigation might be the most convincing cause for American voters. Adaptation, in the United States, does not call to international cooperation: the United States does not rely on external funds or technical assistance. Yet, the bulk of the discussion on the “human cost of climate change” relates to notions of “justice,” “fairness” or “equity.” If Guzman carefully avoids those terms, perhaps as he assumes that an educated American audience would be absolutely indifferent (or even annoyed) by any form of ethical argument. This is uncertain: ethical notions do play a role in international relations. But even if ethical arguments had no role to play at all, there is a pragmatic case to be made for solidarity, if only for the sake of international peace and security in a complex interdependent world.

In practical terms, it is essential that American voters understand the central North-South dimension of climate change governance, and accept necessary concessions to the developing world. Guzman states that “[w]hen one looks at the climate crisis honestly, there is no way to avoid the conclusion that we have to reduce the speed with which we are pumping GHGs into the atmosphere” (p. 221). This is probably right in the United States as in the developed world generally. There, the future benefits of mitigation (or, rather, the harms avoided by mitigation) are most likely to exceed by far their present costs increased by interest rates.

Yet, this story omits a significant detail: the situation of the developing world is quite different. On the one hand, this is precisely because *development* is critical to the developing world, where economic growth mainly fulfills the most fundamental human needs. On the other hand, adaptation costs affect countries of the South disproportionately. Yet, mitigation necessarily impedes development, which is already hampered by the burden of adapting. Restricting GHG emissions in developing countries would slow down economic growth, thus limiting the number of hospitals built and impacting human welfare. In the developing world more than in the developed one, the need to mitigate climate change must be balanced with the need for development. As a result, climate change cannot realistically be addressed without a thorough cooperation between developed and developing countries on fair grounds. And this is perhaps the idea that should most urgently be explained to American voters.

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