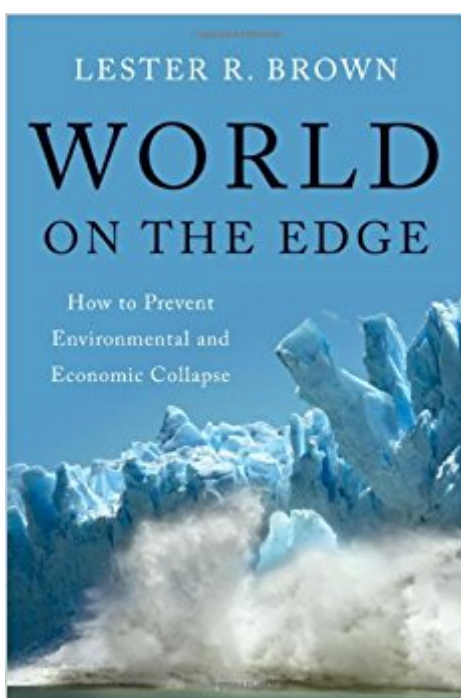


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# World On The Edge: How To Prevent Environmental And Economic Collapse



## Synopsis

In this urgent time, *World on the Edge* calls out the pivotal environmental issues and how to solve them now. We are in a race between political and natural tipping points. Can we close coal-fired power plants fast enough to save the Greenland ice sheet and avoid catastrophic sea level rise? Can we raise water productivity fast enough to halt the depletion of aquifers and avoid water-driven food shortages? Can we cope with peak water and peak oil at the same time? These are some of the issues Lester R. Brown skillfully distills in *World on the Edge*. Bringing decades of research and analysis into play, he provides the responses needed to reclaim our future.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Lester Brown is one of the pioneers and heroes of global environmentalism. If the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize had been extended to a third recipient, the logical candidate would have been Lester Brown. --E. O. Wilson"

Lester R. Brown is the founder of the Earth Policy and Worldwatch Institutes. He has been honored with numerous prizes, including a MacArthur Fellowship, the United Nations Environment Prize, and twenty-five honorary degrees. He lives in Washington, D.C.

I'm considering using this for an undergraduate class, but it has multiple issues. As a book drawing our attention to the looming environmental crisis it is somewhat successful - if you are not scared or

angry by the end of the 4th chapter, you probably haven't been paying attention. But there are lots of examples of scaremongering, imprecise language, doom-laden scenarios and Malthusianisms (basically, we or our children are going to starve to death). As a text to teach undergraduates to be critical of everything they read and to check the sources of 'facts', I think it could be quite valuable.

I've read and reviewed a number of books by Lester Brown and his advocacy agency, and have especially appreciated the State of the World series, and his Plan B Series that keeps getting pushed back, and now has a Plan B 4.0, but between that latter book and this one, I chose this one. It gets four stars for reasons I outline in passing below. The author has his pet rocks, they are all here, but NOT in this book can one find corruption, disease, mercury, rare earths, a strategic analytic model that is holistic, actual true costs across the spectrum of options, or a strategic analytic model. However, and this is strong praise, if you are going to get only one book by Lester Brown, this is the book to get. There are others I recommend, including "High Noon 20 Global Problems, 20 Years to Solve Them," and "A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility--Report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change," the latter also free online. Here are highlights, generally things I did not know and thought worth putting into my notes. + 2020 could be the ultimate recession + We need a massive mobilization at wartime speed -- but I have a negative annotation, "Old C4I mindset?" In my thinking, and all the books I am reading on cognitive surplus, web 4.0, swarm intelligence, etcetera, the answer is not more government control but rather shutting government down and going back to indigenous circles of full consultation and long-view consensus, something that can only happen with everyone gets it. The elites dug this hole themselves, by trying to micro manage and rule by secrecy at the same time they dumbed down the population and drove the smartest with their integrity intact out of politics. + Russia and Pakistan are examples of the future for the West if it does not radically adjust. This is a bit out of date since Russia seems well on its way to overcoming the Harvard-Soros-CIA-Trilateral economic sabotage, and if they have put the fear of death into the Goldman Sachs leaders, all the better. What does not appear in this book in any tangible way is the FACT that the US Government, for lack of integrity, allowed Wall Street to explode the global economy. Mark Lewis gave us full warning in the 1980's with "Liar's Poker." + The book mentions "indirect costs" and cites Herman Daly, whose book "Ecological Economics, Second Edition: Principles and Applications" is a foundation work, more recently complemented by Paul Hawkin's "Natural Capitalism: Creating the Next Industrial Revolution," but the book does not go nearly far enough on this foundation aspect (which, together with integrity and strategic analytics, would turn the world around in ten years). QUOTE (8): "Falling

water tables today signal rising food prices tomorrow."QUOTE (11): "On the social front, the most disturbing trend is spreading hunger."I am much taken with his description of the food bubble being based on the "free water" culture around the world.QUOTE (15): "The time when military forces were the prime threat to security has faded into the past. The threats now are climate volatility, spreading water shortages, continuing population growth, spreading hunger, and failing states. The challenge is to define new fiscal priorities that match these new security threats."+ Saudi Arabia is buying and leasing land in countries including two of the world's hungriest, Ethiopia and Sudan.+ I have a note based on the book, "depletion of aquifers = social collapse." I have reviewed over twelve books on water, I no longer use lists because they do not credit their creators, look for my Huffington Post article, < WATER-Soul of the Earth, Mirror of Our Collective Souls > where I review twelve books I bought in support of a UNESCO survey task.QUOTE (22): "The world is incurring a vast water deficit - one that is largely invisible, historically recent, and growing fast. Half the world's people live in countries where water tables are falling as aquifers are depleted."+ Elsewhere in this section I learn that they are no longer going down a meter or two a year, now it is six to ten meters a year. And while he does not make this point, made better in Marc de Villiers, *Water: The Fate of Our Most Precious Resource*, when an aquifer near the sea goes down under sea level, the sea can push in and contaminate what is left.+ Overall I appreciate the high-level concise overview of water catastrophes looming for Afghanistan, China, India, Iraq, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, and he covers the US as well.+ The section on eroding soils and expanding deserts points out that there are two massive dust bowls, one in northwest China, West Mongolia, and Central Asia, the other in Central Africa and particularly across the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) where the UN continues to have major forces engaged.+ Nigeria is losing 867,000 acres of rangeland and cropland to desertification A YEAR. EACH year. This is really scary.In discussing the politics of food scarcity, the author seems bent on avoiding any discussion of corruption in government or corruption in corporations. While he discusses the need to end ethanol as a grain drain (humor intended), I am really not satisfied with the long litany of crimes against humanity that are integrated in how the industrialized food chain has been corrupted, poisoned, diluted, and generally trashed for reasons that are uniformly against the public interest.QUOTE (66): "One of the little noticed characteristics of land acquisitions is that they are also water acquisitions."In relation to the above quote, it bears mention that the illegal war on Libya by NATO and the USA is about oil, but also about the gold that Libya has amassed, and the most precious Libyan aquifer.The author also observes that governments are selling or leasing millions of acres without consulting the indigenous peoples on them; in some cases they get butchered out of their homestead by corporate mercenaries, in others,

such as the Philippines, public anger forces the government to back off on this atrocity and crime against indigenous humanity. Environmental refugees, we learn are caused by rising seas, flooded river deltas, advancing deserts, toxic waste dumps, and Chernobyl. Since refugees are also caused by wars, both international and civil, and by transnational criminal networks, this is one place where the narrowness of the "look" is more obvious. I've spent a lot of time living in and studying failing states, including the USA where most of the preconditions for revolution now exist, and poverty has doubled under the incumbent Administration, so I find this author's overview of failing states to be somewhat bland and not very compelling. For me it boils down to a lack of integrity in the West enabling massive corruption everywhere else. Drawing toward a close the book states that Plan B focuses on stabilizing climate, restoring earth's natural systems, stabilizing population, and eradicating poverty. All well and good, nothing here that was not anticipated in the 1980's but books such as *Limits to Growth*. The budget for restoring natural systems is according to the author \$200 billion a year. I find this interesting, consistent with E. O. Wilson's estimates in *The Future of Life*, a book I found to be extraordinary. Medard Gable, co-creator with Buckminster Fuller of the analog world Game, has estimated that the cost for eradicating all of the threats to humanity is on the order of \$300 billion a year, or one third the cost of what the USA has spent per year on invading and occupying Iraq and Afghanistan, and in creating the monstrosity two authors call *Top Secret America: The Rise of the New American Security State*. The author touches on holistic design, but nowhere near the complete concepts of Medard Gable and the Earth Intelligence Network, but certainly demanding that the author have a seat at the high table seeking to catalyze public thinking. He writes of building an energy efficient global economy, redesigning cities for people, and reinventing transportation from bicycle paths to high speed rail. The section on alternative energy is not as complete as I would like, focusing only on wind, solar, and geothermal, but it is certainly a great section if you only have time for one read. + Wind power can supply up to 4000 Gigawatts by 2020, one half of the need, IF the reinvention goes as proposed. I sense the author is still in the Industrial-Era paradigm of centralized wind farms, where Buckminster Fuller and others have clearly shown that the greatest efficiencies come from LOCALIZED mixes of wind, solar, and other (e.g. idling automobiles--WIRED Magazine had a great cover story the same week Dick Cheney was meeting with Enron and Exxon to plot the invasion of Iraq). QUOTE (146): "...but for every \$1 invested in rangeland restoration yields \$2.50 in income from the increased productivity of the earth's rangeland ecosystems." I believe that. I also believe that the increasing force and frequency of our extreme weather events is an act of man, not an act of God, and we would do well to start reversing a century of paving over wetlands and building inadequate levees to get around flood

plain restrictions. Look for the shocking < Graphic: US Counties Protected by Levees > as well as < Graphic: Maps of the Post Flood Future Geography > to get a sense of where we might be very very vulnerable. The book whimpers to a close, and I have the strong feeling that the author has not read into the emerging literatures as well as he might have--there is too much of the old stuff here. Soap operas as education, micro gardens, no mention of the fish-plant systems that are fully self-contained with no power or chemical needs. To save civilization we need a new accounting system. True. That's the whole point of Herman Daly's life's work, long overdue for a Nobel Prize. Page 199 has a budget adding up to 185 billion dollars, \$75 billion for Basic Social Goals and \$110 billion for earth restoration goals. Since I donate all my books (unmarked) to the George Mason University Library, and my reviews are all I have left, I am going to take the liberty--and offer to others as a reason to buy the book--the specifics. Basic Social Goals: Universal Primary education (10B), eradication of adult illiteracy (4B); school lunch programs (3B); aid to women, infants, preschool children (4B); reproductive health and family planning (21B); universal basic health care (33B). Earth Restoration Goals: Planting trees (23B); Protecting topsoil on cropland (24B); restoring rangelands (9B); restoring fisheries (13B); stabilizing water tables (10B); protecting biological diversity (31B). The book has an index. The additional resources are adequate but not spectacular. In general I feel that the author's concepts and plans are those of an earlier era. In my own vision, I start with giving each of the five billion poor free cell phones and free hand-held access to the Internet both direct and via call centers with powerful resources, educating the poor "one cell call at a time," and then getting out of the way. In brief, the end of the book is uninspiring, but one has to recognize the decades of monomania that the author has given to this work, so despite my placing the book at a four, I would say that if you can only read one book in this genre, this is the book. My reviews of many others books are free, my books lists are all at Phi Beta Iota the Public Intelligence Blog (see Books in the top bar or Remixed Book Lists (70) in the bottom half of the middle column). Worth buying, worth reading, worth sharing with others.

This is the very best book of its kind that I have read since 'False start in Africa' by Rene Dumont. Having followed Dr Brown's work for the past 30 years I am familiar with many of the facts and warnings that he has been giving. Backed by plenty of confirmable evidence, he has, in my opinion, been proved right in so many of his predictions. Technology has provided some answers to his warnings - for example on energy saving and renewable sources. Other perils that threaten to endanger our civilisation are not, however, being addressed - such as availability of potable water, various types of pollution, over-fishing and consumption of resources that have been unable to keep

up with our demands in some cases, for decades. We may be too late to restore some natural resources, which will be denied to our offspring. The first part of the book is quite frightening, as we face the realities global degradation. However, in the second part he describes ideas and examples of what is already happening, in USA, China and elsewhere, to mediate or even repair some of the damage, and it becomes inspiring. I believe studying the book would enrich the curriculum of any student. Better still, it's so easy to read. Thoroughly recommended. It offers hope and practical solutions.

If you really want to know what is going on with our world and all the changes in climate around the world, Mr. Brown is one of the foremost authorities on explaining in simple terms what we have done (and continue to do) to our one and only planet. My niece who is studying to become a Marine Biologist at Massachusetts Maritime Academy turned me on to Mr. Brown and I have read everything he has written. She found him while still in Junior High and is an avid fan. Now I am too. If you question why this past winter was so cold across the plains and New England not to mention in the southern states, you'll find your answers here. If you wonder why parts of the country (and the world) are being hit with droughts that will likely end in more deserts, you will find answers to those questions too. You don't have to be a scientist to understand Mr. Brown's books, just someone who cares about this one world we have.

Here's the science folks, the real risks ... and it's terrifying! That said, we still have a chance to save the Planet; and the best news is that if we set about the task of changing our energy system and addressing other structural societal flaws pointed out in this book (ie. poverty, treatment of women), we could actually usher in a GREAT new age that's safer & sounder environmentally, economically, strategically & socially. Brown puts environmental issues in economic terms to show how the current paradigm is flawed. Saving the planet can & does make huge ECONOMIC sense! Our biggest challenge at this point is overcoming the 'powers that be' - namely big oil & coal - their control of our government and their huge \$\$ War Chests - which they use overtly to 'throw sand in the eyes' of the public regarding climate science and clean energy.

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