



# CONTENTS

*Foreword*

xiii

**Introduction: “We Are the Wildfire”**

1

**A Hole in the World**

54

**Capitalism vs. the Climate**

70

**Geoengineering: Testing the Waters**

104

**When Science Says That Political Revolution Is Our Only Hope**

110

**Climate Time vs. the Constant Now**

119

**Stop Trying to Save the World All by Yourself**

129

**A Radical Vatican?**

137

**Let Them Drown: The Violence of Othering in a Warming World**

149

**The Leap Years: Ending the Story of Endlessness**

169

**Hot Take on a Hot Planet**

191

**Season of Smoke**

207

**The Stakes of Our Historical Moment**

234

**Capitalism Killed Our Climate Momentum, Not “Human Nature”**

243

**There’s Nothing Natural About Puerto Rico’s Disaster**

253

**Movements Will Make, or Break, the Green New Deal**

259

**The Art of the Green New Deal**

272

**Epilogue: The Capsule Case for a Green New Deal**

280

*Acknowledgments*

293

*Publication Credits*

297

*Index*

299





# Foreword

**“Do we really need to fix everything at once? Can’t we solve climate change first and *then* tackle our broken health care infrastructure and systemic inequality?”**

“Most people don’t want revolutionary change—they want small steps.”

“Trillions, you say—who has that kind of money?”

As with any thesis-driven book, there was some pushback to the first edition of *On Fire*, which came out in September 2019. I’m not complaining: that’s always been part of the fun of publishing books.

What did come as some surprise, however, was how few of the disagreements I encountered focused on the book’s main arguments. I did not hear, for example, that capitalism has the capacity to solve the climate crisis without real change to the existing economic structure. Or that lowering emissions fast enough to keep us safe can be done with a few tweaks to market incentives and some gee-whiz technological fixes. Besides the shrinking pool of hardcore climate-change deniers, I did not even hear that the threat of ecological breakdown was exaggerated, and that we had plenty of time to fix it.

What I hit up against most frequently was a powerful sense of doom. Mostly, there was agreement that a Green New Deal–scale government response is our only hope of preventing catastrophic

warming but, particularly among some journalists, it was taken as a given that it's just not going to happen. Not because the theory behind the need for it is mistaken, but because it is just . . . *too much*. Too much ambition. Too much speed. Too much disruption. And definitely too much money.

This edition comes a mere one year later, but those objections I encountered, dressed in the cloak of common-sense seriousness, now sound like dispatches from another world. As I write, our world is literally on fire: cities are burning in uprisings against racist police violence layered on top of untenable economic injustice. The fires of climate disruption, meanwhile, continue unabated: since I chose the title for this book, huge swaths of the Amazon rainforest have burned, as have large parts of Australia.

And then there is the coronavirus pandemic, which has thrust the entire globe into an era of rapid and radical change. Radical changes to our individual habits, expectations, and routines. Radical changes to government and fiscal policy. Radical changes to the relationships between powerful nation states. And radical changes to the natural world around us—from sudden drops in air, water, and noise pollution to abrupt shifts in the behavior of countless wild species.

If nothing else, the past few months have put the lie to the idea that late capitalist societies are incapable of seismic transformations on a deadline. Indeed, from India to Europe to Argentina to the United States, we have witnessed the most aggressive government interventions in the economy since the Second World War. In the U.S., car manufacturers have started making medical equipment. Spain has nationalized all its private hospitals. And then there have been the shutdowns: deliberate decisions to close down all but essential businesses, as well as schools and other core services, in order to deprive the virus of new opportunities to spread.

I write this in New Jersey near the end of our third month of “shelter in place” orders. On most days, well over 100 people here die from the virus—a marked decrease from our peak, but still the second highest death rate of any state in the United States, the country with (so far) the largest coronavirus death toll in the world.

Where I live, everyone’s life has changed, though by no means in the same way. For my neighbors laboring in hospitals and in Amazon warehouses—two of the biggest local employers—work has been likened to going to war without body armor, with death stalking every shift. Those of us who teach at the nearby public universities, in sharp contrast, spend our days toggling between home-schooling our own kids (if we have them) and teaching students over video calls. We trade strategies for dealing with student anxiety over evaporating future plans. We raise funds for the thousands of immigrant families in our state in dire need. Driving, flying, and shopping have all been pared down to the most essential trips.

Given how much the virus had already spread before most governments began taking it seriously, these drastic lock-down measures have been embraced as the only way to prevent the global death toll from racing into the millions. And yet the economic and human costs have been cataclysmic. Landmark retailers are disappearing. Small family-owned businesses face an existential threat. And, as of early June 2020, 40 million people have been added to the unemployment rolls in the United States alone.

In the face of this kind of economic carnage, other drastic government measures have also been taken. Central banks have injected trillions into markets; governments have spent hundreds of billions bailing out failing industries; families and individuals in need have received direct government aid as well as rent and mortgage relief. But compared to the gusher of funds directed at wealthy companies, often with no oversight and no strings attached,



the aid to individuals (and small businesses) has been a pittance, at least here in the United States. And many of those most in need—migrant workers and undocumented immigrants—have been shut out of aid programs entirely.

So my point is not to romanticize the forms of change that the Covid-19 pandemic has ushered in. It is only to observe that these seismic shifts to public policy and private lives have unfolded over a period of *less than three months*. By the time you read these words, the world will have changed again: some economies will have reopened entirely, others may have closed for a second time; the pandemic may be receding, it may well be roaring back with greater ferocity. What we do know for certain, however, is that the idea that we humans cannot do what is required to confront the climate crisis because it's "too much"—whether too much change or too much money or too much effort or too much sacrifice—was always a convenient myth peddled by those in whose interests it was for things to remain the same. Clearly, when societies decide to treat an emergency as an emergency—precisely what the activists profiled in this book have been calling for—all manner of possibilities instantly bloom. And when governments are genuinely understood to be making changes in the interest of protecting life and keeping people safe, and when these changes are imposed on individuals and big business alike, most of us are willing—even eager—to do our part.

Does this mean our chances of winning a Green New Deal are better now than before the pandemic? On good days, I hold out hope that they are. The kind of bold platform described in these pages is an attempt to address multiple crises at once—to simultaneously fight climate breakdown, poverty, underemployment, and systems of racial and gender domination. A Green New Deal doesn't ask anyone to wait for justice. And the pandemic, more than

any event in my lifetime, has provided us all with a crash course in why disaster response demands this kind of intersectional, multi-faceted approach.

When the lockdowns first began, there was a great deal of talk about how we were all in this together and “viruses don’t discriminate.” But, as with natural disasters, such talk turned out to be far from true. In fact, Covid-19 revealed itself as a ruthless detective, shining a spotlight into every corner and crevice of our society where life and labor were being abused and discounted. That is where it spread like wildfire. That is where it killed in its greatest numbers: wherever bodies were overworked, traumatized, stressed, or poisoned.

It spread in Amazon warehouses, where every move, every gesture, and every second is measured to increase worker productivity and efficiency. It spread in industrial-scale meatpacking plants, where amputations have long been considered an acceptable risk of going to work. It spread in bunkhouses, where migrant farmworkers, stripped of all rights, sleep between shifts. It spread in all the places where humans were treated as interchangeable extensions of machines. It also took enormous tolls in the darkest places where human lives were being locked up, hidden away, and written off. Prisons. Border camps. Favelas. In care homes that treat our elders and the people who care for them as profit centers, not people in need of respect and dignity. Anyone can catch the virus, true. But bodies weakened by the stresses of poverty, pollution, and systemic racism have proven far less able to fight it off.

Racism and inequality have also shaped the response to the crisis. Because even though governments were willing to put economic activity on hold in the name of human health when it seemed like everyone was at risk, once it was clear that the virus presented the greatest threat to those who had already been

discounted—working-class people, poor people, Black and brown people, old and disabled people—the calls to “open up the economy” grew louder and more violent. When Minneapolis police officers were filmed casually choking the life out of George Floyd, an African American man who had allegedly paid for cigarettes with a forged \$20 bill, it was the last straw. Cities went up in flames of rage.

This conflagration is a living rebuke to those who have long insisted that we can craft a response to the climate crisis that hives it off from the many other crises we face. In truth, every large-scale disaster, whether it begins in the body or begins in the atmosphere, contains virtually every other disaster within it. Whatever was bad before the disaster gets downgraded to unbearable. And whoever was treated as disposable before gets downgraded to sacrificial. This is one of the wrenching lessons of the coronavirus pandemic, and it is why we must embrace holistic change.

Indeed, these times of rapid and startling change make a great many things feel more possible than just a few months ago. Having held countless conferences and meetings over video, many professionals are now rightly questioning the necessity of large portions of their pre-Covid air travel, a revelation that could have large climate benefits. The systemic violations of worker rights in meatpacking plants, meanwhile, have convinced many more people that cutting meat from their diets is a moral imperative: another potential boon for the climate. Several cities that opened up dramatically more bike lanes and pedestrian roads during the pandemic (to facilitate social distancing) have decided to make these changes permanent, in order to reduce air and noise pollution and improve quality of life.

And bigger questions are being asked. If governments can pay millions of workers their full salaries (or close to it) to shelter in place—as they have done in several countries including the Netherlands and Germany—then why can’t governments pay millions

more to perform green jobs, like planting trees, remediating polluted land, and building energy-efficient affordable homes? Why can't they be paid to retool their skills to shift from high-carbon sectors to zero-carbon ones? Yes, it's all expensive. But if our governments could pump trillions of new currency into a faltering market, surely there is money to be found for a planet on fire.

I am not claiming these will be easy fights to win. I have been studying disasters long enough to know that politics is more likely to shift in the opposite direction. In Hungary and Israel, we are seeing an acceleration of authoritarian rule under cover of pandemic; from the West Bank to Hong Kong, we are seeing obscene power grabs. Military tanks are rolling through the streets of US cities, egged on by a president who has strongly hinted he will question the legitimacy of the coming presidential elections if they don't go his way.

Meanwhile, in the name of "getting back to growth," the very industries at the heart of the climate crisis are in the process of winning a slew of regulatory and tax victories on top of their bailout billions. In the United States and China, governments have slashed many rules restricting air and water pollution. Australia's government has promised to cut the "green tape" and usher in a "gas-led recovery." In India, an iconic elephant sanctuary is being opened up to coal mining. In Brazil, loggers and miners are using the virus as cover to further raze the Amazon. At the same time, the trillions injected into the markets are already being used to prepare the ground for brutal economic austerity—to claim that there isn't enough money to pay the salaries of teachers and firefighters, let alone to introduce an ambitious green infrastructure program like the one called for here.

The question is: will these ploys work? It is always worth remembering that the Shock Doctrine, as I have called it in the past, is not the only way that societies have responded to previous deep crises. The Green New Deal is inspired by Franklin Delano Roosevelt's

original New Deal, a sweeping economic stimulus program introduced during a time of profound crisis much like our own. It is emphatically not a narrow carbon-pricing scheme that is all too easy to sideline as a costly folly during an economic downturn. It is a blueprint for a different, healthier, and fairer economy, one that would create tens of millions of desperately needed jobs and revitalize some of the most neglected parts of our nations. And there is strong evidence that this is well understood among voters, even in the United States, where the White House regularly uses the Green New Deal as a punching bag. A poll conducted by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication in April 2020, at the peak of the Covid lockdown and bailouts, found that 70 percent of those surveyed support a Green New Deal, including virtually all Democrats, 69 percent of independents, and 48 percent of Republicans.

Clearly, as climate-change fueled disasters careen into communities that are already in crisis because of Covid-19, mass unemployment, and systemic racism, the need for a bold, holistic vision of the future has never been more glaring.

In other words, the future is up for grabs. In an April 2020 essay, Arundhati Roy likened the pandemic to a portal. “We can choose to walk through it,” she wrote, “dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.”

This is critical to understand. There is no returning to where we were before this crisis hit; we are going somewhere new. It could be a lot worse, clearly. But it could also be significantly better. The outcome will depend on what we choose to carry with us—and what we are willing to leave behind.







## **INTRODUCTION: “WE ARE THE WILDFIRE”**

**ON A FRIDAY IN MID-MARCH 2019, THEY STREAMED OUT OF SCHOOLS IN LITTLE** rivulets, burbling with excitement and defiance at an illicit act of truancy. The little streams emptied onto grand avenues and boulevards, where they combined with other flows of chanting and chatting children and teens, dressed in leopard leggings and crisp uniforms and everything in between.

Soon the rivulets were rushing rivers: 100,000 bodies in Milan, 40,000 in Paris, 150,000 in Montreal.

Cardboard signs bobbed above the surf of humanity: **THERE IS NO PLANET B! DON'T BURN OUR FUTURE. THE HOUSE IS ON FIRE!**

Some placards were more intricate. In New York City, a girl held up a lush painting of delicate bumble bees, flowers, and jungle animals. From a distance, it looked like a school project on biodiversity; up close, it was a lament for the sixth mass extinction: **45% OF INSECTS LOST TO CLIMATE CHANGE. 60% OF ANIMALS HAVE**



DISAPPEARED IN THE LAST 50 YEARS. At the center she had painted an hourglass rapidly running out of sand.

For the young people who participated in the first ever global School Strike for Climate, learning has become a radicalizing act. In early readers, textbooks, and big-budget documentary films, they learned of the existence of ancient glaciers, dazzling coral reefs, and exotic mammals that make up our planet's many marvels. And then, almost simultaneously—from teachers, older siblings, or sequels to those same films—they discovered that much of this wonder has already disappeared, and much of the rest of it will be on the extinction block before they hit their thirties.

But it wasn't only learning about climate change that moved these young people to march out of class en masse. For a great many of them, it was also living it. Outside the legislature building in Cape Town, South Africa, hundreds of young strikers chanted at their elected leaders to stop approving new fossil fuel projects. It was just one year ago that this city of four million people was in the clutches of such severe drought that three-quarters of the population faced the prospect of turning on the tap and having nothing come out at all. CAPE TOWN IS APPROACHING DROUGHT "DAY ZERO," read a typical headline. Climate change, for these kids, was not something to read about in books or to fear off in the distance. It was as present and urgent as thirst itself.

The same was true at the climate strike on the Pacific island nation of Vanuatu, where residents live in fear of further coastal erosion. Their Pacific neighbor, the Solomon Islands, has already lost five small islands to rising water, with six more at severe risk of disappearing forever.

"Raise your voice, not the sea level!" the students chanted.

In New York City, ten thousand kids from dozens of schools found one another in Columbus Circle and proceeded to march to

Trump Tower, chanting “Money won’t matter when we’re dead!” The older teens in the crowd had vivid memories of when Superstorm Sandy slammed into their coastal city in 2012. “My house got flooded and I was so confused,” recalled Sandra Rogers. “And it really made me look into it because you don’t learn these things in school.”

New York City’s huge Puerto Rican community was also out in force on that unseasonably warm day. Some kids arrived draped in the island’s flag, a reminder of the relatives and friends still suffering in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, the 2017 storm that knocked out electricity and water in large parts of the territory for the better part of a year, a total infrastructure breakdown that took the lives of roughly three thousand people.

The mood was fierce, too, in San Francisco, when more than a thousand student strikers shared stories of living with chronic asthma because of polluting industries in their neighborhoods—and then getting a whole lot sicker when wildfire smoke choked the Bay Area just a few months before the strike. The testimonies were similar at walk-outs all over the Pacific Northwest, where smoke from record-breaking fires had blotted out the sun for two summers running. Across the northern border in Vancouver, young people had recently succeeded in pressuring their city council to declare a “climate emergency.”

Seven thousand miles away, in Delhi, student strikers braved the ever-present air pollution (often the worst in the world) to shout through white medical masks, “You sold our future, just for profit!” In interviews, some spoke of the devastating floods in Kerala that killed more than four hundred people in 2018.

Australia’s coal-addled resource minister declared that “The best thing you’ll learn about going to a protest is how to join the dole queue.” Undeterred, 150,000 young people poured into

plazas in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, and other cities.

This generation of Australians has decided it simply cannot pretend that everything is normal. Not when, at the start of 2019, the South Australian city of Port Augusta had reached an oven-worthy 121°F (49.5°C). Not when half the Great Barrier Reef, the world's largest natural structure made up of living creatures, had turned into a rotting underwater mass grave. Not when, in the weeks leading up to the strike itself, they had seen bushfires combine into a massive blaze in the state of Victoria, forcing thousands to flee their homes, while in Tasmania, wildfires destroyed old-growth rain forests that are unlike any ecosystem in the world. Not when, in January 2019, a combination of extreme temperature swings and poor water management led the entire country to wake up to apocalyptic images of the Darling River clogged with the floating carcasses of one million dead fish.

"You have failed us all so terribly," said fifteen-year-old strike organizer Nosrat Fareha, addressing the political class as a whole. "We deserve better. Young people can't even vote but will have to live with the consequences of your inaction."

There was no student strike in Mozambique; on March 15, the day of the global walkouts, the whole country was bracing for the impact of Cyclone Idai, one of the worst storms in African history, which drove people to take refuge at the tops of trees as the waters rose and would eventually kill more than one thousand people. And then, just six weeks later, while it was still clearing the rubble, Mozambique would be hit by Cyclone Kenneth, yet another record-breaking storm.

Wherever in the world they live, this generation has something in common: they are the first for whom climate disruption on a planetary scale is not a future threat, but a lived reality. And not in a few unlucky hot spots, but on every single continent, with

pretty much everything unraveling significantly faster than most scientific models had predicted.

Oceans are warming 40 percent faster than the United Nations predicted just five years ago. And a sweeping study on the state of the Arctic published in April 2019 in *Environmental Research Letters*, led by renowned glaciologist Jason Box, found that ice in various forms is melting so rapidly that the “Arctic biophysical system is now clearly trending away from its 20th Century state and into an unprecedented state, with implications not only within but also beyond the Arctic.” In May 2019, the United Nations’ Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services published a report about the startling loss of wildlife around the world, warning that a million species of animals and plants are at risk of extinction. “The health of ecosystems on which we and all other species depend is deteriorating more rapidly than ever,” said the Platform’s Chair, Robert Watson. “We are eroding the very foundations of economies, livelihoods, food security, health and quality of life worldwide. We have lost time. We must act now.”

And so, just as US schoolchildren now grow up practicing “active shooter drills” starting in kindergarten, many of these students have had school days cancelled because of wildfire smoke, or learned to pack an evacuation bag ahead of hurricanes. A great many children have been forced to leave their homes for good because prolonged drought destroyed their parents’ livelihood in Guatemala, or contributed to the outbreak of civil war in Syria.

It has been over three decades since governments and scientists started officially meeting to discuss the need to lower greenhouse gas emissions to avoid the dangers of climate breakdown. In the intervening years, we have heard countless appeals for action that involve “the children,” “the grandchildren,” and “generations

to come.” We were told that we owed it to them to move swiftly and embrace change. We were warned that we were failing in our most sacred duty to protect them. It was predicted that they would judge us harshly if we failed to act on their behalf.

Well, none of those emotional pleas proved at all persuasive, at least not to the politicians and their corporate underwriters who could have taken bold action to stop the climate disruption we are all living through today. Instead, since those government meetings began in 1988, global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions have risen by well over 40 percent, and they continue to rise. The planet has warmed by about 1°C since we began burning coal on an industrial scale and average temperatures are on track to rise by as much as four times that amount before the century is up; the last time there was this much carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, humans didn’t exist.

As for those children and grandchildren and generations to come who were invoked so promiscuously? They are no longer mere rhetorical devices. They are now speaking (and screaming, and striking) for themselves. And they are speaking up for one another as part of an emerging international movement of children and a global web of creation that includes all those amazing animals and natural wonders that they fell in love with so effortlessly, only to discover that it was all slipping away.

And yes, as foretold, these children are ready to deliver their moral verdict on the people and institutions who knew all about the dangerous, depleted world they would inherit and yet chose not to act.

They know what they think of Donald Trump in the United States and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil and Scott Morrison in Australia and all the other leaders who torch the planet with defiant glee while denying science so basic that these kids could grasp it easily at age eight. Their verdict is just as damning, if not more so,

for the leaders who deliver passionate and moving speeches about the imperative to respect the Paris Climate Agreement and “make the planet great again” (France’s Emanuel Macron, Canada’s Justin Trudeau, and so many others), but who then shower subsidies, handouts, and licenses on the fossil fuel and agribusiness giants driving ecological breakdown.

Young people around the world are cracking open the heart of the climate crisis, speaking of a deep longing for a future they thought they had but that is disappearing with each day that adults fail to act on the reality that we are in an emergency.

This is the power of the youth climate movement. Unlike so many adults in positions of authority, they have not yet been trained to mask the unfathomable stakes of our moment in the language of bureaucracy and overcomplexity. They understand that they are fighting for the fundamental right to live full lives—lives in which they are not, as thirteen-year-old climate striker Alexandria Villaseñor puts it, “running from disasters.”

On that day in March 2019, organizers estimate, there were nearly 2,100 youth climate strikes in 125 countries, with 1.6 million young people participating. That’s quite an achievement for a movement that began just eight months earlier with a single fifteen-year-old girl in Stockholm, Sweden.

## **GRETA’S “SUPERPOWER”**

The girl in question is Greta Thunberg, and her story has important lessons about what it will take to protect the possibility of a livable future—and not for some abstract idea of “future generations” but for billions of people alive today.

Like many of her peers, Greta started learning about climate change when she was around eight years old. She read books and

watched documentaries about species collapse and melting glaciers. She became obsessed. She learned that burning fossil fuels and eating a meat-based diet were major contributors to planetary destabilization. She discovered that there was a delay between our actions and the planet's reactions, which means that more warming is already locked in, no matter what we do.

As she grew up and learned more, she focused on the scientific predictions about how radically the earth is on track to change by 2040, 2060, and 2080 if we stay on our current course. She made mental calculations about what this would mean to her own life: the shocks she would have to endure, the death that could surround her, the other life forms that would disappear forever, the horrors and privations that would await her own children should she decide to become a parent.

Greta also learned from climate scientists that the worst of this was not a foregone conclusion: that if we took radical action now, reducing emissions by 15 percent a year in wealthy countries like Sweden, then it would dramatically increase the chances of a safe future for her generation and the ones that followed. We could still save some of the glaciers. We could still protect many island nations. We might still avoid massive crop failure that would force hundreds of millions, if not billions, of people to flee their homes.

If all this were true, she reasoned, then “we wouldn’t be talking about anything else . . . If burning fossil fuels was so bad that it threatened our very existence, how could we just continue like before? Why were there no restrictions? Why wasn’t it made illegal?”

It made no sense. Surely governments, especially in countries with resources to spare, should be leading the charge to achieve a rapid transition within a decade, so that by the time she was in her mid-twenties, consumption patterns and physical infrastructure would be fundamentally transformed.

And yet her government, a self-styled climate leader, was moving much more slowly than that, and indeed, global emissions were continuing to rise. It was madness: the world was on fire, and yet everywhere Greta looked, people were gossiping about celebrities, taking pictures of themselves imitating celebrities, buying new cars and new clothes they didn't need—as if they had all the time in the world to douse the flames.

By age eleven, she had fallen into a deep depression. There were many contributing factors, some related to being different in a school system that expects all kids to be pretty much the same. (“I was the invisible girl in the back.”) But there was also a feeling of great sorrow and helplessness about the fast deteriorating state of the planet—and the inexplicable failure of those in power to do much of anything about it.

Thunberg stopped speaking and eating. She became very ill. Eventually, she was diagnosed with selective mutism, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and a form of autism that used to be called Asperger's syndrome. That last diagnosis helped explain why Greta took what she was learning about climate change so much harder and more personally than many of her peers.

People with autism tend to be extremely literal and, as a result, often have trouble coping with cognitive dissonance, those gaps between what we know intellectually and what we do that are so pervasive in modern life. Many people on the autism spectrum are also less prone to imitating the social behaviors of the people around them—they often don't even notice them—and instead tend to forge their own unique path. This often involves focusing with great intensity on areas of particular interest, and frequently having difficulty putting those areas of interest aside (also known as compartmentalization). “For those of us who are on the spectrum,” Thunberg says, “almost everything is black or white. We



aren't very good at lying, and we usually don't enjoy participating in this social game that the rest of you seem so fond of."

These traits explain why some people with Greta's diagnosis become accomplished scientists and classical musicians, applying their super focus to great effect. It also helps explain why, when Thunberg trained her laser-like attention on climate breakdown, she was completely overwhelmed, with no way to protect herself from the fear and grief. She saw and felt the full implications of the crisis and could not be distracted from it. What's more, the fact that other people in her life (classmates, parents, teachers) seemed relatively unconcerned did not send her reassuring social signals that the situation wasn't really so bad, as such signals do for children who are more socially connected. The apparent lack of concern of those around her terrified Thunberg even more.

To hear Greta and her parents tell it, a big part of emerging from her dangerous depression was finding ways to reduce the unbearable cognitive dissonance between what she had learned about the planetary crisis and how she and her family were living their lives. She convinced her parents to join her in becoming vegan, or at least vegetarian, and, biggest of all, to stop flying. (Her mother is a well-known opera singer, so this was no small sacrifice.)

The amount of carbon kept out of the atmosphere as a result of these lifestyle changes was minute. Greta was well aware of that, but persuading her family to live in a way that began to reflect the planetary emergency helped ease some of the psychic strain. At least now, in their own small ways, they were not pretending that everything was fine.

The most important change Thunberg made, however, had nothing to do with eating and flying. It had to do with finding a way to show the rest of the world that it was time to stop acting like everything was normal when normal would lead straight to