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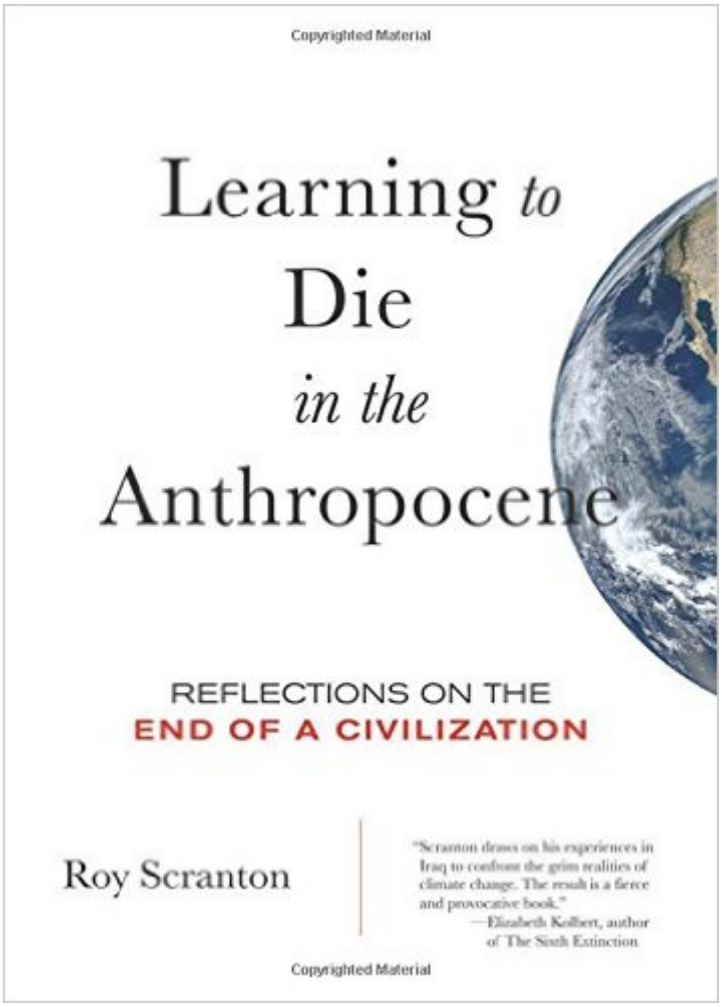
Learning To Die In The Anthropocene: Reflections On The End Of A Civilization (City Lights Open Media)



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Synopsis

"In Learning to Die in the Anthropocene, Roy Scranton draws on his experiences in Iraq to confront the grim realities of climate change. The result is a fierce and provocative book."--Elizabeth Kolbert, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History"Roy Scranton's Learning to Die in the Anthropocene presents, without extraneous bullshit, what we must do to survive on Earth. It's a powerful, useful, and ultimately hopeful book that more than any other I've read has the ability to change people's minds and create change. For me, it crystallizes and expresses what I've been thinking about and trying to get a grasp on. The economical way it does so, with such clarity, sets the book apart from most others on the subject."--Jeff VanderMeer, author of the Southern Reach trilogy"Roy Scranton lucidly articulates the depth of the climate crisis with an honesty that is all too rare, then calls for a reimagined humanism that will help us meet our stormy future with as much decency as we can muster. While I don't share his conclusions about the potential for social movements to drive ambitious mitigation, this is a wise and important challenge from an elegant writer and original thinker. A critical intervention."--Naomi Klein, author of This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate"Concise, elegant, erudite, heartfelt & wise."--Amitav Ghosh, author of Flood of Fire"War veteran and journalist Roy Scranton combines memoir, philosophy, and science writing to craft one of the definitive documents of the modern era."--The Believer Best Books of 2015 Coming home from the war in Iraq, US Army private Roy Scranton thought he'd left the world of strife behind. Then he watched as new calamities struck America, heralding a threat far more dangerous than ISIS or Al Qaeda: Hurricane Katrina, Superstorm Sandy, megadrought--the shock and awe of global warming.Our world is changing. Rising seas, spiking temperatures, and extreme weather imperil global infrastructure, crops, and water supplies. Conflict, famine, plagues, and riots menace from every quarter. From war-stricken Baghdad to the melting Arctic, human-caused climate change poses a danger not only to political and economic stability, but to civilization itself . . . and to what it means to be human. Our greatest enemy, it turns out, is ourselves. The warmer, wetter, more chaotic world we now live in--the Anthropocene--demands a radical new vision of human life.In this bracing response to climate change, Roy Scranton combines memoir, reportage, philosophy, and Zen wisdom to explore what it means to be human in a rapidly evolving world, taking readers on a journey through street protests, the latest findings of earth scientists, a historic UN summit, millennia of geological history, and the persistent vitality of ancient literature. Expanding on his influential New York Times essay (the #1 most-emailed article the day it appeared, and selected for Best American Science and Nature Writing 2014), Scranton responds to the existential problem of global warming by arguing that in order to survive, we must come to terms with our

mortality.Plato argued that to philosophize is to learn to die. If thatâ ™s true, says Scranton, then we have entered humanityâ ™s most philosophical age--for this is precisely the problem of the Anthropocene. The trouble now is that we must learn to die not as individuals, but as a civilization.Roy Scranton has published in the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Rolling Stone, Boston Review, and Theory and Event, and has been interviewed on NPR's Fresh Air, among other media.

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Customer Reviews

Dale Jamieson, environmental philosopher and the author of REASON IN A DARK TIME: WHY THE STRUGGLE AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE FAILEDâ "AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR OUR FUTURE writes that â œRoy Scranton has written a howl for the Anthropoceneâ "a book full of passion, fire, science and wisdom. It cuts deeper than anything that has yet been written on the subject.â • This is high praise coming from a man whoâ ™d knowâ "and who wouldnâ ™t dish out that kind of praise lightly. Scranton sets the stage for global catastrophe already on p. 16 with this quote from the geophysicist, David Archer: â œâ ˆ(t)he potential for planetary devastation posed by the methane hydrate reservoir â | seems comparable to the destructive potential of nuclear winter or from a comet or asteroid impact.â • I donâ ™t consider myself an ignoramus on the subject of climate change by any stretch of the imagination â " and yet, this mention of a methane reservoir just beneath the floor of the Arctic Ocean came as a complete surprise to me. And just in case you (or I) thought this sounded rather bleak, Scranton concludes the first section of his monograph with

â œ(f)rom the perspective of many policy experts, climate scientists, and national security officials, the concern is not whether global warming exists or how we might prevent it, but how we are going to adapt to life in the hot, volatile world weâ ™ve created.â • Less debatable is Scrantonâ ™s contention on p. 23 that â œ(c)arbon-fueled capitalism is a zombie system, voracious but sterile. The aggressive human monoculture has proven astoundingly virulent but also toxic, cannibalistic, and self-destructive. It is unsustainable, both in itself and as a response to catastrophic climate change.

I read this twice before I felt satisfied I could really connect with Roy Scranton’s ruminations - but once that switch clicked, I recognized this as about the most beautiful rumination on humanity’s eventual extinction that we’re likely to read.It’s easy to call this a "climate change" book, but Scranton’s narrative does a good job connecting this to geologic history, not the comparitive split second of recent human history. Climate change IS going to happen, humanity in its current form WILL be destroyed - there’s no point in crying about it. Not tomorrow, obviously, but eventually. But, it’s fairly likely that the children of today’s children will be facing a world where much we take for granted has been dramatically changed.So Scranton is not writing this book as a "drive fewer miles" polemic - as he points out, our reliance on technology burns more fossil fuel in a few minutes than worrying about driving 55 or 65 mph. He is writing literally to wake humanity up to how to learn how to die - because it’s coming. We, as humans, are biologically hard-wired to avoid confronting our own personal mortality - much less confront it as a species. He doesn’t have any answers as to what we should do, but be more enlightened as to our place in the world, and how we can prepare to adjust to an existential conclusion.It’s funny - candidates for president babble about ISIS as an "existential threat" to the US - it isn’t, and will never be. ISIS terrorists could blow up Houston, but the country would survive. In the meantime, an existential threat is happening all around us, every day, and it’s denied at every turn. It’s just humans being humans - worrying about the broken window in a car with no tires.

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