

How late is too late when it comes to climate change?

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The world might already be at a tipping point when it comes to climate change and yet our leaders still seem to be in denial about the reality that we have to face. So, how late is too late when it comes to making the changes required if human life is to survive on Earth?

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This is the transcript:

How late is too late when it comes to climate change?

I've been looking at information about climate change for over 50 years. Some of the books behind me are on that subject. One of them is a book written in 1967 by a man called E. J. Mishan and it's called 'The Costs of Economic Growth'. I read it when I was a sixth former, in 1975. It was the first-ever theoretical economics book that I actually got my head around and read from cover to cover. And what he said then, could be said now, that we have to change the way that we live if human life on Earth is to survive.

Economic growth. is destroying our well-being.

It's destroying our planet.

It's also absurd. It's very obvious that on a planet of finite resources, you cannot have infinite economic growth, which appears to be the aim of our politicians.

We're now seeing the consequence of 50 years of ignoring this information because the climate movement did fundamentally develop during those 1970s when I was a teenager, as I was when I first became aware of it.

What are those consequences?

We've seen flooding in Europe recently.

We're seeing hurricanes hitting America with greater force than for decades if not centuries. We're seeing damage of untold amount.

We're seeing unusual climate patterns.

We are seeing places in the world where water is virtually disappearing.

We're seeing what were arable areas ceasing to be able to produce crops.

We're seeing stress on people as a consequence, who literally have to move because their means of survival no longer exists.

All of that is because we decided that we could carry on burning fossil fuels.

We decided that this planet could be heated.

We decided that the pursuit of profit was more important than the pursuit of sustainability.

We decided that our current ability to globe-trot around the world was more important than providing our grandchildren with a safe place to live.

We decided that this was how we wanted to live.

And we've got it wrong.

Let's be blunt. There is no way that we can carry on as we are.

I'm not saying life on Earth as we have recognised it will cease if we manage the whole process of sustainability. We will have homes. We will have jobs. We could have food. We will travel, not maybe in the same way as we have. We will consume, but perhaps different goods - and a lot more services, because they have, by and large, a much

lower carbon impact. But the point is, we can have life on Earth, still, just about, if we change. Or, we can blow this world apart. As far as we're concerned, that is.

Of course, the world will survive. The world is indifferent as to whether we're here or not.

Many other animals will also survive because they can withstand a process of change better than we can because they don't have the advanced society and infrastructure that we require to support our way of life.

But can we survive? My answer is, I don't know.

Recently, a whole load of climate scientists have said we have reached the tipping point, where it is possible that societal breakdown might happen as a consequence of climate change. I think they're right. Societal breakdown? Because quite simply, hundreds of millions, if not billions of people, on a planet where there are now around 8 billion of us, will have to move because they have no viable home, and that we will therefore have to accommodate, at least in part.

That we will have to absorb into our society because we, in the UK and in Northern Europe - and there will, of course, be other places where this is also true - have a chance of maintaining life in the place where we are.

But can we withstand the strain that this will create?

Can our political systems adjust so that the current narratives, which hate the 'other', with the other being defined as the person who wants to come and live in the UK, whoever they might be, can we see changes in those narratives in sufficient time to handle the stress that climate change is going to create with regard to migration?

Can we change our consumption patterns?

Can we change the attitude of our government when, for example, our government has just decided to invest £22 billion in carbon capture and storage, which is a giant con trick by the fossil fuel industry so that it can keep burning those things that are destroying our planet for a decade or so longer, causing untold harm as a consequence when that £22 billion would be vastly better spent on reducing our consumption of fuels by insulating homes, providing alternative sources of energy, creating new transport systems which do not pollute in the way that our existing ones do, and on and on?

Can we make these changes?

I don't know.

I wish I could tell you that I do.

I used to think I wouldn't be as worried in old age as I was when I was younger, that things would have resolved themselves, and I would now be sitting in relative comfort. But I'm not. I'm more worried now than probably I've ever been. Because I've got through most of my life - let's be realistic, when you're 66, that has to be statistically true - but when I look at the prospects of those who are younger than me, which is, of course, now most of the world, I realise that the legacy of my generation is dire, to be blunt.

Horrible.

Unacceptable.

Something for which we can only apologise because we can't make amends for the mistakes we made.

But we can change our patterns of behaviour now.

Our government could do a Green New Deal, which would invest in our sustainable future. It could find the money in question. It would be much better spent than putting £22bn into meaningless carbon capture and storage to simply fuel the profits of big energy companies.

We could change our approach to sustainability with regard to food and so many other issues.

We could begin to imagine a world where we know that people will have to move and we have to plan for that possibility so that social stress does not arise when it happens.

We could do all those things. They're all entirely plausible. As a consequence, we could survive. But is it too late? Are attitudes going to take too long to change?

That is the biggest question of all. Can we create the mindset where we will survive? Or is that not possible in the time remaining to us?

These are questions I can't answer. You can. You can muse on them. You can decide for yourself. You can ask others about them. You can debate them. You can, as I am trying to be by making this video, part of the change that we require.

But at the end of the day, none of us know whether we're too late or not. We just have to cling on in the hope that we might still have a chance.