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The Terrestrial Biosphere



The prospect of future environmental change challenges our science and our values.

However, in the history of the earth it is clear that change is normal, and humans and other organisms can be very adept at responding to change, but the levels, nature and timings of changes are now uncertain – and the rates of change may well be increasing. Many scenarios of future climatic change exist but often these are in many ways no more than extrapolations of what we already think we know.

The Terrestrial Biosphere tries to pose the questions which underlie the many-sided debate of how to respond to and influence change: How should we view nature? What do we do for the best – how should we act – what are we trying to achieve and what should we be guided by?

In doing so the book introduces and attempts to analyse not only scientific aspects of the debate but also cultural attitudes and values: the notions of ecosystem stability are now challenged and it is also clear that ecosystems are renewable but not repeatable. It finds that prescriptive 'solutions' based on current constructs may not be adequate. Feeling that analysis should lead to advocacy, the author believes that if we can't improve predictability, we have to increase adaptability which means that ecological and social capacity building should be advocated. This is seen in terms of concepts, institutions, attitudes and values which allow for a plurality of meanings and which can cope with surprise and unforeseen change – and which also facilitates responses to change.

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