

A Generation of Irreversible Mistakes

David Wallace-Wells is currently a columnist and editor at New York Magazine, and is perhaps best known for his New York Times best-selling book, “The Uninhabitable Earth.” He has claimed himself as “not an environmentalist,” but rather, someone who has become concerned with the increasing heating of the Earth. He began his discussion by separating climate change into three different phases, with the first being “the speed of change.” He discussed how climate change has not slowed down, noting that since his birth 39 years ago, two-thirds of our emissions have been burned. He described the issue as “not a threat that can be compartmentalized or avoided.” Unfortunately, this is largely due to economic dependence on fossil fuels, especially in developing countries such as India, where it is estimated that civilians would be about “30% poorer” without the fossil fuel. He discussed the relation between increasing temperature and violence, as well as spreading disease. I found it especially depressing when he talked about how temperatures have increased by almost 1.8°F since the beginning of the industrial revolution, a number that is unrivaled by historic records, besides prehistoric times where the ocean levels were not centimeters, but up to 20 meters higher than today. Unfortunately, the hopes of reversing global warming are extremely unlikely, but the Paris Accords has made the ultimate objective, based on scientific input, of halting the temperature increase at 2°C. The second category he discussed was “the speed of human response.” He began on a positive note, talking about how humans “truly do respond when necessary.” We have cut at least four degrees off of our initial projections, as a result of initiatives being made around the world. He referenced initiatives like the Green New Deal, and decarbonization efforts being made in China that, if nothing else, have increased social awareness and involvement. Overall, it has been incredibly dramatic, and unfortunately, could have been handled better. The last category he discussed was “the speed of disorientation.” Wells referenced his own childhood, where he expected the future to be much more promising than it turned out to be. The only thing we had to go by at that time were models, unsure of how accurate they actually were. “Among other things, climate change is a measurement of handling uncertainty,” he stated, relating it to the poor handling of the coronavirus pandemic. Even nature, once a place to escape the wrath of man, has become complicated and tarnished by man-made mistakes. “At the very least we can expect, as climate change worsens,” Wells said “nature will no longer be our friend.”