

GLOBAL WARMING: SCIENCE AND POLITICS IN TROUBLED TIMES—COURSE OUTLINE

Evening School, Semester 1, 2009

Convened by Cameron Shingleton

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Few people would dispute that the issue of climate change raises serious questions for political life, both in democratic and non-democratic societies and for global civilisation at large. *Global Warming: Science and Politics in Troubled Times* attempts to articulate some of those questions by looking at the political contexts in which science is practised. It examines in detail the difficulties besetting the relationship between scientific prediction and public policy, the presentation of scientific issues in the media and the broader dilemmas that follow from the fact that, in the absence of a sudden dawning of universal enlightenment, mass societies can and do take the pronouncements of scientific experts on faith. The problems will be posed in a local context as well as in the abstract: how can we account for the general unwillingness in a mass democracy such as Australia to address the issue of global warming with the seriousness scientific analysis seems to require?

FORMAT

- 2 hour lecture, with discussion

STRUCTURE

Weeks 1 - 2: Science, Politics, Ethics.

Theoretical Introduction. How have the very general features of contemporary society - bureaucracy, advanced technology, the global economic system - shaped the science and politics climate change?

Weeks 3 - 5: Climate Change in Australian Politics.

To what extent was the Howard government's policy on climate change determined by thoroughgoing scepticism? Has the Rudd era seen more than symbolic efforts to deal with the issue? More generally, how have the respective governments negotiated the troubled relationship between science and public policy? Session 5 concludes our case study with a look at the promises and limits of political environmentalism.

Session 6 - 7: Climate Change in Australian Journalism.

A case study of arguments that have made their appearance in the Australian media in recent years. Guiding questions: How accurate and sophisticated is the media's representation of climate change? Are there systematic shortcomings in the media's approach to scientific issues generally?

Session 8 - 10: Knowledge and Authority or: On faith in science.

Scientific and political arguments suggesting that climate change must be addressed urgently are criticised on numerous grounds. Sessions 8 - 10 examine two radical counter-arguments: the first asserts that the broad consensus within climate science has an ideological basis: the second that political proposals to address global warming rely on blind faith in science. How good are the arguments? What sort of faith in science is healthy in a society that deeply depends on scientific and technical expertise?

Sessions 11 - 12: Actualities and Possibilities.

How feasible is a politics which takes climate science unflinchingly on board? What sorts of social currents might support such a politics? What sort of relationship between scientific prediction and public policy should we be aiming for, what might its conceptual and ethical underpinnings be? ∞