

What is climate change?



“Global warming and global cooling are physical phenomenon. But the battle over these real or presumed developments is a cultural and social phenomenon. In this sense at least history and meteorology go hand-in-hand.”

p.181 in Boia,L. 2005 *Weather in the imagination*

“... the phrase ‘climate change’ mobilises very different sets of ideologies, meanings, values and goals ... it means different things to different people in different contexts, places and networks”

p.325 in Hulme,M. 2009 *Why we disagree about climate change*

What is climate change?



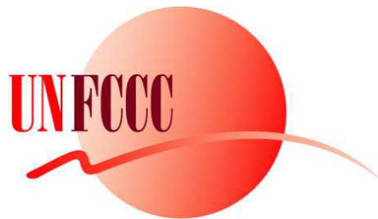
World Meteorological
Organisation

“Climate change refers to a statistically significant variation in either the mean state of the climate or in its variability, persisting for an extended period (typically decades or longer)”

ipcc
INTERGOVERNMENTAL PANEL ON
climate change



“[It] may be due to natural ... processes or ... forcings, or to persistent anthropogenic changes in the composition of the atmosphere or in land use”



“[It] is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability”

What is climate change?



“Climate change is the defining challenge of our age. The science is clear; climate change is happening, the impact is real. The time to act is now.”

**Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General
12 December 2007, COP-13 Bali**

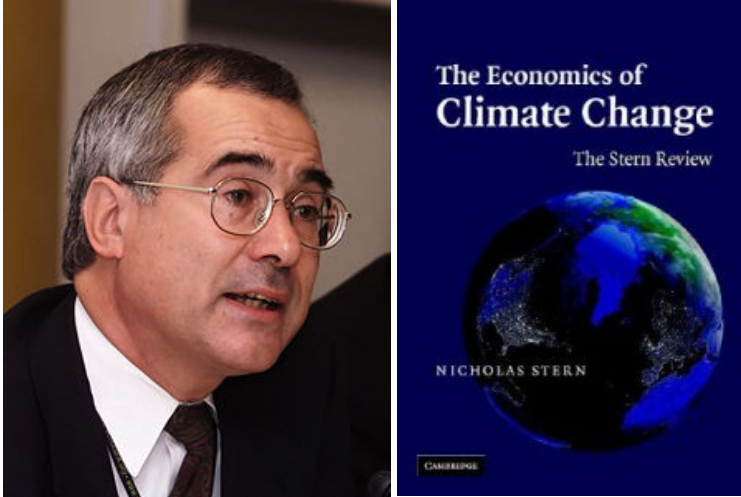
What is climate change?

“I called the threat of catastrophic global warming the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people”



James M Inhofe, US Senator, January 2005

What is climate change?



“Climate change is the greatest example of market failure we have ever seen”

Lord Nicholas Stern, October 2006

What is climate change?



“Global warming is the Earth’s judgement on the global market Empire and the heedless consumption it fosters”

Michael Northcott, 2007, *A Moral Climate: the ethics of global warming*

What is climate change?



“Climate change is due to societal breakdown between [the Porgerans] and the rituals oriented toward powerful spirits that control the cosmos”



**Jerry Jacka, 2009, p.206 in Crate and Nuttall
*Anthropology and Climate Change***

What is climate change?

WMO/IPCC/UNFCCC

change in weather statistics

Ban Ki Moon

geopolitical challenge

James Inhofe

political conspiracy

Nick Stern

market failure

Michael Northcott

heedless consumption

Porgerans

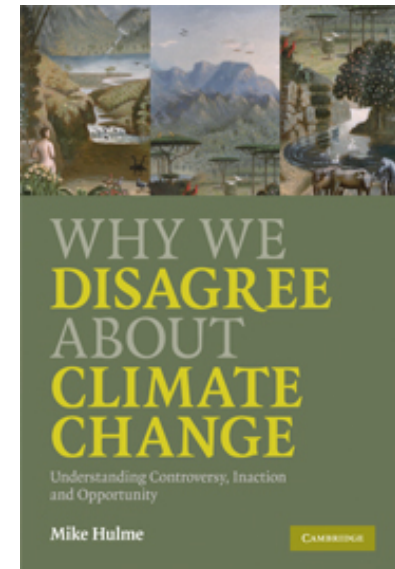
cultural breakdown

Are these 'definitions' right or wrong? And how are we to judge?

Climate change as synecdoche

Climate change might usefully be seen as a **synecdoche (or metonymy)** – a figure of speech by which a part is put for the whole (e.g. ‘fifty sail’ rather than ‘fifty ships’ or ‘boards’ rather than ‘stage’)

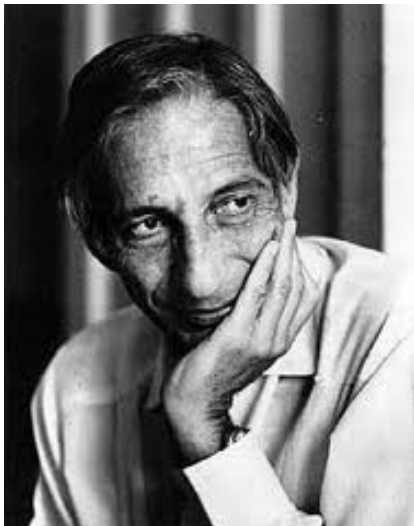
This is partly reflected in my suggestion about distinguishing between lower case – **climate change** – and upper case – **Climate Change**



Climate change as synecdoche

So what does 'climate change' (Climate Change) stand for?

- Risk society
- Socialist ideology
- Loss of 'natural' nature



Ivan Illich (1926-2002)

From 1989 ... *"The warming atmosphere [makes it] intolerable to think of more development and industrial growth as progress, but rather as aggression against the human condition. It is now imaginable to the common mind that, as Samuel Beckett once said, 'this earth could be uninhabited'"*.

Climate change as risk society

“Risk society means that the past is losing its power of determination of the present. It is being replaced by the future, that is to say, something non-existent, fictitious and constructed, as the basis for present-day action. We are talking and arguing about something that is not the case, but could happen if we do not turn the rudder immediately. Expected risks are the whip to keep the present in line. The more threatening the shadows that fall on the present because a terrible future is impending, the more believed are the headlines provoked by the dramatisation of risk today.”



Ulrich Beck, 1997 p.20 ‘Global risk politics’ in Jacobs,M. (ed.) *Greening the millennium*

Climate change as political ideology

*“With the economic crisis set to worsen, efforts to dispute the science that human activity causes climate change will continue. Those of us fighting for change should ensure that we mount a political battle against the climate sceptics, not simply a scientific one. **We need to ensure that those waging that battle recognise that the real enemy is the capitalist system, which puts profit before the lives of billions of humans and the planet.** Equally importantly, we need to recognise who the real allies are in this fight—the millions of working people around the world who have no vested interest in a system that prioritises profit over the world’s climate.”*



Suzanne Jeffrey, 4 January 2011 *International Socialism – a quarterly journal of socialist theory*:
“Why we should be sceptical of climate sceptics”

Climate change as loss of 'natural' nature

*“Not long ago we knew the best time for planting seeds, we knew when we could start picking apples in the orchard, when the leaves would turn deep orange, when to look forward to building snowmen. Things like the cuckoo’s dependable call would be a sign that spring had come. **There was a kind of certainty to our lives**, there was little doubt that we, our friends, our families would have a future, probably brighter than the past*

*But the cuckoo’s are disappearing **and it seems all the patterns of the world are being scrambled ...** For the first time in human history the ability of our planet’s ecosystems to sustain future generations can no longer be taken for granted”*

Camp for Climate Action newspaper, 2008, ‘You are here’

