

Global warming hotheads would burn sceptics at the stake

NOTEBOOK

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- 1 The television advert about the apocalyptic dangers of climate change from the government-funded Carbon Trust is very shocking. It begins with an actor playing Robert Oppenheimer, “father of the A-bomb”. The portentous voiceover tells us: “One man has been where we all are today. When he saw what he had done, he said, ‘I am become the destroyer of worlds’ (cue shot of atomic explosion). Now we all have to face up to what we’ve done. Our climate is changing.”
- 2 To make us feel guilty about “what we have done”, we are shown cities, electricity pylons, personal computers and cars, followed by violent storms, huge waves and flooded towns. The message is that we are destroying the world through climate change, which has been brought about by modern industry and technology. So we must change the way we live and work in order to repent of our sins — or as they put it now, “reduce our emissions”.
- 3 What we ignorant laymen are rarely told is that there remain serious uncertainties about the extent and causes of climate change — as even some scientists working with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change will quietly concede. Yet any expert who tries to raise such questions in public is treated with contempt.
- 4 When it comes to climate change, “sceptic” is a dirty word. Scientists who dissent from the strict orthodoxy on man-made global warming have been shouted down, labelled dupes of the US oil industry, even branded “climate change deniers” — a label with obvious historical connotations. Instead of taking up the sceptics’ case, the accepted response of our illiberal age is to yell: “You can’t say that!”
- 5 But is not scepticism crucial to scientific inquiry? Timothy Ball, a leading climatologist, says that those trying to test the theory of man-made climate change — “a normal course of action in any real scientific endeavour” — are now being “chastised for not being in agreement with some sort of scientific consensus, as if a worldwide poll of climate experts had been taken, and as if such a consensus would represent scientific fact. Nothing could be farther from the truth; science advances by questioning, probing and re-examining existing beliefs.”
- 6 We need to separate the science from the politics. Let the experts thrash out the evidence. But let them do so free from the pressures of a political climate in which human intervention is always seen as the problem rather than the solution, precaution is always privileged over risk and the worst possible outcome is always assumed to be the best bet. Perhaps those commanding us to “face up to what we have done” to the world might first face up to the dangers of reducing complex scientific issues to a simplistic political message, and presenting moralistic sermons as scientific laws. Whatever the true impact on the environment of burning fossil fuels, there seems a real risk of damaging the atmosphere of scientific inquiry by burning sceptics at the stake.

Tekst 7 Global warming hotheads...

- 1p 22 How does the author of the article introduce his topic in the first two paragraphs?
- A He proves that the media tend to present misleading information on global warming.
 - B He shows how the public's feelings of unease about global warming are played on.
 - C He urges every member of the public to take preventive measures to stop global warming.
 - D He warns the public that the world might be heading towards a disaster due to global warming.
- 1p 23 Judging from paragraph 3, to which unwelcome comment is "You can't say that!" (paragraph 4, last line) a reply?
- A Alternative theories on climate change are based on inaccurate research methods.
 - B It is doubtful whether the present scale of climate change is a result of human activity.
 - C Scientific research has provided accurate facts and figures on climate change.
- 1p 24 "But is not scepticism crucial to scientific inquiry?" (paragraph 5)
Which of the following quotations is in line with this question?
- A "chastised ... scientific consensus" (paragraph 5)
 - B "science ... beliefs" (paragraph 5)
 - C "We need ... politics." (paragraph 6)
 - D "precaution ... risk" (paragraph 6)
- 1p 25 Welke van de volgende beweringen is juist op grond van de inhoud van de alinea's 3 tot en met 6?
- A De gangbare theorieën over de oorzaak van klimaatverandering laten te wensen over.
 - B Samenwerkingsverbanden tussen overheid en wetenschappelijke instituten leiden tot snellere successen.
 - C Wetenschappers met een afwijkende mening worden door het "Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change" ontslagen.
- 1p 26 What is the main conclusion to be drawn from this text?
- A Critical input is not taken seriously enough in the debate about climate change.
 - B It is better to use simple language when communicating on climate problems.
 - C Science will come up with a solution for the expanding global energy consumption.
 - D There is no denying that the world's natural fuel resources are nearly exhausted.

Bronvermelding

Een opsomming van de in dit examen gebruikte bronnen, zoals teksten en afbeeldingen, is te vinden in het bij dit examen behorende correctievoorschrift, dat na afloop van het examen wordt gepubliceerd.