

CALL FOR PROPOSALS  
International Colloquium  
**“Climate, Knowledge and Politics,  
XVIII<sup>th</sup>-XX<sup>th</sup> centuries”**

Paris, 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> of September 2011.

Organizers:

Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, Fabien Locher, Julien Vincent.

ANR Profutur

IHMC, UMR ENS/CNRS 8066

CRH, UMR EHESS/CNRS 8558

Global climate change is one of the most pressing questions of our time. It enrolls states, markets and civil society in a complex process mingling political deliberations, scientific expertise, ethics of the future, and government technologies. The recognition of a global climate threat is part of a growing environmental awareness that extends to issues of biodiversity, resources exhaustion, and pollution. This increasingly acute awareness is often described as a radical break from “modernity” and from its restrictive conception of the environmental consequences of human activities, and their “boomerang effects” on human life.

This international colloquium aims at replacing the contemporary linkages between Climate, Knowledge and Politics in a broader historical perspective encompassing the XVIII<sup>th</sup>, XIX<sup>th</sup> and XX<sup>th</sup> Centuries. Was “climate” a category of modern political thought, and did it inform concrete forms of government since the eighteenth century? Did the emerging human sciences participate in contemporary debates and thinking about the climate? Was “climate” part of the environmental awareness of the past? What were the terms of debates about human-induced climate change? To answer these questions we start from two assumptions: first, historical discourse needs to reject the ‘vulgar historicism’ that reduces past climate fears to an old tune, without trying to understand the deep logic at work. Second, great philosophical narratives about the supposed “exit of modernity”, by creating a straw man past, tend to blur our understanding of the historical dynamics and of the contemporary situation.

One aim of the conference is to bring together historians of “the climate” understood both as a philosophical concept, and as a practical concern for individuals and governments. One major theme is the *transverse* nature of the notion of climate. Because this concept was common to many forms of knowledge, academic and popular, including both the moral and the natural

sciences, it was used to analyze a vast variety of facts. The issue of regional climatic differences, for example, brought together disciplines ranging from medicine, geography, botany, anthropology, and law. In the same way, studying the climate in evolution was equally relevant to geology, theology, and history. Were certain kinds of knowledge instrumental in the construction of this climatic paradigm? In which contexts did the transverse nature of climate play a structuring role? Did the constitution of a separate science of weather, put the climatic paradigm into question? Did other, including moral, sciences contribute to the erosion of this climatic paradigm?

Climate was also a practical issue for the government of environments and peoples. Since modern times, climate has been a category of political reflection. But was it involved in government practices? Climatic paradigm defined heterogeneous territories according to the North/South, Hot/Cold, Extreme/Temperate divides, but how were territories more finely described in climatic terms? Did these descriptions justify contrasted ways of governing peoples and environments in the metropolitan and colonial spaces? Some of the papers may focus on climate in relation to time and anticipation. To what extent was this category used so as to anticipate and shape futures? Besides many literary references, what kind of knowledge did governments and administrations put into practice so as to anticipate the difficulties or the benefits that the evolution of climate could entail to human activity? How the impact of human action upon climate was conceived? How were anticipated the consequences its change upon bodies, societies, environments, or the planet as a whole? And more generally, what role did this notion play in the environmental reflexivity of past societies?

This colloquium aims at tackling these complex issues, by using perspectives inspired by political history, environmental history, and science studies.

We particularly encourage proposals for papers that explore the link between **climate and government** and can inform **the long history of environmental concerns**. Proposals focusing on the following themes are more than welcome: **climatic anticipation, humboldtian science, neohippocratism, anthropology, acclimatization, climatic eugenics, climate and political economy/moral sciences**.

Proposals can be made by both Phd students and established scholars. Financial assistance for travel and accommodation will be provided to all conference presenters.

Please email a 500-word abstract and a one-page CV to [climateconferenceparis@gmail.com](mailto:climateconferenceparis@gmail.com) by the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2011.