

Global Warming: The Complete Edition (3rd Edition)

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Global Warming: The Complete Edition (3rd Edition)

By Sir John Houghton

Cambridge University Press, 2004, \$45.00, paperback, ISBN 0521528747

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Discussing the weather is one of our great Canadian pastimes, almost certainly taking over from hockey as the top conversation ice breaker in 2004/2005. Just as everyone goes to school, and so is an expert in education, everyone experiences weather, and so is an expert in climate. This is why we get so enthralled by the eye-popping climate-related headlines of opinion editorials in our local and national newspapers – headlines like: *Global warming will cause an ice age; Scientists debunk climate theory*. Perhaps you, like me, are somewhat fed up with much of the ideological pseudoscience we read on the topic of Global Warming. If this is the case, this book is for you.

In this 3rd edition, Sir John Houghton provides an update to his successful 1st and 2nd editions on the same topic. In particular, this update includes new information from the reports of Working Groups I, II and III to the 3rd Scientific Assessment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Who could better write such a text than Sir John Houghton, the Chair or co-Chair of the Scientific Assessment for the IPCC from 1988 to 2002? This comprehensive text is written for the general public – those who read newspaper editorial pages – and offers an easy-to-read, yet informative, survey of the subject.

The book is organized into twelve interrelated chapters covering the three broad areas of the IPCC Working groups. The four chapters following the introduction deal with basic climate change science at a level easily accessible to those having a minimal science background. In the next three chapters, Sir John moves into a discussion of potential climate change impacts, why these are important and the issue of uncertainty and how we should respond to it. It is here that we get a glimpse into Sir

John's beliefs concerning the links between religion and the environment. Among his many remarkable accomplishments, Sir John is Chair of the UK John Ray Initiative, "an educational charity that works to develop and communicate a Christian understanding of the environment" (<http://www.jri.org.uk>). He has also written *The Search for God: Can Science Help* (1995, 224 pp, Lion Pub. Co., ISBN: 074593305X), which more broadly address the relationships between science and religion.

The next two chapters deal with strategies for dealing with climate change as well as a discussion of future energy supply/transportation and use. These two chapters were perhaps the most novel for me as they provided quantitative estimates of emissions reductions associated with various technology options. Too often, and frequently in rebuttal to some of the more outlandish right-wing think tank climate change pieces, green Gaian gurus espouse the virtues of eating organic, vegetarian food, or some other quick fix, as a means of combating global warming. Such stories bring back memories of the Blue Peter 'how to do it' skit on Episode 28 of the famous Monty Python series where Jacquie tells us how to rid the world of all known diseases: "Well, first of all become a doctor and discover a marvelous cure for something, and then, when the medical profession really starts to take notice of you, you can jolly well tell them what to do and make sure they get everything right so there'll never be any diseases ever again." Sir John takes a more pragmatic approach to the whole issue of climate change adaptation and mitigation – at a level that is once more appropriate for a very wide and diverse audience.

Finally, the book ends with a discussion of the responsibilities and challenges for scientists, policy makers, technology, industry, economists, communicators, educators, and aid agencies, wherein the issue of climate change is staged within the context of other global problems: population growth, poverty, consumption of resources and global security. Christian philosophy and ethics are clearly front and central in this chapter as the unifying thread through the various topics.

Taken together, this is an outstanding treatise on the topic of Global

Warming. It is far more comprehensive than any Summary for Policymakers from the IPCC reports, yet far less technical than the full IPCC reports. I highly recommend it for those of you who wish to dig a little deeper into the issue of Global Warming than the media portrayal of this topic. It will certainly help you with those weather-related (instead of hockey) coffee-room conversations. You even have the time to read it now on Saturday night between 4 and 10 PM (PST)!