

Scientific truth and democratic politics.

Some considerations about the public debate on climate change

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The issue of climate change, like other controversial questions in the contemporary debate, brings about massive tensions in the relationship between scientific truth and democratic politics. The procedures for defining scientific truth have little tolerance for the need to transform them straightforwardly into executive policies, and on the other hand politics bears an intrinsic inertia that makes it scarcely sensitive to the nuances that the scientific method requires. This fragile balance displays three main points of possible rupture. In the first place, the characteristics of scientific truth, with its strict dependence on methodology, lend themselves to wide misunderstandings in public opinion, which may be inclined to attribute to science an oracular character which is foreign to it. Secondly, this balance is threatened within scientific practice itself by the ubiquitous possibility that instances extraneous to the purity of the investigation overlap, particularly in the form of conflicts of interest, above all in the fields and for the types of research that require substantial funding. Thirdly, this balance can be broken by the misleading use that politics can make of scientific truths, which can be attributed, because of ignorance or instrumental motives, a normative value that they cannot have. Each of these possible breaking points in the balance will be subject of analysis within the report..