PSYC185: Psychology of Climate Crisis
Prof AR Aron, Spring 2021, Tuesday/Thursday 5 to 6.20pm

Section 1: Anthropogenic global heating and globalized capitalism
Class 1: The history of anthropogenic global heating
Class 2: Climate Science
Class 3: Climate Impacts
Class 4: The Political Economy of the Climate Crisis

Section 2: From denial to belief
Class 5: Denial, motivated cognition and the rejection of science
Class 6: Science communication: mechanism, consensus and uncertainty
Class 7: Extreme weather, threat perception, ecopsychology and climate grief

Section 3: From belief to collective action
Class 8: The social psychology of collective action
Class 9: Climate justice and the critique of technocratic solutions
Class 10: A Green New Deal
Class 11: The Climate Movement

Life on earth is facing wrenching changes within our lifetimes. A near total consensus amongst climate scientists is that dramatic action must be taken to reduce CO2 emissions over the next decade, but that is not yet happening. Better understanding this climate crisis requires delving into the role played by human psychology: How and why do people arrive at the beliefs they have? When and why do they believe experts? What is the basis of denial? How can science education be most effective? The class focusses on the critical issue of how to shift people from belief to collective action. It considers the psychological and sociological aspects of this shift, the connection with prior social movements, the significance of collective action in the face of political inaction, the characteristics of the current climate movement, and the social democratic solution known as a Green New Deal. A central underlying concept of the class is climate justice – the recognition that those who did the least to incur the crisis will suffer the most, and the recognition that a comprehensive response to the climate crisis must have socioeconomic justice at its core.