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## Sociology: A Guide to Action or to Analysis in the Global Climate Change Crisis? A Call for Action by the Social Sciences and the Humanities

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## Sociology: A Guide to Action or to Analysis in the Global Climate Change Crisis? A Call for Action by the Social Sciences and the Humanities

### Abstract

The debate over the purpose of sociological research has historically been one between Marx and Weber: is sociology's role to analyze society (ala Weber) or to change it (Marx)?

The issue of climate change and environmental destruction is one that has been relegated to the margins of Sociology, being seen as an "environmental" issue. The changes we've seen so far, however, show how this has had and is having a major impact on human beings and, at least in the United States, is having a major impact on the culture of the country, both in general and specifically on different ethnic groups. This paper argues that it is time to move these issues to the forefront of sociology, and proposes that the American Sociological Association move it to the center of its program.

### Keywords

climate change, global climate crisis, sociology, social sciences, humanities

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Climate change and environmental destruction is becoming an increasing threat to the well-being and survival of a growing number of people around the world; it literally threatens the lives and well-being of millions if not billions of people around the planet. (The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in its' latest report of March 19, 2023, estimates that 3.3-3.6 billion people live in contexts vulnerable to climate change: that's almost one out of every two people on the planet! See Scipes, 2023b.)

Yet Sociology—along with other disciplines in the social sciences and humanities—is still caught sitting placidly along the sidelines, refusing to resolve the historic debate between Marx and Weber as to whether the purpose of the social sciences is to use our knowledge to change the world through direct involvement (Marx), or whether providing sophisticated, historically-based analyses of social relations to others is sufficient (Weber). It should be stated that the later position, that advanced by Weber, has dominated the social sciences in the United States for more than one hundred years.

The escalating impact of climate change and environmental devastation, I aver, require that the social sciences and humanities resolve this debate and get directly involved in helping the public and public officials understand the enormity of the issue and, accordingly, to take action to directly address it.

## The Debate

Ken Morrison, in his *Marx, Durkheim, Weber: Formations of Modern Social Thought* (2006) discusses “Weber’s Difference from Marx,” setting out their differences clearly:

*To begin with, Weber rejected Marx’s assertion that the central task of social theory was to change society. Marx believed that it was the historical obligation of all thought to change society and history rather than to simply observe it. As a result, he took the view that the sole purpose of theoretical work was to promote change and eliminate inequalities and hardship in society. Weber, by contrast, disagreed with this in several ways. First, **he thought that the ultimate task of social theory was to search for historical truths and to gather historical facts about society and social development.** Because of this, he believed that social theory itself was in principle a search for historical patterns and relationships in which knowledge of society and history could only be discovered by a comparison of different historical periods (emphasis added) (Morrison, 2006: 276).*

To condense this debate, what was the purpose of social research: action or analysis? While this may initially appear as a nice little academic “debate,” it is argued here that it is of qualitatively greater significance today than ever before.

## The Problem Facing Humanity Today<sup>1</sup>

Despite many popular claims otherwise, scientific evidence overwhelmingly shows that we face an actual crisis in the well-being of humans, animals, and most plants on this planet. The long and short of the situation is that—by current scientific knowledge and research—*unless there are rapid and substantial changes in how human beings interact with and effect our environment by the year 2030, we shall see the beginning of extinction of the human race, animals, and most plants by the end of this (21<sup>st</sup>) century.*<sup>2</sup>

There is a massive amount of research that has been conducted to support such a claim—see, among others, Angus, 2016; Clark, 2019; Cox, 2020; Dunlap and Brulle, 2015; Foster, Clark and York, 2010; Harper, 2008; Harper and Snowden, 2017; Jensen, Keith, and Wilbert, 2021; Klein, 2014; Mann, 2014; McCoy, 2021; and Romm, 2016; for a succinct but powerful account, see Jensen, 2016—and this is not being discussed or debated here; as the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change says, “Scientific evidence for warming of the climate system is unequivocal” (NASA, 2023). The evidence is compelling, it has been rigorously reviewed, and it is so severe that geologists and climate scientists are overwhelmingly accepting that we are now in a new epoch in geological history that has been given the name of “The Anthropocene.” In other words, scientists are now recognizing that *human behavior is having a greater impact on the planet than are natural processes* (Angus, 2016).<sup>3</sup>

The primary actors are both modern corporations and nation-state leaders. These life-threatening actions are a product of our global capitalist economic system in its contemporary incarnations; militaristic nation-states’ actions, commonly known as “imperialism”; and domestic actors that

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<sup>1</sup> Much of this section was first published in Scipes, 2022. It has been enhanced by including subsequently developed research.

<sup>2</sup> With all science being done based on contemporary analysis, the caveat is that things could possibly change with future, unknown and unforeseen advances and developments, and this claim may not be proven correct over time. We have no indication today that this will or will not happen. However, this claim is based on what we know now, and there is nothing on the horizon that can convincingly show that this will not take place. Accordingly, until something develops, we must go on what scientists know today or what they can extrapolate from data gathered up to present time. For one explicit analysis by a highly regarded climate scientist, see the title of Mann, 2014: “Earth Will Cross the Climate Danger Threshold by 2036.”

<sup>3</sup> In addition to that published in books, more recent articles about the current environmental situation (from both popular sources and scientific journals) include Berwin, 2023; Brasher, 2016; Countercurrents Collective, 2022; Cox and Cox, 2022; Editor, 2017; Englehart, 2022a, b; Fountain, 2022; Fountain and Schwartz, 2016; Gerten, Rockstrom, Heinke, Steffen, Richardson, and Cornell, 2015; Gillis, 2017; Goode, 2017; Goodell, 2015, 2017; Horowitz, 2022; Immerwahr, 2015; Jamail, 2016a, 2016b, 2017; Jaramillo and Destouni, 2015; Knight, 2016; McCauley, 2016; Melton, 2016a, 2016b; Plumber and Fountain, 2021; Popovich and Wallace, 2022; Rintoul, Silvano, Pena-Molino, Van Wijk, Rosenberg, Greenbaum and Blankenship, 2016; Rubin, Hubbard, Helder, Throop, Rhyne, White, Glanz, and Williams, 2022; Samenow, 2017; Schultz, 2021; Scipes, 2022, 2022a, 2022b, 2023c; Shao, 2022; Steffen, et. al., 2015; Tabuchi, 2023; and Weisbrod, 2023.

This finding—that human beings are having a greater impact upon the planet than are natural processes—is important: it means that while human beings have caused the problems, they also can also choose to solve them.

support the production of fossil fuels and their derivatives to grow domestic economies.<sup>4</sup> Again, these are not being discussed here, but has been generally well argued by Angus, 2016; Clark, 2019; Foster, Clark and York, 2010; McCoy, 2021; McKibben, 2012; Rasmus, 2016l and Scipes, 2016a: 28-36; 2017; among others. However, for the sake of this article, we must return to environmental “basics.”

## **Environmental Basics**

While the temperature of the Earth has gone through a number of warming and cooling periods over many millennia, *we know that for over 800,000 years, the carbon dioxide component of the atmosphere has never exceeded 300 parts per million (ppm)*. We know that at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, circa 1750, it was about 280 ppm. With a massive jump beginning right after World War II (circa 1948-1952)—known as the “Great Acceleration” (see Angus, 2016)—the carbon dioxide component of the Earth’s atmosphere exceeded 400 ppm for the entire year of 2016 (Jones, 2017). As of this date—writing in mid-February 2023—the carbon dioxide component of the Earth’s atmosphere was 421 ppm (NASA, 2023).<sup>5</sup> Again, in 800,000 years, the carbon dioxide component of the atmosphere has never exceeded 300 ppm.

Why is this important? It means that greenhouse gas emissions are attacking the Earth’s established chemical protection and have weakened it, allowing more solar power from the Sun to enter into the atmosphere, and containing more of the solar heat that has entered the atmosphere.

This can be simply explicated.

The atmosphere that surrounds Earth is really just a collection of chemicals—approximately 78 percent Nitrogen and 21 percent Oxygen—held in orbit by the Earth’s gravity. This chemical composition has generally held steady for the past 11,700 years or so, and has provided the stable conditions that have enabled human beings to create civilizations around the planet.

These chemicals that make up the atmosphere protect the Earth and divert into space much of the solar energy emanating from the Sun and traveling toward Earth, like a flat rock skipping on a placid lake. At the same time, however, the atmosphere allows some of this energy (which we know as “heat”) to enter inside of the atmosphere to reach the Earth. Some of this solar energy that enters the atmosphere is also reflected back into space by ice that covers the planet, at various times and in certain regions. It has been this combination—keeping much of the solar energy outside of the atmosphere, and then reflecting back into space some of the energy that

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<sup>4</sup> These processes are not necessarily separate—especially in the case of the US and many of the other imperial countries—but are delineated to help focus attention on all aspects of the problem; the issue of imperialism, for example, is rarely mentioned in environmental analyses, and this author believes it essential to not only include in analyses, but to draw attention to it, especially the impact of colonization on countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. For one contemporary analysis of imperialism, see Scipes, 2016a: 31-36, based on the work of Jan Nederveen Pieterse, 1989. See also McCoy, 2021. For a recent review of an excellent book on a book with the subtitle “The CIA and the Covert Recolonization of Africa,” see Scipes, 2023d.

<sup>5</sup> For visual evidence of this 800,000+ years of CO<sub>2</sub> and the atmosphere, look at the top chart at <https://climate.nasa.gov/evidence/>. (Accessed on April 17, 2023.)

strikes the Earth—that has kept the Earth at a generally congenial temperature that has allowed human beings to flourish.

However, when we produce goods and services, we use energy. Our main sources of energy for the last 250 years or so have been coal, oil, and natural gas; collectively, these are known as “fossil fuels.”

When fossil fuels are utilized—whether from a factory or out of an electricity generating plant, or out of the tailpipe of our vehicles—they emit carbon dioxide and related gasses; collectively, these are known as “greenhouse” gasses. These greenhouse gasses—mostly carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), methane (CH<sub>4</sub>), nitrous oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>), and troposphere (low altitude) ozone along with water vapor (Harper and Snowden, 2017: 97-99)—in turn, attack the atmosphere, weakening its ability to protect the planet, and letting more heat inside the atmosphere.

Since just after the end of World War II—roughly, 1950—we humans have been emitting so many “greenhouse gases” into the atmosphere that ***these greenhouse gasses have attacked the established chemical protection and weakened it, allowing more solar power from the Sun into the atmosphere, heating the planet. At the same time, it has also contained more of the solar heat that enters the atmosphere, keeping it within the atmosphere.***

*The planet's average surface temperature has risen about 2 degrees Fahrenheit (1 degrees Celsius) since the late 19th century, a change driven largely by increased carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere and other human activities. Most of the warming occurred in the past 40 years, with the seven most recent years being the warmest. The years 2016 and 2020 are tied for the warmest year on record (NASA, 2023).*

In fact, the World Meteorological Organization recently said, “2022 is the eighth consecutive year (2015-2022) that annual global temperatures have reached at least 1 degree C above preindustrial levels” (Stancil, 2023: 2).

This warming (for example, 118 degrees F in the Arctic Circle; see Schultz, 2021) has caused massive ice melting—especially in the Arctic, but also glaciers and the Antarctic as well—which, in turn, has reduced the ice coverage of the planet, reducing its ability to reflect heat back outside the atmosphere. This means that while even more of the solar energy has gotten through the atmosphere, more of that has remained here, as there’s been less and less ice to reflect it out into space (Angus, 2016; Jamail, 2016b; see also Scipes, 2016b).

It is these processes—the weakening of the atmospheric protection, a warming planet, and a reduction of ice coverage—that are leading to other problems.<sup>6</sup> These include rising ocean waters, stronger hurricanes, climate disruption and change which is affecting river flows and agricultural production, a reduction of clean water, deforestation, more wildfires, increased extinction of other species, less biodiversity, reduced animal populations, etc. These each can often add to a warming planet, worsening our problems.

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<sup>6</sup> For an evaluation of impact of climate change on human health, see The Lancet, 2022.

Again, this causes more and more ice to melt, trapping more heat, further increasing the temperature. This is called a positive feedback loop—and it is not good. The essential relationship is *the more greenhouse gasses released, the more damage to the atmosphere*, leading to more warming and many related problems.<sup>7</sup>

This additional heat is also affecting our oceans. The oceans act as an environmental “sink,” capturing some of this heat that enters the atmosphere, keeping the planet from warming even more. This, generally speaking, is a good thing. However, the oceans have now absorbed so much of this heat that they are warming—and are close to being unable to absorb any more; when this happens, the oceans will then be contributing to the further warming of the planet. This warming, along with pollution, is making the oceans more and more acidic. This, in turn, is affecting fish and ocean flora, such as plankton, which is the bottom of the aquatic food chain that about one-third of the world is dependent upon. It is also attacking coral reefs, which are homes for many small ocean animals that eat the plankton. This is all bad.

The world’s forests also act as environmental sinks, similarly to the oceans. They capture (inhale) CO<sub>2</sub> and then, through the process known as photosynthesis, exhale oxygen (O<sub>2</sub>). Thus, they contribute directly to everyone’s well-being. However, when the climate changes and they don’t get the snow or rain that they are used to, forests dry out. Among other things, bugs that would normally get killed by cold temperatures no longer die, so they can further damage trees. When fire strikes, the trees are more vulnerable to it than in the past, and when a tree is burned, it releases all of the CO<sub>2</sub> that it has stored; again, contributing to additional planetary warming.

Joined with this is the continuing destruction of forests to convert to agricultural land, on which to grow cattle to meet the meat-eating demands of the populations of more developed countries. Additionally, besides requiring more resources to produce an equivalent amount of energy from beef than, say, vegetables—it takes 15,415 liters of water to produce a kilogram of beef versus 322 liters per kilogram of vegetables (Water Footprint Network, 2010)—this has other deleterious effects that might not be considered: cattle flatulence produces methane that is an important greenhouse gas; agricultural produces—mostly methane from cattle—produce 10 percent of all greenhouse gases (Greenly, 2022).

The point being made is that by producing greenhouse gases and releasing them into the atmosphere, we are causing other problems as well, and each threaten the well-being of humans, animals, and most plants. We are also destabilizing the atmosphere, allowing quick variations in weather situations; in Northwest Indiana in late December 2022, for example, we went from -6 degrees Fahrenheit to +54 within only a few days (Scipes, 2023b).

Scientists have long argued that this global warming must be stopped before the Earth’s temperature rises above 1.5 degree Celsius (as compared to 1750, when the Industrial Revolution began), or irreparable and possibly fatal harm could be done to humans across the planet. Let’s consider what this might mean.

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<sup>7</sup> Obviously, this means that there has to be a drastic reduction of greenhouse gas emissions; for one proposed plan that addresses both the human and natural environment components, see Scipes, 2017.

In 2000, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Assessment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Control [representing about 2,000 climatologists from 70 nations] reported that “the earth’s mean temperature is very likely to increase 1.4-5.8 degrees C (2.5-10.5 degrees F) between 2000 and 2100. The report defined ‘very likely’ as a chance between 90 to 99 percent probability...” (Harper, 2008: 91-92). In other words, climatologists were predicting that earth’s median temperature has a 90-99% chance of increasing between 1.4-5.8 degrees Centigrade, which is between 2.5-10.4 degrees Fahrenheit, between 2000-2100.

What does that mean?

- A 1.5 degree warming would take us to a climate not experienced since the beginning of agricultural civilization some 6,000 years ago;
- Between 3-5 degrees increase would take us to a climate not experienced by humans since arriving on the earth some 2 million years ago; and
- More than 5 degrees increase would mean a climate not experienced since 40 million years ago, before the evolution of birds, flowering plants, and mammals, and when there were no glaciers in the Antarctic, Iceland, and Greenland (Harper, 2008: 93).

And Harper argues,

*It’s not just the temperature changes that threaten us, regardless of the causes, but how rapidly they occur. Past temperature changes often took place over 1000 to 100,000 years. The problem we face is a fairly sharp projected increase of the temperature of the troposphere in this century (Harper, 2008: 93).*

To give some idea of where things currently stand, as of January 2023, the Earth’s temperature was reported by NASA to have risen 1.18 degrees Celsius (2.12 degrees Fahrenheit) since 1880, which is (obviously) much more recent than 1750, but when accurate records began being recorded (NASA, 2023). This is not good. And it does not take into consideration the warming that has taken place but is not yet sufficient to measure.

What must also be kept in mind, however, is that there is not just “one thing” that is threatening the well-being of people of the planet; climate change is not the only problem. There is actually a combination of things, as suggested above.

To help try to prevent these predictions from becoming true, scientists have established the concept of “planetary boundaries,”<sup>8</sup> and have identified nine planetary boundaries that “are crucial to maintaining an earth-system environment in which humanity can exist safely”:

*Climate change is only one of these, and the others are ocean acidification, stratospheric ozone depletion, the nitrogen and phosphorous cycles, global freshwater use, change in land use, biodiversity loss, atmospheric aerosol loading,*

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<sup>8</sup> “Planetary boundaries” are like the guardrails on a road; as long as you stay within them, you are ok; they are the physical limits to what is known to be safe. Once a planetary boundary is surpassed or exceeded, one gets into areas of instability where things can change qualitatively and without warning; these are known as “tipping points.”



*and chemical pollution. For the last two, atmospheric aerosol loading and chemical pollution, there are not yet adequate physical measures, but for the other seven processes, clear boundaries have been designated. Three of the boundaries—those for climate change, ocean acidification, and stratospheric ozone depletion—can be regarded as [at] tipping points, which at a certain level lead to vast qualitative changes in the earth system that would threaten to destabilize the planet, causing it to depart from the ‘boundaries for a healthy planet’. The boundaries for the other four processes—the nitrogen and phosphorous cycles, freshwater use, change in land use, and biodiversity loss—are better viewed as signifying the onset of irreversible environmental degradation.*

*Three processes have already crossed their planetary boundaries: climate change, the nitrogen cycle, and biodiversity loss (Foster, Clark, and York, 2010: 14).*

Steffen, et. al., updated the initial research on planetary boundaries (PBs) in February 2015. They report that:

*... two of the planetary boundaries—climate change and biosphere integrity—are recognized as core PBs based on their fundamental importance for the ES [Earth System]. Climate change is a manifestation of the amount, distribution, and net balance of energy at Earth’s surface; the biosphere regulates material and energy flows in the ES and increases its resilience to abrupt and gradual change. Anthropogenic perturbation levels of four of the ES processes (climate change, biosphere integrity, biogeochemical flows, and land-system change) exceed the proposed PB.... (Steffen, et. al., 2016).*

Note that “biosphere integrity” was not one of the initial nine planetary boundaries. (See also Masters, 2022).

It is clear, and incontrovertible, that the environment on this planet is under attack, and that the ramifications threaten the very existence of humans, animals, and most plants. It is also clear that this crisis has largely been ignored by governmental, social, and corporate “leaders”—and that the corporate media has enabled this to happen.

However, this might all seem abstract. Alfred W. McCoy discusses these issues in relationship to the US military. He specifically addresses “Pressures on US Global Presence”:

*In the United States, the impact of climate change is a key factor—along with economic processes and demographic changes—that will likely force a reduction or even a retreat from its worldwide military commitments. More broadly, the juxtaposition of just a few key trends indicates the potential role of gathering environmental crisis in catalyzing the shift to a new world order. First and fundamentally, America’s share of the gross world product has declined steadily, from 50 percent in 1950 to a projected 15 percent by 2024. But its defense budget*

*has moved in the opposite direction, rising 150 percent from \$274 billion in 2000 to \$710 billion in 2019, with planned increases to \$747 billion by 2024.<sup>9</sup>*

*Complicating Washington's ability to sustain the high costs of its global military presence, its own 2018 National Climate Assessment predicted the country will face multiple consequences of climate change by 2050, if not before—including sustained drought, proliferating wildfires, coastal storm surges, far more intense hurricanes, damaged infrastructure, and declining harvests—all of which it is already experiencing to some degree. The combined impact of "rising temperatures, extreme heat, drought, wildfire on rangelands, and heavy downpours" will cut US agricultural production back to the levels of the 1980s. Indicating the lack of preparation for such cascading changes, the report warned: "The potential need for millions of people and billions of dollars of coastal infrastructure to be relocated in the future creates challenging legal, financial, and equity issues that have not been addressed." Indeed, another government report, issued in 2020, warned that 40 percent of the US population lives in coastal areas vulnerable to sea level rise, which has accelerated rapidly. By 2100, seas worldwide are very likely to rise at least 12 inches about their level in 2000; however, if carbon emissions continue unchecked, they could surge as much as 8.2 feet (McCoy, 2021: 292-293).*

And if all of this is not enough to make the point, the headline in Henry Fountain's article in the February 14, 2022, *New York Times* does: "How Bad is the Western Drought? Worst in 12 Centuries, Study Finds: Fueled by Climate Change, the Drought that Started in 2000 is now the driest Two Decades since 800 A.D." (Fountain, 2022a).

And I do not think it necessary to delve into the wildfires in California, the flooding in eastern Kentucky, or the awesome devastation of Hurricane Ian in southwestern Florida, all in 2022, to further my point; nor the massive flooding across California in January 2023.

### **What Now for the Social Sciences?**

After considering the data presented above—and there is much, much more—it seems obvious that the time for sophisticated analysis *alone* is over; it clearly is not sufficient for meeting the burgeoning climate crisis. That does not mean, however, that there is no need for sophisticated analysis; it just means that it is not enough to only do sophisticated analysis (and perhaps limit its dissemination to academic journals that are rarely read beyond a few specialists) or to write in ways unintelligible to most people. In terms of this paper, it means we sociologists need to place Weber on the shelf and embrace Marx's call to change the world by getting publicly involved in this battle.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> It actually was \$800.67 billion in 2021, and this was before Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 (Macrotrends, 2023).

<sup>10</sup> Let me be clear so that hopefully I will not be misunderstood: I'm adopting Marx's call for involvement and direct engagement, not necessarily his specific prescriptions. I'm critical of the whole body of work that falls under the rubric of "Marxism," not out of ideological opposition, but because I do not think it delivers near what it suggests.

In fact, as shown above, humans face the possible extermination of people, animals, and most plants on the planet. The context in which we currently live requires social scientists and those working in the humanities—and really, all human beings—to mobilize and demand these issues be forthrightly confronted.

It is truly a call for global mobilization, and this mobilization must be based on accurate data and sophisticated understandings. But it must be based on the public involvement of social scientists and those in the humanities, especially sociologists.

One thing that sociologists bring into the discussion is an inclusion of the interactive effects of humans and the natural environment; to put it another way, the interactive effects of social and natural environments (for one example, see Scipes, 2017). Environmentalists have long detailed the effects humans have had on the environment, but until fairly recently, they have tended not to reflect on how environmental changes have affected and will increasingly affect humans; issues such as population and relocation, housing, water supplies, transportation, health, work, agriculture, industry, travel, etc., all immediately come to mind.<sup>11</sup> The interactive effects go both ways, and both need to be kept in the analysis.

This means sociologists need to bring in our expertise about all things social, everything from our small towns and rural regions to nation-states, and the entire globe, and from every country around the world, and covering all of our subjects of research.<sup>12</sup> And, I argue, they all must be re-oriented, at least in part, to addressing the issues of climate change and environmental destruction while addressing long-standing problems of social inequities.

And it is of utmost importance for our professional organizations to join this global mobilizing, utilizing their knowledge, experience, connections, networks, expertise, and recognized professional legitimacy in disseminating information to our global societies: we must do everything we can to share our collective knowledge around the world.

This suggests a couple of projects that I argue should be put on the front burners of the American Sociological Association (ASA).<sup>13</sup>

(1) ASA should initiate a web-based journal—with the widest range of authors from around the world included—specifically addressing these issues, with devotion of extensive resources to

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<sup>11</sup> These issues, and the political and social processes involved to get them addressed, invite other social scientists such as political scientists, psychologists, anthropologists, economists, and others, to join with sociologists to address these issues; further, humanitarian “story tellers”—such as writers, journalists, literary analysts, communications professionals, and others—are also needed to convey this issues and concerns to the widest public audience possible.

<sup>12</sup> This is in the spirit of ASA President Emeritus Michael Burawoy’s 2004 call to bring “public sociology” into the fold of the discipline (Burawoy, 2005, 2021)—and see the report by the ASA’s Task Force on Institutionalizing Public Sociologies (Nyden, 2005) for recommendations on how to proceed on this—but I’m going far beyond this: I’m basically arguing that all sociologists should become public sociologists in addition to however else they see their involvement with the discipline.

<sup>13</sup> The ASA is not the only professional sociological organization; the Society for the Study of Social Problems is another. However, the ASA is arguably the most important professionally. While I only consider the ASA in this article, professional organizations across the country should take similar actions as these proposed.

producing, advertising, and disseminating our research to elected political leaders, social institutions (including universities, high schools, churches, labor unions, etc.), the media (both mainstream and alternative outlets), and the public, which includes people from around the world. Thus, this web-based journal should not be placed behind any firewalls, but available to anyone in the world with an internet connection for free.<sup>14</sup>

The research published should be peer-reviewed and of the highest quality. An activist-oriented sociologist, with extensive experience of activist orientation in their research as well as political engagement, should be solicited and appointed at first opportunity; a highly-experienced editorial board, each with similar qualifications, should be solicited and established as perhaps a very early project.

While new research on the effects of climate change and environmental destruction should be part of chosen subject matter, much more important would be research focusing on countering these problems and suggestions for future organization of social orders should be made of primary concern.

Another related area would be including studies of how to disseminate these findings and concern, both in the classroom and to the larger publics. This would specifically include efforts to get the mass media to focus on these issues and opening their spaces (pages and social media posts) to folks addressing related concerns. The ultimate goal would be to get a world-wide discussion of these issues, what to do about them, how to organize to educate and mobilize to make these changes, and to evaluate the quality of this work so as to make it more clear, efficient, and powerful.

(2) I suggest ASA transform our annual meetings from disciplinary “gab-fests”—although, at best, with projection to wider audiences of excellent research—to activist-oriented meetings intended to promote and project excellent research from across the discipline for the purposes of engaging more and more sociologists and our graduate students to both address these concerns and to enhance our ability to project and effect public discourse and political decisions.

Whether this would mean transformation of entire ASA meetings, or to make this an included option for all, would have to be democratically decided by the membership. However, I am not arguing for another section or even the enhancement of current sections within ASA: I am arguing for, at minimum, a MAJOR portion of the entire annual meeting being devoted to research about and projection thereof the issues of climate change and environmental devastation. I want to go beyond a few people and or relatively small groups talking only to themselves to make this a major feature of forthcoming ASA annual meetings; I want this to be seen as, and projected accordingly, as a major effort of the entire American Sociological Association, with encouragement of similar efforts at other national, regional, and international sociological organizations.

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<sup>14</sup> This journal, *Class, Race and Corporate Power*, is an excellent example of this kind of openness: it is open to authors from around the world who do high quality work that focuses on these systemic issues; this web site is freely available for anyone in the world with an internet connection, and it also allows authors and other viewers to see where their work has been downloaded any place in the world.

Along with that go several other things: (a) personal participation in annual meetings be limited to people within a certain “region” with mileage limits suggested—unless other work brings one to the city of the conference—and inviting others to participate electronically from afar. While annual meetings are important, we need to reduce our environmental impact of holding them, including travel to and from. Also, by reducing the size of the meetings, we will be able to have meetings in cities with smaller venues than we can currently meet; over time, meaning a wider dispersion of participation, sharing of work, and projection of our research findings.

(b) We need to end the requirement of having fully written papers to be submitted six months or so in advance; our goal should be to expand participation, not restrict it. A shift to abstracts would be sufficient, as is being done in advance of the International Sociological Association’s World Congress of Sociology in June-July 2023 in Melbourne; there will be people on-hand participating as well as electronic participation from around the world. Without the limitation of physical participation, there would be no need for such restrictive measures.

(c) We want to make sure that the latest developments are being considered for the conference. There should be a committee established to allow research to be presented and discussed that may be as close to a month beforehand. Although I may have missed it, having attended the Annual Meeting in Los Angeles in 2022, I cannot remember seeing any formal discussion of the war in Ukraine, even though the Russian invasion began in late February before our August meeting. Again, to be clear, discussion of that war should include not only the invasion and subsequent impact, but discussion of the US and its allies in the European Union role in precipitating those events.

And (d), I would encourage all present to partake in a local tour at each Annual Conference. I would encourage the ASA set up a coordinated program that introduces participants to environmental organizations in the area, and to offer opportunities to speak to local activists, citizens, and workers about the effects of the climate crisis on that specific area, as well opportunities to hear from local officials on their efforts to respond/mitigate impact of the crisis on their constituents.<sup>15</sup>

## **Synopsis**

In short, I have argued that the sociology (and the other social sciences and the humanities) must transform itself from an analysis-focused discipline to one dedicated to learning from and transforming the social world. We have complained for years about the attention garnered by economists in the media; should we adopt an orientation along the lines suggested in this paper, I suggest, that the media will be beating down the doors of our leading researchers for informed commentary on processes that literally will determine the fate of humanity on this planet.

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<sup>15</sup> Thanks to graduate student Kayla Vasilko for these ideas, in response to my previous reporting of my community visit to Boyle Heights in Los Angeles as part of the 2022 Annual Conference.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has looked at Sociology's historical privileging Weber's view of "analysis" over Marx's view of "action" and, in light of the issues of climate change, with all of its expanding ramifications, has argued it is time to put Weber on the historical shelf and to develop following Marx's approach. This does not necessarily mean that we have to endorse and accept all of Marx' claims and conclusions, but that his understanding of the need for social engagement not only remains salient, but necessary.

It suggests that professional organizations, such as the American Sociological Association and others, have an important role to play in addressing the issues addressed herein. These organizations bring together thousands of trained professionals and with their knowledge, experience, connections, networks, expertise, and recognized professional legitimacy, and can be crucial in disseminating information to our global societies

In short, we have to develop sociologists who are activists, not just researchers or teachers: we need sociologists who are adept in responding to a worldwide crisis. We have training, skills, and knowledge to assert ourselves, and serve the world. We do not have the time to do anything less.

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