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Wanted: More Climate Change in Sociology; More Sociology in Climate Change (Policy)

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The publication of three major volumes on the sociology of climate change in 2015 is an indication of the rise to prominence of this topic in the discipline. Readers might presume some degree of overlap among three contemporary sociological texts all focusing on the same issue. These three books, however, offer entirely unique contributions, albeit complementary ones. In *Power in a Warming World*, David Ciptet, Timmons Roberts, and Mizan Khan offer readers a rich, theoretically informed empirical account of two central social dimensions of climate change: inequality and international governance. Alexander Stoner and Andony Melathopoulos, in *Freedom in the Anthropocene*, provide a much-needed critical theory contribution to our sociological inquiries into climate change and, importantly, the sense of helplessness that pervades our confrontations with it. Riley Dunlap and Robert Brulle's *Climate Change and Society: Sociological Perspectives*, on the other hand, compiles a comprehensive synthesis of sociological attention to climate change to date, offering both reason to commend the valuable contributions made and a roadmap for future research. More detailed reviews of each book follow.

Power in a Warming World: The New Global Politics of Climate Change and the Remaking of Environmental Inequality, by **David Ciptet, J. Timmons Roberts, and Mizan R. Khan**. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015. 328 pp. \$26.99 paper. ISBN: 9780262029612.

Climate Change and Society: Sociological Perspectives, edited by **Riley E. Dunlap and Robert J. Brulle**. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. 460 pp. \$29.95 paper. ISBN: 9780199356119.

Freedom in the Anthropocene: Twentieth-Century Helplessness in the Face of Climate Change, by **Alexander M. Stoner and Andony Melathopoulos**. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015. 125 pp. \$67.50 cloth. ISBN: 9781137503879.

The core premise asserted by Ciptet, Roberts, and Khan, on the basis of decades of participatory research among the three of them, is that continued efforts at

international cooperation under the auspices of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change are essential *and* that the ultimate success of this process hinges on significantly bolstered action and accountability at lower levels of governance.

The authors begin with this question: How has global inequality been made, reproduced, and contested through processes of international climate negotiations? Finding the answers to this question offered by existing schools of thought wanting, they contribute a refreshingly inductive theoretical account of political process, on the basis of direct experience in the annual meetings of the Conference of the Parties for over a decade. According to the authors (and I concur), with this approach they provide a social relational analysis of power “that is attentive to both macrostructural and micro-relational processes that have shaped inequality and inaction in the contemporary UN climate negotiations and beyond” (p. xi). Perhaps the one drawback of the book is its publication just before what has come to be seen as one of the most momentous of COP meetings, the Climate Summit in Paris, France in December 2015.

The rapid transformation during the period under consideration of four particular macro-structural processes characterizing our global order has been especially influential; the authors note dramatic shifts in political economy, ecology, geopolitics, and transnational civil society, all with consequences for political process. Beginning with those sources of power and influence that frequently receive attention, the authors offer a number of key insights and many nuances. The authors note the growing threats to the gospel of neoliberalism that have infiltrated climate negotiations, suggesting we are approaching a potentially transformative moment of paradigm shift, but acknowledge that, given the degree of entrenchment of neoliberalism in political and economic institutions, it isn’t going to roll over anytime soon.

Similarly, they give a nod to the enduring dominance of transnational capital in international politics, noting the role of fossil fuel corporations in particular. Despite the growing resistance to fossil fuels on many fronts, these corporations retain undue influence over climate negotiations, with an

insider status enjoyed by few other stakeholders. A scathing analysis of environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) is also offered. Large, moderate ENGOS have effectively endorsed neoliberalism by supporting market mechanisms and, increasingly, entering into coalitions with business. They also receive the lion’s share of funding, enabling a stronger level of engagement in the annual meetings of the Conference of the Parties, and often access to closed negotiations is restricted to these groups. Yet, as noted repeatedly throughout the volume, effective outcomes—particularly those favoring climate justice—require further engagement of civil society, posing the need to empower other organizations that have been marginalized to date.

While coercion and material interest are the currencies of political power that often receive exclusive attention among political theorists, Ciplest and colleagues provide evidence of the influence of more subtle processes involving identities, ideas, and institutions. The authors provide evidence of a number of emerging new identities that have served to disrupt enduring coalitions—such as the fragmentation of the G77 group of countries into several groups with differing interests, including rapidly developing countries, those dependent upon fossil fuel extraction, and those most vulnerable to climate change. We have also seen the emergence of hybrid coalitions among large environmental non-governmental organizations and businesses. Depictions of global politics along the North-South divide are simply no longer a valid interpretation of the rapidly shifting and splintering coalitions on the international stage.

Despite enduring conflict, the authors provide evidence of several instances in which the role of non-coercive, legitimate power prevailed; in other words, shared ideas of what is socially acceptable. The outcomes of negotiation have thus been influenced by coercion, but also concessions, and norm alignment. The authors also identify some key emerging moments that shaped subsequent negotiations in meaningful ways, including the early adoption of market mechanisms, which set parameters around the range of mitigation strategies for years to come. More recently, the rise to

the fore of agreement on the need to address adaptation—raising the issue of adaptation finance—has added to the complexity of negotiations and given a voice to countries that had previously been on the sidelines of negotiations, like low-lying island states. Belatedly, gender has made it onto the agenda, while indigenous organizations, which have been a consistent source of pressure in COP meetings, have made limited progress.

Toward the end of the book, the authors venture into political forecasting, exploring six possible scenarios (not necessarily exclusive) in terms of their likelihood and character: exclusive inaction (complete breakdown of international cooperation); exclusive action (incapacitation of the UN process, action taken at lower levels), renewables transition, and democratic dysfunction (growing reliance on desperate techno-fixes that don't challenge powerful interests; seen as especially likely); going local; and finally—clearly their preferred choice—climate justice. The authors acknowledge the low likelihood of realizing such a scenario but provide the criteria that would be needed to get there: achieving climate justice would require nations to agree on fair contributions and to involve the corporate sector; it would require strong social movement activity, and yet it would be led by community-level initiatives.

While the book provides a rather dark picture, the final chapter is cautiously optimistic. The authors speculate that we may be at a point of opening for substantial shifts in power and discourses that can lead us down a new, more constructive pathway, but capitalizing on this opportunity window will require significant changes in the organizational structures and discourses that characterize the climate change social movement currently, involving both the empowerment of local organizations and transnational coordination.

Alexander Stoner and Andony Melathopoulos's subtitle says it all: *Twentieth-Century Helplessness in the Face of Climate Change*. The central character in this narrative is the concept of the Anthropocene, introduced by atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen. Ostensibly a concept coined on the basis of

mounting earth systems observations, the Anthropocene represents far more than this, suggesting that with the failure of institutional attempts to address ecological crisis, only drastic technological and engineering solutions remain at our disposal. Stoner and Melathopoulos observe that indeed ecological degradation has escalated at the same rate as our growing knowledge of and attempted responses to these conditions, generating a sense of despair about the continuation of the runaway development pattern that defined the previous century. This social context has provided fertile soil for the emergence of the Anthropocene concept, suggesting grim acceptance of our seeming incapacity to self-consciously transform societies.

Stoner and Melathopoulos argue, however, that this incapacity is not inevitable; rather, it is due to the very fact that we are alienated to the core, and emergence of the Anthropocene does little to challenge this alienation. To the contrary, the Anthropocene merely reinforces it. The authors critique the Anthropocene concept for its failure to confront the social structural roots of ecological problems, with reference to the works of three critical theorists, Lukács, Adorno, and Postone, all of whom attempted to understand the changes taking place in their time—the dawn of the Anthropocene.

Marx forecasted proletarian politics to facilitate a conscious transformation of society not unlike what is being called for now. But, according to György Lukács (1885–1971), revolutionary tendencies were stifled by state reforms, which also enabled new forms of domination and helplessness with the rise of the bureaucratic state. Yet, according to the authors of this volume, Lukács also “specifies the conditions under which society's relationship to history could be freed from its ‘rigid, reified structure’” (Lukács [1923]1971:202, cited on p. 32), defining the key contemporary value of Lukács's work. Central to this process is a confrontation with reification, whereby human subjectivity is constrained by the commodification of all things, which conceals their qualitative and material essence. Proletarian politics has the potential to overcome reification, but only if it

confronts the compartmentalization and fragmentation of society, a paradigm forwarded by the sciences at the time. According to Lukács, through capitalism nature has become socialized and society has become naturalized. Writing in 1923, Lukács says: "the essence of history lies in the changes undergone by those *structural forms* which are the focal points of man's interaction with environment at any given point and which determine the objective nature of both his inner and his outer life" ([1923]1971:153, cited on p. 39). The authors find value in Lukács's attention to reification as a mediating process between objective human-ecological transformations and our perceptions of nature. Lukács helps us to understand how we can be aware of ecological crises and yet feel helpless to do anything about them. Contrarily, with the concept of the Anthropocene, Crutzen and his colleagues effectively naturalize, or "reify," a historically specific process.

Theodor Adorno (1903–1969) offers a critique similar to that of Lukács, premised on Hegel's assertion that reason—specifically, determinate negation or "recognizing the limits as well as the conditions of possibility of our conceptualizations" (p. 51)—is necessary to consciousness. Adorno calls for a critique of identity thinking, or that tendency to define and thus limit our conceptualization of things, a practice reinforced by capitalism and positivism and entirely ahistorical, which sounds very much like processes that contribute to Lukács's reification. Adorno calls for a negative dialectics to confront identity thinking. Stoner and Melathopoulos see identity thinking in modern environmentalism, through which activists are integrated into capitalism rather than confronting it. This, for these authors, is environmentalism's "greatest stumbling block" (p. 58). Ultimately, environmentalism has simply furthered the interests of capital, a point also made by Ciplet and his colleagues. Also similar to Lukács is Adorno's attention to the role of states in preventing consciousness, through the comprehensive administration of society that emerged after the Second World War. Production, distribution, and consumption are lumped together into an illusory totality administered by states—an illusion that

helps to explain society's incapacity to react to crisis.

Moishe Postone (b. 1942) attempts to advance Marx's theory of capital with reference to the era of the Anthropocene, confronting critics that refer to the current era as evidence that society is incapable of the conscious emancipation postulated by Marx. We need to be able to recognize capital's internal tensions and the means by which they constrain resistance and inspire helplessness. Like Marx, he draws attention to the role of labor in human-ecology relations. Through the domination of people by their own labor, we have lost control over our own productive capacities. He also focuses on processes of social domination that received less attention by Marx, one being the control of science and technology by capitalism. In capitalism, transformation of the commodity form is an end in and of itself, necessarily achieved through the transformation of matter, an ever-accelerating process seemingly beyond the control of agents. Producing more and more in less and less time—requiring continued domination of labor and ever more biophysical inputs—has served to increase (and concentrate) *wealth*, but not *value*. Thus "[t]he Great Acceleration could then be reconceptualized as the unfolding of the contradiction between wealth and value throughout the latter half of the twentieth century" (p. 85). Breaking through this system requires that we center our attention on "the deeper social structure of value" (p. 91).

The authors conclude, "the Anthropocene has yet to facilitate a critical and historical understanding of the environment-society problematic" (p. 100). All three theorists exemplify the extent to which our current helplessness in the face of ecological crisis is rooted in alienation and reification. A politics with any hope of confronting this crisis must begin with a new theory of praxis that fully confronts these mediating processes.

Riley Dunlap and Robert Brulle undertake what is perhaps the most ambitious of pursuits among the three volumes by seeking to synthesize the contributions sociology has made to the field of climate change research. The editors rightfully point out that the social sciences have played

a marginal role in climate science, although economics and psychology have made more headway than other disciplines. As a result, the role of humans in the climate system is often treated as a black box, and climate change is in effect depicted as an external threat being imposed on us rather than the culmination of multiple, socially driven processes that would need to be recognized and confronted if we were to address climate change in a meaningful way.

Sociological research on climate change emerged in the 1990s, and a respectable record of achievements is represented in the peer-reviewed literature; yet this work remains inaccessible to the wider intellectual community. *Climate Change and Society: Sociological Perspectives* is Dunlap and Brulle's effort to rectify this, under the auspices of the first Task Force on Climate Change to be supported by the American Sociological Association. The editors identify three dominant currents defining social science treatments of climate change: 1) Coupled systems/sustainability science treatments in which social scientists have been largely an add-on to natural-science-dominated efforts; 2) Individual-level analysis, largely promulgated by economists and psychologists and seemingly heartily endorsed by the IPCC; and finally 3) Post-political framing of climate change, constituting efforts to highlight the means by which dominant discourses conceal the social-structural context in which climate change is embedded, which has the effect of depoliticizing our responses. Although the third offers a level of critical analysis absent in the first two, according to the editors all three nonetheless have narrowed the scope of social-scientific inquiry. The book is organized around the central task of addressing this question: what can sociology offer to broaden the scope of this social-scientific inquiry, and what can it offer to the climate sciences at large? The answer to that question is presented in eleven chapters, organized according to research theme.

The first chapter synthesizes sociological attention to climate change's driving forces. The authors accord particular attention to empirical research on IPAT (Impact = Population \times Affluence \times Technology), the formula originally introduced by Paul Ehrlich, and modernization, including descriptions of

research falling under both Treadmill of Production and Ecological Modernization perspectives—they conclude there is no solid supportive evidence for the latter.

The next chapter, by Charles Perrow and Simone Pulver on organizations and markets, was one of my favorites, drawing attention to the disproportionate power of markets and corporations (e.g., fossil fuel lobbies) and thus offering a hard-hitting counterpoint to the predominant inclination to blame individual consumers for the climate problematic. At the same time, the costs and impacts of climate change all too often are counted in dollars, thus discounting other social and ecological impacts and prioritizing market mechanisms that have limited effect.

Following is a chapter that focuses on consumption. While the individual consumer still gets close attention, sociologists in this research field have challenged rational actor depictions of consumers and have also fired a shot at macro-level, aggregate approaches like IPAT by drawing attention to the means by which individual actions are embedded in historically specific social systems. Sociologists have provided evidence of the extent to which consumption is influenced by status, class, marketing, and culturally embedded practices. Attention to climate justice and inequality follows in the next chapter, summarizing research that highlights inequalities in contributors to climate change and draws special attention to the distribution of vulnerability. These inequalities are so stark that sociologists have begun to speak of climate debt, akin to the concept of ecological debt introduced in earlier work by environmental sociologists.

Next, readers find a pair of chapters highlighting research by sociologists on climate change adaptation and mitigation, respectively. The empirical record in these areas is quite strong, with sociologists describing the types of social resources that constitute adaptive capacity. Attention has also been given by sociologists to the politically contentious topic of adaptation finance: case studies of disasters and migration. Similarly, efforts at mitigation have been strongly influenced by processes that tend to be overlooked in academic accounts provided by other disciplines, including social movements, shifts in fertility, the growing

influence of cities, and state position in the world order.

Following these is a chapter focusing on civil society and social movements, providing a useful review of a set of social movement theories and their complementary applications to climate change movements, highlighting the role of discourse. Public opinion is the next chapter theme. The authors of this chapter synthesize sociological research on this topic, noting the challenges offered by sociological research of prevailing psychological accounts of public opinion, which tend to draw generalized conclusions from empirical studies that catalogue individual views but say little about the factors shaping those views. The following chapter is devoted to one of those factors—the organized denial countermovement and its corporate roots—that has enjoyed the limelight recently, after years of compelling empirical research.

Two chapters on theory and methods follow, the former noting the lack of agreement among social theories of climate change on the severity of the issue, the ultimate drivers, and realist versus constructivist standpoints, particularly as they pertain to climate science. The chapter on methods provides an

overview of the multiple methods used in sociological inquiries into climate change, highlighting the role of advanced computing technologies in more recent years.

The concluding chapter takes a look at the efforts of social scientific organizations, formal and informal, and synthesizes a future research agenda on the basis of the preceding chapters. A key message offered by the editors: we cannot afford to entertain post-political perspectives. When social forces are key drivers of climate change, addressing them means conflict and politics.

While each of these books offers something unique, and while the three will likely attract different audiences, I was struck by the degree of agreement across the volumes on several core themes. Together these volumes make clear that sociological inquiry can provide crucial insights into why social responses to climate change have been wholly inadequate and, potentially, how to change course. The relative exclusion of such inquiries to date in the broader field of climate science has limited broader conceptualizations of climate-society relations to overly simplistic accounts of those relations, leading to faulty prescriptions for change.

Life and Times of the American Magazine

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Deploying all the skills of a meticulous quantitative social scientist, Heather Haveman has written the biography of an industry: “The life and times of the American Magazine, the early years.” To this end, she constructs a systematic record of the number and character of American magazines since the first was published in 1741 through 1860 when the Civil War profoundly tested “the making of America.” This tracing of the industry is akin to a collective biography that presents the lives of a set of firms as they unfold in metabolic detail, through annual measurements of height and weight as well as shifting distributions of waking hours across a range of activities,

Magazines and the Making of America: Modernization, Community, and Print Culture, 1741–1860, by **Heather A. Haveman**. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015. 407 pp. \$45.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780691164403.

all carefully assessed in relation to environmental correlates. Rather than focusing on cases already identified as significant in the historical literature, Haveman’s study comprises as much of the entire population as could be reconstructed from a dizzying range of sources, both primary and secondary.