

HSS4F HUMANISTS AND SOCIAL SCIENTISTS 4 FUTURE

STATEMENT BY HUMANISTS AND SOCIAL SCIENTISTS IN SUPPORT OF GLOBAL YOUTH UPRISING FOR CLIMATE ACTION

“You say you love your children above all else, and yet you’re stealing their future in front of their very eyes.... We cannot solve the crisis without treating it like a crisis.” - Greta Thunberg, COP 24, UN Climate Summit, 2018, Katowice, Poland

As educators and researchers, we are committed to exploring the most challenging questions and responsibilities in communities of learners and researchers. Our work gives us the privilege to interact on a daily basis with young people. We take deep inspiration from the international mobilization they are leading, and we join them in their refusal to accept the lack of action to prevent climate catastrophe.

Acknowledging Aldo Leopold’s insight that “one of the penalties of an ecological education is that one lives alone in a world of wounds” (1949), and persuaded by ample experience that a community can help us overcome this solitude and address the grief, anxiety, and anger caused by this “world of wounds,” we declare our support for the Fridays for Future movement,¹ as well as Scientists for Future,² Psychologists for Future,³ and a growing number of groups engaged in this insurgent, international youth-led movement for climate justice.

As scholars of the humanities and social sciences, we study and teach critical analysis of political, economic, psychological, cultural, ecological, legal, and global power relations; of the obscene disparity of resources between rich and poor countries, communities and individuals; of the historical, political, and psychological causes of discrimination, racism, and genocide; and of the power of social movements to instigate positive change non-violently by withholding consent and cooperation, as did the US Civil Rights movement.

These analyses are driven by fundamental moral and ethical questions that should now profoundly inform how we address the climate crisis and the need for climate justice. Counting ourselves among the growing number of scholars studying and teaching how the climate crisis (catastrophe would not be too strong a word) is anticipated, examined, and reflected on in the social world and in cultural productions such as literature, film, art, and critical theory, we witness how this crisis is shaping the collective unconscious in the dystopian narratives that drive an important segment of popular culture. Our disciplines also have great potential for nurturing the languages of imagination that give voices to living creatures’ – including humans’ – pain, despair, and sorrow. Those languages are needed now more than

ever for envisioning and creating a world in which climate justice is a foundation of our communities – locally, nationally, and internationally.

The scientific case for urgent climate action is undeniable. To cite just the most recent grim findings: the latest IPCC report shows how warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius will create climate chaos;⁴ the IPBES Extinction Report warns that biodiversity is declining globally at unprecedented rates, with one million species facing extinction;⁵ and UNEP’s 2018 Emissions Gap Report reveals that the Paris process is falling woefully short of what is needed to stay below maximum warming of +1.5°C or even +2°C,⁶ a fact that corresponds to this year’s record high measurement of 415 parts per million of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere (the highest level in 800,000 years).⁷

These facts are reaching our students and young people around the world. The climate crisis pushes many of them toward anxiety, and some of them to reactionary extremism, melancholia, and even despair.⁸ It also drives their demands for ambitious climate policy at every scale, for curricula relevant to their changing world, and for climate justice in all of its forms, especially intergenerational climate justice.

As educators, we acknowledge their anguish, for they will inherit the dire consequences of failed climate action and rightly perceive that the possibility of such a failure presents a massive threat to their lives, their world, and their futures. Failure to act also constitutes a violation of their human right to environmental well-being.

We are ready to join all those committed to remaking the world in the image of climate justice — a dream that we know is possible because we already see it emerging concretely in conversations and initiatives like Fridays for Future, the Sunrise Movement,⁹ the Climate Mobilization,¹⁰ the Youth Climate Strike,¹¹ the Green New Deal,¹² Johan Rockström et al.’s Roadmap for rapid decarbonization,¹³ Extinction Rebellion,¹⁴ and many more.

By our signatures, we commit ourselves to solidarity with these movements and initiatives and to directing the rich resources of critical analysis and creative imagination to vigorously support their demands in our teaching, scholarship, and practice.

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SOURCES

¹ <https://www.fridaysforfuture.org/about>

² <https://scientistsforfuture.org/>

³ <https://psychologistsforfuture.org/en/>

⁴ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>

⁵ Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES): <https://www.ipbes.net/news/Media-Release-Global-Assessment>

⁶ United Nations Environment Programme Emissions Gap Report: <https://www.unenvironment.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2018>

⁷ For the Scripps Institute Keeling Curve see:

<https://scripps.ucsd.edu/programs/keelingcurve/2019/06/04/animation-of-keeling-curve-history-updated-to-include-2019-milestone/>

⁸ <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/how-climate-change-affects-mental-health-835807/>

⁹ <https://www.sunrisemovement.org/>

¹⁰ <https://www.theclimatemobilization.org/>

¹¹ <https://www.youthclimatestrikeus.org/>

¹² <https://www.sunrisemovement.org/gnd>

¹³ <http://www.iicat.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Johan-Rockstro%CC%88m-A-Roadmap-for-Rapid-Decarbonization.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://rebellion.earth/the-truth/about-us/>

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