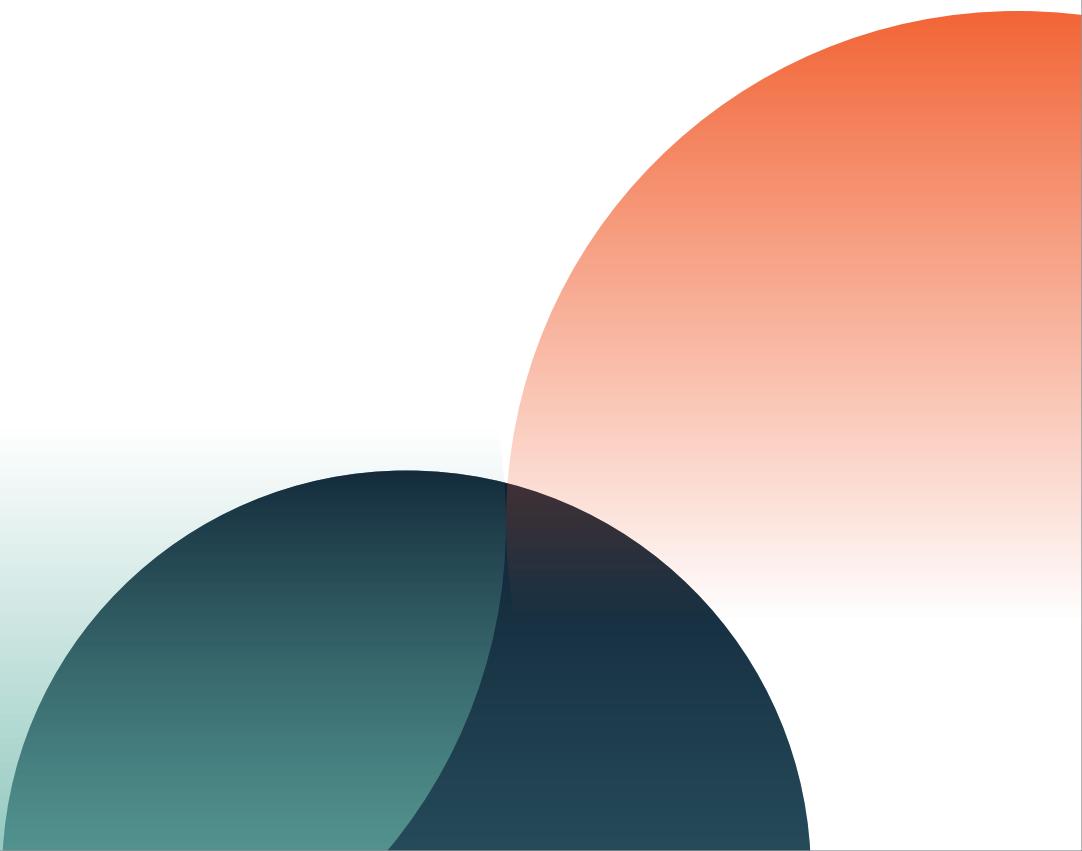


WILLIAM E. CONNOLLY

Climate Machines Fascist Drives and Truth



Climate Machines, Fascist Drives, and Truth

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Climate Machines Fascist Drives and Truth

WILLIAM E. CONNOLLY

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Introduction

Climate, Fascism, Truth

Donald Trump came to power not only by attacking precarious minorities, pushing white triumphalism, slamming the media, courting white evangelicals, demeaning democratic allies of America, pushing misogyny, conspiring with Putin, talking endlessly about a territorial wall, and promising battered workers a return to an old manufacturing regime. He also ridiculed warnings about climate change. These themes do not fit together into a necessary combination, but they do slide into a convenient, politically potent package. One way to court a deindustrialized white working and lower middle class—especially those in “flyover zones” between the two coasts—is to promise that you will bring back the old industrial world by returning to the coal, oil, car, steel, truck, labor, race, highway, and gasoline regime that was in place during a golden age.

The golden years were the 1950s and early 1960s. That is why the nostalgic word “again” is so crucial on the Trump red hat. It incites prejudices and support for simple solutions among a neglected white working and lower middle class caught between the income/wealth concentration machine of the neoliberal right and the noble movements of the pluralizing

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left. This seething constituency has faced disrespect, wage stagnation, job insecurity, weakened labor unions, a very expensive social infrastructure of consumption, underwater mortgages created by a neoliberal meltdown, underfunded schools, difficulty in sending its kids to increasingly expensive colleges, high medical costs, and insecure retirement prospects.¹ Their condition is not as bad as that of the urban and rural poor, but it is severe enough. It is a constituency simmering with ambivalences that Trump strives to pull in a destructive direction.

Many people in Europe and America worried about the environment in the 1950s and '60s. But there were few significant clarion calls about the multiple dangers and deleterious effects of rapid climate change, even though such forces were well underway below the radar of global attention. The most vibrant social movements—on behalf of racial equality, feminism, gay rights, the New Left, antiwar protests, and environmentalism—had not yet lifted off either in the United States or in Europe. “Make America Great Again” refers to a mythic age tied to forgetting (or worse) its terrible injuries; injuries embodied in Jim Crow, antigay actions, misogyny, and McCarthyism. Cruelty, denialism, and an accusatory culture are central to Trumpism. Cruel acceptance of suffering spawned by racism, misogyny, environmental destruction, and empire joined with denial that another massive bill is coming due with respect to galloping climate change.

The Trump syndrome is not only destructive because it refuses to address serious injuries and profound issues. It is also dangerous because, as the climate bills become increasingly palpable, fascist temptations will intensify among many whose current denials become more difficult to sustain.

|

This is not a book only about the dangers and strategies of fascism, however. I wrote a book about that recently.² This study consists of three essays about how galloping planetary climate change works; the challenges it poses to dominant images of the subject, capitalism, nature, theology, truth, and governance; and the regimes of truth that delayed the earth sciences, the humanities, the social sciences, and democratic citizens (in roughly that order) from responding to these processes in a more timely

way, particularly in the United States. The essays turn to the dangers of fascism from time to time because of the gap that yawns between the radical shifts in perspective needed to respond to the climate machine and fascist reactions that grow more tempting as the accelerating pace of that time machine becomes too palpable to evade.

The first essay focuses on three thinkers—Sophocles, Mary Shelley, and Bernard Williams. Writing in different times and places, they advanced overlapping insights that, had they been widely taken up in major Eurocentric theories, may well have advanced understandings sooner about the unruliness of this planet. Sophocles—through the vehicle of the gods—appreciated how periodic eruptions of plagues, earthquakes, volcanoes, and raging seas bounce into the fabric of social life and civic spirituality. His tragedies would be mere exercises in cultural internalism if those volatilities were subtracted from them.

Mary Shelley, writing in the early 1800s after experiencing a mysterious year without a summer in Europe, populates her great novel *Frankenstein: Prometheus Unbound* with radical shifts in terrain, changing weather systems, thoughts about evolution, the dangers of scientific hubris, and hints about the partially self-organizing trajectories of planetary systems.

Bernard Williams, indebted to Sophocles and writing late in the twentieth century, strives to insert the image of an unruly nonhuman world into the center of thought. In his own way, he sought to fold insights from a minor tradition of Euro-American thought into the contours of analytic philosophy. That endeavor did not succeed at the time.

A counterfactual question is posed in the first essay: What would (or might) have happened to the earth sciences, the humanities, and the social sciences in Euro-America if—rather than being transfixed by themes, philosophies, and divine theologies that treat the earth as a set of glacial regularities that change very slowly—important voices in those domains had drawn inspiration from thinkers such as Sophocles and Shelley? Indeed, how much earlier might the galloping processes of planetary climate change have been diagnosed if more modern thinkers had drawn from figures in the minor tradition of European thought such as Hesiod, Sophocles, Heraclitus, Lucretius, Duns Scotus, Spinoza, Kropotkin, and Nietzsche to challenge some assumptions made by figures in the major tradition, figures ranging from Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas to Kant, Hegel, Weber, Hayek, Arendt, and Rawls?³ How much sooner would

earth scientists, humanists, and larger populations have come to appreciate the periodic volatility of earth processes, especially (but not only) when those systems are joined to the depredations of extractive capitalism, socialism, and communism, if early thinkers on the minor list had been consulted earlier, more generally, and more closely?

The question is impossible to answer with confidence. But posing it may help us to discern how deeply a series of intellectual, existential, economic, and political pressures still bear down on many in these domains. It might, to use a phrase summoned from Foucault in the last essay, help us to press more powerfully upon “regimes of truth” that remain powerful today.

So let us distinguish roughly—even crudely—between two European traditions, each full of its own internal debates. The first seeks (and usually claims to secure) strong anchors for its thought while the second often tends to be more speculative and pluralistic. The first tends to forge sharp distinctions between nature and culture while the second tends to emphasize their imbrications. The first often supports a morality of either transcendent command or transcendental derivation while the second often pursues an ethic of cultivation in which people work upon themselves to strengthen contingent seeds of presumptive generosity if and when they already find some expression: the second thus emphasizes the interconnections between how you think, feel, and live. The first tends to set cultural study within the assumption of long-term planetary gradualism while the second often tends to challenge that very idea. And so forth.⁴

Certainly, within the major tradition there are fundamental debates. Kant and Augustine differ on the relation to God pious ones must assume, though the defining characteristics of the omnipotent God each pursues are eerily similar by comparison to discussions of divinity in Hesiod, Sophocles, Epicurus, Spinoza, and Whitehead. Augustine treats an omnipotent, personal God as an essential article of faith; Kant treats it as a necessary postulate of human moral existence as such. Weber, Hayek, and Rawls differ critically on the defining characteristics of capitalism and possible alternatives to it. Marx straddles the major and minor traditions, at once challenging transcendent claims and embracing an assumption of planetary gradualism this study seeks to explode. In the latter respect he deviated from the thought of the radical anarchist and climate scientist Prince Kropotkin, who preceded him. Arendt explores the politics of cre-

ative enactment in ways that distinguish her from several others on the list, but she retains a strict nature/culture division.

Debates within the major tradition are thus multiple and important. But the major debates also tend to drain attention from how the debating partners often converge in downplaying historic periods of volatility in partially self-organizing planetary processes such as climate, polar glacier flows, volcanoes, drought systems, monsoons, mountain glacier transitions, El Niños, and the ocean conveyor system. They too often assume planetary gradualism, a gradualism in which even the sudden eruption of a massive volcano or a major asteroid hit is said to be followed by the slow return to a planet of long, slow cycles.

I teach several major European thinkers regularly, to discern the putative grounds of their systems, to see how they argue, to probe how their rhetorical styles filter into their arguments, to explore issues between them, to uncover the tacit background of contemporary debates, to gain insights about connections between spiritual, economic, ethical, and political forces, and to identify internal flashpoints from which one could launch a different journey from the dominant theme this or that thinker actually forged. For there are often discernible minor themes in them, themes noted but less often pursued by the authors. Such subordinate themes open doors to forge potential and creative intersections between major and minor thinkers.⁵ The major thinkers, then, are full of riches.

But Sophocles, Shelley, and Williams express tendencies more widely distributed in the minor tradition. By exploring themes and existential concerns each projects, we may gain a preliminary sense of how long minor thinkers have sensed planetary volatilities muted by the major tradition—either through denial or by locating observed volatilities in a rift for which humans are primordially responsible. The first essay, after reviewing how Williams strives to think anew with Sophocles and Thucydides, explores how Sophocles bumps unruly nonhuman events into key turns in his human dramas. We then repeat another version of that story through an engagement with Mary Shelley.

The first essay closes with a critique of what I call *sociocentrism*. It is joined to a corollary charge to fold nonhuman, planetary processes more intimately into the humanities and human sciences. *Sociocentrism* is the tacit idea that one set of social processes and changes can be explained (or, in some of its versions, interpreted) almost solely by reference to more

fundamental social processes. The nineteenth- and twentieth-century doctrines of gradualism in the earth and human sciences themselves—the assumption about planetary processes that tacitly supports sociocentrism in the humanities and was not dismantled in the earth sciences until the 1980s—must be displaced today within the humanities too in order to come to terms with the dynamics and consequences of the contemporary climate machine.

Some people will say that this or that major thinker anticipated the story of an unruly planet. Some did, albeit often in dark ways. Weber worried about what would happen to capitalism when the last ton of coal is burned. Marx, the straddler, attended to connections between specific natural resources deployed in historic regimes—water mills, wood, coal, or steam, for instance—and particular relations of production. Marx and Engels also appreciated how European deforestation promoted drought.⁶ But none of these thinkers attended to how volatile planetary processes, with self-organizing powers of their own, roll back and forth with social and political forces to form time machines that periodically change rapidly and are irreducible to either social forms or nonhuman processes taken alone. The first essay seeks to render the humanities and the human sciences highly receptive to such detailed engagements.

II

The second essay takes the leap. Expressing one debt to a revolution in the earth sciences launched in the 1980s and another to a recent analysis by two thinkers in the minor tradition. I draw upon Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* to outline the Anthropocene as an abstract, planetary time machine. To provide preliminary orientation, an abstract machine is a partially self-organizing cluster of heterogeneous forces and agencies that feed upon and fuel each other, often accelerating as the diverse components become more densely imbricated. Reader alert: such a temporal machine is neither a mechanism nor an organism. It is not reducible to human agencies taken alone, nor do the diverse forces and agencies that compose it always follow a slow, regular trajectory. It might move slowly along one trajectory for a long time and then take a sharp turn. Sometimes the turn is rapid, as when an asteroid strike in Mexico and a volcanic erup-

tion in India extinguished dinosaurs and 50 percent of species life, setting the stage for a new turn in evolution, or when the ocean conveyor system, pulling warm weather into Europe and the eastern seaboard of America, seems to have crashed to a rapid halt 12,700 years ago, changing climate rapidly when it closed down. Or consider how the Holocene itself—the roughly eleven-thousand-year period during which agriculture was initiated and human population growth accelerated—may have stuttered into place during a ten-year period.⁷

We do not inhabit a world composed of homogeneous connections alone; connections are also forged between heterogeneous entities—such as wasps and orchids, gut bacteria and human moods, ticks and human disease, CO_2 emissions and ocean algae growth, and the horizontal transfer of genetic material into humans and other species through viral infusions. The climate machine of the Anthropocene draws into its orbit heterogeneous agencies and forces as it unleashes highly asymmetrical effects upon diverse human and nonhuman populations around the globe.

Let us call an *agent* any entity that can strive or pursue a purpose, however simple. A *force* is an entity on the move without purpose, capable of impinging upon or ingressing into other forces and agencies. Glaciers, tectonic plates, and carcinogens are forces. Bacteria, fleas, rats, and human beings are agents, with varying degrees and types of capacity. Bacteria, rats, and humans also possess both individual and collective capacities of agency, as exemplified by those quorum calls of bacteria in the human gut and by organized social movements. The diverse agencies and forces composing the climate machine of today include, for starters, extractive capitalism, several democratic constituencies whose identities and interests are tied to carbon extraction, CO_2 atmospheric emissions, polar glacier melts with self-amplifying powers, growing regions of drought that recoil back on populations, deforestation which feeds upon itself, ocean acidification, refugee pressures flowing from hard-hit subtropical regions to temporal regions, potential monsoon interruptions, social movements to combat these pressures, and neofascist reactions in old capitalist states upon such diverse, interactive processes. The *triggers* pulled by extractive capitalism are exceeded by numerous planetary *amplifiers* they set into motion. And the latter recoil back on both those systems and upon undercapitalized regions.

The second essay, after gauging shifting components in the current planetary machine and the regional asymmetry of its effects, turns to the

danger of fascism in old capitalist states. The problem with accelerationist critiques of capitalism—which call upon the left to exacerbate the contradictions of capitalism until the system collapses and a new one can be built—is that they have not taken an adequate measure of the fascist danger residing precisely in such pressures. It would be better, I wager, if cross-regional constituencies mobilize internal and external pressures upon capitalist states at the same time, pressing them to introduce a series of rapid interim changes in the structure of investment, the infrastructure of consumption, state priorities of regulation, regional mitigation and reparation payments, and the spiritual ethos of the day. You can call such an agenda an improbable necessity of late modern times.

After exploring how capitalist institutions and spiritual energies help to constitute one another, I also hesitate over the temptation to call this latest climate machine “the Capitalocene.” While appreciating contributions post-Marxist accounts make in grasping the critical role of capitalism in creating and sustaining the Anthropocene, the essay draws upon Kyle Harper’s recent account in *The Fate of Rome* on the role of climate change and plagues during the fall of Rome to suggest that the contemporary issues are not reducible to capitalism alone. The fall of Rome was partly induced by the empire’s imbrications with a larger climate machine of its own day, one that it both fed in some ways and was infected by in others. You could also explore the spiraling relations in precapitalist Europe between radical deforestation projects and the Medieval Warm Period.

Extractive capitalism—in its diverse modes—has become a more radical geological force today than any of its cultural predecessors. But attention to previous planetary volatilities helps us to gauge the amplifiers set into motion today and to think about possible responses to those conditions. Several contemporary amplifiers are identified until it becomes clear how and why the assumption of emission/climate parallelism is false. Parallelism, in this context, is the assumption that emissions and climate move along parallel tracks, so that an increase in the volume of the first will be matched by an increase in the temperature of the second, and so that a decline in emissions will produce a parallel decline in temperature. The introduction of amplifiers blows climate parallelism out of the water.

It is certainly imperative today to rethink and revise old capitalist practices and ideals of extraction, investment, the state, inequality, consumption, and growth—Keynesianism, social democracy, liberal schemes

of rights and growth, neoliberalism, and fascist capitalism among them. Such projects are critical. But it may also be important to reconfigure several nineteenth- and twentieth-century ideals that have contended against capitalism. One danger of fascism today resides in the fact that, while extractive capitalism hurtles down its destructive course, several nineteenth-and twentieth-century ideals previously marshaled against it have lost much of their credibility too. The fictive myth of a radical return to the good old days—that is, the prototype fascist recipe of return to a mythic past—flourishes during a period of deindustrialization, climate stress, pressure on diverse regional populations, urgent refugee drives, and the faltering credibility of dominant social ideals that have contended against capitalism. I do not pursue that latter task closely in these essays, though the outlines of an approach are suggested.⁸ An initial task, during an era haunted by the specter of fascism, is to show how the dynamics of the climate machine make it urgent to do so.

III

Well, this little study now arrives at a new flashpoint. It could explore a set of political strategies to respond democratically to the planetary climate machine. It could discuss more closely interim policy changes needed to turn capitalism in a new direction, a direction that could set the stage to move beyond capitalism. Those two issues, indeed, are crucial. But in the company of others I have pursued each of those tasks as extensively as I am now capable of doing in recent books. Indeed, I hope these essays will be placed into conversation with three recent books of mine, *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style* (2008), *Facing the Planetary* (2017), and *Aspirational Fascism* (2017). The first proposes a list of interim changes to American capitalism to promote a more ecological, egalitarian order and to fend off the danger of fascism. The second criticizes different versions of sociocentrism in radical, liberal, and neoliberal traditions, as it supports a cross-regional politics of swarming to reshape hegemonic practices in the domains of extraction, public investment, the infrastructure of consumption, the provision of public nets, regional mitigation and reparation payments, and the mobilization of social desire. The third charts Trumpism as a fascist agenda to exploit current stresses in the United States; it pursues

an ideal of multifaceted, pluralizing, and egalitarian democracy to press against that danger.

So the third essay in this study takes another turn, one also linked to the first two essays. It draws upon two additional and recent thinkers in the minor tradition—Michel Foucault and Alfred North Whitehead—to pursue its task. It asks, how can the aspiration to truth by critical thinkers be preserved and refined as we come to terms with a world in which several unconscious habits of thought have become shaky?

Some commentators today link what they (crudely) call postmodernism to the deployment of “fake news” under Trumpism.⁹ In doing so, they hope to kill two birds with one stone: rid the world of Trump and degrade critical perspectives that challenge the correspondence model of truth and neopositivist images of science.¹⁰ Indeed, they sometimes seek to protect a regime of science that helped to secure the notion of planetary gradualism for centuries. I recently responded to such false equations in a preliminary post on *The Contemporary Condition*.¹¹ The task now is to extend and deepen the response.

The first thing to say about the equation between fake news and postmodernism is that it does not articulate the profound difference between parties who base their claims upon publicly available evidence and those who manufacture stories to incite racism, and so on. I am not a postmodernist so described: I believe in evidence-based claims, advance a positive ideal of democracy, and pursue a positive ethos of eco-egalitarian pluralism. And as far as I know, no postmodernist claimed that Iraq invaded the United States (rather than the other way around) or that weapons of mass destruction were found during that disastrous invasion.

To support evidence-based claims, however, does not mean that you think every issue is readily decided by recourse to facts currently available. Several issues on the cutting edges of evolutionary biology, quantum physics, climate science, neuroscience, political theory, and sociology today are replete with speculation and controversy. Their reasonable resolution often awaits the introduction of new concepts and theories, new testing devices, adjustment in subjective sensitivities to the world, access to evidence made available through those shifts, and shifts in metaphysical assumptions. The charge of a post-truth image of the world often discounts the importance of such adjustments in order to anchor itself in an image of

sharp separation between facts and theories; it also denies the current relevance of metaphysical speculation. The historic shifts in thought between Aristotle, Descartes, Newton, Kant, Einstein, and Whitehead already suggest how much forgetting is embedded in such presumptions.

Second, it is important to attend to fundamental differences in affective tone and purpose that inform fascists and their democratic critics. As I say in “Fake News and ‘Postmodernism,’”

Fascists assert Big Lies dogmatically and rancorously to smear opponents and to gain authoritarian power so that only the ruler’s word becomes legitimate; postmodernists—who often deny our ability to reduce competing metaphysical interpretations to one candidate alone—typically probe alternative interpretations to open a plurality of views for wider consideration. This fundamental difference between one ethos of dogmatism and another of presumptive generosity [to diverse constituencies and perspectives] is, of course, not noted by accusers. Perhaps . . . [neopositivists] who seek to pin the blame for fake news on postmodernism often themselves fail to note how differences in ethos or sensibility make a difference to both public culture and political inquiry.

A third area of debate between neopositivists and process theorists (as I call myself) who resist both fascism and neopositivism is more difficult to state briefly. But neopositivists often support a correspondence theory of truth and deny that the universe contains intersecting entities and processes sometimes marked by pulses of real creativity. They thus support a linear image of time. Process thinkers—embodying one modern outgrowth of the minor tradition—emphasize how multitemporal processes shape a world that periodically morphs in this or that way. We speculate, with evidential support, that knots of real creativity periodically populate aspects of the world, helping to change its direction. That means that explanation and interpretation are often inherently incomplete to themselves, not merely because of limited evidence but also because of creative intersections that bring novelty into the world.¹² We adopt a modified coherence vision of truth in order to examine such possibilities about the world and the shaky place of human beings and other species in it.

The recent blog post closes with the following statement:

A credible case can be made that sometimes something new emerges out of resonances back and forth between a cloudy fork from the past that was not taken and a current encounter. Such a speculative philosophy can be contested, of course. Nonetheless, the case for real creativity it sustains speaks to the artistic and aesthetic dimensions of life without either reducing everything to mere subjective constitution or flattening objectivity into the barren worlds of positivism and rational choice theory. All three of the latter traditions fail to appreciate the complexity and wonder of the world.¹³

IV

Such responses merely provide a promissory note, however. If a correspondence theory of truth—roughly, the contention that a proposition is true to the extent it correctly represents the character of the determinate objects studied—has fallen upon hard times, and if the celebration of a post-truth world is unnecessary and dangerous, how can process and minor theorists negotiate this rocky terrain today? Put another way, if it has become necessary to think about interfolded planetary temporalities that help to constitute a world containing moments of real creativity, what is the best way to pursue truth?

Remember, many people today experience themselves—particularly through exploratory engagements with others—as periodic participants in innovations in the domains of artistic production, food recipes, scientific theory, metaphysical speculation, political strategy, dietary habits, literary inventions, farming practices, or sociopolitical ideals. We resist the cohort of scientists—and many other scientists themselves resist such modes of reductionism too—who treat such experiences as appearances reducible in principle to deeper modes of determination. At least the theorists of complete determinism have not yet succeeded in proving such a wild metaphysical conjecture. It is a highly contestable faith or speculation, as Whitehead would say, one that also cuts against the intuitive experience of many. So we ask, how is it possible to support the intuition of periodic pulses of creativity—an intuition that helps to make life worth living—as

you pursue truth? What, indeed, are the relations between presumptive care for the rich fecundity of the world, pulses of creative change that work upon solid stabilizations, and the lure of truth?

The task at issue is pursued by composing a dialogue between “F” and “W.” F starts as Michel Foucault, a thinker who had a significant impact on my thinking in the 1980s and continues to influence me. W begins as Alfred North Whitehead, a thinker in the minor tradition who started to influence my thinking around 2005 or so and continues to do so. Foucault examined “disciplinary society” and several “regimes of truth” nestled in it. Periodically, previously legitimated or hidden suffering within a regime becomes more palpable through a combination of genealogical analysis and political protest.¹⁴ A new regime may be forged in this or that domain. The interesting thing about a regime of truth is how it is composed of multiple interfolded elements: disciplines, methodological rules, assumptions, faiths, rhetorical strategies of inclusion and exclusion, testing devices, perceptual habits, and aspirations. The elements do not always move in tandem, however; so a regime can periodically become out of sorts with itself.

Whitehead supported a coherence model of truth set in the speculation that there are pulses of real creativity in a world also marked by zones of stability. He folded a theory of intersecting temporalities of heterogeneous sorts into the middle of his philosophy of science and processual view of the world, doing so to make sense of both modes of stabilization and periods of becoming that alter them.

His philosophy, because it extends elements of agency beyond the human estate, is even more radical in this respect than that of Foucault, though tremors of such ideas circulate through Foucault too. But in forging this path, Whitehead was much less alert than Foucault to various injuries done to prisoners, the mad, racial minorities, women, homosexuals, and boat people through the major disciplines and regimes of truth.

Whitehead, the brilliant logician, supplanted mind/body dualism, the subject/object binary, the life/nonlife dichotomy, substance foundationalism, the dichotomy between primary and secondary qualities, and deterministic images that prevailed in several European sciences and philosophies of his day. That is how he participated in the minor tradition. Most of these assumptions, assumed by many majoritarians to be embedded in logic itself, had helped to constitute the dominant regimes of truth in his day. Impressive. But it did not enter his mind to contest how, say, a regime

of gender dualism was nested in the very debates between dominant European theologies, sciences, philosophies, court findings, corporate policies, and commonsense demands of his time—that is, how it was sustained by a multifaceted, major regime of truth.

What happens if you generate a dialogue between F and W that starts with positions each took during one phase of his thought and then allows each to refine some themes through both exchanges with the other and confrontation with new events that neither in fact encountered during his time?

As the dialogue continues, F and W become personae, intellectual figures of the past with continuing philosophical importance today. Their thinking thus begins to adjust through reciprocal exchanges and encounters with new events. The acceleration of planetary climate change is one such event, an event that both would have seized upon if it had come to sharp attention during their lives. But it did not, even though it was well underway. That latter event, indeed, would not only jostle both; it also speaks to the demeanor of self-modesty that each sought to fold into his own epistemological and ontological professions. Both posed surprises for their own generations and sensed that new surprises yet were apt to arrive. That is why Whitehead emphasized how important informed speculation is to philosophy, science, and social thought.

V

The agenda of the last essay, then, is one in which the correspondence model is transcended, pulses of real creativity are affirmed, coherence models are revised, explorations of subjective sensitivity are cultivated, attention to lures of a possible future are consulted, and festering remains from the past play roles in the pursuit of truth. An interplay between truth as regime and as lure is thereby projected. The element of periodic tension between a regime and a lure of truth is emphasized; the lure becomes dramatized most when the multiple elements that have composed a regime of truth begin to move out of synchronicity.

Such an approach scrambles the sense of necessity in a tired set of Euro-American logical binaries. In doing so, the door also opens to more reciprocal modes of exploratory communication with several non-Western traditions. For several of the latter traditions already resist human excep-

tionalism along with the binaries that have sustained it. Such an indispensable pursuit is not taken up extensively in this little study, though it does identify my recent attempts do so. More notably, it identifies reflective efforts by other recent thinkers in the minor tradition of Euro-American thought who have been forging such connections.

Truth now becomes simultaneously a thing of this world, a noble pursuit, problem oriented, subject to evolving methodological disciplines, and compatible with potential bouts of real creativity in the world. At any moment shocks and uncertainties may nudge some elements in a regime of truth, though the edges themselves tend to evolve over time. Whitehead came to such a view early in the twentieth century after he encountered the shock theories of relativity and quantum mechanics posed to the Newtonian theory he and others had so recently treated as apodictic. Newtonians had thought that only a few minor amendments were needed to consolidate a theory that corresponds to the world itself, when in fact, over a few explosive years, the whole regime imploded. Whitehead seems to think that you are better equipped to probe complex relations between time, historic subjectivities, speculation, and truth after you face a crisis in a theory you had thought to be apodictic. Truth now becomes a composite formation. He worries about dogmatism, in science, theology, philosophy, and the humanities, without turning to relativism. The latter stance is not pulled by a lure to truth that exceeds it.

The challenges this impressive logician and mathematician poses to a series of binary logics widely in circulation when he wrote are exemplary. Foucault, on the other hand, found himself painted into a corner as a gay man until he challenged several assumptions and disciplinary practices that had cornered him and many others in a variety of subject positions. He, too, resisted a set of hegemonic binaries authoritatively designed to inform inquiry in a neutral way.

We live during a time when similar things have been happening to neo-Darwinism, the geotheory of planetary gradualism, sharp versions of the life/nonlife dichotomy, theories of neoliberal capitalism, and the quaint idea that a separation of powers in democratic states will always suffice to ward off fascism. A hegemonic theory, even when it encounters several anomalies, can close out competitors for a time through its imposition of authoritative methods and arguments augmented by sharp ridicule of those ranging too far outside the fold. And then something happens that

throws the assemblage into crisis. Now the lure of truth in a more open, fluid setting becomes particularly salient again.

Both Foucault and Whitehead exuded presumptive care for the actual and potential diversities of this world. That care must be presumptive because periodically forces seek to defeat and crush an ethos of diversity. Such forces must be opposed intelligently and militantly. The connection between a positive ethos of fecund life and the subtlety of inquiry—which may seem slender and unimportant to some at first—helps to fend off both the dreariness and dead ends of neopositivism and the reactive instigations to gleeful cruelty, big lies, and fake news defining the ethos of aspirational fascism. It does not suffice to do so, but it makes a difference. It is well to remember how some proponents of procedural democracy—conveying the sufficiency of separation of powers and checks and balances to a pluralist regime—underplayed the role that a positive ethos of sensitivity and presumptive generosity must play in giving life and direction to democratic institutions.

So, three interfolded essays. The first explores a few thinkers in the minor tradition who forged a path not pursued by enough others in Euro-American thought until late in the day. The second articulates the Anthropocene as a bumpy climate time machine composed of heterogeneous, intersecting temporalities. The third embraces the lure of truth, as it strives to devise workable balances between multiple elements in the face of new experiments and events.

Notes

Introduction

- 1 According to a *New York Times* report on July 14, 2018, after the Trump tax cuts of 2018 and amid low unemployment, the percentage of national income received by workers was 62 percent, down from 66 percent in 2000. Corporate profits soared to 13.2 percent, up from 8.3 percent that year. The average worker lost \$3,400 during that period. See Cohen, “Corporate Profits Swell.” For a study that explores connections between the shifting infrastructure of consumption and the binds facing the working class and more marginal classes, see Connolly, *Capitalism and Christianity*, chapters 4 and 5. Several interim reforms to address those binds are also proposed there.
- 2 Connolly, *Aspirational Fascism*.
- 3 I take the terms “major” and “minor” tradition from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. It is introduced in their *Kafka* and pursued more widely and deeply in *A Thousand Plateaus*. The list of thinkers these two authors call “major” (or sometimes “royal”) corresponds rather well to the one Bernard Williams draws up in contrast with Sophocles and Thucydides. A key criterion of distinction for me is whether the thinker acknowledges planetary volatility or not. But the relation of each thinker to a specific mode of explanation, becoming, race, empire, theology, capitalism, and gender are also pertinent to such a cluster concept. Some thinkers slide away from the minor tradition along one or two dimensions while fitting it in others. It is best to speak of

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tendencies here, in a world in which the quest for closed definitions is a fool's errand. Contemporary thinkers who participate in the minor tradition are invoked from time to time as the text proceeds.

- 4 My first essay on this topic was titled "Europe: A Minor Tradition," in Scott and Hirschkind, eds., *Powers of the Secular Modern*. The essay poses a friendly response to Talal Asad, the renowned anthropologist of Christianity and Islam, who argues that the image of modern Europe as a secular continent tends to overemphasize the importance of creed in religious life (which could then be consigned to the private realm) and to underplay the role of ritual, conduct, and mimetic contagion in the quality of religious and cultural life. Those behavioral diversities find public expression in a pluralist society and must not be consigned to a private realm, via the myth of secularism. I concurred with Asad, as I learned from him. But I also contended that there is a minor tradition within European thought itself which challenges the major tradition he reviews; it concurs with him on some of his main points. The examples of minor theorists in that essay were Spinoza, Nietzsche, Stuart Hampshire, and Gilles Deleuze. Here I retain those attributes of the minor tradition and emphasize more appreciation of planetary/cultural imbrications in a world punctuated by planetary volatilities.
- 5 For attention to the presence and importance of such subordinate themes in major thinkers, see Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, and Holland, *Nomad Citizenship*. The first author plumbs minor themes in Plato, Locke, Hume, and Kant, drawing several of those themes into his own thinking. The second does the same with respect to Marx and Hayek. Marx, again, straddles the two mobile traditions, as do several other thinkers. Holland is out to valorize the minor Marx. Advocates of the minor tradition, focusing on multiple, intersecting temporalities, often drop the themes of necessary progress and linear advance from their images of time.
- 6 For a fascinating discussion of the difference between Kropotkin on the one hand and Marx on the other with respect to the issue of climate volatility or gradualism, see Davis, *Old Gods, New Enigmas*, chapter 3. He identifies Kropotkin as an early proponent of planetary volatility, a volatility that is not entirely reducible to the effects of civilizational forces.
- 7 For a discussion of these issues, see Alley, *The Two-Mile Time Machine*, and Broecker, *The Great Ocean Conveyor*. The first is a glaciologist and the second an oceanographer.
- 8 That task has been launched in chapter 4 of Connolly, *Capitalism and Christianity*, and chapter 3 of Connolly, *Aspirational Fascism*.
- 9 The post noted below cites the source of some of these charges. A more recent text is McIntyre, *Post-truth*. In a quotation pertinent to the third essay in this study, McIntyre says, "Here we arrive at the second thesis of postmodernism:

that any profession of truth is nothing more than the reflection of the political ideology of the person who is making it. Michel Foucault's idea was that our societal life is defined by language but language is itself is shot through with the relations of power and dominance" (126). A few points are pertinent. First, Foucault explicitly refused the title of postmodernist; the reasons he did so have been widely reviewed. Second, in his middle phase Foucault was concerned particularly with how specific regimes of truth could sustain injurious modes of life, and he examined such regimes in detail in ways that helped to spawn new movements in medical practice, prison reform, sexuality, gender, and the rights of boat people. It would be interesting to know which of the previous regimes McIntyre endorses, whether he embraces the new movements that emerged to challenge them, and what image of truth he himself thinks is best suited to help us negotiate the rocky relations between social disciplines and objectivity. Third, Foucault placed his own conception of truth on hold in his early work but returned to the issue later. It may be that truth is a pursuit that we must take very seriously and that genealogical histories teach us over and over how what was held with great confidence at one time in multiple venues to be true is often believed later to embody a series of destructive untruths. The two parties who form the basis of the dialogue constructed in the third essay—Foucault and Whitehead—both found themselves shocked a few times, as they were pressed to reconsider previous views that they and others had treated as part of a solid regime of truth. McIntyre? What positive philosophy of truth does he advance under the sway of self-modesty?

- 10 By a neopositivist image, I mean one that plays down the constitutive relation between available testing devices and observable evidence, treats objects of inquiry as fully susceptible to deterministic analysis, eliminates (as a corollary) appreciation of pulses of creativity in most objects of inquiry, and acts as if the progress of science assumes a linear trajectory. Whitehead and Foucault contest such assumptions, while pursuing the lure of truth.
- 11 Connolly, "Fake News and 'Postmodernism.'"
- 12 For several decades, the dominant debate in the human sciences was between two parties: first, advocates of social explanation, who sought to identify structural conditions that show how an old regime was determined and to identify new factors that enable change; they were ranged against advocates of cultural interpretation, who emphasized the role of creative agency and played up the importance of language in constituting the intersubjective web of human cultures. Process philosophy challenges a key assumption that tends to bind the two debating partners together: the assumption that culture, agency, and society are reserved to human beings alone. In a world composed of multiple intersecting human and nonhuman agencies of different sorts, interpretation both gains an edge over explanation and forfeits the

story of human exceptionalism often identified with it. In chapter 3, W will be identified with a panexperientialist version of process philosophy; it locates traces of agency everywhere. F gradually accepts that there are multiple agencies of diverse sorts without accepting the panexperientialist idea that agency of some sort or other is operative in all nonhuman processes. This issue also comes up in chapter 1 when we discuss Terrence Deacon's account of the emergence of life from nonlife.

13 Connolly, "Fake News and 'Postmodernism.'"

14 A genealogical analysis is one that seeks to show how entities commonly taken to be singular or eternal are actually composites formed through complex processes involving power assemblages. Nietzsche and Foucault are masters of genealogical analysis, bringing it to bear on Christianity, sexuality, morality, neoliberalism, the subject, truth, and diverse rationalities. Neither would accept the label of "postmodernist," however. Foucault, indeed, publicly refused the label because of the amorality commonly associated with it and its reputed refusal to pursue positive agendas. Clearly, neither is a relativist either, though some theorists who are themselves confined to only a two-slot set of alternatives love to place Foucault there.

1. Sophocles, Mary Shelley, and the Planetary

1 Williams, *Shame and Necessity*.

2 See Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*. The first moment is operative in Plato, a "real world, attainable to the wise, the pious, the virtuous man." The second finds expression in Paul and Augustine: a world "unattainable for the moment, but promised to . . . the sinner who repents." The third moment is discernible in Kant: the world in itself "cannot be promised, but even when merely thought of, a consolation, a duty an imperative." Here: "The idea grown sublime, pale, northerly, Konigsbergian." If and when you pass beyond the fourth and fifth to the sixth, the real world is abolished and the apparent world is abolished with it too. Is the result nothingness, then, in this Zarathustrian world? No, for now the pair appearance/reality in a dualistic world has been replaced by pluralities of becoming/consolidation in a world taken to be both worthy of human embrace and rather rocky "in itself" (40–41). These pages prefigure the Williams account, though perhaps emphasizing the element in item 6 of plural becomings more than he does.

3 Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, 151.

4 The phrase "majoritarian tradition" or "royal tradition" was composed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. In *Kafka*, they contrast a bumpy, minor tradition (composed of thinkers such as Heraclitus, Lucretius, Spinoza, Kafka,