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Autonomous Conceptions of Our Planetary Situation

Abstract: This article is constructed through a series of linked aphorisms that articulate the relations between autonomy, sense, the world, different people's worlds, disagreement, and wonder. It advances anthroponomy—the organization of humankind to support autonomous life. In the context of the planetary, socially-caused environmental changes of today such as global warming or the risk of a mass extinction cascade, a part of autonomous engagement with our planetary situation is developing an autonomous conception of it—a conception of our situation that makes sense to us. This pluralistic idea has consequences for environmentalism, notably around coloniality, and the reduction of different autonomous worlds to a dominant world, which is currently part of the discourse of the Anthropocene. The aphorisms in this article develop a reflective path toward autonomous conceptions of our planetary situation given the reality of coloniality in how that situation is understood. One result of this path is to open up a way for people to become more autonomously engaged with our environmental situation, an engagement grounded in wonder and critical of the discourse of the “Anthropocene”.

Keywords: anthroponomy, Anthropocene, autonomy, wonder, sense

1. One of the things about autonomy is that it is social. If I look into the face of the woods and do not make sense of its mystery, or if I try to understand non-linear effects in global warming and cannot get my head around them, I am not thereby heteronomous. Rather, my recognition of mystery or of the unknown contributes to my autonomy: to finding how the world makes sense to me, including how it does not.

But when I have to undergo the irresponsibility of others clinging to something that doesn't make sense when there are clear objections to consider, when, that is, these others will not enter into disagreement with me to get to the bottom of things, but rather insist on making others suffer their unreasoning, then I have to contend with heteronomy. Living under their unreason makes me heteronomous. In certain circumstances, it clearly oppresses me. Now I must deal with the fact that the world we share makes less sense as a result of normalized capriciousness, a deep-settled avoidance of accountability.

2. The social nature of autonomy has to do with the worldliness of sense. Sense is of things; it directs us to the world we share, or rather, that I think we share, provisional on our working through disagreement. When I try to make sense, I try to be objective.¹ What you tell me makes sense is something for me to consider, and I have to consider it for myself in light of the world or else I myself become capricious. In this way, sense is of the world, between us, and autonomy is social, because of the nature of this "between us". Autonomy depends on the world and is undermined by failing to try to work out what is between us, namely, this world we share.

3. You might say that there is a continuum. On the one side is autonomy and on the other is heteronomy to the point of being dominated by another's sense of how my life should go (or not go). In between, on the side of heteronomy is capriciousness. My sense of things is not determined by another (is not *heteros*), but nor do I find what makes sense to me, am not testing and contesting sense to find what makes sense (and what does not). Rather, I am becoming arbitrary—surely not autonomous—and am becoming open to heteronomy, that is, to letting others determine the sense of the world for me.

4. Call this testing as a practice, conviction. Without it, I do not test my power of judgment and, so in this way, lose my ability to judge well. But losing my ability to judge well, I weaken the reflexive power of being myself (the reflexive operation of owning what I believe, intend; of owning up to my desire, feelings, etc.).² Lacking conviction, I weaken my sense of self and thus become open to the determination of others.³

5. Conviction isn't self-absorbed. Every authentic person recognizes the differentiation of other people living their own lives. Take belief, for instance. It is open to the sense of the world as I find it—or as it comes to meet me. It is open to the objections of others, working through and holding to what makes sense—or it is hardly a tested and strongly held belief. Conviction, from *convincere*, implies tarrying with objection. Convictions are alive to plurality.

6. Imagine that we disagree about the nature of the world we share. You say that it has been shaped by human nature, and I say that it has been shaped by a specific society's nature. We can try to get to the bottom of this. But if you avoid

¹ J. Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, transl. K. Ross, Palo Alto 1991.

² Ch. Larmore, *The Practices of the Self*, transl. S. Bowman, Chicago 2010.

³ J.-J. Rousseau, *Émile, or on Education*, transl. A. Bloom, New York 1979.

trying, if you do not meet my objections, or if you simply refuse to reason, then living in your world is for me heteronomous. Here I have convictions, and here you do not; you will not even engage with mine. Living in your world, I end up bearing your untested whims. The same goes for you if I avoid your considerations and you end up living in my arbitrary world. What a shitty thing I have done to you, being avoidant and arbitrary. Depending on the severity of what is involved in living in each other's worlds, the arbitrary avoidance of either of us may also be oppressive to the other one of us.⁴

7. The point is, heteronomy is a result of living under other people's non-sense shown in their arbitrary refusal to be accountable to objection, that is to say, to consideration of what we each think out of a practice of living with conviction. Heteronomy is a problem of accountability, issuing in a senselessness that could be otherwise but which we are made to weather.

8. It is possible to be divided in oneself and thereby to be heteronomous with oneself, with one's own senselessness driving one's life against one's better sense. But this is still to refuse to be accountable to the internal dialog of one's own objections. It is an internalized social form, including the refusal to hear objections itself. Think of the uneasy believer who has internalized an authoritarian refusal to question. Think of the academic playing an academic game that they know is beneath their vocation and hating themselves for it as they go.

9. Doing what others tell you to do, or what others do, despite your deep, unsettled qualms is not conviction. You have closed off how the world appears to you.

10. I repeat: Whether it is interpersonal or intrapersonal, autonomy is social and depends on disagreement. Disagreement depends on accountability to each other, to elementary consideration of each other's worlds and on each other's capacity for judgment. We each think—or at least we can, if we try.

11. We can each be open to the world, and in so doing we can develop our own convictions.

12. With those of us who cannot “think”—with those whose awareness does not take the shape of articulable judgments about what is the case or about what should be done (consider many living forms in the more than human world)—there is still much room for disagreement. But the accountability is redoubled on those of us who think we think, for we must be self-critical on behalf of those whose awareness of what is good, or even right, for them, does not involve articulable judgments as we make them. We must use analogy and disanalogy responsibly and form judgments as adequately as we can, involving an ineliminable margin of self-critique, of unknowing, to the mystery of their environments and their striving through and in it. We must be aesthetically audacious in the opening of our sensibilities. What the other ones of awareness show us may lead us to doubt the sense we think our world makes. What they show us about what is good, or even right, for them may lead us to reconsider the world between us. Life is not something to waste or abuse.

⁴ Cf. Ph. Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*, New York 1997.

13. Given that autonomy depends on disagreement and disagreement on accountability to each other's worlds, it is worth asking how the world between us appears between each other's worlds. The world between us is, as Kant once wrote, an [X], discoverable as we come to terms with it, shifting our understandings as we go, following the sense that comes to light of things.⁵ The [world] between us is, precisely, unknown, but—like the aesthetic thing—endlessly generating sense for beings who come trying to understand what negates their understanding in one of a myriad of ways.⁶

14. The world and the apophatic are, in a sense, one.

15. Given the world's mystery, the sense it coughs up appears in and through wonder—the consideration of possibilities of sense in the free play of imagination.⁷ This holds for the world of those who can think and, certainly, when considering the environments of those whose awareness is different than articulable thought as we know it.⁸

16. Conviction appears and rests in wonder. There is no way to wonder without really owning what you think (and feel), testing possibilities. Conviction and wonder imply each other.

17. Given that wonder is the form by which the sense of the world appears between us, it is necessary for disagreement and, thus, for our autonomy, just as conviction was.⁹

18. So a disagreement without wonder is bound for heteronomy, a convictionless training of the obtuse or inactive mind. If I do not consider the possibility of another's sense, I will live without considering the world they brought to light. This self-enclosure from considering objections—from the world in others' lights—erodes my self-critical capacity and thus my autonomy within myself. Creeping toward capriciousness, I head for heteronomy. If one of us has the power to convey social norms, too, and that one does not wonder about my objections, then I am bound for some degree of heteronomy.

19. The importance of wonder holds centrally for beings such as ourselves who can make sense of the world together and for whom living under another's senselessness is the beginning of domination. It holds for us extending our responsibility to the more than human world, even if the more than human world considers us in strange ways that are hard to imagine despite learned inquiry into other forms of life.¹⁰

20. Another way to put the point is that the sense between us depends on wonder, and so does our autonomy together—we beings whose autonomy is tanta-

⁵ Cf. I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, transl. N. Kemp Smith, New York 1965; H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, transl. J. Weinsheimer, D.G. Marshall, New York 2004.

⁶ Cf. I. Kant, "Analytic of Aesthetic Judgment", [in:] idem, *Critique of Judgment*, transl. W.S. Pluhar, Indianapolis 1987; G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, transl. A.V. Miller, New York 1977.

⁷ Cf. I. Kant, "Analytic of the Beautiful", [in:] idem, *Critique of Judgment*.

⁸ Cf. my "The Reasonableness of Wonder", *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities* 18 [3] (2017), pp. 337–355, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2017.1342385>.

⁹ Cf. J.-L. Nancy, *Adoration: The Deconstruction of Christianity II*, transl. J. McKeane, New York 2012.

¹⁰ Cf. R. Powers, *The Overstory*, New York 2018.

mount to freedom from thoughtlessness. A world that is autonomous is structured by wonder just as it is by conviction.

21. These preliminary remarks allow me to ask what a world structured by wonder could be. Given that I find very little of my world structured by wonder and by conviction,¹¹ given that wonder is crucial to living free of capriciousness, and given that I have a moral obligation to oppose domination and its beginnings everywhere in so far as I can, I am required to ask the question of what other worlds are possible, structured by wonder. I am required to face up to and to face down important parts of my world that aren't organized through wonder in them.

22. One world I find lacking, at times, in both conviction and wonder is conveyed by a word that I find makes little sense, itself in a public discourse that makes even less sense, given that it plausibly involves oppression through and in its reiteration of the world behind the word in question. This word is "Anthropocene", and its world is often called "modern".

After considering this word, "Anthropocene", for some time, I worry that it is the verbal edge of a much deeper and larger problem involving domination. This problem might be called the problem of "coloniality" as it erases the plurality of worlds.¹²

23. Let me begin with the part about lacking sense. One of the confusing things about being told that we are living in the "Anthropocene" is that we are made to bear a falsehood, one that comes from such an elementary mistake in reasoning that it seems to emanate from a form of moral corruption pervasive and diffuse like a mist. The falsehood is that humankind is a disruptive, geological force.¹³ The mistake is to conflate social processes that currently determine our planetary situation with our kind of being. The moral corruption is that these social processes get a pass on being the background conditions that they are,¹⁴ driving planetary-scaled wantonness.¹⁵

24. The problems with the sense of the "Anthropocene" are many. At the first level of objection, the sense is plainly false. At the second level of objection, the sense is immoral.

25. To claim or to imply that humankind is a disruptive, geological force is false. Yes, humankind has the potential to be a disruptive, geological force. But it is specific, actual social processes—rather than others—that have formed the

¹¹ Cf. my "This Conversation Never Happened", *Tikkun* 26.03.2018, <https://www.tikkun.org/this-conversation-never-happened> and "How to Do Things Without Words—Silence as the Power of Accountability", *Public Seminar* 28.06.2018, <http://publicseminar.org/2018/06/how-to-do-things-without-words/>.

¹² W.D. Mignolo, C.E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, Durham, NC 2018.

¹³ D. Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses", *Critical Inquiry* 35 [3] (2009), pp. 197–222, <https://doi.org/10.1086/596640>; S.L. Lewis, M.A. Maslin, *The Human Planet: How We Created the Anthropocene*, New Haven 2018.

¹⁴ On background conditions, see I.M. Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, New York 2010, chapters 2 and 4.

¹⁵ W. Steffen et al., "Trajectories of the Earth System in the Anthropocene", *PNAS*, July 2018, <https://www.pnas.org/content/115/33/8252>.

“Great Acceleration”.¹⁶ Although the megafauna extinctions predating recorded history and driven by the invention of technologies for killing at a distance (atlatls, spears, arrows, ...) and the invention of agriculture, which brought with it dense human settlement, accounting, law, and recorded history, were together substantial forces within planetary ecology, study of the onset of the “Anthropocene” is largely focused on a set of practices and institutions emerging within extractive colonialism and industrialization, bundled together in a European ideology called “modernity”.¹⁷ The extraction includes the resources for fossil fuels as well as for nuclear fission and is part of an unsustainable ideology.¹⁸ The industrialization spans modern economies including capitalism and state communism.¹⁹ These practices, as many have noted, are not exhaustive of human social possibilities, are contingent, and are often morally corrupt and wanton.²⁰

26. Given the objectionable nature of the historically contingent, specific social processes made to stand in for all of humankind, occluding humankind’s potential for other, sustainable, and morally accountable social processes presents its own moral problem, beyond the failure of accuracy. Our moral responsibility depends on being able to judge and to act accordingly, choosing between possibilities and doing what is right or good. To presume that humankind as such is a disruptive, geological force is to presume that humankind as such is wanton. This in turn is to presume that we are not capable of moral responsibility. But given that we are and given that the social processes driving our planetary situation are contingent, the implication provided by the sense of the “Anthropocene” is itself immoral. It serves as a way of taking moral responsibility for specific social processes off the table and fatalistically settles us as beings devoid of moral choice. This is dehumanizing and, so, it is immoral. It fails to account for our accountability—and our capacity for conviction.

27. I mean this last conclusion precisely and straight-forwardly. We really must not keep repeating the sense of the “Anthropocene” as if it were merely technical jargon. Nor should it be nihilistic, playful jest²¹—although such whim is perhaps better than an immoral assertion, for it already suspects the word.

¹⁶ See the summary of this expression in J. Dryzek, J. Pickering, *The Politics of the Anthropocene*, New York 2019, chapter 1.

¹⁷ On colonialism’s relation to modernity, see W. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, Durham, NC 2011. Note that even Lewis and Maslin (L. Lewis, M.A. Maslin, op. cit.) advance the view that European colonization of the Americas marks the advent of the “Anthropocene”.

¹⁸ Cf. M. Braungart, W. McDonough, *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things*, New York 2002.

¹⁹ M. Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx’s Critical Theory*, New York 1998.

²⁰ Cf. K. Powys Whyte, “Settler Colonialism, Ecology, & Environmental Injustice”, *Environment & Society* 9 (2018), pp. 129–144, <https://doi:10.3167/ares.2018.090109>; for a more pervasive investigation of the ecological wantonness structured into modern legal constructions, through a case study in Canada involving Algonquin land, see S. Pasternak, *Grounded Authority: The Algonquins of Barriere Lake against the State*, Minneapolis 2017.

²¹ M. Bloom, B. Blais-Bille, “Grimes Announces New Album [sic.] ‘Miss_Anthropocene’”, *Pitchfork* 20.03.2019, <https://pitchfork.com/news/grimes-announces-new-album-miss-anthropocene/>; cf. A. Blasdel,

28. When we do reiterate the sense of the “Anthropocene”, we are complicit in moral corruption. What kind of corruption? Can a world *be* a corruption?

29. To open up the sense of our planetary situation to moral responsibility and to accuracy, our situation needs to be understood through the social processes that have unintentionally weathered it into being. Which are these? Also, how can they be understood from the inside by those living them as well as from the outside by those studying them? These questions are called for to preserve our autonomy.

30. To live an autonomous life is to live a life that makes sense to me on my own terms, working through disagreement with others, grounded in wonder. *My life on the inside should have conviction. So my life on the outside should show consideration.*

31. Suppose that I begin to see that the bundle of social processes organized strongly or mainly in and through capitalism is a main driver of our planetary situation, and suppose that I live my life implicated in all sorts of ways within capitalism—that is, within the bundle of social processes that are strongly or mainly capitalistic. Suppose, too, that I am morally accountable in a basic way. I do not think it is acceptable to cause injustice, and I do not believe it is moral to be wanton with the world of life. So I begin to broach a disagreement with my world.

32. But I live in this world, and so do others with whom I disagree about the moral acceptability of our world. In a sense, we share a world but have different worlds, too. Facing the moral problems of capitalism in driving our planetary situation—both risking and causing injustice and risking and expressing wantonness with the world of life—I must start to make sense of my situation in a way that allows it to make sense to me while considering how it may make sense to others. This seems to imply, in my case, wondering about how our economy could be otherwise, what my world could become, and what my role in changing our world could be. The sense of our planetary situation, passing through autonomy, then becomes a transformative social process on its own in terms I can understand and in which my life can be involved. It becomes a transformative social process open to disagreement with others, too. It acquires some conviction.

33. This brief picture of an autonomous conception of our planetary situation shows one of the things that is missing from the sense of the “Anthropocene”. When the sense of our planetary situation is both false and dehumanizing, a transformative sense of our situation is left out of discourse. What other world could be possible than the dehumanizing and false world of the “Anthropocene”?

34. “The best lack all conviction”, I think to myself.²²

35. Transformation and accountability go hand in hand, grounded in the mysteries that, on hard strained seeking of sense, slip out of our hands.²³ At the world’s point of disappearance, neither wonder nor conviction go missing.

“‘A reckoning for our species’: the [*sic.*] philosopher prophet of the Anthropocene” 15.06.2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/15/timothy-morton-anthropocene-philosopher>.

²² W.B. Yeats, “The second coming”. Available at: <https://poets.org/poem/second-coming>.

²³ S. Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism*, Chicago 1990.

36. The ground slips away from us, and yet we account for it, rather than being capricious.

37. Sense disappears between us, and yet we are accountable to each other, not egotistical and wanton.

38. What would be a transformative sense of our planetary situation? It would have to be one that expresses our moral responsibility and in which we become autonomous, making sense through disagreement over time. In this transformative sense, our becoming responsible would be bound up with understanding our situation by our own lights, and these in turn would involve our changing our world through the sense we develop.

39. Since we live in a world together, including past and future generations and the more than human world, the sense we develop would have to appear through disagreement, grounded in wonder. The transformation we develop would have to emerge through working on our worlds from the inside, jolted and opened up by other worlds, until our worlds are different and the relation between our worlds begins to create another world that we together share.

40. Disagreements in sense are disagreements in the worlds wherein we live. Imagine that we disagree about the sense of our planetary situation. You are a certain kind of natural scientist and think that it displays human nature (that we are geologically wanton).²⁴ I think our planetary situation displays a specific kind of society's nature (that of modern societies emerging from and continuing the colonial world order). We both think the situation of late is novel; but someone else does not (rather, our situation of late was prefigured by colonialism already).²⁵

Note that naming is not really the issue here. The scientist calls our situation the "Anthropocene". I don't think having a name for our situation is the issue, but rather seeing the thing that it is as and through the social processes that have shaped it. The indigenous scholar sees our situation as more colonialism—both naming it and stating the main social processes at issue (capitalism, industrialism, racism, patriarchy).²⁶

What's at stake for us is more than a name. It's a way of understanding the situation and also of approaching it. The scientist, consistently for his position if inconsistently for his humanity, thinks that there may not be any way to approach it. We're doomed. I think that we must take on the main social drivers of our situation and change them. The indigenous scholar thinks that decolonization and, more generally, decoloniality, are required.²⁷

Wonder, as a transformative moment in sense-finding and making, works in the relationship we establish when, out of consideration for each other and of each

²⁴ In a dispute with me, Carl Safina held this view. In-person and email correspondence, Case Western Reserve University, Fall 2016

²⁵ K. Powys Whyte, "Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral Dystopias and Fantasies of Climate Change Crises", *Environment & Planning E: Nature and Space* 1 [1–2] (2018), pp. 224–242, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2514848618777621>; and "Is It Colonial *Déjà Vu*? Indigenous Peoples and Climate Injustice", [in:] *Humanities for the Environment: Integrating Knowledges, Forging New Constellations of Practices*, J. Adamson, M. Davis, and H. Huang (eds.), New York 2017, pp. 88–104.

²⁶ K. Powys Whyte, "Settler Colonialism, Ecology, & Environmental Injustice".

²⁷ On "decoloniality", see W.D. Mignolo, C.E. Walsh, op. cit.

other's worlds, we consider how another world is possible. Once our sense of our situation is grounded in wonder, *engaging in a process of autonomous conception of our planetary situation*, we wonder what of the world another's world discloses. The result is a sense of our situation that is (more) pluralistic, synthetic, and complex. We have to synthesize a new sense of our world, each by our own lights, formed in what wondering about the world disclosed by another's judgment has shown us. This involves an (increased) awareness that the world is seen in many ways—that the sense of our planetary situation isn't simply settled, is not one, and emerges on the edge of the unforeseen judgments we encounter—what they, surprisingly, will uncover for us. So our sense of our situation becomes (more) complex.

41. What it is for us to live in our situation going forward likewise becomes (more) complex.²⁸ The transformations we seek in the situation we share involves already the transformation of our conceptions and the way they guide our living. Call this, again, conviction.

42. What seems important here is that the process of transformation, too, becomes an integral part of carrying on life within and between social processes.

43. To live in disagreement, which is to say, in wonder, is to live within social processes formed around transforming sense through moral and intellectual accountability. Moral accountability is to each other. Intellectual accountability is to the world as it is disclosed.

44. Such a manner of living—call it a morality (for it is interpersonal²⁹)—is opposed to the two problems of the “Anthropocene”.

45. One way to think about the idea presented here is that we should demand a “billion” names for our situation,³⁰ rather than a simplification aimed at being “pragmatic”.³¹ The use of the number “billion” is a gesture to humankind's many worlds and the more than human world's many environments.

46. There should be a *sensibility of the billion*, if I may put it like that. The morality of autonomous conceptions of our planetary situation would seem to involve such a sensibility.

47. If I were to be challenged to provide the name for our planetary situation, I would then reject the request as not making sense to me. Instead, I would claim that we must approach our situation with “a sensibility of the billion”.³²

²⁸ This appears to be what Roy Scranton wanted to say, even if his own message contradicted it at the end, in “No Happy Ending: On Bill McKibben's ‘Falter’ and David Wallace-Wells's ‘The Uninhabitable Earth’”, *Los Angeles Review of Books* 3.06.2019, <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/no-happy-ending-on-bill-mckibbens-falter-and-david-wallace-wells-the-uninhabitable-earth/>.

²⁹ An ethics is monadic in deontic form. See M. Thompson, “What is it to Wrong Someone? A Puzzle about Justice”, [in:] *Reason and Value: Themes from the Moral Philosophy of Joseph Raz*, R.J. Wallace, Ph. Pettit, S. Scheffler, M. Smith (eds.), Oxford 2004, pp. 333–384. See also S. Darwall, *The Second Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability*, Cambridge, MA 2006.

³⁰ K. Yusoff, *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None*, Minneapolis 2019.

³¹ Cf. J. Purdy, *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene*, Cambridge, MA 2015.

³² Cf. S. Wakefield, “The Possibilities for New Ways of Living: What students help their professors learn about teaching the Anthropocene”, *Public Seminar* 3.12.2018, <http://publicseminar.org/2018/12/education-in-the-back-loop/>.

48. Complexity is the way through, not the problem. The way through to what? To autonomy, which is to say, to moral accountability.

49. Complexity developed through wonder in the process of autonomous disagreement leads to realizations, and it depends on participation. Complexity is transformative, and its transformation is social. It has come from a social act, from social investigation.

50. Autonomous conceptions of our planetary situation are committed to becoming increasingly complex and increasingly participatory. Grounded in wonder, they are committed to becoming increasingly transformative. Intensifying responsibility for the sense we share, they are committed to becoming increasingly accountable.

51. There is a way to *characterize* (not name) our planetary situation, once we understand that the sense of it must be autonomous. Given that our planetary situation involves all of us, including the more than human world here on Earth, it makes sense to say that our situation must be structured by anthroponomy.³³

52. Anthroponomy is autonomy pervasive of humankind, including in our relations with the more than human world to which we must be morally accountable in the mode of justice or of decency (avoiding wantonness).³⁴ Normally, autonomy must be potentially accountable to anyone as a basic mode of moral responsibility.³⁵ What makes anthroponomy conceptually distinct from autonomy is that

³³ I first used “anthroponomy” in “Ethical Adaptation to Climate Change”, *European Financial Review*, October–November 2012, pp. 22–26. The most articulated paper-length introduction of it is in “‘Goodness itself Must Change’. Anthroponomy in an Age of Socially-Caused, Planetary Environmental Change”, *Ethics & Bioethics (in Central Europe)* 6 [3–4] (2016), pp. 187–202, <https://doi.org/10.1515/ebce-2016-0020>. My first discussion of anthroponomy in relation to decolonization was in “Decolonialism and democracy: On the most painful challenges to anthroponomy”, *Inhabiting the Anthropocene* 27.07.2016, <https://inhabitingtheanthropocene.com/2016/07/27/decolonialism-and-democracy-on-the-most-painful-challenges-to-anthroponomy/>. To my knowledge, there is no other philosophical use of the term “anthroponomy” except in Kant’s *Metaphysics of Morals*. See, for instance, D. Susskind, *The Idea of Humanity: Anthropology and Anthroponomy in Kant’s Ethics*, New York 2015. An online circulating use of “anthroponomy” as a name given to human-environment interactions in a sub field of anthropology has, however, been unsubstantiated in my research with anthropologists who specialize in the area where the sub-field should be. Finally, I found one use of “anthroponomy” in Martin Gorke’s *The Death of Our Planet’s Species: A Challenge to Ecology and Ethics* (transl. P. Nevers, Washington, DC 2003). It named the giving of value to nature by humans. But the word for this would appear to be more precisely, *anthroponoēsis*.

³⁴ M. Nussbaum, *The Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, Cambridge, MA 2006; my “From Humans to All of Life: Nussbaum’s Transformation of Dignity”, [in:] *Capabilities, Gender, Equality: Towards Fundamental Entitlements*, F. Comim, M. C. Nussbaum (eds.), Cambridge 2014, pp. 175–191; and my *The Ecological Life: Discovering Citizenship and a Sense of Humanity*, Lanham 2006, lecture 6; “Species Extinction and the Vice of Thoughtlessness: The Importance of Spiritual Exercises for Learning Virtue”, *JAGE* 23 [1–2] (2010), pp. 61–83, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10806-009-9190-5>; and “Living Up to our Humanity: The Elevated Extinction Rate Event and What It Says about Us”, *Ethics, Policy, and Environment* 17 [3] (2014), pp. 339–354, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21550085.2014.955309>.

³⁵ S. Darwall, op. cit. See also E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or beyond Essence*, transl. A. Lingis, Pittsburgh 1998. Levinas does not understand autonomy relationally, but mistakes it for self-sufficiency. But *de res*, he points to roughly the same thing as Darwall and I do.

with anthroponomy, one must explicitly attend to the widest reaches of humankind, which in our case currently are mainly planetary, with a substantial amount of orbital effects and some deep space actions.³⁶

53. Anthroponomy as a moral demand has materialized as a result of the planetary situation in which we live. Once specific social processes—for instance, those driving global warming—reached deep into time and extended their effects globally, the concerns of autonomy became of moral necessity the concerns of anthroponomy. This, rather than resulting in deadlocked confusion, is how planetary-scaled, socially-caused, environmental changes should modify the demands of moral responsibility.³⁷

54. Anthroponomy consists in autonomy scaled to the disappearance point of accountability both spatially and temporally. How far and across what scales (microscopic, regional, planetary, ...) do the effects of our social processes extend? How old and how enduring are the effects (or effect processes playing out) of our social processes?

55. Anthroponomy consists in autonomy scaled to the disappearance point of accountability formally. In what forms might sense between us be undermined or opened up? What are the conditions of sense being worked out between potentially autonomous beings? How should the drive of every living being to flourish (*oikēiosis*) be understood within the conditions of sense when moral responsibility demands that life is not just something one abuses or wastes?³⁸

56. Because anthroponomy presses accountability to its point of disappearance (of indiscernibility), wonder is doubly crucial to its grounding, above and beyond the role wonder has in grounding disagreement in the mystery of the world.³⁹ “A sensibility of the billion” is important for anthroponomy in more ways than one.

57. We might even say that the conviction of wonder is important for anthroponomy.

58. Anthroponomy, as a form of moral responsibility in which the claims of autonomy-in-relationship are anticipated and extended to the point of indiscernibility, makes sense as a response to the conditions weathered into being by the social processes of modernity that have expanded globally, temporally, and aesthetically to points of disappearance, disrupting all that is.⁴⁰ These conditions have materialized primarily as planetary conditions, emerging from socially stratified and

³⁶ Cf. N. Brenner, *Implosions/Explosions: Towards a Study of Planetary Urbanization*, Berlin 2013 and the work of the Harvard GSD Urban Theory Lab, *Operational Landscapes: Towards an Alternative Cartography of World Urbanization*, 2013–2016, <http://www.urbantheorylab.net/projects/>, esp. “Atmosphere”.

³⁷ D. Jamieson, *Reason in a Dark Time: Why the Struggle against Climate Change Failed—and What It Means for our Future*, New York 2014.

³⁸ See again M. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, my “From Humans to All of Life” and *The Ecological Life*, lecture 6.

³⁹ Cf. M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, transl. J. Stambaugh, D. Schmidt, Albany 2010; Heidegger uses the misleading term *Angst* (translated as *anxiety*) for wonder. The thing to which he points is the possibility of possibilities.

⁴⁰ W.D. Mignolo, C.E. Walsh, op. cit. and J. Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art*, transl. Z. Paul, New York 2011.

hegemonic processes of extraction, constant reorganization, and mass control of the environment that have reorganized planet energy in wanton ways.⁴¹ One name for the ideological consistency of these social processes is coloniality.

59. At bottom, coloniality names a bundle of hegemonic social processes that extract energy unsustainably from captive ecologies, including people, often condensed into human labor at that trophic point, involving and generating oppression and wanton use of not only those ecologies but all implicated in or related to them by the social processes and their intended (e.g., waste disposal) and unintended (e.g., global warming) effects. To say that coloniality is hegemonic is to point to the ways in which it is predicated off of the lack of autonomy of constituted underclasses—human and non-human—effectively serving or at the disposal of constituted upper-classes of people. For instance, when an effectively oligarchical organization of planetary energy running through the circuits of capitalism and advanced industrialism today produces both a global underclass and a perilous byproduct Earth for future generations risked all the way to a total collapse of civilization and a possible mass extinction event involving humans as well (call that a “sickness unto death!”), we have an example of coloniality in operation at its planetary scale, to its point of disappearance.⁴²

60. One of the ways in which coloniality operates is through totalization—the erasure of plurality from the social processes that constitute it.⁴³ In erasing the many ways in which the world makes sense to people, and by responsible extension to the more than human world (in its *oikēiosis*), coloniality suppresses autonomy as a basic form of moral accountability and structuring operation of just social processes. Coloniality’s totalization tends to globalize discourse by speaking for planetary plurality, reducing it to one way that is consistent with the ongoing oligarchical extraction of energy in wanton ways.

61. It is hard to avoid, then, that the “Anthropocene” is a form of coloniality. The “Anthropocene’s” reduction of plurality to one, uniform cause that obfuscates the specific social processes driving our planetary situation is a form of totalization hiding stratified, hegemonic social processes. When our planetary situation is caused by “humankind” as such, autonomous conceptions of our planetary situation are suppressed. A fatalistic picture of human beings as wanton covers over the social processes driving our situation—in particular, “the Great Acceleration”.

62. The “Anthropocene” is at best complicit with coloniality. Such is the nature of ideology.

63. I repeat: Can a world be corrupt?

⁴¹ N. Brenner, op. cit. and N. Brenner with K. Moe et al., “Energetics of Urbanization”, Harvard GSD Urban Theory Lab, 2018, <http://www.urbantheorylab.net/projects/>; cf. M. Postone, op. cit.; H. Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, Boston 1991; cf. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel’s claim in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), applicable ironically to state communism as well as to capitalism, that “all that is solid melts into air”.

⁴² Stephan Gardiner’s global and intergenerational “storms” help understand the effectively oligarchical construction of extant political economies as colonial. Cf. idem, *A Perfect Moral Storm: The Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change*, New York 2011.

⁴³ W.D. Mignolo, C.E. Walsh, op. cit.

64. Anthroponomy as a response to our planetary situation is decolonial for the reason that it guards the plurality of worlds erased by coloniality.

65. What does it take to construct social processes that are anthroponomous—increasingly participatory, complex, and morally accountable as senses of our planetary situation?⁴⁴ “A sensibility of the billion”?

66. Autonomous conceptions of our planetary situation organized anthroponomically minimize the “Anthropocene” as merely one sense to be worked through of our situation. That sense quickly becomes flimsy for its problematic natures (its inaccuracy, dehumanization, and complicity with coloniality). To find public discourse fixated on it—especially given its evident problems—while more complex, morally accountable, and participatory conceptions of our planetary situation are largely ignored⁴⁵ is a mark of the heteronomy structuring our times. “The best lack all conviction”.

67. It is 4:37 A.M. in Shaker Heights, Ohio on June 12th, 2019. My sense of our planetary situation is that we should stop speaking of it using grand names. I can no longer hear the universe—dark movement of the more than human world. Nor can I hear the many languages, experiences, and ways of life that make up my imperfect sensibility of the billion. Only in the dark movement of the world, the rustling of countless ways of making sense of where we are right now (count them!), can I begin—as if engaged in apophatic practice—to come to terms with our situation and with the violence of the hegemonic processes that are wanton with life and oppressive in their oligarchy on planetary scales. In this world, not us yet.⁴⁶

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⁴⁴ Cf. S. Vogel, *Thinking like a Mall: Environmental Philosophy after the End of Nature*, Cambridge, MA 2015, where social construction becomes explicit.

⁴⁵ Cf. Kyle Powys Whyte, “Settler Colonialism, Ecology, & Environmental Injustice”.

⁴⁶ I would like to thank Urszula Lisowska, Wojciech Malecki, the International Society for Environmental Ethics 2019 annual meeting, H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest, Oregon, U.S.A. and the Earth System Governance Project 2019 annual meeting, Oaxaca, Mexico. An elaborated form of this article’s account may be found in *Involving Anthroponomy in the Anthropocene: On Decoloniality*, London 2020.

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Case Western Reserve University resides on the ancestral lands of the Lenape (Delaware), Shawnee, Wyandot Miami, Ottawa, Potawatomi, and other Great Lakes tribes (Chippewa, Kickapoo, Wea, Pinakashaw, and Kaskaskia). This land of the “Northwest Territory” was ceded under force from the U.S. military by 1100 chiefs and warriors signing the 1795 Treaty of Greenville. Subsequently, the treaty, like all 374 treaties with Native Americans ratified by the U.S. Senate, was violated by settlers and unenforced by the United States of America.