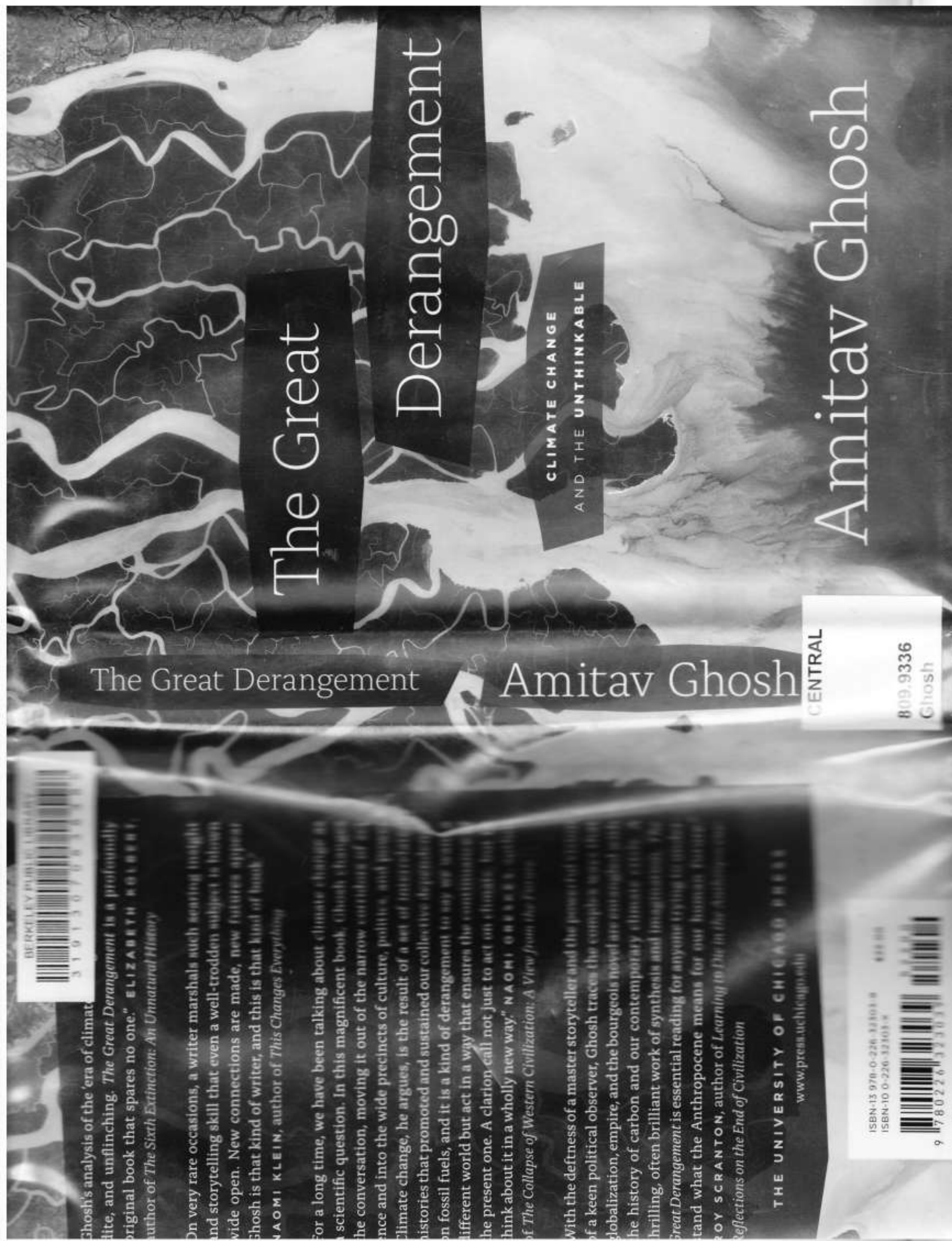

Section 3 - Politics

1.

Climate change poses a powerful challenge to what is perhaps the single most important political conception of the modern era: the idea of freedom, which is central not only to contemporary politics but also to the humanities, the arts, and literature.

Since the Enlightenment, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has pointed out, philosophers of freedom were "mainly, and understandably, concerned with how humans would escape the injustice, oppression, inequality, or even uniformity foisted on them by other humans or human-made systems." Nonhuman forces and systems had no place in this calculus of liberty: indeed being independent of Nature was considered one of the defining characteristics of freedom itself. Only those peoples who had thrown off the shackles of their environment were thought to be endowed with historical agency; they alone were believed to merit the attention of historians—other peoples might have had a past but they were thought to lack history, which realizes itself through human agency.

Now that the stirrings of the earth have forced us to recognize that we have never been free of nonhuman constraints how are we to rethink those conceptions of history and agency? The same question could be posed with equal force in relation to art and literature, particularly in regard to the twentieth century, when there was a radical turn away from the nonhuman to the human, from the figurative toward the abstract.

These developments were not, of course, generated by purely aesthetic considerations. They were influenced also by politics, especially the politics of the Cold War—as, for example, when American intelligence agencies intervened to promote

abstract expressionism against the social realism favored by the USSR.

But the trajectory of the arts had been determined long before the Cold War: through the twentieth century they followed a course that led them to become increasingly self-reflexive. "Twentieth-century art," wrote Roger Shattuck in 1968, "has tended to *search itself* rather than exterior reality for beauty of meaning or truth, a condition that entails a new relationship between the work of art, the world, the spectator, and the artist." It was thus that human consciousness, agency, and identity came to be placed at the center of every kind of aesthetic enterprise.

In this realm, too, Asia has played a special role: the questions that animated, obsessed, and haunted the thinkers and writers of twentieth-century Asia were precisely those that related to the "modern." Jawaharlal Nehru's passion for dams and factories and Mao Zedong's "War on Nature" had their counterparts also in literature and the arts.

In their embrace of modernity, Asian writers and artists created ruptures that radically reconfigured the region's literature, art, architecture, and so on. In Asia as elsewhere, this meant that the abstract and the formal gained ascendancy over the figurative and the iconographic; it meant also that many traditions, including those that accorded the nonhuman a special salience, were jettisoned. Here, as elsewhere, freedom came to be seen as a way of "transcending" the constraints of material life—of exploring new regions of the human mind, spirit, emotion, consciousness, interiority: freedom became a quantity that resided entirely in the minds, bodies, and desires of human beings. There is, of course, as Moretti notes, a sort of "ascetic heroism" in such a vision, but it is also clear now that the more "radical and clear-sighted the aesthetic achievements of that time, the more unliveable the world [they] depict."

And now, when we look back upon that time, with our gaze reversed, having woken against our will to the knowledge that we have always been watched and judged by other eyes, what stands out? Is it possible that the arts and literature of this time will one day be remembered not for their daring, nor for their championing of freedom, but rather because of their complicity in the Great Derangement? Could it be said that the "stance of unyielding rage against the official order" that the artists and writers of this period adopted was actually, from the perspective of the Anthropocene, a form of collusion? Recent years have certainly demonstrated the truth of an observation that Guy Debord made long ago: that spectacular forms of rebelliousness are not, by any means, incompatible with a "smug acceptance of what exists . . . for the simple reason that dissatisfaction itself becomes a commodity."

If such a judgement—or even the possibility of it—seems shocking, it is because we have come to accept that the front ranks of the arts are in some way in advance of mainstream culture; that artists and writers are able to look ahead, not just in aesthetic matters, but also in regard to public affairs. Writers and artists have themselves embraced this role with increasing fervor through the twentieth century, and never more so than in the period in which carbon emissions were accelerating.

As proof of this, let us imagine for a moment, just as a thought experiment, that a graph could be drawn of the political engagements of writers and artists through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. It is quite likely, I suspect, that such a graph would closely resemble a chart of greenhouse gas emissions over the same period: that is to say, the line would indicate a steep and steady rise over the decades, with a few sudden and dramatic upsurges. The First World War would represent one such escalation, the rise in industrial and military activity being mirrored by an enor-

mous outpouring of literature, much of it explicitly political.

During the interwar years, too, the graphs would remain on roughly parallel tracks, a rise in worldwide industrial activity being matched by the increasingly visible involvement of writers with political movements, such as socialism, communism, antifascism, nationalism, and anti-imperialism: Lorca, Brecht, Orwell, Lu Xun, and Tagore being cases in point.

Only in the early post–Second World War decades would there be a marked divergence in the two graphs, with the political engagements of writers outpacing the rise in the rate of emissions. The large-scale industrialization of Asia had yet to begin, after all, while writers around the world were broadening their political engagements on every front. We need think only of the Progressive Writers Movement in India and Pakistan; of decolonization and Sartre; James Baldwin and the civil rights movement; the Beats and the student uprisings of the 1960s; the persecution of Pramoedya Ananta Toer in Indonesia and of Solzhenitsyn in the Soviet Union. This was a time when writers were in the forefront of every political movement around the world.

Not till the 1980s would the graphs again converge, and then, too, not because of any diminution in the political energies of writers and artists but only because the rate of emissions from Asia had begun its steady upward climb. But in this period too, writers were in the vanguard of many movements, feminism and gay rights being but two of them. This was also a time in which the paradoxical coupling of the processes of decolonization, on the one hand, and the increasing hegemony of the English language, on the other, made it possible for writers like myself to enter the global literary mainstream in a way that had not been possible in the preceding two centuries. At the same time, changes in technologies of communication, and a rapid growth in networks of translation, served to interna-

tionalize both politics and literature to a point where it could be said that Goethe's vision of a "world literature" (*Weltliteratur*) had come close to being realized.

I can attest from my own experience that this period—when an exploding rate of carbon emissions was rewriting the planet's destiny—was a breathtakingly exciting time in which to launch upon a career as a writer. As I've noted before, not the least aspect of this was the promise of "being ahead" (*en avant*, of being a part, in effect, of an avant-garde), and this conception has been one of the animating forces of the literary and artistic imagination since the start of the twentieth century. "Modernism wrote into its scripture a major text," goes Roger Shattuck's wry observation, "the avant-garde we have with us always."

To want to be ahead, and to celebrate and mythify this endeavor, is indeed one of the most powerful impulses of modernity itself. If Bruno Latour is right, then to be modern is to envision time as irreversible, to think of it as a progression that is forever propelled forward by revolutionary ruptures: these in turn are conceived of on the analogy of scientific innovations, each of which is thought to render its predecessor obsolete.

And obsolescence is indeed modernity's equivalent of perdition and hellfire. That is why this era's most potent words of damnation, passed down in an unbroken relay from Hegel and Marx to President Obama, is the malediction of being "on the wrong side of history."

That the world's most powerful leader should hurl these words at his enemies, in much the same way that curses and imprecations were once used by kings, priests, and shamans, is of course a disavowal of the very irreversibility of time that the mantra invokes: for is it not also an acknowledgment of the power that words have possessed through the ages, of striking fear into the hearts of foes, of conjuring up visions of terror

with curses and maledictions? And for modern man, terror is exactly what is evoked by the fear of being left behind, of being "backward."

There is perhaps no better means of tracking the diffusion of modernity across the globe than by charting the widening grip of this fear, which was nowhere more powerfully felt than in the places that were most visibly marked by the stigmata of "backwardness." It was what drove artists and writers in Asia, Africa, and the Arab world to go to extraordinary lengths to "keep up" with each iteration of modernity in the arts: surrealism, existentialism, and so on. And far from diminishing over time, the impulse gathered strength through the twentieth century, so that writers of my generation were, if anything, even less resistant to its power than were our predecessors: we could not but be aware of the many "isms"—structuralism, postmodernism, postcolonialism—that flashed past our eyes with ever-increasing speed.

This is why it comes as a surprise—a shock, really—to look back upon that period of surging carbon emissions and recognize that very few (and I do not exempt myself from this) of the literary minds of that intensely *engagé* period were alive to the archaic voice whose rumblings, once familiar, had now become inaudible to humanity: that of the earth and its atmosphere.

I do not mean to imply that there were no manifestations of a general sense of anxiety and foreboding in the literature of that time; nor do I mean to suggest that mankind had ceased to be haunted by intuitions of apocalypse. These were certainly no less abundant in the last few decades than they have been since stories were first told. It is when I try to think of writers whose imaginative work communicated a more specific sense of the accelerating changes in our environment that I find myself at a loss; of literary novelists writing in English only a handful of names come to mind: J. G. Ballard, Margaret Atwood, Kurt

Vonnegut Jr., Barbara Kingsolver, Doris Lessing, Cormac McCarthy, Ian McEwan, and T. Coraghessan Boyle. No doubt many other names could be added to this list, but even if it were to be expanded a hundredfold or more, it would remain true, I think, that the literary mainstream, even as it was becoming more *engagé* on many fronts, remained just as unaware of the crisis on our doorstep as the population at large.

In this regard, the avant-garde, far from being "ahead," was clearly a laggard. Could it be, then, that the same process that inaugurated the rising death spiral of carbon emissions also ensured, in an uncannily clever gesture of self-protection, that the artists, writers, and poets of that era would go racing off in directions that actually blinded them to exactly what they thought they were seeing: that is to say, what lay *en avant*, what was to come? And if this were so, would it not be a damning indictment of a vision in which the arts are seen to be moving forever forward, in a dimension of irreversible time, by means of innovation and the free pursuit of imagination?

2.

Writers are not alone, of course, in having broadened and intensified their political and social engagements over the last couple of decades: this has happened to the entirety of what used to be called "the intelligentsia." In no small part has this been brought about by changes in the technology of communication: the Internet and the digital media have made the sphere of the political broader and more intrusive than ever before. Today everybody with a computer and a web connection is an activist. Yet what I said earlier about literary circles is true also of the intelligentsia, and indeed of circles far beyond: generally speaking, politicization has not translated into a wider engagement with the crisis of climate change.

The lack of a transitive connection between political mobilization, on the one hand, and global warming, on the other, is nowhere more evident than in the countries of South Asia, all of which are extraordinarily vulnerable to climate change. In the last few decades, India has become very highly politicized; great numbers take to the streets to express indignation and outrage over a wide range of issues; on television channels and social media, people speak their minds ever more stridently. Yet climate change has not resulted in an outpouring of passion in the country. This despite the fact that India has innumerable environmental organizations and grassroots movements. The voices of the country's many eminent climate scientists, environmental activists, and reporters do not appear to have made much of a mark either.

What is true of India is true also of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal: climate change has not been a significant political issue in any of those countries, even though the impacts are already being felt across the Indian subcontinent, not only in an increasing number of large-scale disasters but also in the form of a slow calamity that is quietly but inexorably destroying livelihoods and stoking social and political conflicts. Instead, political energy has increasingly come to be focused on issues that relate, in one way or another, to questions of identity: religion, caste, ethnicity, language, gender rights, and so on.

The divergence between the common interest and the preoccupations of the public sphere points to a change in the nature of politics itself. The political is no longer about the commonweal or the "body politic" and the making of collective decisions. It is about something else.

What, then, is that "something"?

A similar question could be posed in relation to the literary imaginary: Why is it increasingly open to certain conceptions of the political while remaining closed to an issue that concerns our collective survival?

Here again the trajectory of the modern novel represents, I think, a special case of a broader cultural phenomenon. The essence of this phenomenon is again captured by the words that John Updike used to characterize the modern novel: "individual moral adventure." I have already addressed one of the implications of this conception of the novel: the manner in which it banishes the collective from the territory of the fictional imagination. I want to attend now to another aspect of it: the implications of the word *moral*.

We encounter this word very frequently today in relation to fiction as well as politics. In my view, the notion of "the moral" is the hinge that has made possible the joining of the political and the literary imaginary.

The word *moral* derives from a Latin root signifying "custom" or "mores"; connotations of aristocratic usages may well, as Nietzsche famously argued, have been implicit in it. The word has had a long career in English: having once resided within the Church—especially the churches of Protestantism—it has now come to draw its force primarily from the domain of the political. But this is not a politics that is principally concerned with the ordering of public affairs. It is rather a politics that is also increasingly conceived of as an "individual moral adventure" in the sense of being an interior journey guided by the conscience. Just as novels have come to be seen as narratives of identity, so too has politics become, for many, a search for personal authenticity, a journey of self-discovery.

Although the evolution of the term moral has brought it squarely into the secular domain, the term continues to be powerfully marked by its origins, which clearly lie within Christianity and particularly Protestantism. The moral-political, as thus conceived, is essentially Protestantism without a God: it

commits its votaries to believing in perfectibility, individual redemption, and a never-ending journey to a shining city on a hill—constructed, in this instance, not by a deity, but by democracy. This is a vision of the world as a secular church, where all the congregants offer testimony about their journeys of self-discovery.

This imagining of the world has profound consequences for fiction as well as the body politic. Fiction, for one, comes to be reimagined in such a way that it becomes a form of bearing witness, of testifying, and of charting the career of the conscience. Thus do sincerity and authenticity become, in politics as in literature, the greatest of virtues. No wonder, then, that one of the literary icons of our age, the novelist Karl Ove Knausgaard, has publicly admitted to "being sick of fiction." As opposed to the "falsity" of fiction, Knausgaard has "set out to write exclusively from his own life." This is not, however, a new project: it belongs squarely within the tradition of "diary keeping and spiritual soul-searching [that] . . . was a central aspect of Puritan religiosity." This secular baring-of-the-soul is exactly what is demanded by the world-as-church.

If literature is conceived of as the expression of authentic experience, then fiction will inevitably come to be seen as "false." But to reproduce the world as it exists need not be the project of fiction; what fiction—and by this I mean not only the novel but also epic and myth—makes possible is to approach the world in a subjunctive mode, to conceive of it *as if* it were other than it is: in short, the great, irreplaceable potentiality of fiction is that it makes possible the imagining of possibilities. And to imagine other forms of human existence is exactly the challenge that is posed by the climate crisis: for if there is any one thing that global warming has made perfectly clear it is that to think about the world only as it is amounts to a formula for collective suicide. We need, rather, to envision what

it might be. But as with much else that is uncanny about the Anthropocene, this challenge has appeared before us at the very moment when the form of imagining that is best suited to answering it—fiction—has turned in a radically different direction.

This then is the paradox and the price of conceiving of fiction and politics in terms of individual moral adventures: it negates possibility itself. As for the nonhuman, it is almost by definition excluded from a politics that sanctifies subjectivity and in which political claims are made in the first person. Consider, for example, the stories that congeal around questions like, "Where were you when the Berlin Wall fell?" or "Where were you on 9/11?" Will it ever be possible to ask, in the same vein, "Where were you at 400 ppm [parts per million]?" or "Where were you when the Larsen B ice shelf broke up?"

For the body politic, this vision of politics as moral journey has also had the consequence of creating an ever-growing divergence between a public sphere of political performance and the realm of actual governance: the latter is now controlled by largely invisible establishments that are guided by imperatives of their own. And as the public sphere grows ever more performative, at every level from presidential campaigns to online petitions, its ability to influence the actual exercise of power becomes increasingly attenuated.

This was starkly evident in the buildup to the Iraq War in 2003: I was in New York on February 15 that year, and I joined the massive antiwar demonstration that wound through the avenues of mid-Manhattan. Similar demonstrations were staged in six hundred other cities, in sixty countries around the world; tens of millions of people took part in them, making them possibly the largest single manifestation of public dissent in history. Yet even at that time there was a feeling of hopelessness; relatively few, I suspect, believed that the marches

would effect a change in policy—and indeed they did not. Then, as never before, it became clear that the public sphere's ability to influence the security and policy establishment had eroded drastically.

Since then the process has only accelerated: in many other matters, like austerity, surveillance, drone warfare, and so on, it is now perfectly clear that in the West political processes exert very limited influence over the domain of statecraft—so much so that it has even been suggested that "citizens no longer *seriously expect* . . . that politicians will really represent their interests and implement their demands."

This altered political reality may in part be an effect of the dominance of petroleum in the world economy. As Timothy Mitchell has shown, the flow of oil is radically unlike the movement of coal. The nature of coal, as a material, is such that its transportation creates multiple choke points where organized labor can exert pressure on corporations and the state. This is not case with oil, which flows through pipelines that can bypass concentrations of labor. This was exactly why British and American political elites began to encourage the use of oil over coal after the First World War.

These efforts succeeded perhaps beyond their own wildest dreams. As an instrument of disempowerment oil has been spectacularly effective in removing the levers of power from the reach of the populace. "No matter how many people take to the streets in massive marches," writes Roy Scranton, "they cannot put their hands on the real flows of power because they do not help to produce it. They only consume."

Under these circumstances, a march or a demonstration of popular feeling amounts to "little more than an orgy of democratic emotion, an activist-themed street fair, a real-world analogue to Twitter hashtag campaigns: something that gives you a nice feeling, says you belong in a certain group, and is

completely divorced from actual legislation and governance."

In other words, the public sphere, where politics is performed, has been largely emptied of content in terms of the exercise of power: as with fiction, it has become a forum for secular testimony, a baring-of-the-soul in the world-as-church. Politics as thus practiced is primarily an exercise in personal expressiveness. Contemporary culture in all its aspects (including religious fundamentalisms of almost every variety) is pervaded by this expressivism, which is itself "to a significant degree a result of the strong role of Protestant Christianity in the making of the modern world." There could be no better vehicle for this expressivism than the Internet, which makes various means of self-expression instantly available through social media. And as tweets and posts and clips circle the globe, they generate their mirror images of counterexpression in a dynamic that quickly becomes a double helix of negation.

As far back as the 1960s Guy Debord argued in his seminal book *The Society of the Spectacle*: "The whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that was once directly lived has become mere representation." The ways in which political engagements unfold over social media confirm this thesis, propounded long before the Internet became so large a part of our lives: "The spectacle is by definition immune from human activity, inaccessible to any projected review or correction. *It is the opposite of dialogue*. Wherever representation takes on an independent existence, the spectacle reestablishes its rule."

The net result is a deadlocked public sphere, with the actual exercise of power being relegated to the interlocking complex of corporations and institutions of governance that has come to be known as the "deep state." From the point of view of corporations and other establishment entities, a deadlocked pub-

lic is, of course, the best possible outcome, which, no doubt, is why they frequently strive to produce it: the funding of climate change "denial" in the United States and elsewhere, by corporations like Exxon—which have long known about the consequences of carbon emissions—is a perfect example of this.

In effect, the countries of the West are now in many senses "post-political spaces" that are managed by apparatuses of various kinds. For many, this creates a haunting sense of loss that manifests itself in an ever-more-desperate yearning to recoup a genuinely participatory politics. This is in no small part the driving force behind such disparate figures as Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders, on the one hand, and Donald Trump, on the other. But the collapse of political alternatives, the accompanying disempowerment, and the ever-growing intrusion of the market have also produced responses of another kind—nihilistic forms of extremism that employ methods of spectacular violence. This too has taken on a life of its own.

3.

The public politics of climate change is itself an illustration of the ways in which the moral-political can produce paralysis.

Of late, many activists and concerned people have begun to frame climate change as a "moral issue." This has become almost a plea of last resort, appeals of many other kinds having failed to produce concerted action on climate change. So, in an ironic twist, the individual conscience is now increasingly seen as the battleground of choice for a conflict that is self-evidently a problem of the global commons, requiring collective action: it is as if every other resource of democratic governance had been exhausted leaving only this residue—the moral.

This framing of the issue certainly has one great virtue, in that it breaks decisively with the economistic, cost-benefit

language that the international climate change bureaucracy has imposed on it. But at the same time, this approach also invokes a "politics of sincerity" that may ultimately work to the advantage of those on the opposite side. For if the crisis of climate change is to be principally seen in terms of the questions it poses to the individual conscience, then sincerity and consistency will inevitably become the touchstones by which political positions will be judged. This in turn will enable "deniers" to accuse activists of personal hypocrisy by pointing to their individual lifestyle choices. When framed in this way, authenticity and sacrifice become central to the issue, which then comes to rest on matters like the number of lightbulbs in Al Gore's home and the forms of transport that demonstrators use to get to a march.

I saw a particularly telling example of this in a TV interview with a prominent activist after the New York climate change march of September 2014. The interviewer's posture was like that of a priest interrogating a wayward parishioner; her questions were along the lines of "What have *you* given up for climate change? What are *your* sacrifices?"

The activist in question was quickly reduced to indignant incoherence. So paralyzing is the effect of the fusion of the political and the moral that he could not bring himself to state the obvious: that the scale of climate change is such that individual choices will make little difference unless certain collective decisions are taken and acted upon. Sincerity has nothing to do with rationing water during a drought, as in today's California: this is not a measure that can be left to the individual conscience. To think in those terms is to accept neo-liberal premises.

Second, yardsticks of morality are not the same everywhere. In many parts of the world, and especially in English-speaking countries, canons of judgment on many issues still rest on that

distinctive fusion of economic, religious, and philosophical conceptions that was brought about by the Scottish Enlightenment. The central tenet of this set of ideas, as John Maynard Keynes once put it, is that "by the working of natural laws individuals pursuing their own interests with enlightenment, in condition of freedom, always tend to promote the general interest at the same time!"

The "everyday political philosophy of the nineteenth century" (as Keynes described it) remains an immensely powerful force in the United States and elsewhere: for those on the right of the political spectrum, this set of ideas retains something of its millenarian character with individualism, free trade, and God constituting parts of a whole. But by no means is it only the religiously minded whose ideas are shaped by this philosophy: it is worth noting that the dominant secular paradigms of ethics in the United States—for example, as in John Rawls's theory of justice—are also founded upon assumptions about individual rationality that are borrowed from neoclassical economics.

It is instructive in this regard to look at an area of the humanities that has been unusually quick to respond to climate change: the subdiscipline of philosophy represented by climate ethicists. The dominant approach in this discipline is again posited on rational actors, freely pursuing their own interests. A philosopher of this tradition, in responding to the argument that the moral imperative of climate change comes from the need to save the millions of lives in Asia, Africa, and elsewhere, might well quote David Hume: "'Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger." Climate activists' appeals to morality will not necessarily find much support here.

Last, we already know, from the example of Mahatma Gandhi, that the industrial, carbon-intensive economy cannot be

fought by a politics of sincerity. Gandhi invested himself, body and soul, in the effort to prevent India from adopting the Western, industrial model of economy. Drawing on many different traditions, he articulated and embodied a powerful vision of renunciatory politics; no reporter would have had the gall to ask him what he had sacrificed; his entire political career was based upon the idea of sacrifice. Gandhi was the very exemplar of a politics of moral sincerity.

Yet, while Gandhi may have succeeded in dislodging the British from India, he failed in this other endeavor, that of steering India along a different economic path. He was able, at best, to slightly delay a headlong rush toward an all-devouring, carbon-intensive economy. There is little reason to believe that a politics of this kind will succeed in relation to global warming today.

Climate change is often described as a "wicked problem." One of its wickedest aspects is that it may require us to abandon some of our most treasured ideas about political virtue: for example, "be the change you want to see." What we need instead is to find a way out of the individualizing imaginary in which we are trapped.

When future generations look back upon the Great Derangement they will certainly blame the leaders and politicians of this time for their failure to address the climate crisis. But they may well hold artists and writers to be equally culpable—for the imagining of possibilities is not, after all, the job of politicians and bureaucrats.

4.

One of the most important factors in the global politics of climate change is the role the Anglosphere plays in today's world. This is true for many reasons, not the least of which is that the

Anglosphere is no longer a notional entity: it has been given formal expression in the Five Eyes alliance that now binds the intelligence and surveillance structures of the United States, Great Britain, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. The UKUSA Security Agreement that formalized the arrangement implicitly acknowledges that this alliance undergirds the world's current security architecture.

The fact that laissez-faire ideas are still dominant within the Anglosphere is therefore itself central to the climate crisis. In that global warming poses a powerful challenge to the idea that the free pursuit of individual interests always leads to the general good, it also challenges a set of beliefs that underlies a deeply rooted cultural identity, one that has enjoyed unparalleled success over the last two centuries. Much of the resistance to climate science comes exactly from this, which is probably why the rates of climate change denial tend to be unusually high throughout the Anglosphere.

Yet it is also true that the Anglosphere, the United States in particular, has produced the overwhelming bulk of climate science, as well as some of the earliest warnings of global warming. Moreover, many, if not most, of those who have taken the lead on the issue politically, whether it be as thinkers, theorists, or activists, are from these five countries, which together possess some of the most vigorous environmental movements in the world. Bill McKibben's 350.org is but one example of a group that has spearheaded a global movement.

The tension between these two polarities—widespread denialism, on the one hand, and vigorous activist movements, on the other—now defines the public politics of climate change throughout the Anglosphere, but particularly in the United States. And since identity and performativity are now central to public discourse, climate change too has become enmeshed with the politics of self-definition. When American and Australian politicians speak of climate change negotiations as posing a threat to "our way of life," they are following the same script that led Ronald Reagan to speak of the reduction of the use of oil as an assault on what it means to be American.

The enmeshment of global warming with issues of an entirely different order has given a distinctive turn to the politics of climate change in the Anglosphere. Instead of being seen as a phenomenon that requires a practical response, as it largely is in Holland and Denmark, or as an existential danger, as it is in the Maldives and Bangladesh, it has become one of many issues that are clustered along a fault line of extreme political polarization. Those on the rightward side of this line view climate science through a conspiratorial lens, linking it with socialism, communism, and so on. (As Naomi Oreskes and Erik Conway have noted, some of the most influential scientific denialists may have been motivated by the ideology of the Cold War.) These associations have, in turn, generated an extraordinary degree of rancor toward some climate scientists, some of whom, like Michael E. Mann, have had to face all manner of threats, harassment, and intimidation. It is a tribute to their courage that they have persevered with their work despite these attacks.

The opposition to climate science is not, however, a self-subsisting phenomenon. As Oreskes, Conway, and others have shown, it is enabled, encouraged, and funded by certain corporations and energy billionaires. These vested interests have supported organizations that systematically spread misinformation and create confusion within the electorate. The situation is further compounded by the mass media, which have generally underplayed climate change and have sometimes even distorted the findings of climate scientists. This bias owes much, no doubt, to the fact that large sections of the media are now controlled by climate skeptics like Rupert Murdoch,

and by corporations that have vested interests in the carbon economy. The net result, in any case, is that the denial and disputing of scientific findings has become a major factor in the climate politics of the Anglosphere.

Yet I think it would be a mistake to assume that denialism within the Anglosphere is only a function of money and manipulation. There is an excess to denialist attitudes that suggests that the climate crisis threatens to unravel something deeper, without which large numbers of people would be at a loss to find meaning in their history and indeed their existence in the world.

In other words, the climate crisis has given the lie to Max Weber's contention that modernity brings about the disenchantment of the world. Bruno Latour has long argued that this disenchantment never happened and this is now plain for all to see. The "everyday political philosophy of the nineteenth century" is, as Keynes understood very well, an enchantment just as powerful as any dithyrambic mythology. And it is perhaps even harder to disavow because it comes disguised as a truthful description of the world; as fact, not fantasy. This perhaps is why, despite every effort to disseminate accurate information about climate science, the public domain of the Anglosphere remains deeply divided on the issue of climate change.

But strangely, the picture takes on a completely different appearance when we look to other domains of the American body politic, for example, the security establishment. There is no sign there of either denial or confusion: to the contrary, the Pentagon devotes more resources to the study of climate change than any other branch of the U.S. government. The writer and climate activist George Marshall notes, "the most rational and considered response to the uncertainties of climate change can be found among military strategists. . . . As General Chuck Wald, former deputy commander of U.S. European Command puts it: 'There's a problem there and the military is going to be a part of the solution.'" Other top-ranking officers have been equally blunt. In 2013, when Admiral Samuel J. Locklear III (then head of the U.S. Pacific Command) was asked about the "biggest long-term security threat to the United States in the Pacific Region," he pointed immediately to climate change, identifying it as the factor that was most likely to "cripple the security environment."

Indeed, the U.S. military establishment's focus on global warming is such that Col. Lawrence Wilkerson, former chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell, once summed it up with these words: "The only department in . . . Washington that is clearly and completely seized with the idea that climate change is real is the Dept. of Defense."

The seriousness of this commitment is evident in the fact that the U.S. military—which is also the single largest user of fossil fuels in the country—has launched several hundred renewable energy initiatives and is investing heavily in biofuels, microgrids, electric vehicles, and so on. Between 2006 and 2009, its investments in this sector rose by 200 percent, to over a billion dollars, and is expected to go up to $10 billion by 2030. All of this has been done in such a way as to bypass the contentious debates of the public sphere.

Indeed, it would seem that the American military has in some instances appropriated the language and even the tactics of climate change activism. "Not only has the grand narrative of climate change been co-opted, warped and re-routed by the proponents of *green security*," write Sanjay Chaturvedi and Timothy Doyle, "the very forms of new social movement resistance have been copied and reworked to suit these most recent geopolitical moments. In these multi-layered, multi-directional spaces, neo-liberal economics and neo-securities are one."

Similarly, U.S. intelligence agencies, and personnel associated with them, have produced some of the earliest and most detailed studies of the security implications of climate change. In 2013, James Clapper, the highest-ranking intelligence official in the United States, testified to the Senate that "extreme weather events (floods, droughts, heat waves) will increasingly disrupt food and energy markets, exacerbating state weakness, forcing human migrations, and triggering riots, civil disobedience, and vandalism."

In addition, American intelligence services have already made the surveillance of environmentalists and climate activists a top priority. This has been greatly facilitated, on the one hand, by the widening powers granted to security agencies in the "permanent state of emergency" of the post-9/11 era, and, on the other, by the increasing privatization of intelligence gathering in recent years. The latter development has led to the emergence of a "gray intelligence" industry through a "blurring of public and private spying," and this in turn has made it possible for corporations as well government agencies to infiltrate and spy on environmental groups of many different kinds.

In short, in the United States climate activists are now among the prime targets of a rapidly growing surveillance-industrial complex. This would hardly be the case if the vast American intelligence establishment were in denial about the reality of climate change.

The British military posture is similar; this is how a report by an Australian military think tank sums it up: "From mainstreaming climate change into national planning to appointing senior military authorities to lead on climate change within the defence force, the UK and US governments have directed their militaries to rapidly prepare for climate change and its impacts." The Australian defense establishment is also working hard to coordinate its climate security strategy with

the United States and United Kingdom: this posture has been maintained even at times when the stance of the country's political leadership was denialist.

5.

Clearly, despite the deep public divisions in the Anglosphere, there is no denial or division about global warming within the military and intelligence establishments of these countries: to the contrary, there is every indication that their political elites and security structures have tacitly adopted a common approach to climate change.

But is it conceivable that any branch of government in an "open society" would covertly adopt a posture on a matter of such importance? That surely is not how liberal democracies are supposed to work?

Or have they ever really worked as they were supposed to? It is in the colonies, as Sartre once said, that the truths of the metropolis are most visible, and it is a fact certainly that the forms of statecraft that Britain used in its colonies were quite different from those of the metropole. This fissure was laid bare as far back as 1788, when Warren Hastings, the former governor of Bengal, was impeached by Edmund Burke on counts that amounted precisely to the charge that Hastings's statecraft in India represented an affront to the British political system. With Hastings's acquittal, the split came to be embedded at the heart of the imperial practices of the Anglosphere: through the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth, the statecraft that England and her settler colonies practiced in their dealings with non-Europeans was of an entirely different order from that which obtained domestically. Outside metropolitan areas, the functioning of power was always guided, in the first

instance, by considerations of security. The maintenance of dominance outweighed any other imperative of governance, and it was toward these ends that statecraft was primarily oriented.

When seen through this prism, it does not seem at all improbable that certain organs of state, particularly the security establishment, would adopt an approach that is quite different from that of the domestic political sphere. Global warming is unique, after all, in that it is simultaneously a domestic and global crisis: a bifurcation of responses is only to be expected.

Nor is it conceivable that institutions of governance in any contemporary nation could be indifferent to global warming. For if it is the case that "biopolitics" is central to the mission of modern governments, as Michel Foucault argued, then climate change represents a crisis of unprecedented magnitude for their practices of governance: to ignore this challenge would run counter to the evolutionary path of the modern nation-state.

Moreover, the climate crisis holds the potential of drastically reordering the global distribution of power as well as wealth. This is because the nature of the carbon economy is such that power, no less than wealth, is largely dependent on the consumption of fossil fuels. The world's most powerful countries are also oil states, Timothy Mitchell notes, and "without the energy they derive from oil their current forms of political and economic life would not exist." Nor would they continue to occupy their present positions in the global ranking of power.

This being the case if the emissions of some countries were to be curbed while the emissions of others were allowed to rise, then this would lead inevitably to a redistribution of global power. It is certainly no coincidence that the increase in the consumption of fossil fuels in China and India has already

brought about an enormous change in their international influence.

These realities cast a light of their own on the question of climate justice. That justice should be aspired to is widely agreed; it could hardly be otherwise since this ideal lies at the heart of all contemporary claims of political legitimacy. How such an end could be reached is also well known: an equitable regime of emissions could be created through any one of many strategies, such as "contraction and convergence," for instance, or "a per capita climate accord," or a fair apportioning of the world's remaining "climate budget." But the resulting equity would lead not just to a redistribution of wealth but also to a recalibration of global power—and from the point of view of a security establishment that is oriented toward the maintenance of global dominance, this is precisely the scenario that is most greatly to be feared; from this perspective the continuance of the status quo is the most desirable of outcomes.

Seen in this light, climate change is not a danger in itself; it is envisaged rather as a "threat multiplier" that will deepen already existing divisions and lead to the intensification of a range of conflicts. How will the security establishments of the West respond to these threat perceptions? In all likelihood they will resort to the strategy that Christian Parenti calls the "politics of the armed lifeboat," a posture that combines "preparations for open-ended counter-insurgency, militarized borders, [and] aggressive anti-immigrant policing." The tasks of the nation-state under these circumstances will be those of keeping "blood-dimmed tides" of climate refugees at bay and protecting their own resources: "In this world view, humanity has not only declared a war against itself, but is also locked into mortal combat with the earth."

The outlines of an "armed lifeboat" scenario can already be discerned in the response of the United States, United King-

dom, and Australia to the Syrian refugee crisis: they have accepted very few migrants even though the problem is partly of their own making. The adoption of this strategy might even represent the logical culmination of the biopolitical mission of the modern nation-state, since it is a strategy that conceives of the preservation of the "body of the nation" in the most literal sense: by a reinforcement of boundaries that are seen to be under threat from the infiltration of the pathological "bare life" that is spilling over from other nations.

The trouble, however, is that the contagion has already occurred, everywhere: the ongoing changes in the climate, and the perturbations that they will cause *within* nations, cannot be held at bay by reinforcing man-made boundaries. We are in an era when the body of the nation can no longer be conceived of as consisting only of a territorialized human population: its very sinews are now revealed to be intertwined with forces that cannot be confined by boundaries.

6.

It goes without saying that if the world's most powerful nations adopt the "politics of the armed lifeboat," explicitly or otherwise, then millions of people in Asia, Africa, and elsewhere will face doom. Unthinkable though this may appear, such a Darwinian approach would not be in conflict with free market ideology: that is why it has a long pedigree in the statecraft of the Anglosphere. Lest this seems far-fetched, let us recall that this is not the first time that British and American officialdom has had to confront catastrophes brought on by vagaries of climate. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, El Niño events caused enormous disruption in India and the Philippines, and as Mike Davis has shown in his

remarkable study *Late Victorian Holocausts,* in dealing with drought and famine, British and American colonial officials consistently placed far greater store on the sanctity of the free market than on human life. In these instances, as with the famines of Mao's China and Stalin's USSR, ideology prevailed over the preservation of life.

Malthusian ideas were also often invoked in the context of famine and starvation in Asia and Africa, as, for example, by Winston Churchill when he said, "Famine or no famine, Indians will breed like rabbits." Although we are unlikely to hear words of this kind in our era, there can be little doubt that there are many who believe that a Malthusian "correction" is the only hope for the continuance of "our way of life."

From this perspective, global inaction on climate change is by no means the result of confusion or denialism or a lack of planning: to the contrary, the maintenance of the status quo *is* the plan. Climate change may itself facilitate the realization of this plan by providing an alibi for ever-greater military intrusion into every kind of geographic and military space. And it is quite likely that this plan commands widespread but tacit support in many Western countries. Significant sections of the electorate probably understand that climate change negotiations may have the effect of changing their country's standing in the world's hierarchies of power as well as wealth: this may indeed form the basis of their resistance to climate science in general.

The refusal to acknowledge these realities sometimes lends an air of unreality to discussions of climate change. There are some who believe, for instance, that considerations of fairness may make people more willing to accept serious mitigatory measures. The trouble with this, in relation to climate justice, is that these measures would affect some far more than others. The geologist David Archer reckons that to reach a genuinely

fair solution to the problem of emissions would "require cuts in the developed world of about 80 percent. For the United States, Canada and Australia, the cuts would be closer to 90 percent." Will an abstract idea of fairness be sufficient for people to undertake cuts on this scale, especially in a world where the pursuit of self-interest is conceived of as the motor of the economy? Let's just say there is much room for doubt.

The fact is that we live in a world that has been profoundly shaped by empire and its disparities. Differentials of power between and within nations are probably greater today than they have ever been. These differentials are, in turn, closely related to carbon emissions. The distribution of power in the world therefore lies at the core of the climate crisis. This is indeed one of the greatest obstacles to mitigatory action, and all the more so because it remains largely unacknowledged. This question will probably be even more difficult to resolve than economic disparities and matters like compensation, carbon budgets, and so on. We do at least possess a vocabulary for economic issues; within the current system of international relations, there is no language in which questions related to the equitable distribution of power can be openly and frankly addressed.

It is for these reasons that I differ with those who identify capitalism as the principal fault line on the landscape of climate change. It seems to me that this landscape is riven by two interconnected but equally important rifts, each of which follows a trajectory of its own: these are capitalism and empire (the latter being understood as an aspiration to dominance on the part of some of the most important structures of the world's most powerful states). In short, even if capitalism were to be magically transformed tomorrow, the imperatives of political and military dominance would remain a significant obstacle to progress on mitigatory action.

7.

The cynicism of the politics of the armed lifeboat is matched, on the other side, by the strategy that the elites of some large developing countries, like India, seem to be inclining toward: a politics of attrition. The assumption underlying this is that the populations of poor nations, because they are accustomed to hardship, possess the capacity to absorb, even if at great cost, certain shocks and stresses that might cripple rich nations.

This may not be as delusional as it sounds. It is not impossible, for instance, that in dealing with situations of extraordinary stress the very factors that are considered advantages in coping with extreme weather—education, wealth, and a high degree of social organization—may actually become vulnerabilities. Western food production, for instance, is dangerously resource intensive, requiring something in the range of a "dozen fossil fuel calories for each food calorie." And Western food distribution systems are so complex that small breakdowns could lead to cascading consequences that culminate in complete collapse. Power failures, for instance, are so rare in advanced countries that they often cause great disruption—including spikes in rates of crime—when they do occur. In many parts of the global south, breakdowns are a way of life, and everybody is used to improvisations and work-arounds.

In poor countries, even the middle classes are accustomed to coping with shortages and discomforts of all sorts; in the West, wealth, and habits based upon efficient infrastructures, may have narrowed the threshold of bearable pain to a point where climatic impacts could quickly lead to systemic stress.

Acclimatization to difficult conditions may itself produce certain sorts of resilience, especially in regard to one of the most immediate effects of global warming: extreme heat. Thus, for instance, the European heat wave of 2003 resulted in forty-

six thousand deaths, while the 2010 heat wave in Russia had an estimated death toll of fifty-six thousand. These figures are far in excess of the toll of the 2015 heatwave in South Asia and the Persian Gulf region which registered heat index readings of as much as 163 degrees Fahrenheit (72.8 degrees Celsius). Moreover, ties of community are still strong through the global south; people who are completely cut off from others are relatively rare. This too is a safety net of a kind: recent experience shows that the absence of community networks can greatly amplify the impact of extreme weather events. After the 2003 heat wave in Europe, for instance, it was found that many of the dead were elderly people living in isolation.

In short: the rich have much to lose; the poor do not. This is true not just of international relations but also of the internal structure of the developing world, where the urban middle classes have a carbon footprint that is not much lower than that of the average European. However, it is not the middle classes and the political elites of the global south that will bear the brunt of the suffering but rather the poor and the disempowered. This too is a brake on effective progress in climate negotiations in that it reduces the incentive to compromise: the belief that they are not gambling with their own lives is, no doubt, just as important a factor for the political elites of the developing world as it is for their counterparts in the West. It is therefore not totally unrealistic to assume that poor countries may be able to force rich countries to make greater concessions merely by absorbing the impacts of climate change, at no matter what cost.

These considerations are, as I have noted, just as cynical as those that underlie the politics of the armed lifeboat. Yet, it is hard also to determine what an ethical strategy might be for poor countries like India. Should they perhaps abandon the quest for Western-style prosperity, so that a greater number

will survive to take the struggle for justice forward in some uncertain future? But this would require the abandonment also of the project of "modernization" that was often implicit in decolonization: it would put a freeze on a system of colonial-style inequality.

In any case, who could possibly make a convincing case for the poor to make sacrifices so that the rich can continue to enjoy the fruits of their wealth? To do so would be an acknowledgment that the ideas of equality and justice from which the dominant political imaginary draws its legitimacy have never been anything other than grotesque fictions, designed to secure exactly the opposite of those professed ends. This perhaps is why such a case is never explicitly made but only implied by euphemistic exhortations that urge poor countries to take a "different road to development" and so on.

Take the use of coal. Much concern has been expressed in the West about coal plants in India. Yet, analysts have calculated that "in 2014 the average Indian accounted for around 20 per cent of the average American's coal consumption and around 34 per cent of those from the OECD." The logical and equitable response might be for the United States or the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development to shut down one of their coal plants every time a new plant is commissioned in India, until a convergence occurs. But this is, of course, highly unlikely to happen.

This then is another way in which the terrain of global warming has been shaped, not just by capitalism but also by empire: the impetus for industrialization in much of the world was a part of the trajectory of decolonization, and the historical legacy of those conflicts is also embedded in the context of climate change negotiations. The end result is that these negotiations now resemble a form of high-stakes gambling in which catastrophe is the card that is expected to trump all others.

8.

In the annals of climate change, 2015 was a momentous year. Extreme weather events abounded: a strong El Niño, perching upon "the ramp of global warming," wrought havoc upon the planet; many millions of people found themselves at the mercy of devastating floods and droughts; freakish tornadoes and cyclones churned through places where they had never been seen before; and extraordinary temperature anomalies were recorded around the globe, including unheard-of midwinter highs over the North Pole. Within days of the year's end, 2015 was declared the hottest year since record-keeping began. It was a year in which the grim predictions of climate scientists assumed the ring of prophecy.

These disturbances were almost impossible to ignore: on the web as in the traditional media the phrase "climate change" was everywhere. Few indeed were the quarters that remained unperturbed, but literary fiction and the arts appear to have been among them: short lists for prizes, reviews, and so on, betray no signs of a heightened engagement with climate change.

But 2015 did produce two very important publications on climate change: the first, Pope Francis's encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*, was published in May; while the second, the Paris Agreement on climate change, appeared in December.

These two documents occupy a realm that few texts can aspire to: one in which words effect changes in the real world. But the documents are also *texts*, brought into being through the crafts of writing, with meticulous attention being paid to form, vocabulary, and even typography. To read them as texts is revealing in many ways.

As is only to be expected, the two works, one written by a former teacher of literature and the other by a multitude of

diplomats and delegates, are not at all similar, even though they rely on many of the same materials and address some of the same subjects. Yet they also have certain things in common: perhaps the most important of these is that they are both founded on an acceptance of the research produced by climate science. In this sense they together represent a historic milestone: their publication marks a general, worldwide acknowledgment that the earth's climate is changing and that human beings are largely responsible for these changes. The documents can therefore rightly be seen as a vindication of climate science.

Beyond that, the documents diverge sharply, although not in predictable ways. It might be thought, for example, that as a primarily religious document the pope's Encyclical would be written in an allusive and ornate style; it might equally be expected that the Agreement would, by contrast, be terse and workmanlike (as was the Kyoto Protocol, for instance). In fact the opposite is true. The Encyclical is remarkable for the lucidity of its language and the simplicity of its construction; it is the Agreement, rather, that is highly stylized in its wording and complex in structure.

The Agreement is divided into two parts: the first and longer part is entitled "Proposal by the President," while the second—which is the Agreement itself—is described as an "Annex." Each part is preceded by a preamble, as is the convention for treaties—except that in this case these sections are far longer and more elaborate than is customary. The preamble to the Kyoto Protocol, for instance, consists of only five terse declarative clauses; by contrast, the text of the Paris Agreement contains no less than thirty-one ringing declarations. Fifteen of these precede the first part of the document (the president's proposal); here are some of them:

Recalling decision 1/CP.17 on the establishment . . .
Also recalling Articles . . .
Further recalling relevant decisions . . .
Welcoming the adoption . . .
Recognizing that . . .
Acknowledging that . . .
Agreeing to uphold and promote . . .

The lines pour down the page in a waterfall of gerunds and then, without the sentence yet reaching an end, the clauses change into numbered articles as the document switches gear and "*Decides* to adopt . . ." and "*Requests* the Secretary-General . . ."

And so the Proposal continues, covering eighteen densely printed pages: yet this large block of text, with its 140 numbered clauses and six sections, consists of only two sentences, one of which runs on for no less than fifteen pages! Indeed this part of the Agreement is a work of extraordinary compositional virtuosity—thousands of words separated by innumerable colons, semicolons, and commas and only a single, lonely pair of full stops.

The giddy virtuosity of the text provides a context for the images that streamed out of Paris after the negotiations: of world leaders and business tycoons embracing each other; of negotiators with tears in their eyes; of delegates crowding joyfully together to be photographed. The pictures captured a mood of as much astonishment as joy; it was as if the delegates could not quite believe that they had succeeded in reaching an agreement of such significance. The euphoria that resulted is as clearly evident in the text of the Agreement as it is in the pictures: the virtuosity of its composition is a celebration of its own birth.

There is no such exuberance in *Laudato Si'*, which is remark-

able instead for the sober clarity with which it addresses complex questions. While the preambles of the Agreement occupy a prosodic domain of their own, somewhere between poetry and prose, *Laudato Si'* resorts to poetry only at the very end, in two concluding prayers.

Here again lies an unexpected difference between the two documents. Because of the prayerful ending of *Laudato Si'*, it might be thought that there would be more wishful thinking and conjecture in the Encyclical than in the Agreement. But that too is by no means the case. It is the Paris Agreement rather that repeatedly invokes the impossible: for example, the aspirational goal of limiting the rise in global mean temperatures to 1.5 degrees Centigrade—a target that is widely believed to be already beyond reach.

Although the Paris Agreement does not lay out the premises on which its targets are based, it is thought that they are founded on the belief that technological advances will soon make it possible to whisk greenhouse gases out of the atmosphere and bury them deep underground. But these technologies are still in their nascency, and the most promising of them, known as "biomass energy carbon capture and storage," would require the planting of bioenergy crops over an area larger than India to succeed at scale. To invest so much trust in what is yet only a remote possibility is little less than an act of faith, not unlike religious belief.

Laudato Si', by contrast, does not anywhere suggest that miraculous interventions may provide a solution for climate change. It strives instead to make sense of humanity's present predicament by mining the wisdom of a tradition that far predates the carbon economy. Yet it does not hesitate to take issue with past positions of the Church, as, for example, in the matter of reconciling an ecological consciousness with the Christian doctrine of Man's dominion over Nature. Even less does the

Encyclical hesitate to criticize the prevalent paradigms of our era; most of all it is fiercely critical of "the idea of infinite or unlimited growth, which proves so attractive to economists, financiers and experts in technology." It returns to this theme repeatedly, insisting that it is because of the "technocratic paradigm" that "we fail to see the deepest roots of our present failures, which have to do with the direction, goals, meaning and social implications of technological growth."

In the text of the Paris Agreement, by contrast, there is not the slightest acknowledgment that something has gone wrong with our dominant paradigms; it contains no clause or article that could be interpreted as a critique of the practices that are known to have created the situation that the Agreement seeks to address. The current paradigm of perpetual growth is enshrined at the core of the text.

But perhaps criticism is not the business of a treaty? Not true: international narcotics agreements, for example, use quite strong language in condemning "the evil of drug addiction," and so on. Critical language even figured in earlier climate treaties like the Kyoto Protocol, which did make reference to "market imperfections." No such phrase is to be found in the Paris Agreement: it merely acknowledges that "climate change is a common concern for humankind."

The Agreement is similarly tepid in its naming of the conditions that it is intended to remedy: while words like *catastrophe* and *disaster* occur several times in the Encyclical, the Agreement speaks only of the *adverse impacts* or *effects* of climate change. The word *catastrophe* is never used and even *disaster* occurs only once, and that too only because it figures in the title of a previous conference. It is as if the negotiations had been convened to deal with a minor annoyance. No wonder then that the Agreement's provisions will come into force (if such a word can be used of voluntary actions) only in 2020 when

the window for effective action will already have dwindled to the size of the eye of a celestial needle.

In contrast to the Agreement's careful avoidance of disruptive terminology, *Laudato Si'* challenges contemporary practices not just in its choice of words but also in the directness of its style. In place of the obscurity and technical jargon that enshrouds the official discourse on climate change, the document strives to open itself, in a manner that explicitly acknowledges the influence of the saint who is the pope's "guide and inspiration": "Francis [of Assisi] helps us to see that an integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology and take us to the heart of what it is to be human."

In much the same measure that *Laudato Si'* strives for openness, the Agreement moves in the opposite direction: toward confinement and occlusion. Its style as well as its vocabulary convey the impression of language being deployed as an instrument of concealment and withdrawal; even its euphoria is suggestive of the heady joy of a small circle of initiates celebrating a rite of passage. In clause after clause, the Agreement summons up mysterious structures, mechanisms, and strange new avatars of officialdom—as, for example, when it "*decides* that two high-level champions shall be appointed," and "*invites* all interested parties . . . to support the work of the champions" (where, one wonders, is the Colosseum in which these champions have dueled their way to the "highest level"?).

That the word *champion* is left undefined is telling: it implies that the document's authors know tacitly whom they are referring to—and who could that be but others like themselves? This is indeed an Agreement of champions, authored by and for those of that ilk.

Strangely, *Laudato Si'* seems to anticipate this possibility: in a passage that refers to the way that decisions are made in "in-

ternational political and economic discussions," it points to the role of "professionals, opinion makers, communications media and centres of power [who] being located in affluent urban areas, are far removed from the poor, with little direct contact with their problems. They live and reason from the comfortable position of a high level of development and a quality of life well beyond the reach of the majority of the world's population." It is with exactly this in mind that the style of *Laudato Si'* seems to have been forged, as an attempt to address those to whom it repeatedly refers as the "excluded."

The opacity of the Agreement, on the other hand, hints at the opposite intention: its rhetoric is like a shimmering screen, set up to conceal implicit bargains, unspoken agreements, and loopholes visible only to those in the know. It is no secret that various billionaires, corporations, and "climate entrepreneurs" played an important part in the Paris negotiations. But even if this were not publicly known, it would be deducible from the diction of the Agreement, which is borrowed directly from the free-trade agreements of the neo-liberal era: these clearly are the provenance of its references to "accelerating, encouraging and enabling innovation" and of many of the terms on which it relies, such as *stakeholder, good practices, insurance solutions, public and private participation, technology development*, and so on.

As is often the case with texts, the Agreement's rhetoric serves to clarify much that it leaves unsaid: namely, that its intention, and the essence of what it has achieved, is to create yet another neo-liberal frontier where corporations, entrepreneurs, and public officials will be able to join forces in enriching each other.

Might the Paris Agreement have taken a different turn if the terrorist attacks of December 2 had not radically changed the context of the negotiations by providing the French government with an alibi for the banning of demonstrations, marches,

and protests? What would have happened if the delegates had been forced to deal with a great wave of popular pressure, as climate activists had planned? These questions will haunt historians for years to come, and the answers, of course, will never be known. However, the alacrity with which the French authorities moved against climate activists, and the efficiency with which it put dozens of them under house arrest, suggests that even in the absence of the attacks a means would have been found for corralling the protesters—as has been the case at many other international negotiations during the last two decades. This is one area in which governments and corporations around the world have grown extraordinarily skilled, and there is every reason to believe that the investments that they have made in surveilling environmental activists would have paid off, once again, to enforce the exclusions that are hinted at in the Agreement's text.

If exclusion is a recurrent theme in *Laudato Si'*, it is for exactly the opposite reason: because poverty and justice are among the Encyclical's central concerns. The document returns over and again to the theme of "how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace."

In *Laudato Si'* the words *poverty* and *justice* keep close company with each other. Here poverty is not envisaged as a state that can be managed or ameliorated in isolation from other factors; nor are ecological issues seen as problems that can be solved without taking social inequities into account, as is often implied by a certain kind of conservationism. *Laudato Si'* excoriates this latter kind of "green rhetoric" and insists that "a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*." This in turn leads to the blunt assertion that "a true 'ecological

debt' exists, particularly between the global north and south."

Here again the contrast with the Paris Agreement is stark. When poverty finds mention in the Agreement, it is always as a state in itself, to be alleviated through financial and other mechanisms. The word never occurs in connection with *justice*—but this is scarcely surprising since there is only one mention of justice in the text and that too in a clause that is striking for the care with which it is worded: the preamble to the Annex merely takes note of "the importance for some of the concept of 'climate justice' when taking action to address climate change."

The scare quotes that bracket the phrase "climate justice" and the description of the concept as being important only "for some" amount to nothing less than an explicit disavowal of the concept. But an implicit disavowal occurs much earlier, in one of the few passages in the text that is pellucid in its clarity: "the Agreement does not involve or provide a basis for any liability or compensation." With these words the Agreement forever strips the victims of climate change of all possible claims to legal recompense for their losses; they will have to depend instead on the charity of a fund that developed nations have agreed to set up.

The differences between the two texts is never clearer than in the manner of their endings. The Agreement concludes by conjuring itself into being through the will of the signatories and by announcing the date of its self-actualization: the twelfth day of December, in the year 2015. The very syntax is an expression of faith in the sovereignty of Man and his ability to shape the future.

The prayers with which *Laudato Si'* concludes, on the other hand, are an appeal for help and guidance. As such they are also acknowledgments of how profoundly humanity has lost its way and of the limits that circumscribe human agency. In this

they echo one of the most radical elements of Pope Francis's critique of the era that he describes as "a period of irrational confidence in progress and human abilities." It is his questioning of the idea that "human freedom is limitless." "We have forgotten," goes the text, "that 'man is not only a freedom which he creates for himself. . . . He is spirit and will, but also nature.'"

It is by this route that the themes of *Laudato Si'* lead back to the territory that I explored earlier in trying to locate the fronts where climate change resists contemporary literature and the arts. Insofar as the idea of the limitlessness of human freedom is central to the arts of our time, this is also where the Anthropocene will most intransigently resist them.

9.

Bleak though the terrain of climate change may be, there are a few features in it that stand out in relief as signs of hope: a spreading sense of urgency among governments and the public; the emergence of realistic alternative energy solutions; widening activism around the world; and even a few signal victories for environmental movements. But the most promising development, in my view, is the increasing involvement of religious groups and leaders in the politics of climate change. Pope Francis is, of course, the most prominent example, but some Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, and other groups and organizations have also recently voiced their concern.

I take this to be a sign of hope because it is increasingly clear to me that the formal political structures of our time are incapable of confronting this crisis on their own. The reason for this is simple: the basic building block of these structures is the nation-state, inherent to the nature of which is the pursuit of the interests of a particular group of people. So powerful is this imperative that even transnational groupings of nation-

states, like the UN, seem unable to overcome it. This is partly due, of course, to questions of power and geo-political rivalries. But it may also be that climate change represents, in its very nature, an unresolvable problem for modern nations in terms of their biopolitical mission and the practices of governance that are associated with it.

I would like to believe that a great upsurge of secular protest movements around the world could break through the deadlock and bring about fundamental changes. The problem, however, is time. One of the reasons why climate change is a "wicked" as opposed to a "normal" problem is that the time horizon in which effective action can be taken is very narrow: every year that passes without a drastic reduction in global emissions makes catastrophe more certain.

It is hard to see how popular protest movements could gain enough momentum within such a narrow horizon of time: such movements usually take years, even decades, to build. And to build them in the current situation will be all the more difficult because security establishments around the world have already made extensive preparations for dealing with activism.

If a significant breakthrough is to be achieved, if the securitization and corporatization of climate change is to be prevented, then already-existing communities and mass organizations will have to be in the forefront of the struggle. And of such organizations, those with religious affiliations possess the ability to mobilize people in far greater numbers than any others. Moreover, religious worldviews are not subject to the limitations that have made climate change such a challenge for our existing institutions of governance: they transcend nation-states, and they all acknowledge intergenerational, long-term responsibilities; they do not partake of economistic ways of thinking and are therefore capable of imagining nonlinear change—catastrophe, in other words—in ways that are perhaps closed to the forms of reason deployed by contemporary nation-states. Finally, it is impossible to see any way out of this crisis without an acceptance of limits and limitations, and this in turn, is, I think, intimately related to the idea of the sacred, however one may wish to conceive of it.

If religious groupings around the world can join hands with popular movements, they may well be able to provide the momentum that is needed for the world to move forward on drastically reducing emissions without sacrificing considerations of equity. That many climate activists are already proceeding in this direction is, to me, yet another sign of hope.

The ever-shrinking time horizon of the climate crisis may itself be a source of hope in at least one sense. Over the last few decades, the arc of the Great Acceleration has been completely in line with the trajectory of modernity: it has led to the destruction of communities, to ever greater individualization and anomie, and to the industrialization of agriculture and to the centralization of distribution systems. At the same time, it has also reinforced the mind-body dualism to the point of producing the illusion, so powerfully propagated in cyberspace, that human beings have freed themselves from their material circumstances to the point where they have become floating personalities "decoupled from a body." The cumulative effect is the extinction of exactly those forms of traditional knowledge, material skills, art, and ties of community that might provide succor to vast numbers of people around the world—and especially to those who are still bound to the land—as the impacts intensify. The very speed with which the crisis is now unfolding may be the one factor that will preserve some of these resources.

The struggle for action will no doubt be difficult and hard-fought, and no matter what it achieves, it is already too late to avoid some serious disruptions of the global climate. But

I would like to believe that out of this struggle will be born a generation that will be able to look upon the world with clearer eyes than those that preceded it; that they will be able to transcend the isolation in which humanity was entrapped in the time of its derangement; that they will rediscover their kinship with other beings, and that this vision, at once new and ancient, will find expression in a transformed and renewed art and literature.