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FIRE IN THE SKY

UAP, Climate Change and the Political-Economic Future of Human Society

by

M. Cifone

Introduction. In the common definition of 'sovereignty', *absolute power* over a people, territory or relevant domain is denoted – with 'absolute' itself meaning that said power is unrestrained or not otherwise limited by an external authority not itself deriving from the sovereignty of the people themselves. The key institutions or systems of modern nation states operate with the presupposition of some form of this sovereignty. Politically, the presupposition of sovereignty for the nation state means absolute control and power over its geographical *territory* (its political borders), incursion into which by non-citizens being acceptable only if officially sanctioned. Developmentally and operationally, the presupposition of sovereignty for the modern nation state must also be expressed in terms of power and control over the processes and forces of *nature* for the purposes of institutional and political-economic endurance (and vitality) in a larger context of geopolitical and economic relations, where this enactment is again not imposed upon by any social or political (or even individual) force not itself determined by the sovereignty of the people themselves (i.e. through their own legitimate legislative, executive or judicial authorities). However the enactment of this sovereignty, in which absolute power functions as a kind of structuring principle, inevitably must confront the real limits to any exertion of power, given the finitude of human beings under the conditions imposed on them by nature. Consequently, we may treat the political-economic order of society psychoanalytically, as a kind of collective consciousness, which from time to time must face antagonistic and frictional limits to its own expression of power, but which cannot tolerate *fundamental* challenges to the presupposition of sovereignty which structures that political-economic order's self-articulation and concrete realization over time. Little is it ever reflected on, however, that these expressions of sovereignty have an even *deeper* presupposition: that in both the political, economic and technical-scientific expressions of sovereignty enacted by modern nation states, it is *human* sovereignty that is presupposed: no other being of equal intelligence or useful and productive knowledge of the structure of nature, for the purposes of (civilizational) nation-building, exists which could challenge the human in its ostensibly rational societal designs, or challenge its (arguably irrational) quest for mastery over nature. The political-economic order of society is a decidedly *human*-born product; so too science and the socially and economically essential technologies it makes possible, even though in our deeper philosophical reflections we have come to realize (in an odd symbolic doubling of political democracy in science) that the human is an equal player in the natural order and enjoys perhaps only temporary intellectual sovereignty, or that, epistemologically at least, the human standpoint itself can perhaps be transcended altogether (the belief – more an ideology – that science provides a "view from nowhere").

In this essay, I propose to first recognize and then consider the implications of a curiously importune conjunction of two profound challenges to this sovereignty that cuts all the way down to human sovereignty itself: that implied by so-called "unidentified aerial (or anomalous) phenomena" or UAP, and that implied by climate change and the climate emergency following from it. As this present volume allows us to proceed on the assumption that UAP are "real" – that is, that at least some significant subset of all UAP reported are neither the product of hoax, human malperception, nor instrument error – this essay considers that this subset of UAP present the first rather shocking and fundamental challenge to human sovereignty, as first noted in a seminal article in *Political Theory* by Wendt and Duvall (2008). This perhaps explains the fear of – or recoil from – the very idea that UAP are "real" and that the best explanation for the data (as problematic as it often is) is that they represent the activity of an unknown but advanced nonhuman intelligence. If that were the case, and if UAP really do demonstrate shockingly advanced technologies which it would seem no nation on the planet is equipped to handle strategically – or even understand scientifically – then human sovereignty is basically nullified, leaving nation states without their basic justification in the social contract: if states cannot defend against potential threats, they cannot ensure the safety of their citizens, and without this guarantee they are *ipso facto* illegitimate.

We will argue (briefly) for the cogency of this UAP "reality" assumption but table a more thorough engagement with the empirical issues at stake, since such is well outside of the scope of the present volume of essays. We will therefore move quickly to an exploration of the implications this likely explanation for UAP has in relation to the *other* profound challenge to human sovereignty which we face today, right alongside UAP: climate change and the ensuing climate emergency. With UAP, the shock is that it's *not* us – with climate change, the shock is that it is: that in our principled assertion of modern political sovereignty over our territories, its scientific and technical realization has in fact *undermined* the moral legitimacy of the political-economic order which we have designed through science and technology, since our actions have now imperiled the habitability of the planet itself (at least for human beings). In another moment of what we might call, after Horkheimer and Adorno (1944), the "dialectic of Enlightenment", the enactment of absolute power over nature, which has become a political-economic directive of the modern nation state in its employment of technoscience for its own ends, demonstrates that in fact the human *has no practical sovereignty* over nature – that nature both constitutes us and is constituted by us, and in this dialectical reciprocity, neither has absolute power over the other.

Both UAP and climate change profoundly check (if they do not negate) human sovereignty and so, symbolically, represent an existential bifurcation point – a cleft in modernity itself – in which the human can no longer be the fundamental unit around which all social, political or economic analysis (and institutional organization) revolves. Latour (2018) explored the ramifications of climate change for the political order (in particular, the reconfiguration it implies for the existing political-ideological coordinate space), and later in this essay I want to introduce UAP to his analysis of those ramifications; this will allow us to see what UAP potentially signify as they come (symbolically) crashing into the Earth, perturbing our comfortable presupposition of human sovereignty. This, however, looks at UAP only as what it *signifies* (symbolically) and how the political order may consequently be reconfigured in light of this signification. But there is more to say here in terms of a possible alternative

political-economic order – a new kind of society – which could follow not only in the wake of acceptance of the actual *reality* of UAP, but also the recognition of there being a *specific, empirically demonstrated technological order implied by our (instrumented and personal) observations of them*.

Here, though, I want to problematize the so-called "disclosure" of this UAP reality (a notion that has long been something of a trope in discourse surrounding this subject) and argue that, most likely, any ostensible "disclosure" will be grounded in data that are likely to remain troublingly enigmatic and ambiguous – except for what the best UAP cases have so far demonstrated to science in terms of a technology that eludes any reasonable accommodation within the accepted paradigm of matter and motion. As the particular form that a technology (and the science required to bring it into being) takes is a key structuring factor in the emergence of a social, political and economic way of being, I want to suggest that the technological form that (at least some) UAP disclose, will – without any actual transfer of that technology from the probable nonhuman intelligence behind it to us – surely affect and possibly determine the future course of human society. In other words, the consistent message found among many religion-like movements that seem to be configuring around UAP encounters, as some scholars have documented, may indeed be correct, albeit for the wrong reasons: UAP and the agency behind them are indeed "signaling" humanity – but only as an uncanny and possibly always-remote signifier of profound technological and scientific change, which in turn may occasion, by *mimicry* of their technological-scientific order, a new society. If we have fire because of lightning, or flight because of birds – and an industrial society predicated on rapid travel between distant places – then we will have some form of technology, which will be as transformative to the character of society as fire or flight was, because of UAP. And all we require here is neither actual technology transfer as some hope, reverse engineering as some claim, nor the ecstatic prophecy of "contactees" who purport to supply us with alien technological insights (or "downloads") as others attest; all that is required is the simple human desire to *imitate* what we can see: in the data itself (which is shocking enough), or with our own eyes (which for some is personally transformative).

1.Climate Change And The Climate Emergency. As catastrophic events go, the climate emergency seems to be categorically different: it is *existential* – that is, of an order of magnitude on a par with other threats such as nuclear war, asteroid impacts and so on. But, unlike these other existential threas (which are quite immediately catastrophic: nuclear war or asteroid impacts are immediately catastrophic) climate change is gradually and sporadically catastrophic, a threat that is gradually imperiling civilized human life. Accordingly, tt is also categorically different because of the manner in which this emergency is and will be unfolding: larger time scales (decades, centuries), with effects dynamically distributed throughout a highly complex, spatially extended biosphere composed of multiple sub-systems. Despite this complexity, the cause is unequivocal: it's us. Hence it is called "anthropogenic climate change" (ACC).

What is curious is that the natural history of ACC encompasses natural *and* social causes; indeed the "social" here is decidedly ontological. It is arguably a reflection of a deeper philosophical or existential stance adopted towards nature – which following Hadot we might call

"Promethean"[1] – whose origins can be found in the peculiar intellectual culture that took root during the first few centuries of the (European) Scientific Revolution. By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, as what we might call "technoscience" (the conjunction of scientific knowledge of the principles of nature, purposed for the development of technical instruments of control over nature and guided by the perceived needs of a political-economic order[2]) emerged, modern societies were predicated on two false but ideologically necessary operating principles:

(1) That there exists an (effectively) *endless* supply of energy inputs into the industrial system, which can be converted into work in order to produce positive-value outputs.

(2) That there exists an (effectively) *unlimited* garbage dump for the (negatively-valued) waste (chemical, thermal, etc.) produced by the required conversion of energy into (industrially) usable work, which waste has no reciprocal effect on the stability, integrity or sustainability of the industrial system as a whole (the presupposition here being that waste is an externality with no internal significance or meaning for the industrial system as such).

The extent to which (1) is true is highly contingent on the specific form of technology used to convert energy into useful work. For example, the fossil-fuel-based political-economy we have ("petro-capitalism" as it were) is actually rather severely finite in the long run – there is only a limited quantity, and it will not last forever.[3] Again, due to a peculiar set of social, political and cultural circumstances, the form that this energy-conversion technology took was based largely on combustion – little more than a controlled explosion, which turns out to be a highly polluting and inefficient means of converting matter into usable energy to do work.[4] In other words, we ended up with modern industrial societies reliant on very sophisticated and manageable fires, a kind of technology known to early human beings many tens of thousands of years ago.

Given the contingent facts about the way physical matter is converted into energy for work by our societies, (1) is effectively false, as is (2). While it might not have been conceivable (or foreseeable) in the early days of industrial modernity, building out a *global* industrial society over the course of

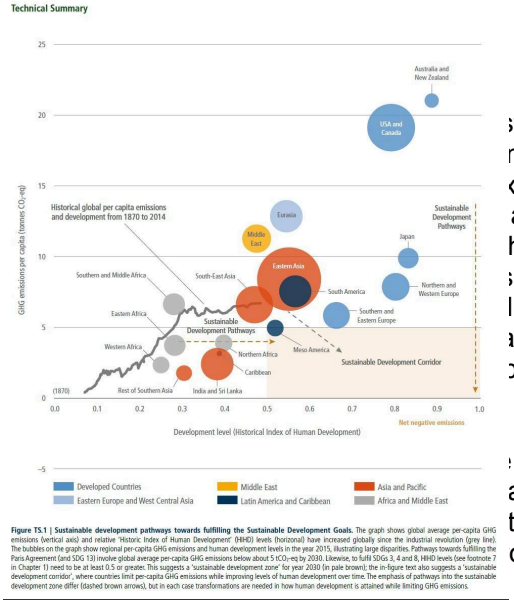

Figure TS.1 | Sustainable development pathways towards fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals. The graph shows global average per-capita GHG emissions (vertical axis) and relative 'Historic Index of Human Development' (HIHD) levels (horizontal) have increased globally since the industrial revolution (grey line). The bubbles on the graph show regional per-capita GHG emissions and human development levels in the year 2015, illustrating large disparities. Pathways towards fulfilling the Paris Agreement (and SDG 13) involve global average per-capita GHG emissions below about 5 tCO_2-eq by 2030. Likewise, to fulfil SDGs 3, 4 and 8, HIHD levels (see footnote 7 in Chapter 1) need to be at least 0.5 or greater. This suggests a 'sustainable development zone' for year 2030 (in pale brown); the in-figure text also suggests a 'sustainable development corridor', where countries limit per-capita GHG emissions while improving levels of human development over time. The emphasis of pathways into the sustainable development zone differ (dashed brown arrows), but in each case transformations are needed in how human development is attained while limiting GHG emissions.

stinction between the "Orphic" vs. the "Promethean": two related but ntological stances towards Nature. Although Hadot stresses that they xclusive, the "Orphic" takes a gentler, detached, observation-centric ature's "secrets" (the Aristotelian method is the archetype here); h more active interventionist approach, seeking to *forcibly* coax s is the experimental tradition, and Hadot takes the work of Bacon and l be that the "Promethean" tendencies of modern science occasioned ably fatal to the biosphere – even though they brought about, early on, oringing poverty's end within reach, for example).

Streeck (2018) defines it as the "accumulation of accumulating

years ago regarding the phenomenon of "Peak Oil", and some ad in fact been reached. For a more recent discussion of these t is generally believed that the total proven reserves could last, at oximately 250 years or so.

several centuries that presupposed these two false principles would doom modern civilization to a dependency on what would prove in the very long term to be a radically destabilizing, environmentally destructive political-economic arrangement.[5] But build this we have done, and now the prospect of mitigating the problem is looking rather daunting. Just examine the stark graphic found in the middle of the Technical Summary of the IPCC's Interim Report *Climate Change 2022: Mitigation of Climate Change* (the full *Sixth Assessment Report* was due for release in March 2023).

The question we now face–as much moral as it is empirical or scientific–is rather fundamental: how exactly should climate change, and the catastrophic climate emergency that it implies, be addressed? There are at least two possibilities:

> Option (A): changing the underlying technoscientific means to achieve industrial ends, while leaving the basic political-economic arrangement (Capitalism) untouched; or
>
> Option (B): altering the fundamental political-economic arrangement *along with* the technoscientific means that enables (and sustains) it.

The consensus view – which tends to idealize Capitalism as the only viable game in town[6] – is doubtless going to prefer option (A); whereas (B) would be considered too radical as indeed it suggests a *revolutionary* approach to the solution. Proponents of (B), however, would consider (A) to be too little too late, and in any case too weak to counter the powerful interests involved in sustaining the *status quo*.

The reality is that there is no quick fix to the problem, given how well-integrated fossil fuel technologies are with our current favored political-economic arrangement (Capitalism).[7] Even if a technological solution is in fact on the horizon (one which might allow our political-economic arrangement to continue unaltered[8]), the fact remains that there are vested interests bent on preserving the existing technoscientific/political-economic system, one which will countenance alternatives only and when it is economically permissible, rather than morally and existentially demanded.[9] So, in fact it appears that (A) might be the more idealistic or utopian of the choices after all. The fact remains that, however much it is difficult to accept, the political-economic arrangement we have[10], in conjunction with an enabling technoscientific apparatus (seen in value-free terms–i.e., that science and technology create the value-neutral means which value-burdened humans employ for ends of their choosing), has proven to be radically destructive to the point where it is now clear that the very civilizational life which is the

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[5] One cannot help but call to mind here the famous aphorism of economist John Maynard Keynes: "In the long run, we're all dead".

[6] Recall Margaret Thatcher's infamous remark: "there is no alternative"–what is referred to now as "TINA". Thatcher's dictum is, of course, evidence of this conceptual deadlock, and so she is, in a sense, correct: there is no alternative–but only because we are for some reason incapable of determining viable (which is to say practicable) alternatives. The climate emergency and the UFO phenomenon, as we show here, are catalysts breaking this deadlock–by force of circumstance.

[7] For an extended discussion, *see* Wainwright and Mann (2018), chapter 5: "A Green Capitalism?".

[8] Fusion power, e.g., promises to be a true, "green" solution–although the question of the creation of free neutron radiation and other byproducts of the process would have to be carefully examined.

[9] For a popular analysis, *see* Klein (2014); *see also* Park (2015).

[10] The German political-economist Wolfgang Streeck defines it as the endless "accumulation of accumulating capital"; *see* Streeck (2016).

presupposition of this political-economic arrangement is itself imperiled in very basic (and dramatic) ways, i..e, where whole regions of the planet threaten to become relatively uninhabitable (at least for significant periods of time) for human beings. This is the uncomfortable (literally and figuratively) result, it would appear, of the relentless pursuit of economic-industrial growth – yet another driving compulsion of capitalist political economy.[11]

Climate change is traumatic, so much so that the psychotherapeutic community is increasingly recognizing climate change as a driver of anxiety in the general population, leading to the recognition of "climate anxiety" as a diagnosable disorder.[12] In light of this, and at a more fundamental level of sociopolitical consciousness, we might then say that climate change is precisely fulfilling the conditions of what Lacan called "The Real": a psychic trauma that "arises from the confrontation between an external stimulus and the subject's inability to understand and master these excitations".[13] Indeed, especially since we may consider how difficult if not impossible it is to even grasp "climate change" as a well-defined phenomenon (some have argued that we must are forced to interpret it instead as a more ambiguous and amorphous "hyperobject"[14] or "multiple object"[15], where the precise reality is eternally subject to the kind of denialism seen in the past[16]), we can see how climate change exists at the limit of what can be symbolized, of what can be comprehended as an immediate reality, further complicating mitigation efforts.[17] In psychoanalytic terms, this indeed is the character of the Lacanian "Real": a traumatic encounter, one best denied or suppressed, and certainly one difficult if not impossible to grasp directly for what it is (namely, a catastrophic climatological shift unknown to recent human civilization). This then forces us to confront collectively what, individually, we have left unexamined or unaddressed: our peculiar industrial way of life. Such fundamental self-examination, which opens the space for an equally fundamental change, is itself traumatic, and thus is (at the level of political consciousness) something to be carefully avoided or deferred.

But the trauma does not stop here, as if this is not already enough…

2. A Timely Conjunction? UAP & the Climate Emergency. We might say that the climate emergency dwarfs all other major social, political, moral, economic and natural crises that any human society has had to face. Several things are remarkable about it: (1) the scope of the emergency – it threatens the short- and near-term human habitability[18] as well as the long-term

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[11] See Appleby (2011) for an extended historical exposition of what she calls the "relentless revolution" which is the essence of capitalist political economy.
[12] Clayton (2020).
[13] For discussion, *see* "The real as the limit of symbolization" https://nosubject.com/Jacques_Lacan:Real (accessed 11 April 2024).
[14] Tim Morton (2013). He writes "... every accident of the weather becomes a potential symptom of a substance, global warming. All of a sudden this wet stuff falling on my head is a mere feature of some much more sinister phenomenon that I can't see with my naked human eyes. I need terabytes of RAM to model it in real time…" (p. 101-102).
[15] Sean Esbjörn-Hargens (2013).
[16] An issue we take up below.
[17] Because of the complicated, "multiple" ontology of climate change, as Esbjörn-Hargens explains (*ibid*.), there will necessarily be a plurality of programs of climate change mitigation – not all of which will be compatible with one another. Thus, politically in any case, climate change mitigation will remain a site of endless contestation.
[18] See Wallace-Wells (2019) for an extended argument and discussion.

survivability of the species, if it does not contribute to another *mass* extinction event[19]; (2) its ultimate cause: human beings and their peculiar sociopolitical and economic choices, in tandem with the technoscientific apparatus used to realize those choices with increasing speed and efficiency; (3) the scope of the solution to the emergency: it must be a broadly-implemented strategy encompassing every economically and technologically impactful nation-state on the planet without exception, and must be sustained over a long period of time.[20] The climate emergency therefore stands alone here.[21]

But having only within the last decade or so become a generally accepted fact, the stark reality of anthropogenic climate change, and the resulting catastrophic climate emergency, has entered into our collective consciousness just as we seem to be entering into a new and potentially frightening era regarding the enigmatic phenomena known collectively as "unidentified aerial (or anomalous) phenomena" – "UAP". It is potentially frightening because it is not entirely clear what the global political, economic (or internal national security) implications will be once the reality of the UAP is accepted as one whose best explanation is some version of the NHI[22] or ETI[23] hypothesis. This brings ET home, as it were: The hypothesis (uncomfortably the most likely, if we accept that some data on UAP is veridical) is not just held out as a distant (theoretical) possibility to which mainstream thinking can comfortably assign a very low probability.[24]

UAP – formerly "UFOs"[25] – remain, however, a highly contested reality; it has been a subject that, historically, has been treated with disdain and outright hostility.[26] Even though this

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[19] An examination of the relevant literature seems to show that the data at least indicates that such an event is underway – whether or not climate change can be taken as one of its primary drivers. *See* Barosky *et al.* (2011) for a detailed literature review and evaluation of the relevant data. *See also* Kaiho (2022) and Malanosky *et al.* (2024) for more recent treatments.

[20] *See* for example the strong statements contained on p. 57 of the recent Technical Summary of the IPCC's Working Group III on climate change mitigation: "Achieving the global transition to a low-carbon, climate-resilient and sustainable world requires purposeful and increasingly coordinated planning and decisions at many scales of governance including local, sub-national, national and global levels (*high confidence*)".

[21] Although one can easily make a case that global nuclear war ought to be in this category as well. In an essay for *Foreign Affairs*, professor of philosophy William Macaskill curiously overlooks climate change in his rundown of the catastrophic existential threats humanity faces. "Nuclear weapons," he writes, "are far from the only risks we face. Several future technologies could be more destructive … [a] recent report by the U.S. National Intelligence Council," he continues, "identified runaway artificial intelligence, engineered pandemics, and nanotechnology weapons, in addition to nuclear war, as sources of existential risks – 'threats that could damage life on a global scale'..." (p. 17). What about "runaway climate change" one wonders?

[22] NHIH = "nonhuman intelligence hypothesis". Some prefer the term 'nonhuman intelligence' over 'extraterrestrial intelligence' (ETI) because it is neutral regarding (planetary) origin.

[23] As indicated above, in the absence of clear evidence to the contrary, it's unclear why the intelligence(s) arguably indicated by some UAP must be off-world. As Kastrup (2024) recently suggested, from a strictly logical standpoint, a reasonable (albeit circumstantial) case can be made for a *terrestrial* nonhuman intelligence behind some UAP.

[24] Putatively on Bayesian grounds; *see* for example the arguments of Frank (2023), who now advocates for a "cautiously agnostic" approach to UAP as an object for serious scientific study.

[25] When referring to older work on the subject, we will occasionally employ the older term 'UFO'; but, unless otherwise indicated, 'UAP' and 'UFOs' should be taken as interchangeable.

[26] For a recent history of the controversies inside and outside of academia, and how the subject has played out within the U.S. government (and the military establishment in particular), *see* Graff (2023). The classic treatment is Jacobs (1975).

seems to be changing[27], what remains out of bounds as a live explanatory possibility is that some UAP may *in fact* represent the activity of a nonhuman intelligence of some kind (or a variety of kinds). While the stated reasons for this hostility are ostensibly epistemic and evidential (poor quality of the evidence; more plausible explanatory alternatives; etc.), given the *prima facie* case that can nonetheless be made as to both the reality of UAP and what might best explain some of the best cases on record, one wonders whether something else is in play: a para-rational, unconscious inhibition – a classic "taboo".

3. Wendt's Thesis: Official UAP Acknowledgment & Ontological (In)Security. In their seminal 2008 paper for *Political Theory*, Wendt and Duvall try to explain the existence of the very puzzling "authoritative taboo" that has existed regarding the investigation of UFOs.[28] The way that investigation is dismissed is telling, they show, because the assumption in dismissing it is that UFOs can't be extraterrestrial. Yet, we don't actually *know* that UFOs are not (or more strongly, *cannot* be) extraterrestrial–precisely because they are not being taken seriously enough to be seriously studied! Hence we seem to have a puzzle, a kind of epistemological loop. As they write in their abstract "UFOs have never been systematically investigated by science or the state, because it is assumed to be known that none are extraterrestrial. Yet in fact this is not known, which makes the UFO taboo puzzling given the ET possibility".[29]

The puzzle is unraveled when Wendt and Duvall show that what's really at stake here is something much deeper: a principle of modern *sovereignty* that is thoroughly anthropocentric, and which, crucially, is foundational to the modern state itself. The possibility of there being *real or actual* extraterrestrial intelligences, present and operating on Earth (not just "out there" somewhere) clearly threatens this anthropocentric sovereignty. Indeed, the ETI interpretation of the very real UFO constitutes in this regard an existential threat. Thus, UAP haven't been systematically investigated by government or academia simply because, as Wendt and Duvall write, "the functional imperatives" of anthropocentric sovereignty can't tolerate it.[30] Anthropocentric sovereignty says that humans alone are truly sovereign, that is: "solely responsible for deciding their norms and practices" (albeit under constraints imposed, of course, by nature).[31] But if UAP could possibly represent the activity of ETIs, then this sovereignty is negated: there'd be another intelligent "kid on the block" which potentially imposes new and fundamental constraints on human activity to which we are powerless to respond, or even to challenge in a meaningful way. Dismissal of UAP as a serious object of investigation, then, is an

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[27] In a recent study of perceptions among faculty in higher education published in *Humanities & Social Sciences Communications* (a publication of *Springer Nature*), the authors found that "faculty think the academic evaluation of UAP information and more academic research on this topic is important" and they found that "[c]uriosity outweighed skepticism of indifference" (from the study's abstract). *See* Yingling *et al*. (2023).

[28] Wendt and Duvall (2008), "Sovereignty and the UFO".

[29] *Ibid*. Though we should note that in fact, historically, there has been at least one attempt to systematically study the phenomenon: the so-called Condon Study (Condon & Gillmore 1969); in fn. 12, the authors acknowledge this, but refer to it as "politicized and methodologically flawed", citing a number of trenchant critiques that appeared in the wake of this contentious study – for example, McDonald (1972) or Sturrock (1987).

[30] *Ibid*., p. 612.

[31] *Ibid*, p. 620. Although it's worth considering the extent to which the history of science and technology is the history of *changing* what those limits imposed by nature actually are.

institutional requirement acting independently of our actual engagement with UAP themselves. As Wendt noted in a 2022 SCU lecture, it therefore represents "forbidden knowledge".[32]

What is interesting is that Wendt is focused on what happens when or if this taboo *actually* collapses and it is openly admitted that the most likely explanation for the anomalous evidence the government actually has in their possession is that these phenomena represent the activity of some as-yet unknown extraterrestrial intelligence. If the UAP taboo prohibiting serious investigation into the phenomenon was an institutional requirement meant to preserve anthropocentric sovereignty, then it was also protection from the so-called "ontological shock" of there being a superior technological power rendering modern nation-states effectively impotent – thus shaking the very foundations of the social contract ensuring a stable institutional relation between citizen and state. If there are intelligent beings displaying their clearly superior technology openly in our skies and right next to our military materiel, which every modern nation-state is powerless to stop or to challenge, then the state is no longer the guarantor of the safety of its citizens. If the state cannot guarantee this, then its most basic function is undermined and its social contract is thereby nullified. Indeed, the ETI/UFO conjunction suggests that there is another possible (but unknown) social or political organization (a distinctly *nonhuman one*) that is powerful enough in principle to challenge every existing state, showing that the force employed by states is ultimately meaningless.

Wendt proposes that this initial shock that we're not alone is necessarily followed by an even greater socio-political/existential crisis that could very well lead (he believes) to a radical destabilization of the political order as such. Why would we continue to put our trust and faith in institutions that are impotent, powerless to offer protection or existential security in the face of a superior ETI? Indeed, we see the problem here filtering down to the very most basic ontological level of collective political (and even personal) self-identity. Wendt proposes a very dire picture of the ramifications of a decisive general agreement that (at least some) UAP in fact represent the activities of an (otherwise unknown) ETI. Yet, isn't this one possibility we *hope* the scientific study of UAP will decide on – either for or against? Thus, Wendt's SCU lecture actually takes "forbidden knowledge" here in a double sense: it is forbidden by the institutional requirements of anthropocentric sovereignty, but it is also "forbidden" in the sense that, once we eat of the tree of knowledge of the real nature and origin of the UAP (something science opens the way for, and tempts us to finally uncover), we may no longer be what we once were: masters of our small patch of being. We are, then, the very "last" humans in this regard, Wendt chillingly suggests: the last to have operated under the "we are alone" assumption that has dominated technoscientific modernity since the middle of the twentieth century.[33]

According to Wendt's thesis, then, we face (or will inevitably have to face) yet another major crisis, this time also of global proportions. I would like to consider that it stands together with the climate emergency not in terms of the severity and immensity of the problems it discloses for civilized human life ; but rather that the climate emergency stands together with official and unambiguous UAP/ETI acknowledgement because they are together profoundly

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[32] Wendt's talk was entitled "Dangerous Knowledge: UFO Science and the Last Humans". This is a theme the philosopher Michael Zimmerman took up for the abduction phenomenon in his important paper published in 1997 (Zimmerman 1997).

[33] Early speculations that life (even intelligent life) might inhabit Mars or Venus were quashed in the 1950s and 1960s with more precise measurements and observations of the conditions that predominate on these planetary near neighbors. *See* Graff (2024) for a recent review of the issues.

existential – to an extent that we are faced with equal, potentially catastrophic, challenges to the very foundations of human civilization. If the climate emergency imperils civilized human life and human habitability (at least for large swaths of the Earth's surface) and represents for us a discernible apocalyptic (albeit slowly-arriving) end, then the phenomenon of the UAP/ETI precisely represents a profound threat to our "ontological security" (to use Wendt and Duvall's characterization), and a challenge to the presupposition of the human as the central (or only) ethical, political, economic and practical unit of concern.

So while we would no longer seem to have a reality problem for UAP (they are now openly acknowledged in government and even by NASA, for example, to be "real" in a basic sense), we still have profound resistance to an unconventional resolution to the origins/nature question: what is intolerable here is that it *might not be us at all*. And it might not even be a novel phenomenon of nature. For climate change, the specific human element can no longer be plausibly denied, which makes it uncomfortable since the character of our way of life is thereby impugned; and with UAP, it's the potential *lack* of any natural or anthropogenic explanation that's so worrisome, frightening – and intolerable.

4. Reality Troubles. Not unlike the situation with UAP, there would be significant institutional pressures to suppress and deny the reality of climate change, because it challenged the consensus view (manufactured by the incipient neoliberal class percolating into Washington during the 1970s and 1980s[34]) that our industrial way of life was by far a boon; after all, the prevailing view of the political and economic elites has been that Capitalism had managed to do the impossible: to convert, as Mandeville was to put it, "private vice into public virtue."[35] The way out of this uncomfortable (or, as former U.S. Vice President Al Gore famously put it, "inconvenient") truth was, of course, to dispute the attribution of blame to the political-economic system as such – and simultaneously to argue that the only effective (i.e., politically and economically expedient) way for climate change to be mitigated was by means of the structural incentives only Capitalism is so good at imposing (thus attempting to internalize the exogenous, purely negative value of waste for example[36]). The proposal is therefore to use that same technoscientific apparatus (which enabled the environmentally destructive industrial system to grow and thrive) to solve the problems it had created – yet another "save": a further instance of the Mandevillian Promise where private vice gets (magically) converted into public benefit. But the road to the acceptance of the actuality of deleterious (even catastrophic) anthropogenic climate change would be a very long one. It is still disputed to this day – and probably will always be.

UAP present even more of a challenge when it comes to an acceptance of their (empirical) reality and the implications of that reality in cases where their anomalous

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[34] And we note that this is precisely when the "merchants of doubt" went into action. *See* esp. Oreskes and Conway (2010), pp. 173ff.

[35] Streeck (2015), p. 59. This is called, as Streeck notes, the "Mandevillian Promise" and elsewhere in his book he describes it as the final "consequentialist moral justification" of Capitalism (p. 34). The text from which this notion derives is Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees: Or, Private Vices, Publik Benefits* (1714).

[36] Such internalization goes against the structural logic of Capitalism, since its profitability, writes Craig Calhoun (2013), "often depends on externalizing the costs of its activities – human and ecological as well as financial" (p. 132). Calhoun goes on to argue that "external" threats like climate change will cause it to transform, not collapse (as some might argue).

characteristics don't easily lend themselves to prosaic explanations – though, as we've argued, the institutional pressures prohibiting that acceptance are parallel if not virtually identical to those of climate change. With climate change, even though we're not dealing with a single object – but, as we have said, a complicated "hyperobject" or "multiple object", the grasp of which requires the synthesis of the results of multiple vectors of climatological data – it remains true that *none of the data for climate change presents a serious (i.e., fundamental) anomaly to the various sciences involved in studying the phenomenon*. In other words, the phenomenon itself is thoroughly graspable within the domain of existing (climatological) science (or any of the other sciences involved). So, we didn't have the complication of the phenomenon being inherently problematic for the sciences that would study it. UAP are decidedly different in this regard.

5. The Transgressive UAP. From an epistemological standpoint what is so problematic about the UFO is, first, that the very term 'UFO' or even 'UAP' is a catch-all that lacks precision; and second, that their alleged observed characteristics (at least for a certain subset of all UFOs reported) *appear to be profoundly anomalous for science*. Thus, we have the extra burden of having to work through a number of conventional possibilities as to what an alleged UFO actually is before we move on to what might be called the genuinely anomalous or classical UFO as such–what I like to refer to as the "recalcitrant residuum" of cases. But then, *this reality becomes again disputed*, precisely because of its alleged anomalousness! The Bayesian priors, we are told by the establishment scientist (or academic) who bothers to take a look at a supposedly recalcitrant UFO case, overwhelmingly suggest that the anomaly is due to human misperception, ignorance, or instrument error. So, we end up in a kind of epistemic loop, circumscribed by the inverted logic first clearly identified by J. Allen Hynek: "it can't be, therefore it isn't", whereas the correct axiom in modal logic ought to be: "actuality implies possibility". That is: if something is actual, it must be possible, which in turn ought to motivate the sciences to find out how these phenomena could be the case (i.e., by what principles of nature they operate in the ways observed). The problem is that we can't seem to achieve consensus that this recalcitrant residuum is even *actual*. We have nothing like a consensus that there really are truly, recalcitrantly anomalous UFOs. We have instead a promissory note of endless circulation: if a UFO incident can't be explained (conventionally), it will be–we promise.

Another way of understanding the difficulty here, which is as much conceptual as it is evidentiary, is to consider that the true UFO or UAP is, according to its purported phenomenology, inherently *liminal* in nature: an object whose observed characteristics are so extraordinary or fantastic, whose behavior is so out of keeping with what we think we understand about the nature of reality – an understanding presumably supplied to us by science – that they stand curiously both *inside and outside* the boundaries of conventional knowledge of nature.[37] The phenomena are frequently visually observable, and in a number of particularly significant cases electromagnetically observable (i.e., on radar or thermal sensors). They sometimes are alleged to have landed or have been touched. According to their reported characteristics, they are phenomena standing in the "terminator" as it were: the threshold between the light of what is known and familiar to us, and the utter darkness of what is unknown and yet to be discovered. We are dealing, therefore, with an inherently unstable epistemological

[37] Consider the calculations of Knuth *et al*. (2019).

space when we attempt to understand these phenomena – a "liminal epistemology" if you will. Quite unlike with climate change, it is the liminality of the phenomena of UAP that further complicates not only the science that would attack the problem, but the issue of "disclosure" or, somewhat less dramatically, of official acknowledgement. What, after all, is found in the historically significant June 2021 ODNI report (around which many of the essays in this volume are organized) – but an acknowledgement of a measure of *liminality* to UAP?

We have on the table, then, a number of rather profoundly enigmatic UFO cases. Some are more recent than others, but they all share one obvious trait in common: physical movement in space and implied energies and power concomitant with it that are hard to explain in conventional terms.[38] But hard to explain doesn't mean impossible. Yet, that's the crucial question: what is "possible" in terms of explanations for the observable characteristics of UAP (some of which have been measured[39])? Given the ineliminable *forensic* nature of historical UAP cases, we are always limited by the inaccessibility of certain key facts so that arguments and analysis here will always involve a measure of probabilistic uncertainty.[40] Even so, we have available to us the logic of what in philosophy is known as "inference to the best explanation"[41] and on these inferential grounds, I argue, there is a reasonable case to be made that at least some UAP represent the activity of an intelligent nonhuman agency – once hoax, witness misidentification and other likely natural causes are (probabilistically) ruled out. If this argument is sound, then for similarly strong, recalcitrant UAP cases, it should follow that *any* government has sufficient warrant to inform its populace that *most likely* we are interacting with something nonhuman (either directly a technology, or indirectly an intelligence). As with the IPCC recommendations in its sequence of climate change reports, we can only assign a certain confidence level to this assertion. But my argument is that *we can already assign a sufficient level of confidence to warrant an official statement*. Yet, agencies of the federal government – most importantly of the United States – refuse to countenance such a reasonable inference to the best explanation (ostensibly on the grounds that more and better data would be needed). Such a stance only further exacerbates the historical impasse between so-called "believers" and advocates v. the skeptics, leaving unaddressed the not unreasonable inference that can be made, as adumbrated above.

So, what we're up against in these debates – between the advocate for the nonexistence of conventional explanations of some particularly recalcitrant UAP, and the skeptic who endeavors to deny this – is not the relative strength or soundness of the "evidence" or "data" for these cases (and those like them) and the reasonable (albeit "ampliative") inferences that can

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[38] For a recent discussion of the crucial cases and accompanying evidence, *see* Coumbe (2023) and Powell (2024).

[39] For a detailed exposition of a series of field studies of UAP using astronomical methods, and the difficulties involved, *see* Teodorani (2024). For an overview of scientific studies of the phenomena using observational instrumentation over the last several decades, *see* Ailleris (2024).

[40] This has led to the development of various ways of estimating the confidence one has in coming to certain conclusions based on an analysis of this (primarily forensic) data; *see* for example the discussion and rating system developed by Coumbe in *ibid*.

[41] This logic is sometimes called "ampliative", although strictly speaking inferences to the best explanation (or "IBEs") are *species* of ampliative inferences, since they involve introduction of hypotheses that attempt to "amplify" or move beyond the data that they explain by introducing something new – something *beyond* the data itself.

now be drawn; rather, what we're up against in the kind of skeptical pushback we find within mainstream journalism[42], government and academia is a para-rational strategy of "denialism" (as opposed to skepticism). This is not a matter of reasoned debate but of *ideological* confrontation, and thus is something more properly theorized in institutional-structuralist or psychoanalytical terms: either in terms of the Wendt-Duvall thesis (which draws on the structuralist thought of Foucault, for example), or analyzed more fundamentally in the psychoanalytic-Lacanian terms I have suggested earlier in this essay (that is, in terms of the analytic of Lacan's "Four Discourses"). In short, then, we are fighting against an *ideology*. As we can see with climate change denialism, an ideology–as Marx realized–is a repetitious discourse that, as philosopher Matthew Sharpe writes:

> …promote[s] false ideas (or "false consciousness") in subjects about the political regimes they live in. Nevertheless, because these ideas are believed by the subjects to be true, they assist in the reproduction of the existing status quo, in an exact instance of what Umberto Eco dubs 'the force of the fake'.[43]

And of course, the "political regime" here is the *episteme*[44] of science itself: an institutionalized network of practitioners of a certain set of norms of research and reasoning, pressured by external funding resources, and plugged into a larger political-economic matrix of concerns and directives.

Given the ideological nature of these proponent/debunker debates, and as is well known in the philosophy of science and STS traditions, it is clear that, despite the (otherwise sound) call for more and better data, no amount will be sufficient *on its own* to move the needle of mainstream scientific opinion from "there must be a conventional explanation for every recalcitrant UAP case" to "we have a decided anomaly here which cannot be account for in conventional terms". The persistence of Aristotelian thinking for almost two millennia[45], or the perpetual specter of "underdetermination" well-known in the philosophy of science for over a century, which will eternally challenge any alleged anomaly – even one with "good data" – should be instructive here.[46] This shows us that any potential "disclosure" by authorities in the government (for example), in whatever form, will be likely be an ideologically fraught affair; it is not likely to be a straightforward matter of crucial and convincing "evidence" or "data". The same may be said for the path from (good) data to conclusions based on it; what is likely is that the data will remain elusive, or ambiguous – subject to any number of competing (and rational)

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[42] Journalist Keith Kloor perhaps represents the current mainstream opinion among not only mainstream journalists, but also the educated public – namely, that there's little more than conspiracy theory and pseudoscience when it comes to UFOs and those who take an interest. See for example Kloor (2020).
[43] Sharpe (n.d.).
[44] An "episteme" is a term from the work of Michel Foucault, and refers, as O'Leary and Chia (2016) put it, to: "implicit 'rules of formation' which govern what constitutes legitimate forms of knowledge for a particular cultural period. They are the underlying codes of a culture that govern its language, its logic, its schemas of perception, its values and its techniques, etc."
[45] The Ptolemaic geocentric model of the universe, mandated by Aristotelian metaphysics, can be *indefinitely extended*, as has been famously noted, by adding an arbitrary number of "epicycles" to save the system from any potentially anomalous motions–for example the retrograde motion of planets.
[46] "At the heart of the underdetermination of scientific theory by evidence," writes philosopher of science Kyle Stanford in his encyclopedia entry on the concept, "is the simple idea that the evidence available to us at a given time may be insufficient to determine what beliefs we should hold in response to it".

alternatives to the NHI/ETI hypothesis, as we see already happening within the government's own UAP study project (AARO).[47]

6. A Double Whammy: The Fires In the Sky. The UFO phenomenon, together with the climate emergency, are coequal existential crises the likes of which humanity has not encountered at any time before now. Yet, any crisis poses a problem which must, at some point and in some form, be addressed. The problems crises pose call for *some* solution–whether by patient and careful design, or foisted upon those affected by force of circumstance (usually, a combination of the two). Such threats exert pressure politically, culturally–even ontologically. Given their global and existential nature, the twin crises of climate change and the UFO phenomenon both demand, we want to argue here, some equally "existential" response–a solution determined by the very nature of these crises themselves. That we face these kinds of crises *at the same time* suggests to us that we have entered a *new* era of what we might call convergent existential crisis–one dominated by the simultaneously global and existential character of the two crises examined here.

If UAP represent an existential crisis for humanity equal to that faced by humanity in the climate emergency, and there is a unique challenge posed by UAP for science (namely, that they represent a definite *anomaly* for science), then I want to further suggest that the resolution of these twin crises is deeply interrelated: that an understanding of the one (UAP) provides a clue as to how to resolve the other (the climate emergency). This is of course a *trope* in the folklore that has emerged around the UAP *qua* myth, as documented in the scholarly literature on UAP experiencer narratives[48]; but my suggestion here is that there is nonetheless a "truth" in this myth, and that is does not require any actual technology transfer for it to be a viable possibility socio-politically – a question that can certainly be explored quite independently of the content of these narratives (which in any case tend towards the soteriological-religious). UAP imply new science or radically new technology (which implies radically new ways of understanding what it means to harness energy), but it is precisely just such a new science – which must imply some new (yet-to-be-determined) *political-economy* that springs from it – that is demanded as a fundamental solution to the climate emergency. Climate change challenges our whole way of life – our technologies *and* our political economy. But the genuine UFO challenges us existentially by showing us that not only are we not the only technologically savvy intelligent creatures, but that there is another (potentially radically *nondestructive*) technology that is *de facto* possible and, by implication, a whole other possible political economy that could be configured around or spring from such technology. In other words, the challenge to our science and technology the UFO represents discloses a *response* to climate change, while both constitute a coequal existential "threat" to humanity. That is: this "threat" is a good thing, the catalyst for needed *radical change*. Indeed, if at least some of these objects are *agentive*, then what we are witnessing is perhaps a kind of symbolic communication – a cypher of *meaning*

[47] The recently released "Report on the Historical Record of U.S. Government Involvement with Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena" by the USG's "All Domain Anomaly Resolution Office" (AARO) comes to what some consider a stunning conclusion: that "[it] has found no verifiable evidence that any UAP sighting has represented extraterrestrial activity". This despite contradictory results reached by other researchers working with information from the USG's own military officers (e.g. Knuth *et al.* (2019)). For the AARO March 2024 report, *see* Lopez (2024).

[48] For a broad overview, *see* especially Bullard (2010).

that simultaneously discloses the horizon of our own conditions of technoscientific and political-economic possibility, at the same time as it discloses the inner possibilities of the scientific-technological form of the UFO in itself.

In what follows, we attempt to discern the (potential) sociopolitical and economic logic of these implications.

7. The Legitimacy of the Nation-State and the Necessity for Change. Acceptance of the *reality* of both UFOs and climate change challenges, then cuts down human sovereignty in a way that is existentially fatal. However, if human sovereignty cannot be plausibly maintained in the face of the tragedy of the climate emergency – and the Freudian humiliation implied by a potential NHI active on Earth – then it would seem that not only is our political-economic, cultural and technoscientific way of life fundamentally challenged, but so too is the legitimacy of the nation-state as the appropriate unit of social, political and economic organization (if it ever was as human civilizations transitioned into an era of industrialism, bringing about increasingly stronger global ties between nations). In the face of the climate emergency, the appropriate unit of action is global; but is this not precisely *also* the proper unit of concern when faced with the existential threat posed by the discovery of an active presence of NHI on the Earth? Both the climate emergency and the acknowledged presence of NHI on the Earth induce, then, some form of "planetarity": not a "global consciousness" (something discussed for decades now) but an importantly pragmatic planetary framing of the simultaneous crises of climate change and active technological NHI on Earth.

The nature of the global crises that we face, I claim, discloses the absolute terminus of the legitimate moral (and political) possibilities contained in the very notion of the nation-state. Climate change implies this because the political-economic calculus of nation-states, tied as it is to historically determined geopolitical borders – ultimately incompatible with the requirements of true planetarity – has secured the fate of industrial societies to a long battle for habitable surface and the allocation of increasingly stressed resources (water, food) for basic survival, let alone economic vitality. UAP discloses this by virtue of their manifest demonstration of the impotency of the social contract on which the nation-state is based, as Wendt has pointed out[49], which is underscored by the clear superiority of the technology (and therefore intelligence) thus far suggested by the best cases on record. As the legitimacy of the nation-state collapses in the face of these twin crises, pointing in the same directions, this occasions a world-historical circumstance of decisive, perhaps radical, socio-political change: it signals the coming of a rather significant "bifurcation point"[50] where humanity is forced to choose between some number of alternatives. But these alternatives *must be determined in response to these crises*, that is: the specific character of the crises themselves informs the choices we will have to make. What makes the crises even more pronounced, and indeed worse, is that there are really *no* well-tested alternatives ready-to-hand – only the *status quo* and beyond, a graveyard of past choices or futural speculations saturated with untested idealisms (or tragically tested ones, as in

[49] In his June 2022 SCU lecture.

[50] The term derives from Immanuel Wallerstein's work in "world-systems theory", which he developed in order to study very long term political-economic and social formations. It was inspired by the Braudelian school of history.

the case of Leninist-Stalinist Marxism[51]). With few exceptions, sociopolitical and economic experimentalism is somehow not allowed, and so social, political and economic organization is always in a state of seeming necessity, locked down as an historical matter with change slow to come and radical (revolutionary) change frequently a descent into societal chaos and effective collapse.

With the acceptance of the reality of both climate change and the objective likelihood that some UAP are nonhuman technology, then, we have arrived at the initial stage of the decisive collapse of a long-standing socio-political and economic unit of organization, self-understanding and theoretical analysis – the nation-state – and are forced to devise alternatives. Or rather, circumstances will force alternatives to emerge. What those alternatives are going to be is unclear, but what *does* seem clear is that at least the general political coordinate space – where ideological positions are locatable – is taking a definite form and will guide (at least conceptually) how concrete alternatives emerge in the future.

More specifically, we think here in terms of a coordinate space of general sociopolitical ideologies, conceived, to borrow from the philosopher Bruno Latour's analysis, as "attractors"[52] in the space; it is around these "attractors" where concrete responses to political, economic, and social challenges are configured. As new challenges arise, such ideological attractors or focal points appear which become the axes according to which new sociopolitical and economic possibilities are (at least conceptually) differentiated. This leads to a polarity, as the two attractors pull in different (ideological and practical) directions.

According to Latour's analysis, the existing coordinate space can be defined along a "global" v. "local" axis – with both attractors deriving from older sociopolitical and economic concerns (e.g. "globalization" and the neoliberal embrace of "free trade" – the buzz words of the late 1980s and 1990s). However, Latour argues, the realities of climate change have upended this older space with its increasingly outmoded differentiation in terms of the local and the global. Here he discovered that two new attractors have appeared, both determined by the sociopolitical responses necessitated by the reality of climate change – and in Latour's view, they decisively confront the older ones. The new attractors are the "terrestrial" (i.e., the "down-to-earth" option, which conceives of the Earth as a continuous living surface, not as isolatable and individuated local regions) and the "out-of-this-world" (think the Elon Musk Mars-as-planet-B option – in other words, *escape and start over again*). These two climate-change-induced attractors have crashed into the existing coordinate space and have upset its order, opening up fresh sociopolitical and economic possibilities.

What of course Latour did not consider in his text *Down To Earth* was the crashing (as it were) of the UFO into this space – their appearance on the scene at roughly the same historical moment as the climate emergency begins to take definite shape. We must therefore insert the UFO into Latour's analysis and see what results.

In order to see how the UFO lands in ideological coordinate space, let us briefly examine Latour's incisive diagram of the sociopolitical coordinate space where we see the old and the

[51] A curious possible exception here, of course, is Maoist Chinese Communism, which today has taken, somewhat paradoxically, the form of "Capitalism with Chinese Characteristics". For a thorough discussion and overview of the issue, *see* Zhao (2015).
[52] Bruno Latour (2018).

new “attractors” collide.[53] Since this space has already been determined by Latour in relation to the climate emergency, what remains to be seen is how the UFO phenomenon – in its realistic depth as suggesting the operations of a nonhuman intelligence on Earth – might alter this space.

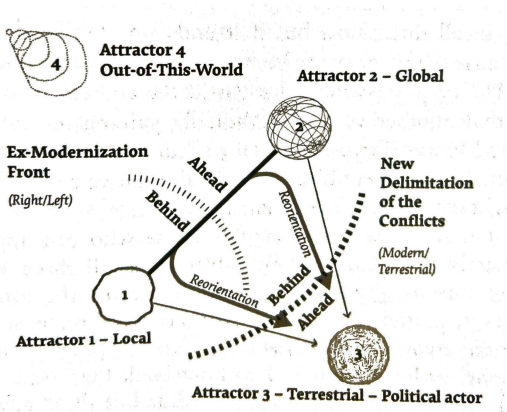

Figure 6 A new set of alliances

What climate change induces, argues Latour throughout his text, is a “new climatic regime” which, because of both its potentially catastrophic significance (at least symbolically), and its real (material) impact on the habitability of the planet, forces a new political actor to emerge: the “terrestrial”. This, finally, is where politics is forced to come back “down to Earth”, from its awkward estrangement[54] from the real effects of political-economic activity, effects (i.e., industrial pollution, greenhouse gasses, etc.) which were off-worlded (as it were) to the capitalist nether-region of abstract, negative value with no internalized meaning. Politics (political ideologies informing policy, etc.) had been structured along the classical axis of Global (“Attractor 2”) vs. Local (“Attractor 1”). Neoliberalism was the arch-globalist framework of thought–but “global” in the abstract calculus of markets and networked economies, burdened with the inconvenience of non-economic moral imperatives of the various localities (the tapestry of variously constituted nation-states). As Nature and Life were the last items on the list to be commodified, neoliberalism overlooked the “inconvenient truth” of a new moral imperative: that of the planet itself – Terra – as a real material reality whose biophysical details could no longer be overlooked, that is: treated as a mere “externality” of the system, as we discussed at the beginning of this essay. The reality of climate change then, according to Latour induces a third – and perhaps the most important – attractor, upending the classical ideological space of sociopolitical and economic possibilities (or “alliances” as Latour describes them): the “Terrestrial” – “Attractor 3”.

But if the attractor of the Global – exemplified by neoliberalism’s drive towards global trade *sans frontiers* – was to disrupt local economies and ways of life, pulling the eye of political concern from peoples to ever-more-distant (and therefore abstract) “free markets”, which in time led to a reactionary backlash (the apotheosis of which, perhaps, we saw in the rise of Trump and his overtaking of the Republican Party – once been easily aligned with the mainstream Left under the neoliberal paradigm), then the opposite – the Local – was increasingly impotent to challenge the reach of the Global, and came to look increasingly more quaint or even backwards. After all, as the sociologists tell us, “structural problems require structural solutions” – and the solution to the alienating and dislocating architecture of Globalism would seem to require an equal response: some kind of robust coordination – but on a *planetary* scale. The climate emergency forces us to consider the “globe” in precisely this new “planetary” way: not

[53] The figure we reproduce here is taken from *ibid*., p. 51.
[54] Let us not forget the theme of modernity as such, as Weber (1919) articulated it: the “disenchantment” (*Die Entzauberung*) of the world.

primarily as a kind of empty Newtonian container for our political-economic/industrial ambitions, which we can arbitrarily fill with our sovereign utilitarian designs (those things that are only calculated to maximize the accumulation of accumulating capital), but as a living surface, as Latour theorizes, that will *react* to our the sovereignty enacted on and within it. The Earth is no longer just our "dominion", that is: something outside of us, over which we exert arbitrary rulership. Rather, the Earth – "Gaia," in Latour's preferred term – responds as any organic system, and with this necessary reciprocity our sovereignty is thereby put in check: she imposes decisive *limits*. We now must consider ourselves, argues Latour, as *belonging to a land* – but not in a "modern" or classical sense,[55] "[f]or the Terrestrial is bound to the earth and to land, but it is *a way of worlding*, in that it aligns with no borders, transcends all identities".[56] If the "globe" had as it were an infinite horizon – the endlessness of capitalism's imperative, as Streeck (2015) so well examined it – the Terrestrial has only the infinity of the surface of a world wrapped unto itself. What appears now, perhaps for the first time, is the Terrestrial – Earth, or Gaia – not as mere background or (unaccounted for) presupposition, but precisely as the foreground which must necessarily be accounted for in real terms.

Pulling away from the Terrestrial, then, is a fourth and final attractor in Latour's diagram, which he labels "out-of-this-world" ("Attractor 4"). If the Global/Local attractors both found themselves pulling in opposite directions *within the Earth* itself – which ironically remained unthematized as such (i.e., the Earth as living planetary surface remained the background condition for the possibility of the Global/Local dichotomy), then the new Terrestrial/"out-of-this-world" dichotomy (i.e., that between Attractors 3 & 4) is remarkable because it counterposes the Earth as our place of habitation with *extra*-terrestrial (i.e., "out-of-this-world") spaces of potential future habitation – as-yet wholly *unrealized*. Here, then, is where the emergence of UAP as a decisive element socially, politically, economically and culturally in a way that it hadn't before becomes significant. Precisely *here*, I claim, is where the work of scholars of UAP like Diane Pasulka, who are chronicling a kind of incipient "UFO religion", become absolutely and clearly relevant.[57] We find here the figure of the UAP as a messenger of this fourth attractor, a message from "out-of-this-world". What is the most common religious experience reported, according to Pasulka? … that the UAP represent an intelligence signaling for terrestrial transformation, a "re-worlding" of the world. It is also significant in this connection that the "UFO experience" (to borrow Hynek's terms) had – at least in terms of how encounters were reported – a dimension of science fiction: uncanny phenomenology couched in preexisting fictionalizations, seemingly readymade for it.[58]

There is another valence of the UAP problem, however, which we must consider at this point. It allows us to flip and invert the religious interpretations and technological dreams of possessing or contacting UAP. And it is this valence that suggests the opening of new political and economic possibilities that may well serve to circle back to the climate emergency,

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[55] *See* Latour's discussion on pp. 50-56.
[56] Latour (2018), p. 54. 'Worlding', as Latour explains in a footnote (p. 118), is a word coined by the philosopher Donna Haraway in contrast to 'globe' or 'globalism'. The term keeps 'world' distinct.
[57] *See* Pasulka (2019) for example – although it should be noted that her work was preceded by the more trenchant and detailed scholarly analysis provided by Denzler (2003).
[58] For the science-fictional dimension of the UFO phenomenon and how it has appeared (in a phenomenological sense), the reader is encouraged to consult the work of French theorist Bertrand Méheust (for example, his 1975).

suggesting (not without irony – and an uncomfortable affinity with the stories of the so-called "contactees") a kind of solution to it. UAP *may* end up saving us (as is the dream of the contactee) – but not as a god from above (it was Heidegger who once remarked "only a god can save us").

After the initial shock of the open acceptance (let us suppose) that (some) UAP *really* represent the activity of an unknown nonhuman intelligence freely exercising its (again unknown) purposes on Earth, UAP may very well remain utterly opaque to us in terms of more precise scientific understanding – mute except insofar as we interpret these phenomena from an (uncomfortable) distance. What is now best called a "protoscience" (neither a science nor a pseudoscience), "ufology" – the empirical study of the phenomena of UFOs – may remain an entirely *observational a*ffair, occasionally interrupted by material fragments, like the ambiguous ejecta from alleged UAP incidents.[59] "Their" intentions may then remain unknown, entirely speculative to us if we can speak about it at all.[60] And given the ease of movement of many of these objects, it's unlikely any can be captured for closer study. A "crash" is the hope of many – and the claim of some. But if, as is the very purport of this volume of essays, we allow ourselves the freedom to cross the threshold of taboo and countenance the (admittedly ampliative) hypothesis that some UAP represent the activity of an as-yet unknown nonhuman intelligence on Earth, then, if some UAP appear as definite objects exhibiting extraordinary physical characteristics (most obviously of *flight*), it seems reasonable to think of such UAP as *technological*. If some UAP are technological, then that technology implies an entire form of life – indeed, it implies a whole *worldview*, and along with it a *technopolitics*. That is, we need not see the UAP in terms of an intelligence attempting to make contact with humanity (which may in fact never occur), but just as the symbol of a technopolitical possibility – one we may realize *by imitation*.

Even if we cannot more exactly determine the specific (empirical) form of technology behind those UAP that do *prima facie* present as technological, we can nevertheless expect the intelligence behind these technologies to be as intimately related to their technologies as we are to ours; that is, we can expect there to be a *technopolitics* just as there is one for humanity (a specifically human political order determined in relation to its specific technologies and the forms of knowledge presupposed by them). The figure of the UAP, then, represents to humanity a powerful symbol, or cypher, of an alternative way of being – another technopolitical order in which another way of being-in-the-world comes forth into view, possibly always at an (uncomfortable) distance. We may wonder at what this order of technopolitical being is in more specific (i.e., empirical) terms, but even if humanity *never* manages to resolve the enigma of UAP in scientific terms (a distinct possibility we may simply have to learn to live with), the fact of their *phenomenological* disclosures (their observable kinematics) will remain part of what Nature discloses as at least a *possible* technology we can construct – and with this a technological-political (technopolitical) existence. Just thinking about the possible explanations for how some UAP move opens the way towards new technopolitical possibilities *with no actual transfer of technology* between the (agentive) UAP and human beings. Rather, as we see so do we desire to *imitate*; through our scientific engineering into this new space of technological

[59] For an extended recent discussion, *see* Coumbe (2023).
[60] Clearly there is a larger discussion to be had here about alleged abductions or entity encounters, but this is beyond the scope of the present essay.

possibility disclosed merely by the *phenomenology* of UAP we enter into entirely new technopolitical possibilities. And these new potential technologies, which we will be mimetically inspired to create by the figure of the UAP, finally open up a possible solution to the climate crisis itself – if only by demonstrating the possibility of a technopolitical order of being which no longer has a conflictual relationship with nature, something, perhaps more "bionic" than machinic. For one of the most striking hallmarks of the phenomenology of the UAP (again, as recounted in literature that remains suggestive, not definitive as Watters *et al*. correctly point out) is their *noninteractivity* with the surrounding atmosphere: they seem capable of moving well in excess of reentry speeds (i.e., greater than Mach 30) *without producing thermal effects due to air resistance.* Does this not signal to us the possibility of a kind of profound control over the extent to which our technologies *can* interact with their surroundings – and does this not hold open the possibility of a less "Promethean" form of science (to borrow from Hadot, mentioned at the beginning of this essay), where damaging effects (say, to the specific physical systems necessary to sustain biological life) can be mitigated very subtly, or circumvented altogether?

8. Conclusion. Where does this leave us? Well, despite the existential threat to the metaphysical sovereignty human beings have enjoyed (at least since the dawn of modernity), it leaves us, quite ironically, where we've started, and where we remain for the foreseeable future: *down to Earth*. Indeed, as we've seen with the ramifications of climate change for the sociopolitical "alliances" this tragedy induces – climate change forces us to foreground the planet Earth in a way that it hadn't before, to think of it as no longer a mere backdrop for industrial development but a living surface profoundly interrupted by our industrial ambitions – the live possibility of UAP as nonhuman technology under the control of a nonhuman intelligence of some unknown kind serves to intensify the incipient rift between the sociopolitical attractors Latour described as the Terrestrial and the Out-of-this-World. On the one hand, the new science of UAP is emerging as a radical reintegration of the various strands of a thoroughly *terrestrial* science[61] – too long differentiated by the specialization necessitated by academic scholarship – in an effort to produce a rich, holistic comprehension of the terrestrial environment sufficient to be able to determine anomalous signatures in contrast to the apparent normal. But as the science comes down to Earth (perhaps it will appear that UAP science is in fact a key to develop a better, more comprehensive understanding of "Gaia"?), we are still nonetheless left with an uncomfortable possibility that this science may have to face: the possibility that some UAP are in fact off-world technology of nonhuman origin. Here, as we ponder the mystery of the phenomenology of UAP – the extraordinary manner of their movement through Earth, leaving it mostly untouched, seeming to have the ability to be radically *noninteractive* yet kinetic in yet-unfathomable ways – the UAP appears as an outsider, a cosmic interloper whose off-world (other-worldly in a literal sense) technological prowess, while possibly forever remote from direct human engagement (thus forcing our sciences of the phenomenon into the position of sixteenth century astronomy: purely observational, gazing from afar at objects whose inner workings remain enigmatic), nonetheless forms for us an object of fascination, full of technological potency like the bird whose flight we have for centuries dreamt of mastering but only recently had made a definite realization in technological terms. The "things seen in the sky" (as Jung once said of the "UFO") may surely remain a mystery, best understood in psychical rather than

[61] Witness the publications of the Harvard-affiliated *Galileo Project*.

physical terms (but do we not want to know what's inside – and are we yet too-early anatomists afraid of what the dissection might reveal, even forbidden to look inside?); but their visible presence – undeniable – will nevertheless stand before us as something to imitate, a form for our technological designs to copy and reproduce, not matter what the UAP are (or can be scientifically determined to be). And if the technological form can also achieve the graceful noninteractivity many UAP seem to demonstrate as they move through the Earth (so eerily rhapsodized in Jordan Peele's cinematic masterpiece, *Nope!*), then this will necessarily usher in a new technopolitical regime, and indeed, fulfil the now easily dismissible longings of the UFO "contactee", who see in them cyphers of human salvation – often with environmental overtones.[62]

Whatever they may be, the UAP does indeed come down to Earth at a curious moment, just as we must reconsider not only what the Earth means to us, and how to relate to it as a living surface (if we accept Latour's view), but also how to make our technologies – and the technopolitical order thereby implied – harmonize with this new understanding of the Earth as living surface. Are we seeing in UAP, then, a new kind of science – where noninteractivity is an option, like as it has not been possible for our "Promethean" sciences? It is a tantalizing possibility left open to the theoretical sciences to determine – if only from afar, with the "things seen in the sky".

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