10 Cosmic Delegitimation

TOWARD A POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF SCALE

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> This thinking carries with it I know not what secret horror; one finds oneself wandering in an immensity devoid of any limit or center, and therefore of any determinate place.
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> Johannes Kepler, *De stella nova* (1606), on Giordano Bruno's vision of the decentered infinite universe

Political theology grapples with the structures of legitimation and delegitimation that cut across the secular-religious binary. The production of this binary has been constitutive for Western modernity and its modes of self-legitimation, and political theology has comprehensively interrogated the so-called secular modern world—with one key lacuna. It has rarely engaged with the foundational event of modernity that is the Galilean-Copernican revolution or the transition from the hierarchized cosmos to the decentered infinite universe.[1]

Given the post-Heideggerian suspicion toward modern science still prevalent across critical theory, this lacuna is perhaps unsurprising, and political theology is not alone in this. In a well-known gesture, Martin Heidegger decried the first pictures of the Earth taken from space, in which our planet appeared, in Günther Anders's turn of phrase, as an "alien celestial body [*fremdes Gestirn*]."[2] For Heidegger, these pictures exemplified the horror of the technological objectification of the planet instead of a poetic terrestrial dwelling. In the guise of an environmentalist dogma represented most influentially by Bruno Latour in his call to land back on the Earth and his dismissal of the "view from Sirius," and of the extraterrestrial as merely an escape fantasy, the assertion of the Earth over and against the cosmic expanse continues to live on—even in Latour's proclaimed non-anthropocentrism.[3] Thereby, Latour's thinking reiterates the (in the strict sense of the term) reactionary trajectory of modern geocentric thinking represented by philosophers such as G. W. F. Hegel and Edmund Husserl,

who reacted against heliocentrism and against the affirmation of a decentered universe by insisting on the Earth as the only planet that matters philosophically and existentially. As Anders put it in 1970, "Emotionally, to this day we stand against Galileo."[4] To "stand against" Galileo is to stand on the side of his accusers—of a geocentric apparatus that unites "religious" (the church) and "secular" authority (modern philosophy).

From the outset of modernity, this persistence of the Ptolemaic over and against the Copernican generates a dichotomy between human self-assertion and the dis-ordered and decentered universe. As I argue, this dichotomy, in which the modern subject seeks to rival and subdue the cosmic, engenders the specifically modern problem of scale and what I call the process of *upscaling* at the heart of modernity. Today, this process both escalates and threatens to go off the rails as the looming climate catastrophe reveals forcefully a more-than-human planetary and cosmic scale so indifferent as to have no care for humanity's existence, and as divisions within humanity intensify again and the specter of de-globalization haunts the globe, while capitalists and states dream of life on Mars and of enclosing the last remaining commons: outer space. The present moment of crisis thus cuts across the three (temporal and spatial) scales of modernity that have been seldom thought together yet have been co-imbricated in the constitution of modernity as epoch and normative program: the global, the planetary, and the cosmic in the post-Copernican sense.

Throughout modernity, the very idea of global humanity as universal category was co-constituted with the ideas of the planetary and cosmic. Or, to put this differently, the scale on which the concept of global humanity functions was constituted over and against the planetary and cosmic scales. By "the global," I understand the idea (and ideal) of the oneness of humanity and human history across the globe as this oneness was assembled in a colonial and racialized manner following the symbolic event of 1492. As Sylvia Wynter has argued, the modern category of humanness, or of "Man," as the globally normative rational subject, was formed to mark (and to legitimate) the unequal distribution and racialization of the global in colonial modernity.[5] For my purposes in this essay, I therefore speak of "global humanity," "the human," and "the global" interchangeably. "The planetary"—a term that has gained prominence in the Anthropocene debate—indexes the deep time of the Earth's formation and its geological history, operating on a different scale from that of human history.[6] "The cosmic" points to the most measureless scale of all: the alien expanse of the universe revealed by modern astronomy. My suggestion is that "modernity"

itself, which consolidated as a universal epochal category in Enlightenment and Romantic thought, was from the beginning a cross-scalar category and served not least the goal of mediating among the three scales named earlier. In political-theological terms, modernity was constituted in an interplay of legitimation and delegitimation that involved playing these scales off against each other, and that continues to this day. This interplay forms the core of what can be called a political theology of scale in modernity.

In view of the current crisis as a crisis of the modern co-imbrication of the global, the planetary, and the cosmic, two speculative lines of questioning emerge for political theology. First, what would political-theological thinking proceeding from the Copernican revolution and post-Copernican cosmic immanence look like? Second, how do the operations of legitimation and delegitimation function on a post-Copernican cosmic scale?

The contemporary French philosopher Quentin Meillassoux, whose thought is usually associated with speculative realism or speculative materialism, serves in what follows as the lens through which to introduce what I call "cosmic immanence" and "cosmic delegitimation." Meillassoux's cosmic thinking is important since he is the rare philosopher to attempt to think the Copernican event immanently. However, I offer not just an exposition but a reconfiguration of Meillassoux's thinking, expanding its narrow philosophical focus. What emerges from Meillassoux once his thought is revisited from a political-theological perspective is a speculative political theology of cosmic immanence that delegitimates every claim to necessity and every transcendent legitimation, whether it is "religious" or "secular." At the same time, Meillassoux's thinking needs to be placed in the context of the ongoing "rediscovery" of the planetary and cosmic scale constitutively inscribed into modernity from the outset. Ultimately, I suggest, the cosmic scale can delegitimate the very dichotomy between human self-assertion and post-Copernican decenteredness through an embrace of universal contingency and an immanent inhabitation of the alien body of the Earth.

Cosmic Delegitimation

Meillassoux's crystalline prose in *After Finitude* (published in French in 2006) is permeated with a sense of the contingently catastrophic, opening onto a cosmic immanence that precedes and exceeds the human. This immanence is "unveiled" or "revealed" (two key verbs in Meillassoux's description of the Copernican event) in the transition from the closed world to the infinite universe—to the decentered, contingent, glacial cosmic void.

To think this inhuman cosmic immanence is to unground the standard configurations of immanence and transcendence as too human-centered. To say that the cosmic exceeds the human would seem to invoke transcendence. However, cosmic immanence precedes the human, and global modernity imposes itself transcendently on the planetary immanence of the Earth, which is one with the immanence of the universe. This immanence is what Meillassoux calls "ancestral" reality, indexing the deep geocosmic time (of the formation of the solar system) known through statements of science but unexperienceable phenomenologically—yet "diachronically" persisting alongside the time of human history and erupting in a way that is "blindly evident now."[7] While constituting the presupposition of human existence, cosmic immanence is irreducible to human immanence or divine transcendence. It impossibly exceeds what the finite subject can phenomenologically conceive, and its phenomena seem almost impossible even from a scientific perspective—and yet it is real.

The irony of the Anthropocene is that, in its demiurgic striving to control reality, modernity has come full circle, now facing the same post-Copernican scale: one that is geocosmic and inhuman, uncontrollable, and incapable of being contained within the phenomenological horizon. The shock of the Anthropocene and the shock of the Copernican event unveil the one cosmic immanence, and Meillassoux is its foremost contemporary thinker.

In the seventeenth century, this shock underlies the "horror" of which Johannes Kepler speaks, as well as John Donne's sense that, due to the astronomical disorientation, "the Sun is lost, and th'Earth," "all coherence [is] gone," and "this world's spent," or the invocation of the frightening cosmic silence in Blaise Pascal.[8] It runs likewise through eighteenth-century thought, intensifying with the rise of geological catastrophism, the discovery of deep time, and the expansion of the known universe into an endless multitude of galaxies. It gets taken up within the thermodynamic framework, lurking behind the Victorian fears of the depletion of the Earth and the heat death of the universe and underpinning the image of the blind and threatening cosmic expanse in Nikolai Fedorov, the nineteenth-century founder of Russian Cosmism whose thought provided a key inspiration for the Soviet space program. It is the same shock, too, that Anders observes in the reactions to the first real forays into space in the twentieth century. Today, this shock lives on in the discourses of transhumanism and existential risk, and in the calls to make humanity a multiplanetary species so that humanity can survive and assert itself vis-à-vis the decaying Earth

and the dangers of outer space—or, in transhumanist dreams, the reality of universal death itself. But it lives on in Latour, too, through his programmatic repression of the decentered extraterrestrial expanse. These reactions to the Copernican shock, merging with the shock of the Anthropocene, amount to legitimating and recentering the human and the Earth over and against the threat of their cosmic delegitimation in a universe that no longer eternally coheres.

Meillassoux's term for this incoherence and perishability is *contingency*. In a way that resonates between the seventeenth-century and the twenty-first-century catastrophic sentiment, he writes: "Everything could actually collapse: from trees to stars, from stars to laws, from physical laws to logical laws; and this is not by virtue of some superior law whereby everything is destined to perish, but by virtue of the absence of any superior law capable of preserving anything, no matter what, from perishing."[9] Unveiled by the Copernican revolution is not just the contingency of this or that circumstance, but contingency as the absolute condition: the contingency of all invariants of the world. No law, no order is necessary. If there is an order, it is a mere fact, nothing preordained by a religious or secular authority. It could have been and could still be otherwise; nor can it be legitimately inscribed into any narrative of legitimation. Meillassoux's position is distinct from the age-old adage that everything necessarily perishes insofar as he proclaims this necessity itself to be contingent and even perishability to be a mere fact that cannot be legitimated through appeal to necessity. The Copernican event rationally discloses that everything that is is without reason, and this absence of reason, or "unreason," is the only "absolute" or "in-itself," non-metaphysical and delegitimating any appeal to a necessary entity. Cosmic contingency is thereby imbued by Meillassoux with an apocalyptic sense. It collapses any legitimation and unveils the in-itself *in* this collapse—so that, in the cosmic disorientation invoked by Donne, modernity sees the in-itself face to face. This in-itself is the infinite void of contingency, immanent only to itself, an indifferent hyper-chaos of whatever possibility and whatever fact.

For post-Copernican modernity, the infinite plenum of contingency reoccupies the position of "the veracious God."[10] The post-Copernican cosmic scale with its contingency is, in a way, omnipotent, too: "capable of destroying both things and worlds, of bringing forth monstrous absurdities, yet also of never doing anything, of realizing every dream, but also every nightmare, of engendering random and frenetic transformations, or conversely, of producing a universe that remains motionless down to its

ultimate recesses."[11] This dis-orderly, eccentric omnipotence that, "far from guaranteeing order, guarantees only the possible destruction of every order," cannot but appear as menacing, underlying the Copernican shock.[12]

What this omnipotence signifies is strikingly minimal: the fact that whatever is is without reason, and thus must be thought of as *not* necessarily the way it is. It is omnipotence as delegitimation. How to think the world without justifying it? That is, I believe, a central anti-theodical question, and Meillassoux seeks both to think the conditions of possibility of the world and to delegitimate any concealing of immanent nothingness with transcendent necessity. Contra any Leibnizian attempt to stabilize the post-Copernican universe via the theodical principle of sufficient reason, Copernican immanence is to be inhabited by a reason dispossessed of its desire for sufficiency—and of its desire for universal coherence, too, another basic theodical desire. Meillassoux writes: "In reply to those metaphysical questions that ask why the world is thus and not otherwise, the response 'for no reason' is a genuine answer. Instead of laughing or smiling at questions like 'Where do we come from?,' 'Why do we exist?,' we should ponder instead the remarkable fact that the replies 'From nothing. For nothing' really *are* answers."[13] This material nothingness on a cosmic scale indexes an immanence that is decoupled from the world of human and terrestrial self-assertion and that delegitimates this world's legitimations and transcendences.

Ptolemaic versus Astro-Modernity

However, although the scientific revolution was constitutive for modernity, modernity failed to stay with the cosmic trouble revealed in the Copernican event. Meillassoux offers a critique of the trajectory of modernity, which I would recontextualize as follows.

As Hans Blumenberg argues, with the new opening of reality at the outset of modernity, the subject asserts itself *against* the groundlessness and contingency of reality, seeking to produce order out of disorder and chaos. The term *self-assertion* that I use in this essay belongs to Blumenberg and is employed by him to designate the process of the "self-assertion of [human] reason through the mastery and alteration of reality," the "existential program" that leads to what becomes modernity. Within this program, reality is seen as infinitely "open" to the subject who is supposed to "make use . . . of the possibilities" inherent in it.[14]

Modern self-assertion is a project of legitimation, too, precisely as the legitimation of the modern subject, and of the world it seeks to produce, vis-à-vis the decentered infinite real that seems to declare all human possibility futile and insignificant. Within the boundless void of what is impossible yet real, the modern subject carves out for itself a space and time—a world—of possibility, striving to master and control it, here on the Earth but also beyond it in projects such as asteroid mining or the colonization of Mars. That this project of mastery has now led to the planetary-scale eruption of the contingency that the subject set out to control is one of modernity's catastrophic ironies.

Meillassoux diagnoses this project as a *narrowing* of the cosmic and planetary to the phenomenological structure of the subject-object relationship. In the modern structure of finitude, reality appears as correlated with the subject, and this "correlationism," in various guises, characterizes especially the post-Kantian trajectory of thought. The human-world correlation is, furthermore, a structure of domination and racialization.[15] Again ironically, what Kant dubbed his own Copernican revolution constituted, as Meillassoux argues, a "Ptolemaic counter-revolution": a foreclosure of cosmic immanence.[16] In identifying the conditions of representation with the invariants of the world, the transcendental turn was, one might add, a theodical operation.

Modernity *qua* correlationism equals for Meillassoux not only "Ptolemy's revenge" but also a structure of loss, even mourning: "bereavement," "loss" of "the great outdoors."[17] Meillassoux's critique of the neediness, human-centeredness, and blind narrowness of modernity may be said to reconfigure, via cosmic immanence, Christian critiques of modernity in a way that avoids affirming either side of the secular-religious binary. That Meillassoux draws on these critiques is evident in his reference to Rémi Brague no less than in his overly simplistic view of modernity as "de-Christianization." At the same time, "de-Christianization" means for him not a secularization but a "re-ligionization." Meillassoux takes seriously Kant's claim to delimit knowledge to make room for faith. By foreclosing the in-itself and absolutizing the limits of finitude, secular skepticism and transcendental philosophy alike "abandon whatever lies beyond this limit to the rule of piety," producing a "fideism of any belief whatsoever" underwritten by faith in the necessity of the way the world is (a necessity identified with the limits of finitude themselves).[18] At this point, secular humanism becomes indistinguishable from belief in providence. Ultimately, one might say, the more the "fragility" or "mystery" of the world is

emphasized, the more ironclad the world's grip becomes. What modernity calls immanence (i.e., the subject-world structure of finitude) takes for granted the (transcendent) necessity of the world, thereby mystifying it.

Meillassoux may be said to critique the coproduction of the religious and secular—which, however, I view as part of the Christian-modern apparatus of legitimation, not as de-Christianization. To regain astonishment in looking at the universe is to break through this binary apparatus and to inhabit nonhuman cosmic contingency immanently without the desire to transcend it, without the striving for mastery and control or for human self-assertion over and against cosmic immanence.

In *The Number and the Siren* (2012), Meillassoux's deciphering of Stéphane Mallarmé's *Coup de dés*, an immanent inhabitation of contingency points to the persistence of the Copernican event, despite the correlationist trajectory of modernity. As Copernican, modernity is diachronically excessive over its Ptolemaic double, ungrounding any pretense of mastery, and Meillassoux's account of this ungrounding is strikingly Christological, further complicating any de-Christianization narrative.

To give up the striving for mastery is to deliver oneself to what Meillassoux describes as "Chance, the God of the moderns." If Copernican modernity indexes the death of God and the sacrifice of transcendence, then to dispossess oneself of any attempted mastery amounts to a sacrifice of sacrifice opening onto a "divine dimension of suffering," a kenotic embrace of nothingness morphing into a kind of secular salvation—a becoming infinite by becoming Chance, a salvation voided of transcendence.[19] Importantly, while it is mathematical in character, Chance for Meillassoux cannot be reduced to probability or calculability, opposing, as "the detotalization of number," the enclosure of possibility via calculation.[20] As a result, his invocation of Chance as "the God of the moderns" may be taken to suggest, from a Blumenbergian perspective, two things: first, the reoccupation of divine infinity and the unfathomable divine will by cosmic infinity and contingency in the Copernican event; and second, the idea that, in its very attempt to tame contingency, to make it calculable and controllable, the modern subject has continued to assert itself demiurgically against the God of salvation—so that it is cosmic Chance that occupies in modernity the voided place of the *deus absconditus*.

Instead of seeking mastery, Mallarméan astro-modernity embraces Copernican immanence as crystallized in the *perhaps* (as unveiling "no longer *being*, but the *perhaps*"). Mallarmé's hypermodern poetics is an astro-poetics in which the poem—"as christic crystallization of Chance"

or "Christal of Nothingness"—refracts cosmic infinity, not unlike the stars in their "evanescent flickering."[21] In this, Copernican modernity promises "transfiguration" through the *perhaps*, while the Ptolemaic trajectory of modernity seeks to impose order on this *perhaps* to regain stability and control. The tension between these two poles indexes the movement of modernity, to which I now turn.

Upscaling—Or, Modernity Across Scales

In an essay from *One-Way Street* (1928) entitled "To the Planetarium," Walter Benjamin observes in World War I, with its hitherto unprecedented scale of mobilization and annihilation, a striving on the part of global humanity to attain by technological means an ecstatic unity with the cosmic scale. It was "an attempt at new and unprecedented commingling with the cosmic powers"—disrupting what Benjamin sees, repeating a traditional trope, as the absence of connection to the cosmic in modernity. Prior to the war, modernity's cosmic dimension, he posits, was either merely theoretical ("optical") or "individual, as the poetic rapture of starry nights." This time, however, things were different: "Human multitudes, gases, electrical forces were hurled into the open country, high-frequency currents coursed through the landscape, new constellations rose in the sky, aerial space and ocean depths thundered with propellers, and everywhere sacrificial shafts were dug in Mother Earth. This immense wooing of the cosmos was enacted for the first time on a planetary scale—that is, in the spirit of technology."[22] The global, the planetary, and the cosmic are the three scales that can be discerned in Benjamin's account, cutting across the ostensible division between human and nonhuman and between natural and technological or artificial. What Benjamin describes, I want to suggest, is a process of *upscaling* in which global humanity seeks to rival and "woo" the universe by elevating itself to a new massive scale, including the scale of mass annihilation and death.

It is important, I would add, that such a wooing is addressed to the post-Copernican universe of perishability. If the universe is what annihilates planets and worlds, and if annihilation is not the end but part of the processuality of the universe, and out of it new celestial formations arise, phoenix-like, then the war itself is a cosmic war, and mass annihilation is a way of being ecstatically one with the universe, a reenactment of the "cosmic power" of the void and a scaling up *to* this power. "In the nights of annihilation of the last war, the frame of mankind"—the world of the

global—"was shaken by a feeling that resembled the bliss of the epileptic," Benjamin continues, "and the revolts that followed it were the first attempt of mankind to bring the new body under its control."[23] The war and the revolution constituted at once a triumph and crisis of upscaling. In its forceful transition to the new scale, global humanity found a momentary bliss (of oneness with the planetary body and with the infinite night of the universe), yet humanity could not control the scale that it attained.

The delirium of such an upscaling becomes widespread during the early twentieth century; it manifests itself likewise in Italian futurism and the Russian avant-garde or, later, in texts such as Ernst Jünger's *The Worker* (1932), for which the planetary industrial-technological scale is central. The prominence of "the masses" in twentieth-century theory and practice indexes the same upscaling, as well, and not only the leveling criticized by Friedrich Nietzsche.

At least since the industrial revolution, this upscaling forms the central movement of modernity and the precondition of the so-called Great Acceleration of the Anthropocene starting from the 1950s–1960s. As the Romantic philosopher Friedrich Schlegel speculatively proposes around 1800, during what is often considered the beginning of the Anthropocene, perhaps global humanity (and, one might add, its technology) should be viewed as an extraterrestrial outgrowth of the Earth—an image suggesting that humanity envelops the planet like a massive plant and repurposes it as humanity's own soil and resource for growth.[24] Human masses amass on the Earth, grow out of it, and remediate it, becoming a geophysical power that rivals the planet's even as it remains one with it. The current climate crisis, too, is a crisis of this process of entangled upscaling.

In fact, this process can be traced even further back, to the beginning of the modern age. While Benjamin is correct if one understands him to claim that, up to a certain point, this process was more "ideal" than "real" insofar as modern humanity still lacked the technological means and sheer mass necessary to *really* rival the planetary and the cosmic—yet, contra Benjamin, the cosmic dimension of modernity was never merely theoretical. Blumenberg points out that, within the modern logic of self-assertion, all "theory" is subordinated to the "practical" project of human mastery over reality.[25] In the late nineteenth century, Fedorov offered a critique of this project—proclaimed theoretically already by Francis Bacon and René Descartes and evident practically in the modern production of "nature" as resource—theorizing it as the ongoing attempt by the Western subject to (re)instate itself at the center of reality against the shock of the Copernican decentering.

For Fedorov, this impulse stands behind modern colonialism as coimbricated with the dissolution of sacred geography (what he calls the violent "circumnavigational movement" of the modern formation of the global), as well as behind the desire to expand human mastery by colonizing the universe.[26] Both are in fact *one* movement of "circumnavigationally" remediating, through human rationality as modernity understands it, the *entirety* of the newly opened expanse of reality. Interest in exploring and mastering the depths of the Earth (a trajectory leading to modern extractive logics) and in exploring outer space, at first ideally (optically and imaginatively) but always with an eye toward real exploration, forms no less a constitutive dimension of modernity than geographical exploration and expansion, or the assembling of the globe in a Western-centric manner. Today, this cross-scalar movement continues in the remediation of the Earth and its orbit by digital networks and by the infrastructure of satellites, sensors, and cables—or, beyond the orbit, of space telescopes and probes—and it is this movement that global capitalism seeks to expand to the moon and Mars.

From this perspective, the event of 1492 and the Copernican event constitute but one event on different scales. The reality against which the modern subject asserts itself is cosmically open and contingent across all scales. The Copernican shock is engendered by the universal collapse of the idea of a proper distribution of place, and of *scala naturae* as a providential hierarchy—the collapse that occurs at the level of the global, as well. The post-1492 "shock of circumnavigation" is one with the Copernican shock.[27] Already Giordano Bruno analogizes between Columbus and himself, writing that, just as Columbus opened the globe and "unloose[d] the bonds of things," so he, Bruno, has opened the universe for "human spirit and cognition," discovering "the way to scale the skies."[28]

However, what Bruno, through his hermetic optic, views purely as liberation from cosmic prison, or as a way to inhabit the "infinite multitude" and "abundance" of the All without "ends, boundaries, limits or walls," also entails disorientation and the anxiety of decentering.[29] In the shock that reverberates between the global and the cosmic, the Christian European subject faces a cross-scalar decentered expanse over and against which the subject's assumed central position suddenly appears as contingent. In his analysis of the self-assertion of reason, Blumenberg astutely grasps the conjunction of emancipation and anxiety inherent in the project of modernity. However, he fails to see how this emancipation—which is, in modernity, subordinated to the imperative of the demiurgic production

of order to stave off anxiety and to put contingency under control—itself turns subjugating. As a result, the world that the modern subject constructs serves primarily to reinstate this subject to its lost central place through mastery over all human, as well as nonhuman, reality.

One could also put it the following way: The world of possibility and mastery that the modern subject carves out for itself vis-à-vis the decentered and contingent expanse of the real does not simply remain constant. It expands and scales up in all dimensions simultaneously: around the globe but also into the depths of the Earth and into the skies. Geocosmically or geophysically, from a speculative materialist standpoint, "modernity" can be said to name the process of this expansion and upscaling, through which global humanity at once reiterates and seeks to rival and subdue the movement of the universe.

Modernity as a geophysical process of remediating the Earth and the universe has an ideal (conceptual) and a real (material) side that are inseparable. Thus, the theoretical construction of "nature" in modern thought cannot be separated from the material colonial and extractive practices, or from turning everything—and everyone who is relegated to the status of mere nature—into a resource that the subject can use. Similarly, the Romantic vision of particular national spirits as that through which global humanity is assembled forms a constitutive part of the broader modern reassembling of the globe as a network of particular national states and cultures. The Romantic ideal of synthetically assembling the universal *out of* the particular is co-imbricated with the modern architecture of a networked global world in which unity is constructed through communication among particular nodes, with the corresponding material infrastructure from telegraph and railroads to the internet. Throughout modernity, the ideal and the real, for all their tension, form one ever evolving infrastructure of remediation and upscaling—a process impossibly directed, at its limit, toward fully remediating the planetary and the cosmic scale. Contra Meillassoux, the movement of modern self-assertion is not a mere narrowing to the perspective of the subject; it is a focusing or recentering of subjectivity as a point or node *from which* to remediate and expand onto the totality of reality.

It was inevitable that at some point this process would really confront the more than human or inhuman scale—as has happened in the encounter with Gaia in the Anthropocene—and seek to upscale itself to this scale in projects such as geo-engineering, which is but another technique of rationally remediating the globe (in this case, the Earth's entire critical zone) on a planetary scale in order to put it under control. I view Meillassoux's

thought, and the posthuman turn across the humanities more broadly, as part of this encounter with the inhuman—the encounter that intensifies starting in the 1950s–1960s with the Great Acceleration and the rise of new more-than-human logics of remediation, such as live television, the digital, space exploration, and Earth System Science, and with the so-called "long 1968" (itself a global event) as representing the conjoined crisis of the global and the human.

On a new scale, this crisis is restaged in the present crisis of the coimbrication of the global, planetary, and cosmic. The much discussed environmental costs of artificial intelligence and satellite systems, as real abstractions through which we navigate the globe (such as when our physical location is remediated into GPS coordinates used by Google Maps), demonstrate the oneness of abstraction and extraction within the modern process of remediation and upscaling.[30] It is as though the higher humanity, this massive plant, ascends into the skies, the deeper and vaster must its (underground and aboveground) network of roots go through which it sucks out the nutrients from the Earth and beyond it.

The ever upscaling violence and catastrophes that modernity keeps producing, too, are part of this geocosmic process. Thus understood, modernity has the structure of a catastrophic spiral, which keeps re-collecting itself as it moves from crisis to crisis and from scale to scale. Plunged into the infinite abyss by the Copernican shock, the Western subject strives to scale this abyss step by step while refusing to accept its own decentering. In the Copernican event at its most radical, the subject becomes abyssally ungrounded, seeking to assert itself *against* this event as what threatens to delegitimate the centrality of the Christian-modern world. And if the subject's ultimate desire is to become a subject free-floating in the infinite space, then it may be because modern subjectivity itself is constituted in the tension between the never-ending striving to produce, out of contingency, a world that would be fully controlled and the horror of the abyss of contingency in which this world is suspended and that is destined to consume the world of the self-assertion of "Man."[31]

A Coda: Modernity Dissolved

Short of a total climate apocalypse or nuclear annihilation, the process of upscaling is likely to continue. The programmatic return of discourses of modernity and Enlightenment in proponents of geo-engineering and planetary governance is but a symptom of that. But while this movement

is unlikely to be stopped, its impasses can be rethought—which is why reconceptualizations of the cosmic such as Meillassoux's are essential, no less than decolonial, Marxist, Russian Cosmist, and other approaches to the cosmic commons. To dismiss the extraterrestrial as an escape fantasy is as theoretically myopic as it is practically dangerous. In neglecting it, critical theory and practice abandon the cosmic—and, thus, also our planet—to the whims of billionaires acting in tandem with the state-military apparatus. It is important to oppose the escalating cosmic enclosure—and this opposition must itself be cross-scalar.

The problem originally posed by Fedorov remains central: How is one to conceive of a post-Copernican ethos of the cosmic commons so as not simply to legitimate global divisions and violence on a cosmic scale? Or, relatedly, How can one decenter and delegitimate the logics of upscaling inherent in modernity in order to rethink them? From a political-theological perspective, these questions necessitate a refusal of the theodical tendency of modernity, at least since the eighteenth century, to legitimate the global—the world as modernity has formed it—via the cosmic scale. Already Leibniz in his *Theodicy* (1710) appeals to the immensity of the universe, relative to which "our globe and its inhabitants" appear as "something incomparably less than a physical point," for the purpose of paradoxically justifying the perceived evils of human history as "almost nothingness in comparison with the good things which are in the universe."[32] In Romanticism, too, the idea of global humanity as a planetary and cosmic being is entangled with the colonial construction of universal history from a post-Enlightenment Western center.[33]

Today, many proponents of transhumanism, active evolution, geoengineering, and Silicon Valley–style cosmism return to the idea of humanity's cosmic destiny, justifying the late-capitalist civilization as the pinnacle of planetary and cosmic evolution and arguing for the spread of this civilization onto the rest of the solar system. An often repeated sleight of hand declares technology to be the highest achievement of the human species, and even of the evolution of the Earth, to justify the current ills of the human condition as mere deviations to be rectified through increased technological agency and intensified planetary governance. This sleight of hand is dangerous because it reiterates the same old technocratic vision under the guise of a new planetary and cosmic ethos. This, too, however, is symptomatic of the widespread longing for such an ethos. What the present crisis signals is that, now that human and planetary history have become so entangled, a new configuration of the global, the planetary, and

the cosmic is struggling to be born, with capitalist powers old and new seeking to control the process.

To approach the cosmic commons from the standpoint of cosmic immanence is to view all scales as equally touched by contingency and to view this world that modernity has formed as *not* having necessarily to be the way it is. Instead of proclaiming the human as it has been constructed by modernity to be the pinnacle of cosmic evolution, philosophy must embrace the immanent inhabitation of cosmic contingency and an *unknowing* that discloses the human as a contingent cosmic experiment or a manifold of experiments that all remediate the scales of reality in different ways—a cross-scalar topography of contingency foreclosed by the ever upscaling project of self-assertion. Political theology, too, must insist on the standpoint of world delegitimation and post-Copernican decenteredness. One could say that, to stay true to the Copernican event, political theology must provincialize the human and (the nomos of) the Earth in order to proceed from cosmic immanence as the otherwise to the capitalist-modern logics of transcendence concealed under the name of "this world," an otherwise that opens onto a different logic of inhabiting the cosmic. This means, among other things, that political theology must not be fixated on the political identified with the global but must take seriously the post-Copernican dimension of modernity and the constitutive modern process of upscaling to retrace the logics of world investment and (de)legitimation across scales.

The Christian-modern desire for a new world, too, must be dissolved in the bliss of inhabiting immanently the contingency of a universe in which the human, to borrow Meillassoux's expression, is but "a traveler—a *viator*—a man of the earth and not the blessed in heaven."[34] To focus on a new world, the way Meillassoux himself does, is to obscure the fact that, in its life on the Earth and its travels across scales, the human is already cosmic in the post-Copernican sense—not as the bearer of a glorious cosmic destiny or purpose, but as a cosmic attempt at intelligent life without any telos, existing in a frangible relationship with an alien planet that is itself one with the contingency and disorder of the post-Copernican universe. What post-Copernican political theology must assert is that to delegitimate this world is not to spiritually invest in a world to come—but to disclose the plenum of the Earth and the skies on which this world is transcendently imposed and that constitutes the cosmic commons that we already inhabit, yet in a way that is subordinated to the logics of profit, domination, and use. Admitting of no beyond and abolishing all investment in the world, cosmic immanence discloses the here and now of the post-Copernican

universe *within* and *on* the decentered Earth, decentering and dissolving the never-ending not yet of self-assertion.

Notes

1 For one notable exception, see Taubes, *From Cult to Culture*, 98–123, 165–76. I view my essay as pointing toward a new answer to the broadly Taubesian question: How is the Gnostic logic of world delegitimation transformed from within post-Copernican cosmic immanence?

2 Anders, *Der Blick vom Mond*, 61.

3 See Latour, *Down to Earth*, 68.

4 Anders, *Der Blick vom Mond*, 61. In this regard, the Copernican revolution marks not a punctiform occurrence but a complex process that runs throughout modernity and in which the position of the human and the Earth vis-à-vis the universe keeps being recontested—but that continues to be underwritten by the shock evident in the epigraph from Kepler. This shock, together with its lasting repercussions, is what I call "the Copernican event."

5 See Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom."

6 I build here on the distinction between *global* and *planetary* from Chakrabarty, "The Planet."

7 Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 121.

8 Donne, *The Complete Poems*, 837–38; Pascal, *Pensées*, 64.

9 Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 53.

10 Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 64. On the "reoccupation" of the divine by the infinite universe in modernity, see Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*.

11 Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 64.

12 Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 64.

13 Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 110.

14 Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 137–38, 209.

15 Wynter's work may be viewed as diagnosing this coconstitution of "human" and "world" in modernity. On correlationism and antiblackness, see also Jackson, "Sense of Things."

16 Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 118.

17 Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 7.

18 Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 82.

19 Meillassoux, *The Number and the Siren*, 122–26.

20 Meillassoux, *The Number and the Siren*, 103.

21 Meillassoux, *The Number and the Siren*, 103, 222.

22 Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 94.

23 Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, 95.

24 See Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, 18:151. Cf. Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, 20:329: "Humanity [is] *a massive plant*"—emphasizing the sheer (planetary) scale of global humanity.

25 Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 208–9.

26 Fedorov seeks to reclaim this impulse for his ideal of inhabiting the Earth and the skies in common: see Chepurin and Dubilet, "Out of the Cemetery of the Earth, a Resurrective Commons."

27 On the "shock of circumnavigation," see Sloterdijk, *Spheres, Volume 2*, 808. Jared Hickman further analyzes the event of 1492 as the disorienting cosmological clash that engenders the modern logics of racialization: Hickman, *Black Prometheus*.

28 Bruno, *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, 59–60.

29 Giordano Bruno, "On the Infinite Universe and Worlds," in Singer, *Giordano Bruno, His Life and Thought, with an Annotated Translation of His Work* On the Infinite Universe and Worlds, 245.

30 For a visualization of these costs, see Crawford and Joler, "Anatomy of an AI System." Cf. Bratton, *The Stack*, 12: "Computation is not virtual; it is a deeply physical event."

31 On the desire to be the free-floating subject, see Arendt, "Man's Conquest of Space," 535.

32 Leibniz, *Theodicy*, 135.

33 See Chepurin, *Bliss Against the World*, chap. 6; Chepurin, "Reading Novalis and the Schlegels."

34 Meillassoux, "The Immanence of the World Beyond," 473.