

2 UNPARALLELED CATASTROPHE FOR OUR SPECIES?

Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations

Katherine McKittrick: These conversations began in 2007. Since that time, a series of ideas and exchanges have taken place and unfolded into ongoing discussions about humanism, monohumanism, natural scarcity, genetic codes, race, location, and more. This document archives the key ideas that arose through what was originally, in 2007, an “interview” while also assembling, around and through these ideas, the call-and-response conversations between Wynter and McKittrick that have taken place since.¹ The call-and-response has been textual, telephonic, computerized, and musical—with one document repurposing and mashing up the breaking of the levees and geographies of the Ninth Ward with the 2007 “interview” archives, Kansas Joe McCoy and Memphis Minnie, the Detroit electronica band Drexciya, and others.² The narratives here, though, in text form, are conversations that draw specific attention to Sylvia Wynter’s ongoing concerns about the ways in which the figure of the human is tied to epistemological histories that presently value a *genre* of the human that reifies Western bourgeois tenets; the human is therefore wrought with physiological and narrative matters that systemically excise the world’s most marginalized. Here, her comprehensive knowledge of arts, letters, history, geography, science, and nature comes together—in relation to different times and spaces—and provides a meaningful pathway to dwell on what means to be human and, more important, how we might give humanness a different future.

This conversation should be read with Wynter’s earlier work in mind. Her writings on the overrepresentation of Man and her conceptualization of Man₁ and Man₂, which are explored throughout her writings and in the essays collected here, inform much of what is put forth below.³ The human,

in Wynter's writings, is representatively linked to the figure of Man₁ (invented by the Renaissance's *studia humanitatis* as *homo politicus* and therefore differentiated but not wholly separate from the *homo religiosus* conception of human) that was tethered to the theological order of knowledge of pre-Renaissance Latin-Christian medieval Europe; this figure opened up a slot for Man₂, a figure based on the Western bourgeoisie's model of being human that has been articulated as, since the latter half of the nineteenth century, liberal monohumanism's *homo oeconomicus*.⁴ These figures, both Man₁ and Man₂, are also inflected by powerful knowledge systems and origin stories that explain who/what we are. These systems and stories produce the lived and racialized categories of the rational and irrational, the selected and the dysselected, the haves and the have-nots as asymmetrical naturalized racial-sexual human groupings that are specific to time, place, and personhood yet signal the processes through which the empirical and experiential lives of *all* humans are increasingly subordinated to a figure that thrives on accumulation.

Added to this, Wynter thinks about the neurological responses that such figures induce: with our biblical and Darwinian origin stories in mind, she locates how the human remains beholden to these pervasive knowledge systems. Thus our postbiblical origin stories might also be described as *macro-origin* stories—as they are tightly knitted to the figures of Man₁ and Man₂ and consequently function to semantically activate the endogenous opiate reward-and-punishment system of the human brain.⁵ The paradoxical way in which *race*—as the naturalized and secular organizing principle of those global relations that are wedded to the Darwinian/Malthusian macro-origin stories that iterate and normalize *homo oeconomicus*—will continue, too, to cast an apocalyptic shadow on any possibility of our thereby *just*, existence as a species. We presently live in a moment where the human is understood as a purely biological mechanism that is subordinated to a teleological economic script that governs our global well-being/ill-being—a script, therefore, whose macro-origin story calcifies the *hero figure* of *homo oeconomicus* who practices, indeed normalizes, accumulation in the name of (economic) freedom. Capital is thus projected as the indispensable, empirical, and metaphysical source of all human life, thus semantically activating the neurochemistry of our brain's opiate reward/punishment system to act accordingly!

Sylvia Wynter offers a different origin narrative possibility. Extending Frantz Fanon's new descriptive statement, which redefines our being hu-

man in both meta-Freudian and meta-Darwinian terms, she offers an ecumenically human (origin) story. Specifically, she works through the ways in which Fanon's concept of sociogeny (our codes or masks or *mythoi* or origin narratives) is *linked in semantically activating causal terms*, with the *bios* phenomena of phylogeny/ontogeny.⁶ Our *mythoi*, our origin stories, are therefore always formulaically patterned so as to co-function with the endogenous neurochemical behavior regulatory system of our human brain. Humans are, then, a biomutationally evolved, hybrid species—*storytellers who now storytellingly invent themselves as being purely biological*. With this, particular (presently biocentric) macro-origin stories are overrepresented as the singular narrative through which the stakes of human freedom are articulated and marked.⁷ Our contemporary moment thus demands a normalized origin narrative of survival-through-ever-increasing-processes-of-consumption-and-accumulation. This is reinforced by the epistemological elaboration of a story line—here we should be mindful of the disciplinary discourses of natural scarcity, the bell curve, and so forth, together with the “planet of slums” reality that is before us—which is nevertheless *made to appear, in commonsense terms*, as being *naturally* determined.⁸ This commonsense naturalized story is cast as the only *possible* realization of the way the world must be, and “is.”

Working alongside W. E. B. DuBois, C. L. R. James, Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, and Elsa Goveia, among others, Wynter dedicates her own past and still ongoing work to the furthering of the “gaze from below” emancipatory legacy. This legacy had been born out of the overall global range of anticolonial and antiapartheid struggles against the overtly imperial and colonial liberal monohumanist premises. Those struggles were to eventually fail; *politically independent* nation-states came to be epistemologically co-opted and globally reincorporated into the Western world system—a system that is now in its postcolonial, postapartheid but still liberal (or now neoliberal) monohumanist symbolically encoded configuration. Because her ongoing work still strives, as her earlier work had done, to fully realize that emancipatory legacy by putting forward an alternative, *yet no less secular*, version of humanness imagined outside liberal monohumanism, her overall project can be identified as that of a *counterhumanism*—one now ecumenically “made to the measure of the world.”⁹

Some preparatory remarks on the document that follows: The discussion is framed by four guide quotes, which, ideally, the reader will keep in mind throughout. The guide quotes are followed by the larger textual

document—the conversations. The conversations are divided into sections that the reader can study in order, out of order, separately, or all together. Each section includes a heading and a very short preamble by McKittrick, which leads into the subsequent insights by Wynter. The entire document reflects the questions from the original 2007 conversation, parts of that conversation that have not been reproduced, verbatim, here, and the call-and-response pattern mentioned above. This is to say that the headings, preambles, and insights are anchored to Wynter’s ideas and were generated through what I can only describe as a broader conversational praxis. The endnotes—in the spirit of Wynter and others—draw attention to those areas of the conversations that have been omitted in the text but are relevant to thematic concerns and, perhaps more important, will encourage further explorations of narratives that think through and across humanness, location, and knowledge.¹⁰

Guide Quotes

We know that when we talk about the processes of civilization, or evaluate human behavior, human organization, or any biological system, *we are concerned with self-corrective systems*. Basically these systems are always *conservative* of something. As in the engine with a governor, the fuel supply is changed to conserve—to keep constant—the speed of the flywheel, so always in such systems changes occur to conserve the truth of some descriptive statement, some component of the *status quo* . . . fundamentally, we deal with three of these enormously complex systems or arrangements of conservative loops. One is the human individual. Its physiology and neurology conserve body temperature, blood chemistry, the length and size and shape of organs during growth and embryology, and all the rest of the body’s characteristics. This is a system which conserves descriptive statements about the human being, body or soul. For the same is true of the psychology of the individual, *where learning occurs to conserve the opinions and components of the status quo* . . . Second, we deal with the society in which that individual lives—and that society is again a system of the same general kind. . . . And third, we deal with the ecosystem, the natural biological surroundings of these human animals.

—Gregory Bateson, “Conscious Purpose versus Nature” (emphasis added)¹¹

How was *Homo oeconomicus* foisted on us? In spite of his elegant foreign name, he is selfish and unmannered, *brutish as Caliban, naïve as Man Friday*. We all love to speak scathingly of him. Judging from the bad press he receives, we actually

dislike him a lot and cannot believe anyone *could really be so greedy and selfish. He is logical*, but even that is unattractive. His shadow stretches across our thoughts so effectively that *we even use his language for criticizing him*. . . . Our subject is about his origins: *Where did someone without social attributes come from in the first place*, and why has he expanded from a small, theoretical niche to become an all-embracing mythological figure . . . like a *republican parallel to the imperial microcosm of former civilizations?*

—Mary Douglas and Steven Ney, *Missing Persons* (emphasis added)

What if we did not know where we are and who we are? What if all previous answers to the question of who we are were merely based upon the application of an answer given long ago, an answer that does not correspond to what is perhaps asked in the question *now touched upon of who we are?* For we do not now ask about ourselves “as human,” assuming we understand this name in its traditional meaning. According to this meaning, man is a kind of “organism” (animal), that exists among others on the inhabited earth and in the universe. We know this organism, *especially since we ourselves are of this type*. There is a whole contingent of “sciences” that give information about this organism—named man—and we collect them together under the name “anthropology.”

—Martin Heidegger, *Basic Concepts* (emphasis added)

What is by common consent called the human sciences have their own drama. . . . All these discoveries, all these inquiries lead only in one direction: to make man admit that he is nothing, absolutely nothing—and that he must put an end to the narcissism on which he relies in order to imagine that he is different from the other “animals.” . . . This amounts to nothing more nor less than man’s surrender. . . . Having reflected on that, I grasp my narcissism with both hands and I turn my back on the degradation of those who would make man a mere [biological] mechanism. . . . And truly what is to be done is to set man free.

—Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

Toward the Counterauthority of a New Science in the Global Context of Our Contemporary Crisis-Ridden Times

Katherine McKittrick: In the following, Wynter sets out her project, delineating the ways in which the Copernican leap was to be iconic of the Renaissance transformative mutation. She outlines how the redefinition of the meaning of being human during this epoch, within the overall context of a *studia humanitatis* order of knowledge, was being effected, for the first time, in implicitly desupernaturalizing terms. The premise of this counterpoetics,

initially realized by Copernicus's new astronomy, later came to be developed as the physical sciences together with their uniquely new self-correcting mode of cognition. This was followed by a redefined purely secular liberal monohumanist figure that enacts, presently, the hegemonically bourgeois *homo oeconomicus* "descriptive statement" of being human: *pari passu* with the rise and development from the late nineteenth century onward of the Darwinian / neo-Darwinian biological sciences that now underwrite our contemporary epistemological order.¹²

Sylvia Wynter: What I'm going to propose is that we are now challenged with envisioning a new "science of the Word," which I take from Aimé Césaire.¹³ This challenge can be likened to that made by Copernicus when he declared that, while it may *seem* absurd, the Earth indeed also moves! Then Galileo tried to support this view, and he was imprisoned by the Inquisition and had to recant specifically that the Earth indeed does not move. Yet of course, the Earth *does* move. Yet, the premise that the Earth did not move was very central to the form of Christian theology that was hegemonic at the time. Thus, as the famous Cardinal Bellarmine—in the later context of Galileo's heresy trial for his defense of Copernicus's thesis—said: if the Earth moves, it would vitiate our entire plan of salvation.¹⁴ Thus the context of that history demonstrates that, within that theologically absolute system of knowledge, the Earth was supposed to be *fixed* at the center of the universe, as the divinely condemned abode of post-Adamic fallen man. Now, many bourgeois scholars keep saying: Oh, Copernicus took man away from the center, thereby *devalorizing* the human. But they are liberal scholars, right? They see the world *biocentrically*. And they do not understand that, seen *theocentrically*—as would have been the case then—to *be at the center was to be at the dregs of the universe*. The center was then the *most degraded* place to be! So when Copernicus says that the Earth also moves, he is *revalorizing* the Earth. With his challenge, what now has to be recognized is that since the Earth also moves, *and is therefore a star like any other*, it also has to be, over against the traditional astronomy, *of the same homogeneous physical substance as the heavenly bodies*! But he's *also* changing the center to the Sun—and instead of the center being a degraded place, it's now an exalted place.¹⁵ So unless we move out of the liberal monohumanist mindset, it's very difficult to see where we've been, where we're going. Once the Earth had been proved to move, medieval Latin-Christian Europe's then hegemonic theologically absolute worldview had begun to come to an end.

Let us say if you were a Christian subject—now you and I, we don't feel the Earth to move, right? But we take it for granted that the natural scientists are right when they tell us it moves. But for those inhabiting the medieval order of Copernicus's time, when they didn't feel the Earth to move, they would say: ah, I am sinful because Adam and Eve fell and this Earth, divinely condemned to be nonmoving, is justly my abode. If the Earth moved, the theo-Scholastic order of knowledge would have to go. It disappeared.

Copernicus's proposed new astronomy fundamentally breached what was, at that time, the still hegemonic and theologically absolute Scholastic order of knowledge. At the same time, the lay or largely secular scholars—the humanists—projected *studia humanitatis*, which had also come to counterpose itself against that of the theologically absolute order of knowledge together with the overall vertically caste-stratified hierarchical order of medieval Latin-Christian Europe; this was a legitimated order of knowledge wherein a vertically hierarchical order was dominated *spiritually* and *epistemologically* by the church and its celibate clergy. Thus, as an imperative function of the above, *before* the challenge of Copernicus's new astronomy, the hierarchies of the order of late Latin-Christian medieval Europe, the latter in both its spiritual (i.e., sexually celibate) and profane (i.e., sexually non-celibate) clergy/laity forms, had anchored itself on, inter alia, an orthodox Ptolemaic astronomy, for which the cosmos had continued to be defined by a projected fundamental (Heaven/Earth) divide. While this millennially held tradition of knowing the macrocosmos and, co-relatedly, the role allocations of the respective microcosmoi of all societal orders in analogically reinforcing or *mirroring* terms, had logically led, at its Ptolemaic best, to a technically proficient yet at the same time epistemologically resigned astronomy.¹⁶ An astronomy and ordering that, although theologically elaborated in then Latin Christianity's monotheistic Heaven/Earth divide terms, had hitherto remained unchallengeable, reaching all the way back as it did, to Greek astronomy (and there evidencing, if philosophically elaborated, the no less fundamental macrocosmic Form/Matter divide).

Copernicus's epochal breaching of the Heaven/Earth divide was only to be made possible during the Renaissance, first, in generic terms, by the revalorizing/reinvention of Latin-Christian medieval Europe's *homo religiosus Adamic fallen Man* as *homo politicus*, a figure now self-governed by its/his reason, articulated as reasons of state. This was a newly invented Renaissance humanist counterpoetics that was projected over and against the Absolute and conceptually all-powerful, *uncaring* and arbitrary God of the

church's then late-medieval orthodox theology. In the terms of the latter's counterpoetics, therefore, the relation was now renarrated as one between the traditional biblical Christian God and a mankind *for whose sake* (*propter nos homines*), rather than merely *for the sake* of his own glory (as the then nominalist orthodox theology held), he had indeed *created the Universe*.¹⁷ And he, as Copernicus was to centrally argue, as "the best and most systematic artisan of all," would *have had to have created* the universe's "world machine" according to rules that made it *law-likely* knowable by the human reason of those creatures *for whose sake* he had done so.¹⁸

The result was that Copernicus's new (1543) astronomy would, over several centuries and with further development by other scholars, come to be fully realized as a uniquely new and *cognitively open*—because, normally, *imperatively self-correcting*—order of knowledge, just as that of the physical sciences. That premise was therefore to also open up a generalized *natural scientific* conceptual space. This conceptual space provided a context for the biological sciences of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries to become increasingly institutionalized. This conceptual space, then, was therefore to make possible Darwin's epistemological rupture or leap—that is, its far-reaching challenge to Christianity's biblical macro-origin story's theocosmogonically projected divinely created divide between an ostensibly generically Christian mankind, on the one hand, and all other species, on the other. These natural (biological) sciences, however—as they too function, for the main part, in cognitively open and self-correcting terms—must be taken into account with the aporia of their now globally hegemonic Janus-faced *purely biocentric* version of humanness.

The Renaissance humanist mutation and resulting eventual disappearance of the theo-Scholastic order of knowledge reveal that our own now purely secular and purely biocentric order of knowledge can also cease to exist; we see an analogical challenge to that advanced by Copernicus when he challenged the order of knowledge of his time. What I'm putting forward as a challenge here, as a wager, is therefore that the human is, meta-Darwinianly, a hybrid being, both *bios* and *logos* (or, as I have recently come to redefine it, *bios* and *mythoi*). Or, as Fanon says, phylogeny, ontogeny, and sociogeny, *together, define what it is to be human*. With this hypothesis, should it prove to be true, our system of knowledge as we have it *now*, goes. Because our present system of knowledge is based on the premise that the human is, like all purely biological species, a natural organism; or, the human is defined biocentrically and therefore exists, as such, in a relationship

of pure continuity with all other living beings (rather than in one of both continuity and discontinuity).¹⁹ So, if the biocentrists are right, then everything I'm saying is wrong; but, if I am right, I cannot expect them to accept it easily. For our entire order of secular knowledge/truth, as it has to do with *ourselves*, is devastated if we are hybrid beings! If humans are conceptualized as hybrid beings, you can no longer classify human individuals, as well as human groups, as *naturally selected* (i.e., eugenic) and *naturally dysselected* (i.e., dysgenic) beings. This goes away. It is no longer meaningful. So I have to be realistic and say how can I expect people whose *discipline is their identity* to accept this hybrid model? When what they/we are being faced with is the total removal of their discipline as an autonomous field of inquiry? But then think of the dazzling creativity of the alternative challenge that would be opened up!

So if you are an economist, for example—and I'm anticipating myself here—instead of economics as a behavior-regulatory order of discourse that is, how shall I say, *indispensable to the replication of our present economically homogenized world-systemic order*, you remake it instead into a *science of all genre-specific human modes of material provisioning*, this including our contemporary own. How are these past and present economies understood when seen from a post-*homo oeconomicus* perspective? This is going to be related in a sense to what you call geography. But then geography will not exist as a discipline *by itself* anymore. A part of it will be physical geography—what was the Earth like before we came on the scene, even before any living beings came? And then, as all forms of biological life exploded, how did our later auto-instituting of ourselves as uniquely hybrid living beings bring this new form of specifically humanized geography into being? But geography will no longer be an *in-itself*; geography also becomes part of the study of our planet's overall self-organizing environmental-ecological system.

Now what I'm saying has to do with many of the papers and essays you have read. But what I'm saying also goes beyond those papers in order to attempt to make it all more hearable. Therefore, in what we'll be talking about, I'll be bringing in points that are coming from a book I have been working on. The first part of its title—"In the Great Silence of Scientific Knowledge"—is taken from Aimé Césaire, from "Poetry and Knowledge," a talk he gave at a 1946 conference in Haiti. He proposed that as brilliant as the feats of the natural sciences are, they themselves are half starved—because they cannot deal with our human predicament.²⁰ He then puts forth the idea of a new science, a hybrid science: a science of the Word. This idea is one in

which the study of the Word (the *mythoi*) will condition the study of nature (the *bios*). What my work has led me to think about is that—like Cardinal Bellarmine, who had opposed theologically any suggestion that the Earth also moved—we are, collectively, in a similar situation. Specifically, we are stuck, committed to our now secular, no longer theocentric but no less absolute biocentric premise, that the human is also a purely natural organism, like any other. What I have been attempting to put forward on the basis of Césaire’s proposed new science will therefore necessarily call for a rewriting of our present now globally institutionalized order of knowledge.

What I’ve been struggling with and working on, then, is to come up with a way of getting the above across, without falling into the traps laid down by our present system of knowledge, which means that I am often afraid that I will not be able to get it all across, and that’s why I was so delighted by your book. In *Demonic Grounds* you are extending—you’ve caught what I am struggling to say—and you’re making it become your own, argued in your terms.²¹ And I know that that’s how it’s going to be, because the struggle we are confronted with cannot be in any way a one-person task. We must now collectively undertake a rewriting of knowledge as we know it. This is a rewriting in which, inter alia, I want the West to recognize the dimensions of what it has brought into the world—this with respect to, inter alia, our now purely naturalized modes or genres of humanness. You see? Because the West *did* change the world, *totally*. And I want to suggest that it is *that* change that has now made our own proposed far-reaching changes *now* as imperative as they are inevitable. As Einstein said, once physical scientists had split the atom, if we continue with our old way of thinking—the pre-nuclear way of thinking—we drift as a species toward an unparalleled catastrophe.²²

**White Radiance/Aesthetic Normalcy and the Teleology of Our
Ostensibly Ecumenically Human Development: The Genre-Specific/
Culture-Specific Objective Truths of Economic Development**

KM: The enactment of our present biocentric descriptive statement (and thus its eugenic and dysgenic sociogenic codes of symbolic life and death) is linked to the law-like normalization of the corporeal features of Western Europeans in their now ethno-class bourgeois aesthetic configuration. This normalization is most strikingly evident in the consumer marketing of skin-bleaching creams and cosmetic surgery, as well as by the proposed mainline genetic engineering of designer babies. Such techniques and procedures

prescriptively imply that all humans, globally, be corporeally and aesthetically homogenized according to a single genre-specific (ethno-class) Western European model.²³ This model, of course, must be understood against and with the range of our incomplete postcolonial, postapartheid, post-1960s “politics of identity/identity politics” emancipatory struggles and, therefore, the now incomplete (and paradoxical reversal of the) “beautification” in bourgeois-consumer terms of, most markedly, blackness. The failure and eventual co-optation of these struggles are not, as we know, limited to the corporeal. They reflect, instead, the emergence of a global free-market-driven and consumer-oriented mimetic desire that is anchored to a single genre-specific Western European bourgeois model of being that is, itself, projected onto, and incorporates, all those who belong to the now globally economically Westernized middle classes; their working classes; and their criminalized and jobless underclasses. This then reifies an ostensibly *humanly normative* social category: *homo oeconomicus* (the virtuous breadwinner, the stable job holder, the taxpayer, the savvy investor, the master of natural scarcity).²⁴ This figure also unveils, Wynter explains, the *symbolic death* of the denizens of the “planet of slums” just as it uncovers the teleological underpinnings of the story-lie of ostensibly human development, as well as the reality of climate change/instability, to which, inter alia, it gives rise.²⁵

SW: There are two contemporary issues that make this project urgent for me. One of them is a small-scale issue, although its implications are not. The Jamaican health minister—I think it was in February [2007]—announced that they were putting a ban on the sale of skin-whitening cream by unlicensed vendors because they were selling cheaper versions, which were harmful.²⁶ It turned out that all across the country, men and women are using these skin-whitening creams. At the same time, in several newspaper articles, you see that the same thing is going on in Asia. And you find that many of these women’s faces are now blotched, especially the poorer women. And Olay, for example, is turning out products like White Radiance. In the United States, a \$15 billion-a-year plastic surgery industry flourishes. Its clients include everybody—whites themselves but, of course, many many blacks and many nonwhites, too: those who don’t look sufficiently like the Western bourgeoisie’s projected Grecian norm of being and of beauty. Think of the systemically induced self-aversive plastic-surgical mutilation tragedy of the brilliantly gifted Michael Jackson! James Watson, one of the two techno-scientists whose feat was to crack the DNA code, un-

derscores a second, correlated but even more extreme issue, specifically, the dangerous ethical implications of his proposal that techno-scientists mainline-genetically engineer designer babies because he said he doesn't like ugly people and he doesn't like stupid people.²⁷ Ugly and stupid, that is, from his own genre-specific perspective as a Western bourgeois subject who is, however, at the same time, when in his lab, a natural scientist.²⁸ Okay. So this is what I mean by the biocentric Scholasticism or the bio-Scholasticism, of our present episteme. This is an episteme that functions, with respect to the knowledge of our contemporary world and its systemic reality, *according to the same cognitively closed descriptive statement and its sociogenically encoded truth of solidarity as that of the theo-Scholastic knowledge system of the medieval order of Latin-Christian Europe*. So this is what gives me the urgency, do you see what I mean? For we cannot allow ourselves to *continue* thinking in this way. This way of thinking is linked to the *same* ethno-class mode of behavior-regulatory and cognitively closed order of knowledge that has led to our now major collectively human predicament: the ongoing process of global warming, climate instability, and ecosystemic catastrophe.

Regarding the above, a 2007 report in *Time* magazine on global warming tells us two things: first, that global warming is a result of *human* activities; and, second, that this problem began in about 1750 but accelerated from about 1950 onward.²⁹ Now, the date 1750 points to the Industrial Revolution. But the article, which builds on the expertise of a U.N. climate panel, fails to explain *why* global warming accelerated in 1950. What happened by 1950? What began to happen? The majority of the world's peoples who had been colonial subjects of a then overtly imperial West had now become politically independent. At that time, we who, after our respective anticolonial uprisings, were almost all now subjects of postcolonial nations, nevertheless fell into the mimetic trap of what Jean Price-Mars calls, in the earlier nineteenth-century case of Haiti, "collective Bovaryism"³⁰—because the West is now going to *reincorporate* us neocolonially, and thereby mimetically, by telling us that the problem with us *wasn't* that we'd been imperially subordinated, *wasn't* that we'd been both socioculturally dominated and economically exploited, but that we were *underdeveloped*.³¹ The West said: "Oh, well, no longer be a *native* but come and be Man like us! Become *homo oeconomicus*!" While the only way we could, they further told us, become *un-underdeveloped*, was by following the plans of both their and our economists. The catch was that our economists, like the distinguished Caribbean economist Sir Arthur Lewis, had been educated in British im-

perial universities, like many of us. This is the same kind of model as in the Roman Empire: all the elites of the imperially subordinated populations were educated in Roman imperial schools! And so these mimetically educated elites, proud to be incorporated as Roman citizens, had helped to keep the Roman Empire going; and then when the Roman Empire was going to break down, among such elites you had a scholar like Augustine, who before his conversion to Christianity had been a professor of rhetoric and of the imperial Roman theory of high and low styles. After his conversion he had then taken all of that knowledge, then shifted the above rhetorical strategies to reinforce the revolutionary *sermo humilis* of the then new “gaze from below,” postpagan, postclassical monotheistic religion of Christianity—this latter as one whose projected promise of eternal salvation in the City of God will far outstrip the glories of the cities of Man, including that of Rome itself. This is what I call an Augustinian turn, the taking and revising of an existing system of knowledge, in order to create that which is imperatively emancipatorily new.³²

There is one profound difference here, however. Rome’s empire was *Roman*. Instead, as studies of contemporary neocolonialism as well as of its predecessors colonialism and postcolonialism reveal, the West, over the last five hundred years, has brought the *whole* human species into its *hegemonic*, now purely secular (post-monotheistic, post-civic monohumanist, therefore, itself also transumptively liberal *monohumanist*) model of being *human*. This is the version in whose terms the human has now been redefined, since the nineteenth century, on the *natural scientific model* of a *natural* organism. This is a model that *supposedly* preexists—rather than *coexists* with—all the models of other human societies *and* their religions/cultures. That is, all human societies have their ostensibly natural scientific organic basis, with their religions/cultures being merely superstructural. All the peoples of the world, whatever their religions/cultures, are drawn into the homogenizing global structures that are based on the-model-of-a-natural-organism world-systemic order. This is the enacting of a uniquely secular liberal monohumanist *conception* of the human—Man-as-*homo oeconomicus*—as well as of its rhetorical overrepresenting of that member-class conception of being human (as if it is the *class of classes* of being human itself). Guess what happens? Its empirical results, for both good and ill, have been no less large-scale. Yet at the same time, no less *genre-specifically* caused! So that’s the terrifying thing with the *Time* report. It thinks the causes of global warming are *human* activities, but they are not! The Masai who were (and

are) being displaced have nothing to do with global warming! It's all of us—the Western and mimetically Westernized middle classes—after we fell into the trap of modeling ourselves on the mimetic model of the Western bourgeoisie's liberal monohumanist Man2. But mind you, at the time—just prior to, during, and after the anticolonial and civil rights struggles—what other model was there?³³ Except, of course, for the hitherto neocolonially neglected yet uniquely ecumenically human model put forward by Frantz Fanon from what had been his activist “gaze from below” antibourgeois, anticolonial, anti-imperial perspective. A uniquely ecumenically Fanonian human model that could (and can) in no way law-likely exist within the *vrai* of our present epistemological order. The *vrai* of, that is, in Richard Rorty's terms, its “truth of solidarity” rather than that of, ostensibly, objectivity.³⁴

Yet it is precisely within the law-like epistemic terms of the now globally homogenized descriptive statement model of being human specific to the above order that the climate panel's report and recommendations are generated; these terms are also transmitted, postcolonially, by each ex-colony's branch plant university variant of the West's overall liberal monohumanist academic system. Consequently, the report's recommendations must be put forward in the terms set by the master discipline of economics and its disciplinary “truth of solidarity.” This means that the genre-specific preprescribed “truth” of economics must itself analogically elaborate an ethno-class *descriptive statement* mode of *material provisioning* that can, law-likely, be *only that of homo oeconomicus's* single absolute model of free-market capitalism. This model's imperative supraordinate telos of increasing capital accumulation thereby predefines it as the *only* means of production indispensable to the enacting of the economic system of free-trade-market capitalism's unceasing processes of techno-industrial economic growth. This model can, at the same time, be enacted only on the homogenized basis of the systemic repression of all other alternative modes of material provisioning. In this mode of material provisioning, therefore, there can ostensibly be no alternative to its attendant planetarily-ecologically extended, increasingly *techno-automated*, thereby job-destroying, postindustrial, yet no less fossil fuel-driven, thereby climate-destabilizing free-market capitalist economic system, in its now extreme neoliberal transnational technocratic configuration. The exceptions, however, are those clusters of still extant nomadic or sedentary indigenous traditionally *stateless* societies—for example, those of the Masai, the San, or the Pygmy in Africa, as well as the range of other such

societies in Australia, the Americas, and elsewhere. Many of these groups are now being pushed out of their ostensibly “underdeveloped” “places” totally.³⁵

The larger issue is, then, the incorporation of all forms of human being into a single homogenized descriptive statement that is based on the figure of the West’s liberal monohumanist *Man*. And this conception of being, because ostensibly natural-scientific, is biocentric. So when Fanon says, “I take my narcissism in both hands and I say that the human is not a mere [biological] mechanism,” he overturns this biocentric conception.³⁶ That doesn’t mean that this ethno-class natural organism model of the human doesn’t bring you knowledge—as Heidegger points out, it brings you all kinds of knowledge.³⁷ But it is *not* the knowledge of the human reconceptualized in the direction of a hybridly, both *mythoi* and *bios*, being. We therefore now need to initiate the exploration of the new reconceptualized form of knowledge that would be called for by Fanon’s redefinition of being human as that of skins (phylogeny/ontogeny) and masks (sociogeny). Therefore *bios* and *mythoi*. And notice! One major implication here: *humanness* is no longer a noun. *Being human is a praxis*.³⁸

Now with respect to the *challenges* to the single biocentric model of liberal monohumanist *Man*, the sixties’ movements were really the first opening phase of the dynamic in which the series of “isms” (initiated by the black antiapartheid struggle for civil rights, women’s rights/feminism, indigenous and other of-color rights, gay and lesbian rights, and so forth) had erupted to challenge *Man*’s episteme, its truth, and therefore its biocentric descriptive statement. And momentarily, they were making these challenges *all together*. Ah, but when you separate them, you retreat into the bourgeois order of things. And that was the remimeticized Bovaryism trap into which we all fell.³⁹ The sixties’ movements had begun that whole ripping apart of the emperor’s clothes—and remember, the sixties movements had been fueled by the earlier anticolonial movements all over the world, which had climaxed in Vietnam, Algeria, and elsewhere. All such humanly emancipatory struggles, all then so fiercely fought for! *You bring them together*, and the world system had begun to question itself! To me Derrida’s most radical essay was his revised version of a talk he gave at a philosophy conference in 1968, where he refers to the fact that Martin Luther King had been assassinated, that the Vietnam War was going on, and the student uprisings in Paris were in full force. Now his talk was called “The Ends of *Man*.”⁴⁰ At the end he asks,

“But who, ‘we’?” The *referent-we* of man and of its ends, he implies, is *not* the *referent-we* of the human species itself. Yet, he says, French philosophers have assumed that, as middle-class philosophers, their *referent-we* (that of Man₂) is isomorphic with the *referent-we* in the *horizon of humanity*. I am saying here that the above is *the* single issue with which global warming and climate instability now confronts us and that we have to replace the ends of the *referent-we* of liberal monohumanist Man₂ with the ecumenically human ends of the *referent-we in the horizon of humanity*. We have no choice.

If we take the report put forth by the climate panel in *Time* seriously, what we find is this: the authors of the report, as natural scientists and also bourgeois subjects, logically assume that the *referent-we*—whose normal behaviors are destroying the habitability of our planet—is that of *the human population as a whole*. The “we” who are destroying the planet in these findings are not understood as the *referent-we* of *homo oeconomicus* (a “we” that includes themselves/ourselves as bourgeois academics). *Therefore, the proposals that they’re going to give for change are going to be devastating!* And most devastating of all for the global poor, who have already begun to pay the greatest price. Devastating, because the proposals made, if nonconsciously so, are made from the perspective of *homo oeconomicus* and its attendant master discipline of economics, whose behavior-regulatory metaphysical telos of mastering Malthusian natural scarcity is precisely *the cause* of the problem itself. So for us to deal with global warming, this will call for a far-reaching transformation of knowledge—this *pari passu* with a new mutation of the answer (its “descriptive statement”) that we give to the question as to *who* as humans *we are*. Again, this kind of transformation of knowledge, which had occurred some five hundred years ago and had put forth—what at the time was to be profoundly revalorizing for the secularizing (reasons-of-state) ruling elites of the then Western European population’s *referent-we*—an epochally mutational new answer. Seeing that the Renaissance West, in bringing to an end the then totally hegemonic *theologically Absolute*, because cognitively closed, world of late-medieval Latin-Christian Europe—thereby, *inter alia*, making the Copernican leap and later the physical sciences possible—had also brought into existence what has become today our now planetarily extended, globally incorporated Western and Westernized hegemonically secular world of contemporary modernity—a worldview that is, in transumptively inherited yet dialectical terms, being articulated and engendered as *biologically Absolute*.