Climate Leviathan

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Carl Schmitt once wrote that 'state and revolution, leviathan and behemoth, are actually or potentially always present'—that 'the leviathan can unfold in unexpected historical situations and move in directions other than those plotted by its conjurer.' Even for Schmitt, for whom this was no minor point of order, this is an understatement. Leviathan, whether in the Old Testament or in even older Ugaritic myths, was never a captive of its conjurer's will, and it remains at large today. It still prowls the spaces between nature and the supernatural, sovereign and subject, yet Leviathan no longer names the many-headed serpent of the eastern Mediterranean, but Melville's whale and Hobbes' sovereign, the 'Multitude so united in one Person' to form the 'Common-wealth':

This is the Generation of that great Leviathan, or rather (to speak more reverently) of that Mortall God, to which wee owe under the Immortall God, our peace and defense. For by this Authoritie, given him by every particular man in the Common-Wealth, he hath the use of so much power and strength conferred on him, that by terror thereof, he is enabled to forme the wills of them all, to Peace at home, and mutuall ayd against their enemies abroad…. And he that carryeth this person is called Soveraigne, and said to have Soveraigne Power; and every one besides, his Subject.

How did the figure of sovereign power come to be called Leviathan? Hobbes does not say, but the reference is certainly to the Book of Job. Job, abused by misfortunes cast upon him by Satan, cries out against the injustices visited upon the faithful. God's reply, however, is not kindly: he reminds Job not of His justice, but of His might. Indeed, God taunts him; the Leviathan is proof of His worldly authority, but, equally, of Job's powerlessness:

Can you pull in the leviathan with a fishhook or tie down his tongue with a rope? Can you put a cord through his nose or pierce his jaw with a hook? Will he keep begging you for mercy? Will he speak to you with gentle words?... Any hope of subduing him is false; the mere sight of him is overpowering. No one is fierce enough to rouse him. Who then is able to stand against me? Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me.  .  .  .

On earth [leviathan] has no equal, a creature without fear.

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He looks down on all that are haughty; he is king over all that are proud.³

If this is the reference to the worldly king that suggested 'Leviathan' to Hobbes, it is a pretty rough transposition.⁴ As Schmitt is at pains to explain, Hobbes' equation of state and Leviathan 'has obviously not been derived from mythical speculations.' Rather, it is put to work for what are at least superficially quite different purposes.⁵ Leviathan, the sea monster who seems the very embodiment of nature's ferocity, is for Hobbes the means to escape the state of nature. Indeed, as Schmitt makes clear, Hobbes' sovereign is in many ways a machinic anti-monster, and its sovereignty is not founded in mere terror, but in an originary social contract.

Schmitt said that his philology of Leviathan was 'a response to Benjamin [that has] remained unnoticed'.⁶ Although aimed specifically at Benjamin's 'Critique of Violence', the point of contention is best expressed in what Agamben calls the 'decisive document in the Benjamin-Schmitt dossier', the eighth thesis on history: 'The tradition of the oppressed classes teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is the rule. We must attain to a concept of history that accords with this fact. Then we will clearly see that it is our task to bring about the real state of exception'.⁷ Since the US inaugurated its most recent 'states of emergency' via the War on Terror and trillion dollar bail-outs, this thesis has received a lot of attention, and rightly so. It does indeed seem that 'the declaration of the state of exception has gradually been replaced by an unprecedented generalization of the paradigm of security as the normal technique of government'.⁸ Moreover, regulation in these exceptional conditions is increasingly a planetary matter. For, while the securitization problem is usually posed within a governmental imaginary framed by the nation-state, global climate change has produced conditions in which it is increasingly solicited at a scale and scope hitherto

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³ Job 41: 1-34.
⁴ Also true if Hobbes was inspired by the reference to the covenant at Job 41: 4.
⁷ Agamben, State of Exception, p. 57.
unimaginable. What of sovereign security in a planetary crisis? Is a warming planet 'fierce enough to rouse' Leviathan? Or will Leviathan 'beg for mercy'?

The news on climate change is, of course, uniformly bad and getting worse. The pace and range of implications grows with each report from climate science. Many in the global North seem to find comfort in the belief that the worst consequences—food scarcity, political unrest, inundations and other 'natural' disasters—are far enough away or far enough in the future that they will not live to experience them. That reaction, if unjustifiable, is nevertheless entirely comprehensible because the negative consequences of climate change sound out in two rhythms that are not syncopated. There is a slow, almost imperceptible ambient noise, such as the plodding upward of food prices: wheat and maize yields have fallen ~3.8% and 5.5%, respectively, due to climate change since 1980.9 But this is hard to hear. It is the occasional pound of stochastic events that punctuates this background noise. Consider 2010. The northern hemisphere cooked through the hottest summer on record, Pakistan suffered historical floods, Russian wildfires blazed, grain prices doubled, some countries cut off food exports.10 But such exceptions have a sound of their own, so to speak; thus the real tone of climate change is not yet resounding in our political lives.

Then there are the ongoing wars for the world's energy supplies, with ever more fronts. Taken all together, it is difficult to even contemplate the future; merely to confront the perils that loom can paralyze us with fear. As Mike Davis noted in a recent NLR, the effects of regular calamities on our political imaginations are practically overwhelming: 'on the basis of the evidence before us, taking a 'realist' view of the human prospect, like seeing Medusa's head, would simply turn us into stone'.11 Yet, at the risk of being turned to stone, it is clearly

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10 'Putin Announces Ban on Grain Exports', Financial Times, 5 August 2010.
11 Mike Davis, 'Who Will Build the Ark?', New Left Review II/61, p. 46. In sharp contrast, Alex Cockburn laments the left's current 'fixation' on 'speculative and increasingly discredited models of anthropogenic global warning', New Left Review II/68, p. 79. If Cockburn lacks the requisite pessimism of the intellect to size up the climate change
time to theorize the possible political futures that climate change might induce. For, as Davis points out, the looming political formations are no small part of our peril. The more optimistic hopes for international agreements, cap-and-trade markets, renewable energy technologies, carbon capture and storage, 'green finance', and geoengineering—even putting aside their many problems—fall far short, in both rate and extent, of the kind of radical change that many climate scientists are convinced is necessary.

In the face of this, two questions arise. First, if we are to achieve something like the commonly identified target of a 90% reduction in global carbon emissions by 2050, how might we do so? What political processes or strategies could make that happen in anything resembling a just manner, or in any manner at all? Second, if we do not achieve massive social reconstruction (as seems highly likely), and climate change reaches some threshold or tipping point at which it is globally impossible to ignore, then what are the likely political outcomes? What processes or strategies will emerge then? Can the capitalist nation state survive catastrophic climate change? If so, in what form? If not, what forms of political-economic organization are likely to emerge? To restate our questions differently:

[1] Do we have a theory of the 'coming revolution' for climate justice? Do we have, that is, a theory of the revolution for which Davis has called—one of 'almost mythic magnitude in the redistribution of income and power'?12

[2] Do we have a theory of how capitalist nation states are transforming as a consequence of planetary change?

The first asks how we might accomplish what we must; the second asks us to anticipate the alternative political futures with which we must compete. Taken together, the challenge is to

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12 Davis, 'Who Will Build the Ark?', p. 38.
develop a politics adequate to the present conjuncture. Our responses to these questions must be formulated with five constraints:

1. There is no legitimate basis for debating climate change as such. The climate is changing, and anthropogenic modification of the chemical composition of atmosphere is the major cause.  

2. Humanity may or may not have time to reverse these changes, which are sure to have dreadful and often deadly consequences—particularly for the relatively weak and the marginalized (human and non-human).

3. The political-ecological conditions within which the immense decisions about climate change are being (and will be) made are fundamentally marked by uncertainty and fear; there are no real 'climate decisions', only reactions of various sorts.

4. The elite transnational social groups that dominate the world's capitalist nation-states certainly desire to moderate and adapt to climate change—not least to stabilize the conditions that produce their privileges; yet, to date, they have utterly failed to coordinate a response (see Copenhagen and Cancún).

5. In light of the potential severity of climate change, elites will increasingly attempt to coordinate their reactions, all while sailing seas of uncertainty and incredulity.

Whether or not Davis is correct that 'growing environmental and socio-economic turbulence may simply drive elite publics into more frenzied attempts to wall themselves off from the rest of humanity', we must consider the means by which such power might be exercised. And we must think these possibilities through beyond the increasingly common 'collapse' (Davis, 'Who Will Build the Ark?', p. 38).

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15 Davis, 'Who Will Build the Ark?', p. 38.
narratives.\textsuperscript{16} There are a limited number of forms these responses will take; examining these possibilities is of utmost urgency if we are to produce an effective counter-response.

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We posit that two key variables will be determinant of the coming world order. The first is whether the prevailing economic formation will continue to be capitalist or not. While a great deal of diversity can be found between capitalisms, all capitalist societies in history have been shaped by what Marx called the general formula of capital: $M\rightarrow C\rightarrow M'$. Whether this circuit of capital continues to expand—that is, whether the value-form will continue to shape social life—is fundamental to the emerging order. The second is whether a coherent planetary sovereign will emerge or not. The question here is whether 'sovereignty' will be reconstituted for the purposes of planetary management. Climate Leviathan exists to the precise extent that some sovereign exists who can decide on the exception, declare an emergency, and decide who may emit carbon and who cannot. This sovereign must be planetary in a dual sense: capable of acting at the scale of the Earth’s atmosphere (since carbon sequestration presents itself as a massive collective action problem), but also because it must act in the name of planetary management—for the sake of life on Earth. A task of biblical proportions, amounting to an impossible global accounting of everything, like determining 'a weight for the wind and apportion[ing] the waters by measure.'\textsuperscript{17}

This pair of dichotomies produces four potential global political responses to climate change, each of which is distinguished by the hegemony of a particular bloc, a mode of appropriation and distribution through which that hegemony is exercised: a capitalist climate Leviathan; an anti-capitalist, state-centred climate Mao; a reactionary capitalist Behemoth; and a communist climate X (see figure one). The top pair in the box reflect capitalist futures. The left side of the box represent scenarios where planetary sovereignty is affirmed and


\textsuperscript{17} Job 28: 25.
constructed. What we call climate Leviathan is defined by the affirmation of both capitalism and planetary sovereignty (and is therefore in the upper-left corner).

[INSERT FIGURE ONE [attached]]

Our central thesis is that the future of the world will be defined by Leviathan, Behemoth, Mao, and X, and the conflicts between them. This is not to say that all future politics will be simply determined by climate, which is certainly wrong, but rather that the challenge of climate change is so fundamental to the global order that the complex and manifold reactions to climate change will unavoidably restructure the world along one of these four paths. To say the least, the persistence of our existing capitalist liberal democracy cannot be safely assumed. Yet because of its likely dominance in the near term, the possible futures that exist outside climate Leviathan may largely be seen as responses to it.

Among these possible futures, Leviathan is presently leading but is neither consolidated nor uncontested; Behemoth is Leviathan’s greatest immediate threat, and, while unlikely to become hegemonic, may well remain disruptive enough to prevent Leviathan from achieving a new hegemonic order. If Leviathan essentially reflects the dream of a sustainable capitalist status quo, and Behemoth reaction, Mao and X are competing revolutionary figures in the worldly drama. X is ethically and politically superior, but Mao is more likely to enter the scene from stage left. Let us consider each in turn.

**Climate Leviathan**

Climate Leviathan is defined by the dream of a planetary sovereign. It is a regulatory authority armed with democratic legitimacy, a panopticon-like capacity to monitor and discipline carbon production, consumption, and exchange, and binding technical authority on scientific issues. The UN-COP negotiations on emissions reductions—notwithstanding their abject failure even on their own ecologically and socially inadequate terms—represent the first institutional manifestation of this dream of planetary regulation, a process that the dominant capitalist nation-states will surely accelerate and consolidate as climate-induced
disruptions of accumulation and political stability become more urgent. Although binding agreement could not be reached in Copenhagen or Cancún, the terms of a potential agreement were basically agreed in advance. To begin, capitalism itself is not a question on the table, but rather treated as the solution to climate change. Indeed, filtered through the COP lens, climate change appears to capital as an opportunity. Carbon finance, trading in carbon-emissions permits, judicious market assessments of 'tradeoffs', nuclear power, corporate leadership, steady economic growth: this is Leviathan's lifeblood.

Why is this 'Leviathan'? Climate Leviathan is a direct descendant in the line from Hobbes' original to Schmitt's sovereign: when it comes to climate, Leviathan will decide, and is constituted precisely in the act of decision. It is the pure expression of a desire for, the recognition of the absolute necessity of, a sovereign—indeed, the first truly global sovereign—to seize command, declare an emergency and bring order to the world, in the name of extending life. If Giorgio Agamben is correct to argue that 'the declaration of the state of exception has gradually been replaced by an unprecedented generalization of the paradigm of security as the normal technique of government', \(^\text{18}\) then the consolidation of climate Leviathan represents the rescaling of 'the normal technique[s]' to encompass planetary security, the making-secure of planetary life. With this achievement the state of nature and the nature of the state become perfectly enmeshed.

In one important respect, therefore, climate Leviathan exceeds its lineage, for it sweeps aside the state-based territorial container fundamental to Hobbes' and Schmitt's thought. Even for those states most committed to national autonomy, it is increasingly clear that independent regulatory regimes are inadequate to the problem of global climate change. This contradiction—already rending deep fissures in the UNFCCC process—will inevitably manifest itself in a manner similar to the ways in which the leading nation-states have attempted to coordinate similar 'public good' collective action problems: with the construction of a nominally 'global' frame which is in fact a political and geographical extension of the rule of the extant hegemonic bloc, i.e. the capitalist global North.

Yet climate change has broken the surface of political consciousness at a moment of global political economic transition. Any realizable planetary climate Leviathan must be constructed with the approval of a range of actors formerly excluded from global governance—China and India most notably, but the list could go on. Ensuring China's support for any binding climate regulation complicates the role of capital in the Leviathan. (Any nation in which the state owns more than fifty percent of industrial assets presents an unusual sort of capitalism.19)

What this means for climate Leviathan not entirely clear. Our conjecture is that Leviathan could take two forms. On one hand, a variety of authoritarian territorial sovereignty, arguably truer to Hobbes’ own vision, could emerge in nations or regions where political economic conditions prove amenable. We name this possibility ‘climate Mao’, and discuss it below. On the other hand, we could see Leviathan emerge as the means by which to perpetuate the extant rule of northern liberal democratic capitalist states. Arguably the most likely scenario is that sometime in the coming decades the waning US-led liberal capitalist bloc will endeavour to impose a global carbon regime that, in light of political and ecological crisis, will brook no opposition in defense of a human future for which it volunteers itself as the last line of defense. The pattern of mobilization will likely be familiar, in which the United Nations or other international fora serve as a means of legitimizing aggressive means of surveillance and discipline. This could make the construction of climate Leviathan a key means by which to salvage American international hegemony—a prospect that, if anything, only increases the likelihood of its consolidation.20


20 Indeed, the UN Security Council is currently considering the establishment of an 'environmental peacekeeping force'—‘green helmets' who will manage the coming climate-induced unrest ('UN Security Council to Consider Climate Change Peacekeeping', Guardian
The current agents of a potential capitalist climate Leviathan will press for its diplomatic resolution. One might find, for example, the personification of this effort in John Holdren, Harvard physicist and National Science Advisor to President Obama. Since his 2008 appointment, right-wing media have derided Holdren as a harbinger of a climate police state. One website claims he has called for 'forced abortions and mass sterilization' to 'save the planet.' Paranoid hyperbole, certainly, but the underlying critique is not entirely misplaced. Holdren was an early visionary of what we call climate Leviathan. Consider these lines from the conclusion of Holdren's 1977 textbook on resource management, in which he outlines a new sovereignty he calls 'Planetary Regime':

_Toward a Planetary Regime:_ … Perhaps those agencies, combined with UNEP and the United Nations population agencies, might eventually be developed into a Planetary Regime—sort of an international superagency for population, resources, and environment. Such a comprehensive Planetary Regime could control the development, administration, conservation, and distribution of all natural resources…. Thus the Regime could have the power to control pollution not only in the atmosphere and oceans, but also in such freshwater bodies as rivers and lakes that cross international boundaries or that discharge into the oceans. The Regime might also be a logical central agency for regulating all international trade, perhaps including assistance from DCs to LDCs, and including all food on the international market. The Planetary Regime might be given responsibility for determining the optimum population for the world and for each region and for arbitrating various countries’ shares within their regional limits. Control of population size might remain the responsibility of each government, but the Regime would have some power to enforce the agreed limits.22

Holdren's coauthors here, the Ehrlichs, are well-known Malthusians. But this vision of a capital 'R' Regime owes more to a German legal theorist than the British Reverend.

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21 http://zombietime.com/john_holdren/

We should re-emphasize here the specifically capitalist character of the climate Leviathan to whom this call appeals. In contrast to the sovereign Leviathan conceived by Schmitt—for whom capital was at best an epiphenomenon—capitalist climate Leviathan emerges in a manner reminiscent less of National Socialism than of the disparate and desperate efforts to save capitalism after 1929, retrospectively collected under the umbrella-term 'Keynesianism': a concentration of political power at the national scale in combination with international coordinating institutions that attempt to render the current hegemony immutable—allowing, as with the UN, for specific constraints on capital's dominion.

The notion of 'green-washing' hardly does justice to the pretentions of this transition to globalized green capitalism. As Edward Barbier describes in his outline of a 'Global Green New Deal'—the most sophisticated call for a capitalist Leviathan yet uttered—it will require both an institutional-juridical structure of planetary climate sovereignty, and the construction of sophisticated and liquid global markets in a series of novel enviro-financial instruments whose status as functioning 'securities' is by no means clear. Nevertheless, climate Leviathan will be the fundamental regulatory ideal motivating elites in the near future. Yet it is neither inevitable nor invincible; it is strong and coherent, but not uncontested. Not only is it threatened within by the usual burdens of any state-capitalist project divided by multiple accumulation strategies, but it is almost impossible to imagine that it will actually reverse climate change. Given the drive for incessantly expanded accumulation without which capital ceases to be, the constant conversion of the planet into means of production, and the material throughput and energy-intensivity through which it is operated, capitalism is effectively running up against its planetary limits. If there is a 'spatial fix' for this contradiction, it is as yet unavailable.

Moreover, capitalism's tendency to deepen inequalities of wealth and power is tightly linked to the challenge of confronting climate change. Any attempt to reduce planetary carbon emissions will require sacrifices and transnational alliances; deep inequalities, within and

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between nations, are fatal to such efforts. Intra-nationally, because inequalities make it difficult to build coalitions around shared sacrifice and entrench the capacity of the wealthy to prevent the conversion of carbon-intensive economies into more sustainable alternatives. And internationally, because the massively unequal dispensations of wealth and power in the world prevent the kind of global compromise that will be necessary for Leviathan to rule effectively. Thus, even if climate Leviathan can come into being—through a global consolidation of ecological and economic sovereignty, via some combination of coercion and consent—it is unlikely to secure a confident hegemony. But it will not die a quiet death. Even now it watches the world, in search of a containment strategy for its foes.

Yet again, what we call 'Leviathan' could take two forms, depending essentially on whether the emerging sovereign power acts to defend or overthrow capitalism. Let us consider the latter.

*Climate Mao*

Of the two incarnations of climate Leviathan, one lies at the end of the red thread running from Robespierre to Lenin to Mao. Climate Mao is marked by the emergence of a non-capitalist Leviathanic domestic authority along Maoist lines. If capitalist climate Leviathan stands ready to confront carbon governance within an evolving Euro-American liberal hegemony, climate Mao asserts the necessity of a 'just terror' in the interests of the future of the collective. Concretely speaking, this means that it represents the necessity of a planetary sovereign but wields this power *against* capital. The state of exception determines who may and may not emit carbon—at the expense of unjust wastefulness, unnecessary emissions, and conspicuous consumption.

Relative to the institutional means currently available to capitalist liberal democracy and its sorry attempts at consensus, this trajectory has some distinct advantages, particularly in terms of the capacity to coordinate massive political economic reconfiguration quickly and securely.

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comprehensively. In fact, to recall the questions with which we began—how can we possibly meet the necessary emissions reductions targets?—it is this feature of climate Mao that recommends it most. As climate justice movements all over the planet struggle to have their voices heard, most of those in the global north are premised on an unspoken faith in a lop-sided, elite-biased liberal proceduralism doomed to failure in the face of changes of a scale and scope hitherto unimaginable. If climate science is even half-right in its forecasts, the liberal model of democracy—even in its idealized Rawlsian or Habermasian formulations—is at best too slow, at worst a devastating distraction. Climate Mao reflects the demand for revolutionary, state-led transformation today.

Indeed, calls for variations on just such a regime abound on the left: Mike Davis and Giovanni Arrighi have more or less sided with climate Mao, which they see as the only viable alternative to capitalist climate Leviathan; we might even explain the renewal of enthusiasm for Maoist theory (including Alain Badiou’s version) by the prevailing crisis of ecological-political imagination. Minqi Li's is arguably the best developed of this line of thought, and like Arrighi, Li locates the fulcrum of world climate history in China, arguing that climate Mao offers perhaps the only way out of our current planetary conditions. His analysis:

[U]nless China takes serious and meaningful actions to fulfill its obligation of emissions reduction, there is little hope that global climate stabilization can be achieved. However, it is very unlikely that the [present] Chinese government will voluntarily take the necessary actions to reduce emissions. The sharp fall of economic growth that would be required is something that the Chinese government will not accept and cannot afford politically. Does this mean that humanity is doomed? That depends on the political struggle within China and in the world as a whole.


Taking inspiration from Mao, Li argues that a new revolution within the Chinese revolution could transform China and save humanity from doom. Of course, Li does not suggest such
an outcome is likely; one need only consider China's massive highway expansions, accelerated automobile imports, and subsidized urban sprawl. But he is right to emphasize that if an anti-capitalist planetary sovereign is to emerge that could change the world's climate trajectory, it is likely to emerge in China. 

Even today, when the Chinese state invokes its full regulatory authority, it can achieve political feats unimaginable in liberal democracy. Perhaps the most notable instance of state-coordinated climate authority is the manner in which Beijing's air quality was re-engineered during the 2008 Olympics, as flowers were planted all over the city, traffic barred, millions of trees planted in the desert, and regional factories and power plants closed—to successfully create blue skies for the Games. Recall, too, that in early 2010 the Chinese state effectively killed General Motors' gas-guzzling Hummer when it blocked the division's sale to Sichuan Tenzhong Heavy Industrial Machinery due to the vehicle's emissions levels. One can also point to the 'Great Green Wall' against desertification, which, if successfully completed, will cross 4,480 km of northern China, and various tree-planting programs will give the country 42% 'forest' cover by 2050. And since vowing in the summer of 2010 to apply an 'iron hand' to the task of reducing emissions, the Communist Party closed over 2,000 steel mills and other carbon-emitting factories by March 2011. Such changes foretell the possibility of climate Mao, if China were to become a global hegemon and also undergo a revolutionary green twist. To be clear, we do not see China on this path today; these capacities reflect rather that the CCP is committed, at least presently, to building climate Leviathan. (Consider

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China's recent voluntary 'border tax adjustment' program, aimed at reducing exports of energy-intensive products.\(^{33}\)

Still we insist on speaking of climate Mao, not climate Robespierre or Lenin. Climate Mao is, in the near future, a specifically Asian path, or better: climate Mao is a global path which can only be cut from Asia. In contrast to sub-Saharan Africa or Latin America, for example, only in Asia—and only with some revolutionary leadership from China—do we find the combination of factors that make climate Mao realizable: massive and marginalized peasantries and proletariats, historical experience and existing state capacity, and skyrocketing carbon emissions. The key contrast here is with Evo Morales' Bolivian state, which serves as the most powerful voice on the left within the UNFCCC progress, promulgating the Cochabamba accord in counterpoint to the US/EU Copenhagen framework. While the view from Cochabamba is certainly radical—its accord calls for a 50% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 2017, while rejecting carbon credits and 'the consumption patterns of developed countries'—it is difficult to see how it could translate into global transformation.\(^{34}\) By contrast climate Mao is not impossible in Asia because of the confrontation between millions of increasingly climate-stressed poor people and the political structures that abet those very stresses, not to mention the living legacies of Maoism. In the imminent confrontation of Asia's historical-geographical conditions with catastrophic climate change, too many people have too much to lose, too quickly—a formula for revolution.

To be clear, we are not claiming that climate Mao will emerge via an ecological awakening on the part of Indian or Chinese peasants. Asian peasants (and recently urbanized former peasants) will respond not so much to carbon emissions as to the elite expropriations certain to come in the face of climate-induced instabilities, and failures to act in response to real crises. Yet again, China's state is presently building climate Leviathan. How we get from here to climate Mao depends principally on the Chinese proletariat and peasantry. As is


\(^{34}\) Final Declaration of the World People's Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth, Cochabamba, Bolivia, 26 April 2010.
commonly noted, China's emissions are growing daily, and the economic growth with which those emissions are associated is the basis of much of the legitimacy enjoyed by the Chinese state and ruling elites. If—or better, when—the Chinese working class responds to likely massive climate change-induced disruptions in growth, the possibilities for an energetic climate Mao are substantial. Moreover, the preconditions for the rise of climate Mao are extant, and in some cases thriving: outside of the Maoist tradition in China itself, the Maoist Naxalites of India's eastern 'red corridor' is actively engaged in armed conflict with India's coal mafia; Maoists effectively now hold power in Nepal; and North Korea, although of course not exactly Maoist, is not going away. Certainly any collective embrace of the West's vision of capitalist Leviathan on the part of the peasantry and proletariat of China or the rest of Asia seems unlikely. Rather, the opposite is more plausible: the rapid rise of more authoritarian state 'socialisms', regimes that use their power to rapidly reduce global carbon emissions, and maintain control during climate-induced 'emergencies'.

So much for Asia. But what, if anything, makes climate Mao a plausible basis for global transformation? Bear in mind that by 2025 Asia will not only be home to the majority of humanity, but also will likely be the leading economic region for commodity production and consumption as well as carbon emissions. Moreover untold millions will comprise the subaltern social groups—from Pakistan's floodplains to coastal China—that are among the most at-risk to suffer the negative consequences of climate change. The terrible floods of 2010 in Pakistan foretell something of the magnitude of potential unrest. Such turbulence will combine in a region with an enormous, growing capacity to reshape the consumption and distribution of all the world's resources. Thus it is a far more interesting thought

experiment to ask how radical social movements in Asia could challenge Leviathan than to imagine a would-be 'climate Mao' emerging in, say, Lagos or La Paz.

*Climate Behemoth*

While Climate Mao looms over Asia, the spectre haunting the world’s core capitalist states today is that of reactionary conservatism. Climate Behemoth is one of its most significant expressions. Represented by the right half of the box (see Figure one), Behemoth opposes Leviathan qua planetary sovereign, which is itself not a bad thing in our view. When Schmitt remarked that 'state and revolution, leviathan and behemoth' are always potentially present, Behemoth takes the revolutionary position. This is consistent with its figural representation as the masses in Hobbes, or even—insofar as the masses were tied to the soil—in the representation of Behemoth as cattle in pre-renaissance painting.

In its reactionary form—where populism defends capital (as represented by the upper-right corner)—climate Behemoth can be seen in the ideological force behind the 'climategate' sham and the persistence of a more-or-less conspiracist climate denialism in mainstream political discourse, especially in the US. This ideology's lifeblood is petrodollars and arms, bound together in a millenarian nexus. In its milder manifestations, it accepts the fact of climate change, but posits it as a 'natural' process—either 'natural' qua human nature, or 'natural' qua non-human nature—which is beyond our control, rendering any policy response futile. We see this represented by figures like Bjorn Lomberg, who acknowledge but radically depoliticize climate change, and more generally in the chorus of ridicule aimed at 'alarmists' who call for reorganizing political-economic life to address imminent planetary change. The more aggressive variation on this theme is the fearless affirmation that if the world is coming to an end, it is God’s will. Sure of itself, Behemoth denies or even condemns the hubris of climate science. Behemoth hates Leviathan for its liberal pretentions to World Government, Mao for its faith in secular revolution, and both for their willingness to sacrifice liberty for lower carbon emissions.
Perhaps the clearest personification of this today is Sarah Palin. Erstwhile Governor of oil state Alaska, an aggressively naïve patriot who made her name by 'standing up to the oil companies', Palin brilliantly performs the populist style of an advocate for authentic community confronted by liberal compromise-democracy and secularism. Her rise as a superstar conservative politician in the US cannot be separated from popular reaction to climate Leviathan. Indeed, without the foil of climate Leviathan, she is unimaginable. Her signature affiliations—faith, nationalism, guns, and especially cheap domestic oil—perfectly crystallize Behemoth's essence. As much as anyone, Palin is Behemoth.

It is no accident that while the 'liberal' intelligentsia began to heed the signs of climate change, the most intensely chanted refrain on her 2008 campaign trail was 'drill baby drill!' (or 'drill here, drill now!'). The power of such sloganeering resides in the way it articulates a desire by those who identify with the 'USA'—i.e. nationalists and racists—to affirm their unconditional right to power, especially of the military, motor and electric varieties. Palin's vice-presidential campaign is done, but the force of those chants remains. Notwithstanding the liberal view that she would make an ideal opponent for Obama in 2014, Palin need not take office to shape US hegemony.

Regardless of who inhabits the White House, the US state could yet become Leviathan's torso. To date, however, it remains the absent center of this new planetary sovereign, held back by Behemoth. To the extent that US hegemony will continue to require affordable fossil fuels (as Palin is undoubtedly right to believe), the emergence of Leviathan poses a threat to many in the US—enough to feed Behemoth and its expressions, and check Leviathan's potential for a time.

*Climate X*

None of the previous trajectories contain the possibility of a just climate revolution, let alone one of 'almost mythic magnitude'. Faced with the challenge, most of the left seems awestruck, and, almost by default, building climate Leviathan seems to have come to stand as the most 'practical' immediate response, even though we recognize the unlikelihood of its
achieving an effective hegemony soon. The strength of Leviathan today stems from the fact that it enjoys, among liberals, hegemony as a conception of the world's future. The vast popular mobilization around Copenhagen, at least in the global North, is evidence of how many millions cling to it, knowing all the while that it will almost certainly fail. As Jameson famously said, 'it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism.' And yet it is the end of capitalism we need. Certainly this can never emerge via the imagination alone, but neither can it emerge without it. The first task is thus to produce an effective conception of such a world: for want of a name, we call it 'climate X.'

What constitutes climate X? Let us begin by defining it formulaically: climate X is a world which has defeated the emerging climate Leviathan and its compulsion for planetary sovereignty, while also transcending capitalism. In other words, we argue that only in a world that is no longer organized by the value form, and only where sovereignty has become so deformed, and politics can no longer be organized by the sovereign exception, is it possible to imagine a just response to climate change.

A tall order, to be sure. But this formula allows us a vantage from which to identify and measure progress. No longer celebrated: UNFCCC negotiations on REDD+; climate finance; and the elite politics of 'sustainable' capitalism. Rather: organizing for a rapid reduction of carbon emissions by collective boycott and strike. Utopianism? Not necessarily. To begin with, climate X has the merit of necessity: we must. If this is not enough, one might add that it is already emerging. Consider again the struggles for climate justice coalescing all over the world, and especially amongst some of the world's most marginal social groups, vociferously opposing the Copenhagen conception of climate politics because they knew it was capital's talent show, and — with respect to its capacity to reduce carbon emissions — a meaningless

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liberal piety. These movements, more or less quixotic, are nonetheless the seeds of X, proof that it is indeed germinating now.\textsuperscript{39}

But what are the conditions to building this movement? Describing the outcome of the radical developments before us, or at least the possibilities for which we must aim, is a starting point. Minqi Li, for example, proposes ecological resurgence via communist revolution in these terms:

\begin{quote}
Hopefully, people throughout the world will engage in a transparent, rational and democratic debate which is open not only to economic and political leaders and expert intellectuals, but also to the broad masses of workers and peasants. Through such a global collective debate, a democratic consensus could emerge that would decide on a path of global social transformation that would in turn lead to climate stabilization … This may sound too idealistic. But can we really count on the world’s existing elites to accomplish climate stabilization while meeting the world population’s basic needs? Ultimately, climate stabilization can only be achieved if the great majority of the world’s population (not just the elites and the ecologically conscious middle class individuals) understand the implications, relate these implications to their own lives, and actively … participate in the global effort of stabilization.\textsuperscript{40}
\end{quote}

Yet it is easier to accept the possibilities inherent in this vision, to recognize in them the seeds of what is necessary, than it is to figure out how we create the conditions in which they can become what they must be: for all intents and purposes, a world revolution which rejects both capital and the sovereign exclusion. In other words, although time is clearly short, the challenge is substantially one of cultivation, of working the material and ideological ground in which these movements can bloom as rapidly as possible. Cultivation here requires the kind of radical struggle that proves history wrong. For if ‘climate stabilization can only be achieved if the great majority of the world’s population understand the implications, relate these implications to their own lives, and actively and consciously participate in the global effort of stabilization’, it is not clear on which pasts we might draw to help construct the political means by which to render global participation possible.

\textsuperscript{40} Li, ‘Capitalism, Climate Change’, p. 1058.
Indeed, it is worth remembering that when Schmitt posited the necessity of the sovereign exception, he explicitly denied the possibility of global sovereignty, because, for him, a state (or any properly political entity) is constituted in enmity. We cannot all be 'friends'.

If so, we should expect that those who will suffer the greatest consequences—the urban poor in Calcutta or Jakarta, peasant farmers across central Mexico and the Sahel—will find ideological resources elsewhere, principally through religion.

We noted that numerous challenges to Leviathan in Asia stem from the existence of numerous social groups at risk from climate change and other political-economic factors. Any attempt to anticipate the form these challenges will take must consider that, across much of Asia today, the prevailing political opposition to Western liberalism takes shape via political Islam in one form or another. These movements could coincide with what we have called Behemoth, the potentially revolutionary right half of the four-square. Apropos climate Leviathan, Behemoth may represent reaction (upper-right) or revolution (bottom-right); Islamism may take either form. Where Leviathan calls for planetary management, what we might call 'climate al Qaeda' represents an attack on the hubris of liberal attempts at planetary sovereignty, or more positively, a defense of 'Creation'. If this seems fanciful, it is worth reading Osama bin Laden's communiqué of 10 February 2010, outlining 'the way to save the Earth.' This memo eviscerates the hopelessly limited solutions proposed to address climate change, noting that the 'world has been kidnapped' by wealthy people and corporations 'who are steering it towards the abyss.' Bin Laden reasons that responsibility for the climate crisis is held by the industrialized countries, especially the US. Surely he is correct; and the tactics he suggests—beyond a rather generic appeal to live simply, he calls for boycotting oil companies and the US dollar—are neither unprincipled or naïve. His critique of the West’s

43 '[W]e should refuse to do business with the dollar and get rid of it as soon as possible. I know that this action has huge consequences and massive repercussions; but it is an important way to liberate humanity from enslavement and servitude to America and its
hypocritical attempt to maintain its capitalist dominance while taking responsibility for managing 'Creation' offers a powerful illustration of Behemoth attacking Leviathan, one that is likely to resound no less forcefully among poor Muslims across Asia after his assassination by US forces.

Although the extent to which bin Laden's proposals question the hegemony of capital is by no means clear, one might also read this text— and perhaps much of Islamism—as, potentially, a version of X. Is bin Laden's path our path? No; but how then is this vision distinguishable from something in which the left may place our hopes? The answer is found in his appeal for Islam's redemption of our 'corrupted' hearts as a means to 'save Creation'. This essentially theological vision cannot but exclude large sectors of humanity: the non-believers. And this will be true of all attempts to counter climate Leviathan in the name of religion, Palin and the Tea Party included. One way to conceptualize the challenge presented by climate Leviathan is that we need a worldly X that is structurally open: a movement in defense of the community of the excluded, affirming climate justice and freedom against capital and planetary sovereignty.

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Faced with an overwhelming challenge to which we have as yet no coherent response—the 'impossibility' of which provides climate Leviathan with no small part of the legitimacy it enjoys— it is worth remembering that the problems posed at present are not new, despite their novel appearance as atmospheric chemistry and glacial melt-rates. The basic questions which have tormented the left for centuries— the relations between sovereignty, democracy, and liberty; the political possibilities of a mode of human life that produces not value, but wealth—are still the ones that matter. The defining characteristic of their present intensity is corporations. 'He adds for an imputed Western audience: 'be earnest and take the initiative in boycotting them, in order to save yourselves, your wealth and your children from climate change and in order to live freely and honorably [instead of standing on] the steps of conferences and begging for your lives.'
that they have an ecological deadline. The urgency global warming imposes does not cut us off from the past, but only reignites it in the present.

Consider the many lives of Hegel's analysis of sovereignty, which Schmitt came to celebrate in light of the 'failure' of Hobbes' Leviathan.\(^4^4\) Marx struggled with the same material in the 1840s. Throughout his notes on the *Philosophy of Right*, Marx subjects to tireless criticism the very feature of Hegel's state which arguably appealed to Schmitt—its 'logical pantheistic mysticism':

If Hegel had set out from real subjects as the bases of the state he would not have found it necessary to transform the state in a mystical fashion into a subject. 'In its truth, however,' says Hegel, 'subjectivity exists only as subject, personality only as person.' This too is a piece of mystification. Subjectivity is a characteristic of the subject, personality a characteristic of the person. Instead of conceiving them as predicates of their subjects, Hegel gives the predicates an independent existence and subsequently transforms them in a mystical fashion into their subjects.\(^4^5\)

Marx's critique of Hegel anticipates the essential problem we face with climate Leviathan: it is sovereignty in search of a subject. In both its capitalist and non-capitalist forms, the mysticism of the would-be planetary sovereign resides in what Marx calls 'the actual regulation of the parts by the idea of the whole'.\(^4^6\) In other words, the Idea of planetary governance that structures hegemonic responses to climate change is unfolding like a caricature of Hegelian necessity. It represents the ultimate end of sovereignty, the coming into being of sovereignty's *telos*, the concept 'mystically' realizing itself in the world. Planetary government stands as the natural completion of modernity. And just as it did for Marx, sovereignty's relation to democracy remains troubled. For Hegel, democracy and sovereignty are contradictory, antinomies even:

But the usual sense in which the term 'popular sovereignty' has begun to be used in recent times is to denote *the opposite of that sovereignty which exists in the monarch*.

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\(^4^6\) Marx, 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law', p. 24.
In this oppositional sense, popular sovereignty is one of those confused thoughts which are based on a garbled notion of the people. Without its monarch and that articulation of the whole which is necessarily and immediately associated with monarchy, the people is a formless mass.\textsuperscript{47}

Marx, at least at this stage in his thinking, was outraged by Hegel's dismissal of sovereign democracy. Hegel, he wrote, thinks of the monarch as 'political consciousness in the flesh; in consequence, therefore, all other people are excluded from this sovereignty…. But if he is sovereign inasmuch as he represents the unity of the nation, then he himself is only the representative, the symbol, of national sovereignty. National sovereignty does not exist by virtue of him, but he on the contrary exists by virtue of it'.\textsuperscript{48} Here the young Marx's romantic residuals prevented him from grasping what was at stake for Hegel in the sovereignty-democracy relation: that democracy—what distinguishes X from Mao—is not a form of sovereignty, but its very negation. Hegel posits sovereignty in the monarchical manner he does because, for him, democracy cannot constitute sovereignty. This is true for Schmitt too. The monarch or sovereign is 'political consciousness in the flesh' because the act of decision, i.e. the constitution of sovereignty as such, determines the very realm of the political. Likewise for Schmitt, for whom sovereignty is constituted in the act of decision. On these grounds, the political cannot pre-exist sovereignty: a world without sovereignty is no world at all.\textsuperscript{49}

In our present moment of climate crisis, these are not idle matters trawled from the past. On the contrary, they magnify precisely what is at stake today in realizing climate X. For Hegel and Schmitt, democracy's failure to constitute sovereignty is its great failure; for X it is its great hope. If the coming transition is to be just there can be nothing left of sovereignty. X crosses over, or cancels out, the mysticism of the Idea of planetary rule. If there is any possibility we can all be 'friends', one of its fundamental conditions is the end of sovereignty, and the end of the Idea of planetary rule, performing a world in which to realize itself.

\textsuperscript{48} Marx, 'Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law', pp. 26, 28.
\textsuperscript{49} Carl Schmitt, \textit{Political Theology II}, p. 45; Schmitt, \textit{Concept of the Political}, pp. 43-5.
We are not without some resources with which to derail Leviathan's mystical train. In his tenth thesis on history, Benjamin excoriates the Social Democrats with whom 'the opponents of fascism have placed their hopes':

These observations are intended to disentangle the political worldlings from the snares in which the traitors have entrapped them. Our consideration proceeds from the insight that the politicians' stubborn faith in progress, their confidence in their 'mass basis', and, finally, their servile integration in an uncontrollable apparatus have been three aspects of the same thing. It seeks to convey an idea of the high price our accustomed thinking will have to pay for a conception of history that avoids any complicity with the thinking to which these politicians continue to adhere.

Thesis X basically restates the more famous ninth thesis ('angel of history') in more explicitly political form. The politics Benjamin impugns here—faith in progress; confidence in mass basis; servile integration into apparatus—are precisely those of our three opponents in the struggle ahead: Leviathan's ethos is the faith in progress; Mao's is confidence in the masses; Behemoth is the integration into the security apparatus of terror. Barring the realization of climate X, these are the three alternatives we face, none of which is willing to own up to 'the high price our accustomed thinking will have to pay for a conception of history that avoids any complicity with the thinking to which … politicians continue to adhere.'

How can we measure the costs of this complicity? Climate Leviathan is emerging and at war with climate Behemoth—not to mention political Islam—and a global war with climate Mao is hardly unimaginable. The terrifying ecologies and polities produced by these coming conflicts are the price we face for our progress. We were long ago warned against intervening in these wars and their terrible justice, when God taunted Job: 'Just lay your hand on [Leviathan]; remember the battle, don't try again'.

Yet we must.

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50 Book of Job, 41: 8.
Figure 1

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