

Orthodox Sovereignty and Oligopoly Capital in the Decline of Anthropocene Man

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Prepared for Presentation at the 2013 Annual Meeting of the Western Political Science Association, Hollywood, CA. Please do not quote without permission

ABSTRACT: State sovereignty and oligopoly capital appear within the limited scope of neoclassical global economics and neorealist political discourse as conveniently unrelated social scientific phenomena, the former purely political and the latter purely economic. Both suffer from a crude absence of ethical or critical consideration by most practitioners of international political theory. This cognitive dissonance, or perhaps willful exclusion, constitutes a politico-theoretical emergency of the highest order, one that must be engaged by the academic community in short order. In this paper, I analyze these sociopolitical phenomena through the lens of political ecogism in the Anthropocene age.

Introduction

Global political discourse today is overwhelmingly informed by a clear hegemony of the underlying assumptions of the capitalist world-system. Of taproot importance to this system is the unquestionable acceptance of the utopian notion of the endless accumulation of capital, or 'growth' as it is commonly referred to. Capitalist accumulation and its dependence upon finite natural resources, leading to increased pollution, is the prime causal mechanism of ecological degradation, dating back to the industrial era (ca. 1800-1945) and beyond, correlating directly to what geological chemist Paul Crutzen asserts is *Stage 1* of the Anthropocene epoch. Crutzen asserts that:

In the footsteps of the Enlightenment, the transition began in the 1700s in England and the Low Countries for reasons that remain in dispute among historians. Some emphasize material factors such as wood shortages and abundant water power and coal in England, while others point to social and political structures that rewarded risk-taking and innovation, matters connected to legal regimes, a nascent banking system, and a market culture.

(Crutzen, Steffen, and McNeil, 2007)

Utilizing the concepts of sovereignty and oligopoly capitalism, my aim is to engage a discussion within the academic community that no longer treats the ecological decline of the Anthropocene as an external discourse of international political theory and political economy. Therefore, the concern is as much with the current philosophy of social science and its treatment of the paradigmatic shift to the

ecological as it is with the theoretical and practical implications within the field of political theory more broadly.

State sovereignty and global oligopoly capital appear within the limited scope of neoclassical global economics and neorealist political discourse, in particular, as conveniently unrelated social scientific phenomena, the former purely political and the latter purely economic. Both concepts suffer from a crude absence of ethical consideration by most practitioners of international political theory, and I contend that this constitutes an intellectual emergency of the highest order. Oligopoly is the 'manifest destiny capitalist world-system', and continues to be dependent upon the state for its realization, and the modern nation-state is dependent upon the foundational assumptions of what I will identify as *orthodox sovereignty*, assumptions that form a dominant knowledge framework that also supports the furthering of oligopoly. However, it is important to state outright that the scope of this essay is not sufficient for laying out a lengthy taxonomy of all of the various interpretations of nation-state sovereignty. Instead, what I will discuss are the basic assumptions of modern, primarily US-centric nation-state sovereignty, and their often less-than-obvious implications.

Nation-state sovereignty addressed, as it routinely is, only from that of the geopolitical-territorial, undermines the complexity of the subject and its profound effects upon international political discourse. It will be argued that the nature of the currently dominant view of sovereignty, hence the orthodox, it is perhaps more evident in the practice of international politics today, under the hegemony of the United States, than ever before. It is quite clear, given the current organization of the international political community, that the understanding of state sovereignty operationalized across the globe is one centered on the all-consuming assumptions of anarchy and autonomy within the world political system. The dominant, US-centric neorealist nature of the global discourse on sovereignty, which forms the basis of my definition of *orthodox sovereignty*, is based primarily upon the Waltzian model, and it is as much an aid to the further economic domination of the global South by the global

North, as is the underlying neoclassical economic belief system that the capitalist world-system is dependent upon for continued accumulation.

These seemingly unrelated concepts – sovereignty and oligopoly – begin to take on a new level of importance when they are examined through an Anthropogenic lens, or from a view rested in the assumption of increasing scarcity and ecological decline, or *ecopolitical reality*.¹ It is only through that lens that one can objectively (to the extent that objectivity is possible) examine the indirect, yet powerful, relationship that the presuppositions of *orthodox sovereignty*, as they will be defined herein, have upon the global system as we know it. Sovereignty is, in short, the knowledge foundation that much of international relations theory is based, so all questions of international (eco)politics must also be filtered through that screen if one is to adequately re-examine the baseline assumptions therein. However, as I will develop, the space of ecopolitics is one devoid of borders, a characteristic shared by the increasingly slippery movement of international capital.

Global capitalism increasingly informs the decision-making regimes of nation-states, particularly in the realm of international politics, under which the problem of the ecosystem² now falls. The global economy is dependent upon the extraction and now oligopolistic buying – on the global market – of finite natural and human resources by the rich countries of the North, from the so-called 'developing' countries of the South. This is exemplified by the oligopolistic, and borderless, structure of the international banking system and the increasing financialization of the capitalist world-system in general. There is extensive dialogue in the world of global finance and economics on such issues as capital and informational flows, monetary sovereignty, popular sovereignty, and consumer sovereignty,

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- 1 It should be noted here that the term *ecopolitical reality* has been used, most notably by Infolfur Bludhorn, and occasionally by others in the field, but as far as my reading has gone, I have not found any other theorists than myself who use the term in a defined, operational way. That said, I am not taking credit for the term, but simply defining it for my own uses. I have also used the term operationally in several other articles yet to be published.
 - 2 I use the term *ecosystem* to denote the global aggregate ecosystem, as opposed to an individual finite ecosystem. For the purposes of this work, the reader should assume that I am referring to the global ecosystem, in the same sense that one would refer to the Earth as one large organism.

but what appears to be curiously missing is an adequate discussion of how to regulate financial and market transactions in a way that does not simply perpetuate the North-South nexus, ultimately leading to what Andre Gunder Frank called 'dependent accumulation' (Frank, 1979). In the sarcastic, but nonetheless prescient words of Karl Marx, “In order to be able to extract value from the consumption of a commodity, our friend, Moneybags, must be so lucky as to find, within the sphere of circulation, in the market, a commodity, whose use-value possesses the peculiar property of being a source of value, whose actual consumption, therefore, is itself an embodiment of labour, and consequently, a creation of value. The possessor of money does find on the market such a special commodity in capacity for labour or labour-power” (Tucker 1978, 336). In this sense, the wealthy nation-states of the North (or the center) carry the nickname of 'Moneybags', and the developing, less wealthy countries of the South (or the periphery) are forced to sell their labour-power to him.

I will argue that the State, supported by the pre-conditions of *orthodox sovereignty*, perpetuates the existence and continuation of the global oligopoly of capital, thereby intensifying the resulting ecological destruction. Hence, the final leg of what Paul Crutzen calls *stage 2 of the Great Acceleration of the Anthropocene* (Schellnhuber, Crutzen, Clark, and Hunt, 2005). Sovereignty in its orthodox prime, works *for* states as a buffer *against* the interference of other states, even in the presence of the actually existing ecopolitical reality the Anthropocene epoch presents. The very foundation of sovereignty, brought forward by John Locke – private property – is itself problematic to the challenge of attending to the eventual repair of the ecosystem, if we are to understand the global ecosystem as a commonality to all humans and nonhumans alike. Locke's concept of “waste land” is an apt representation of this notion. According to Thom Kuehls, “On Locke's reading (of 'waste land'), useful land is only land that has been subjected to modern, European methods of use. All other methods of procuring its fruits and resources are captured in the phrase “left wholly to nature”. Thus, “Indian” agricultures are invisible to the Lockean mind, and the work that goes into them is hence also

invisible” (Kuehls 1996, 70 – emphasis added). Kuehls' argument against Locke's vision of 'waste land' ties to the eventual development of the concept of private property, for private property meant land utilized for profit, or at the very least for material production. Whereas the Native people of the United States, for example, respected the land itself, before that of humanity, humanity in the eyes of Locke began to see the land as producer of material goods, and the labor upon that land as evidence of ownership therein. In Locke's own words, “God, who hath given the world to men in common, hath also give them reason to make use of it to the best advantage of life and convenience. The earth and all that is therein is given to men for the support and comfort of their being” (Locke 1690, 21). The concepts of 'best advantage' and 'comfort of their being' might be pointed to as the very core of the ecological problem of humanity in the Anthropocene age. Locke, of course, cannot be made the only culprit, for it was modern man, post-industrialization, who made the flawed assumption the defacto law of the land. This disregard for the maintenance of the land that gives Locke's patriarchy the 'comfort of their being' has led to disastrous practices, such as clear-cutting. Thom Kuehls explains how this is in place in the Clayoquot Sound region of British Columbia:

as with Brazil, the principle method of logging on Vancouver Island is clear-cutting. While clear-cutting is argued to be the most economically efficient manner of extracting the valued trees, it is far from ecologically efficient. Aside from removing the trees themselves, clear-cutting also removes the deadwood that covers the forest floor, thus depleting the area of available habitat for a wide variety of temperate rain forest species. Clear-cutting in this manner also exposes the soil to torrential downpours, often resulting in large mudslides and massive erosion. Furthermore, it leaves “islands” of trees too small to sustain themselves the wildlife that resides within them. The British Columbia government's own independent scientific panel has condemned clear-cutting in Clayoquot Sound for not only ecological, but cultural and future-oriented, considerations.

(Kuehls 1996, 116-117)

The more one looks at the problem of the degradation of the global ecosystem and all of its related parts, the less comfortable one feels in regard to the ethics of the underlying belief system that

has allowed humanity to rely so deeply upon finite resources. I make no argument for any particular view of sovereignty, nor do I intend to provide definitive answers to the problems addressed. To the contrary, the goal is, again, simply to work toward the instigation of a discipline-wide re-examination of the underlying assumptions of two vast knowledge frameworks – sovereignty and global capitalism (realized here as oligopoly) – and how those assumptions drive the decline of humanity in the Anthropocene. It will be argued that there is a *hierarchy of Anthropogenic decline* that starts with the presuppositions of *orthodox sovereignty*. Those presuppositions provide support for the capitalist world-system, such that it could not continue to operate without, at least, the tacit support of the state. Oligopoly capital will be shown to be directly supported and maintained by the power and interests of nation-states. And finally, I will argue that the operationalization of financial and otherwise oligopoly guarantees the continuance of ecological degradation for profit, leading to the continued decline of Anthropocene humanity. The emerging paradigmatic shift to the ecological within the social sciences, is taken as implicit here. This is the new knowledge framework that the Anthropocene brings with it. Perhaps Val Plumwood stated it best: “If our species does not survive the ecological crisis, it will probably be due to our failure... We will go onwards in a different mode of humanity, or not at all” (Plumwood 2007, 1).

The methodology utilized here is qualitative and mostly descriptive, for the purpose of this essay is not to provide new data or particularly empirical analysis that can be added to the existing body of knowledge. To the contrary, the goal is simultaneously less complex and yet more challenging to achieve. That is, as mentioned above, to somehow push the global academic community to engage in a collective re-examination of the underlying assumptions that have brought about the Anthropocene, the same re-examination humanity itself must undergo.

I.

Orthodox Sovereignty Defined: three basic assumptions

The definitional limitations of sovereignty presented in this paper are employed with the task of identifying the orthodox. That is, I am not attempting to define sovereignty itself, for it has been debated at length for most of the modern history of political philosophy. To the contrary, I am concerned with the current hegemonic conceptualization of sovereignty, the orthodox, and the raw, foundational assumptions it is informed by. That knowledge-system is, in my view, based on American-centric, neoliberal international political theory, and its taproot assumptions about the theoretical notion of sovereignty are neorealist in nature. All taken together, the base-level assumptions that will be outlined here form *orthodox sovereignty*, as I intend it to mean. Sovereignty is discussed here as a foundation for political knowledge, akin to the work of Jens Bartelson, who posited in his seminal work *A Genealogy of Sovereignty*, “With some simplification, one could say that the question of sovereignty is to political science what the question of substance is to philosophy; a question tacitly implied by the very practice of questioning” (Bartelson 1995, 1). The same might be said of the role liberalism has played in the development of global capitalism.

The word “orthodox” stems from the Greek *orthos* (*right, true, and straight*) + *doxa* (*opinion, belief*). It is but an incremental concept stretch to make the assertion that *orthodoxy* is an acceptable term for a hegemonic doctrine, or knowledge framework from which other important normative implications are drawn. Therefore, *orthodox sovereignty* for the purposes of this paper will be defined as *the current globally hegemonic view of nation-state sovereignty in international political theory and relations*. Though he did not write on the subject of sovereignty, Karl Popper might have suggested that the concept has suffered a fate similar to many conceptual frameworks of international politics, that of being treated as a 'clock-like' notion, versus that of a 'cloud-like' one (Popper 1972, 210). Simply putting the term 'orthodox' in front of most any concept denotes a less-than-changeable set of notions, hence a more clock-like knowledge set. While sovereignty suffers under a hegemonic

interpretation at the level of international political discourse, it is nevertheless susceptible to a more cloud-like interpretation. It is the current orthodoxy of sovereignty that is on trial here, not the concept itself. I do not argue, as many do in the realm of ecological politics, against sovereignty or for a particular ecological or otherwise formation of sovereignty, though it could be a logical next step after the completion of this work. Neither do I argue that sovereignty has undergone a kind of metamorphosis in light of the increased number of global environmental agreements. To the contrary, I am arguing that the neorealist anarchy-centered framework on sovereignty must be defeated, and in short order, if global ecological balance is to ever be achieved; if indeed the participation of the world's most ecologically and environmentally destructive states can be imagined to an adequate level. The focus here is to outline these faulty foundational assumptions.

Orthodox sovereignty, as it is intended for use here, has within it three basic assumptions, all extending from the first: *the global system is perceived, by states, to be anarchic; there is a general acceptance by all states of the principle of nonintervention, or the assumption of autonomy;* and the somewhat traditional adherence to the concept of *no binding adjudication without consent*. These three basic tenets make up the most important presuppositions to the modern hegemonic, arguably neorealist, view of sovereignty, or the *orthodox* view of sovereignty. It should also be noted here that this is, in my understanding, the US-centric view as well.

These assumptions are treated as entirely unproblematic by the neorealist academic establishment, which is a central issue of dissent within ecologism as a political ideology. Andrew Dobson expertly addresses this dissent:

at this point ecologism throws into relief a factor – the Earth itself – that has been present in all modern political ideologies but has remained invisible, either due to its very ubiquity or because these ideologies' schema for description and prescription have kept it hidden. Ecologism makes the Earth as physical object the very foundation-stone of its intellectual edifice, arguing that its finitude is the basic reason why infinite population and economic growth are impossible, and why, consequently, profound changes in our social political behavior need to take

place.

(Dobson 2007, 12)

The limits to growth theory utilized in the early radical political economics movement is again a central tenet, this time in green political economy and political ecology en large. Ecologism challenges the characteristics of liberalism that have led to some of the most unwanted outcomes in the global political-economic system, by in fact differentiating itself from 'environmentalism'. According to Dobson, "Environmentalism and liberalism are compatible, but ecologism and liberalism are not" (Dobson 2008, 150), and that is precisely because ecologism internalizes the limits to growth theorem, whereas environmentalism does not. The neorealist brand of international political discourse is hardly welcome territory for a limits to growth approach to global political economics. The mirage of autonomy that the discourse on sovereignty adheres to is quite at odds with all but the most vulgar market-based 'environmentalist' answers to the ecological crisis. Territorialized politics is naturally supportive of economic systems that depend upon autonomy. I am seeking to explain how this flawed logic not only exacerbates the continued social-ecological decline characterized by the Anthropocene, but brings about the oligopoly of capital that moves the degradation only farther ahead.

In keeping with the Bartelsonian view of sovereignty as a knowledge framework, it is viewed herein as a concept based more in the external than the internal relations of state-hood. That is, the subject matter is particularly global in nature, and therefore it is more logical to examine sovereignty as a geopolitical externality versus that of popular sovereignty, or the many other understandings of the concept more internal to the state, and to individual actors in society. As Bartelson notes, "Far from being homogeneous, the contemporary empirical discourse on sovereignty flows from two distinct but complementary fields of knowledge, their separation to an extent reflecting the divide between the external and internal aspects of sovereignty inherent in the concept... Thus, while concern with the former aspect is the traditional privilege of international political theory, macrosociology of state

formation aims to explain the latter” (Bartelson 1995, 19) Similarly, ecological problems do not exist as solely internal or external to the state, but occupy both places at once, and spending most of its time at the state level and beyond. Ecopolitical theorist Thomas Kuehls argues that ecopolitics exists outside of the realm of sovereignty, in that “Ecopolitics might more properly be said to occupy the space of international political theory, for international political theory is said to involve problems that exceed separate sovereign territorial state boundaries” (Kuehls 1996, 25).

The concept of nation-states as actors within a global state of anarchy is of taproot importance to the current orthodox. Kenneth Waltz' infamously stated that “Among states, the state of nature is a state of war” (Waltz 1979, 102). This Hobbesian sentiment is quite exemplary of the most common assumption of orthodox sovereignty as it is meant here, namely that states are understood as politically and otherwise autonomous global actors, subjected to no authority beyond that of the state itself. This foundational belief is precisely what the US-centric neoliberal-neorealist, or orthodox view of sovereignty rests upon. Waltz further states that the distinction between traditional political scientists and those of the modern age (post World War II), “turns on the difference between politics conducted in a condition of settled rules and politics conducted in a condition of anarchy” (Waltz 1979, 61). John J. Mearsheimer puts it another way, positing that “Since no state is likely to achieve global hegemony, however, the world is condemned to perpetual great-power politics” (Mearsheimer 2001, 30). From this perspective it becomes evident that in the neorealist view of sovereignty, the state is in competition for power, and that in this competition there will never be a winner, merely a defender of the position of the dominant power of the moment. This hyper-territorialized 'balance of power' theorem, as it is so commonly referred to in the international relations literature, leaves little room for an ecological treatment of sovereignty, nor for sober examination of the obvious hierarchies of power that exist.

Few can argue with either Waltz or Mearsheimer, if indeed the presuppositions of orthodox sovereignty are accepted. The mere existence of the global ecosystem is tragically absent in both

theorists' visions of sovereignty. This is not a unique problem to Waltzian or for that matter neorealist theoretical visions of sovereignty in general, for the ecosystemic issues of sovereignty are, with rare exception, generally treated as externalities in any discussion of international politics, just as they are in general economics. The main exception to this rule has been environmental security, a field that has unsurprisingly gravitated toward the neorealist school of international political theory. The environmental security framework allows realists to hold tight to their core beliefs about the primacy of state autonomy – the ability to make decisions independent of the global political community – and control. According to Karen Litfin, paraphrasing the work of Homer-Dixon and Ronnie Lipschutz, “This literature sees “ecological scarcities” as a growing cause of violent conflict. However, besides the fact that this literature tends to naturalize environmental problems, thereby masking their socioeconomic causes, it is as much concerned with intrastate conflict as with international conflict” (Litfin, 1997). It is important not to play down the reality that violent resource-based conflict is a growing concern for those researching the global politics of ecological degradation, but it is equally important not to allow the problems of the ecosystem to devolve into some new ecological form of offensive realism, where states become only more obliged to forcefully procure natural resources in the face of obvious looming scarcities, leaving, again, no room for ethics.

The security-based discourse runs the risk of sliding into the same neorealist political discourse that has so engulfed that of the international political foundation, adhered to by the wealthy West, leading to a kind of ecological version of hegemonic stability, where intransigent realist concepts of power and interests simply come in the form of the ecological. Hegemonic stability theory is easily applied to the complicated issue of ecological stability, when seen through the lens of the environmental security framework. As Keohane points out in his analysis of HST, “Hegemonic powers must have control over raw materials, control over sources of capital, control over markets, and competitive advantages in the production of highly valued goods” (Keohane 1984, 32). In an

ecological sense, this might come in a form of ecological global governance that James Lovelock, among others, appears to support, namely that of 'cybernetic holism'. In this ecological realist revision of sovereignty, Lovelock sees the need for a global “superstate”, which would live outside the system of established nation-states (Smith, 2009). In suggesting that the ecosystem is best served by one particular nation-state that has the necessary financial and technological resources to handle the now heightened demands of the global ecosystem, Lovelock and others within the ecological realist framework (Barry, 2012) appear to leave to fate that of the possible co-optation of the entire ecosystemic problem to the vagaries of the capitalist class, for it is only they who possess the necessary means. In short, what Lovelock is suggesting is to leave the problem of ecosystemic collapse to the oligopolists, the very entities that are pushing global society toward something akin to what freelance writer Bob Johnson calls 'the new feudalism'. According to Johnson, “Those of us not at the top of the income/land ownership scale wait outside the castle/estate walls to catch whatever crumbs are so generously tossed our way by the elite lords of industry. Even worse, we pay our tithes to these masters in hopes of getting a small portion of our tithing returned” (Johnson, 2011).

The 'principle of *nonintervention*, argues Ruth Lapidoth, is more or less irrelevant in modernity. “In the past, prior to the development of the international protection of human rights, the duty of noninterference applied in particular to the relations between a state and its own citizens... Among others, one important exception justified the right to humanitarian intervention in case of a severe violation of human rights” (Lapidoth, 1992). In regard to the issues of global political economics of ecological depletion, the principle of nonintervention is very much in play. Many, including Lapidoth, argue for the merits of the international environmental agreements that have come through the United Nations as evidence that states are indeed beginning to allow other states to intervene by proxy. International agreements aside, there are few examples of states allowing other states to interfere in that state's self-interest. There are such concepts as 'sovereignty trade-offs' (Litfin, 2000) that states engage

in for varying reasons, but there is little evidence that the states of the global North are truly implementing the environmental agreements signed with the poorer countries of the global South.

Finally, the concept of *no binding adjudication without consent* (Lapidoth, 1992) is, like the assumption of anarchy among nation-states, strongly held in place within the current world-system. This notion is best exemplified by the difficulty of one state holding the market behavior of another state in contempt. The problem of global production shows precisely why states bear little chance of attempting to curtail the monopoly-like activities of other (state-supported) transborder industries. Scholte argues that “In this vein enterprises have pushed the development of global communications, global organization and global finance in order to be able to site production operations wherever labor costs, taxation rates, regulatory frameworks and other variables are most favorable to them” (Scholte, 1997). Under a system of oligopoly capital it is highly unlikely Northern states are going to willingly submit to transborder enforcement of anything that hinders freedom of economic collusion or even hegemony.

II.

The Rise of Neoclassical Economics and The Sovereignty-Economy Nexus

The interdependent paradigms of the ecological and the economic can and often do meet between the lines of sovereign nation-states, but it is the very existence of sovereignty as a powerful knowledge framework that makes the 'sovereignty-economy nexus' so difficult to clearly express. Just as the global ecosystem adheres to no sovereignty, global capital and informational flows also tend not to follow the dictates of the states. State-hood only exists at the behest of the concept of sovereignty, and therefore the understanding of the concept of the state can only change along with changes in discourses of sovereignty. It should then stand to reason that one cannot engage in an empirical if not at least logical discussion of sovereignty in a globalized world without also engaging in a detailed conversation of political economics. It is in this sense that a more 'radical' version of political

economics is necessary to tackle the problematics of the global ecosystem. In his deft deconstruction of Edward P. Lazear's suggestion that 'economic imperialism' is well-earned, because of the supposedly more scientific nature of economics as a discipline than the other social sciences, Ben Fine explains that the “The absence of meaning in economics is apparent in its abstract formalism, in which mathematical symbols stand for variables that are related to one another through mechanical models” (Fine, 2002). The desperate clinging of the field of economics, and increasingly others within the social sciences, to such mechanistic thinking is precisely what makes the re-deployment of a critical ecological political economics so very necessary, for mechanistic analysis is rarely adequate for an ethics-inclusive ecological politics.

As this paper is heavily predicated on a critical interpretation of neoclassical economics, it is necessary to engage in a brief examination of its rise to dominance as the hegemonic economic doctrine of the current world economic system. The discovery of what would ultimately be called the 'principle of marginal utility' – the central tenet of neoclassical economics – was virtually simultaneously discovered by three influential economic thinkers: the Englishman William Stanley Jevons, the Austrian Karl Menger, arguably the most famous interpretation, and the Frenchman Leon Walras, all emphasizing different aspects of the principle, but in the end all arguing for the basic idea, *con* Marx, that the proverbial consumer is “a person who continually weighs the relative advantages of this or that course of action and always chooses the one that gives him the greatest increment in welfare” (Fusfeld 1966, 73). Few things can be labeled more obvious than this. The problem with neoclassical economics, as it is understood by the principles they are founded upon, is not found in whether or not the logic is befitting of the behavior of the individual consumer under capitalism. Rational self-interest is rather a quite logical behavior in the world of commodities, something Marx outlined perhaps more extensively than all others in *Das Kapital*. The problem of neoclassical economics lies in the complete lack of ethical consideration presumed by its theorists, and this is rooted in liberalism. That is, the

neoclassical framework is focused not upon putting to rest the objections and deep critical-theoretical work of Marx against such notions – before they were even brought to the forefront of economic thought – but upon the popularization of what is the generally flawed framework of individualism.

Land, its ownership, and its productive capacity is the root of all that can be conflated with the study of economics, but this basic fact is nearly absent in the current mainstream of economic thought. Karl Polanyi, like other critics of classical and neoclassical economics, had the clarity of mind to point out what the liberal international capitalist class was loathe to admit, namely that “What we call land is an element of nature inextricably interwoven with man's institutions. To isolate it and form a market for it was perhaps the weirdest of all the undertakings of our ancestors” (Polanyi 1944, 187). The process of colonization that was then taking place, and continues to take place today, is a near perfect example of the sovereignty-economy nexus. Polanyi further explains, in reference to the dependence of man upon land, “We might as well imagine his being born without hands and feet as carrying on his life without land. And yet to separate land from man and to organize society in such a way as to satisfy the requirements of a real-estate market was a vital part of the utopian concept of a market economy” (Polanyi, Ibid.) The entire foundation of the market economy idea is made up of land, and man's connection with it, and in the case of colonization, the negation of Native inhabitants' connection with it.

Dishonesty and ill ethic ensues whenever one speaks about sovereignty and market economics as disparate notions, for the 'One Big Market' (Polanyi, 1944) can only be developed with the subordination of the land necessary to produce the material goods of said market, for 'it can readily be seen that market economy involves a society the institutions of which are subordinated to the requirements of the market mechanism' (Polanyi, Ibid.). This is effectively the first real attack upon sovereignty, whether implied or politically implemented, that can possibly take place; that is, the taking of one's land by colonists for sale on or usage by the capitalist market. Polanyi explains this process as

the 'stages of the subordination of the surface of the planet to the needs of industrial society', the final stage of which is 'the extension of such a system of surplus production to overseas and colonial territories. With this last step land and its produce were finally fitted into the scheme of a self-regulating world market' (Polanyi 1944, 188). All the (wo)men of Earth became the mythical *homo economicus* with the advent of the global market. All are treated by the international capitalist class as rational actors intent on nothing more than profit maximization, and that furthermore, the world is made a better place as a result of this supposed 'enlightened self interest'.

The rise of neoclassical economics in the last part of the 19th century brought with it the rise of naturalism in the social sciences, and the resulting mathematization of economics, referred to earlier. To quote the great David R. Fusfeld again, “Although orthodox neoclassical economists never gave up their basically deductive method of drawing conclusions from assumptions and premises – with a growing use of mathematical techniques – theories and conclusions were increasingly checked against facts, statistics, and experience. Theories without facts and facts without theories gave way to a blending of theoretical and empirical studies that remains the style of economics today” (Fusfeld 1966, 83). The eventual internationalization of the central underlying neoclassical economic belief system implicated here deeply informs the American neorealist conceptualization of nation-state sovereignty, and its taproot basic assumption of autonomy, a concept at home in the mind of the neoclassical economist. I am content to make the even bolder assertion that the rise of the neoclassical economic knowledge framework coincides with the historical appearance of the most detrimental effects of the Industrial Revolution, brought about by the additional internationalization of the new focus upon the individual as consumer, versus the individual as laborer with inherent value. Marx reminds us, “For the conversion of his money into capital, therefore, the owner of money must meet in the market with the free labourer, free in the double sense, that as a free man he can dispose of his labour-power as his own commodity, and that on the other hand he has no other commodity for sale, is short of everything

necessary for the realization of his labour-power” (Tucker 1978, 338). If we are to take Marx's statement to the level of international political-economic interaction, we surely can draw the obvious conclusion that traditional 'labour-power' is now owned by the trans-territorial corporation, which then engages in trading that labour-power on the international market, with the help not of empowered labourers in other nation-states, but with the help of the nation-state apparatuses themselves. In short, with the aid of sovereign states, commodities (including labour-power) are exchanged across borders free of the requirement of ethical social relations. In the relative absence of such ethics, it ought come as no surprise that ecological ethics are also left out of the international exchange of commodities.

It will no doubt be assumed by some critical readers of this work that, judging from the general economic worldview I have presented in this paper, I am asserting that the answer to the problem of the ecosystem is some form of socialism, perhaps even global socialism, but I am not. However, it is nevertheless important to briefly address this issue, for I would assert that many values and basic tenets of socialism do in fact adhere logically to those within ecologism. Marie Mellor has contributed some stunningly insightful thinking in regard to the role of socialism in the political challenges of the ecological crisis. Most importantly, she has outlined the simple truth that many socialistic tenets are deeply embedded within ecologism itself, and that in fact “the ecological challenge provides the basis for a new and invigorated socialism” (Mellor 2006, 49). The commons, while a term arguably used beyond meaningful interpretation by the environmentalist (and by this I mean one who wishes to simply manage the challenge of ecosystemic collapse by creating policy and otherwise tools that in no way challenge the existing system) wing of the ecological challenge, includes all of those so-called 'resources' that are the basis of the human-nature nexus. Put more bluntly by Mellor, “There is no justification for private ownership of the global 'commons', that is, the resources necessary for the existence of humans and other species. Commons cannot be secured unless people are certain they can have equal access and that others will not take more than their share. This can only be achieved within

a political framework based on equality and mutuality: that is, socialism” (Mellor 2006, 47). Land, air, and water. Nothing of worth can be developed without it, and yet every human and nonhuman that exists within the global ecosystem depends upon such things. Whether or not socialism is the answer, this is the economic emergency of our time.

The role that land plays in the development of the global capitalist market is perhaps the most obvious place to begin a conversation about global economics and sovereignty. What is not so obvious is the role that sovereignty, particularly assumptions of *orthodox sovereignty*, plays in the maintenance of that global market. For example, the issue of the virtual inability of states to follow, and for that matter have any control of, the flow of capital on the international market. The *capital mobility hypothesis*, as it is commonly referred to, basically posits that “in financial matters, states have become essentially impotent” (Cohen 2003, 216). A more applicable term might be 'the capital mobility crisis', for the inability of states to accurately track the movement of capital means an increased difficulty in discerning the ecological impact of those funds.

One of the traps of the sovereignty discourse that this paper attempts to remain free of is that of suggesting a form of sovereignty that is, above all others, superior to the current orthodoxy in regard to how it addresses the ecosystem. For every neorealist representation of what sovereignty is, there are others that claim a kind of 'green' or 'ecological' sovereignty. However, it is difficult to find within the literature any discussions of green or ecological sovereignty that actually address, to any adequate length, the still dominant problem of the capitalist world-system, excepting of course such theorists as Immanuel Wallerstein and others featured herein, most of whom are fairly recent contributors to the discourse. The concept of ecological sovereignty is nevertheless a growing one, broken down by Mick Smith to two main schools of thought – that of the 'ecological modernist' and that of 'cybernetic governance'. The former approach is often argued by the likes of James Lovelock and others, who John Barry identifies as 'ecological realists' (Barry, 2012). The ecological modernism of James Lovelock,

mentioned previously, is dangerous on two accounts. First, it relies upon what Smith calls an “ecological superstate” (Smith, 2009), in which – as Lovelock argues for – we are to confer “political authority on at least one unspecified, nation which would claim to act on others' behalf as a technologically superior and morally justified (responsible) 'world leader'” (Smith, 2009). Second, another supporting concept of ecological modernization is that of 'cybernetic naturalism', posits simply that those who are capable of handling the challenge of ecological repair – states, corporations and banks – take the challenge on, leaving 'the people' out of it for the most part. Spaargarden, as quoted by Smith, states that under this kind of solution, “roles and responsibilities formerly reserved for nation-state actors are fulfilled by market actors and civil society groups and vice versa (Smith, 2009). This leaves room for more critical examination, for there are solid arguments that support at least part of the 'cybernetic governance theory', namely that nation-states can, and arguably should be, the primary organizers of the global ecosystem, if for no other reason than the fact that they are the only organizational forces in society large enough to treat the ecological crisis on the global level. It may also be pointed out that the sovereignty-ecology conundrum has yet to be solved, and until it is, nation-states have the money and backing to do the mammoth task at hand, should there ever be agreement upon a global plan of action.

Immanuel Wallerstein takes a noticeably direct approach to viewing the sovereignty-economy nexus than most contemporary scholars of international relations and political theory: He views the entrepreneur as a dependent of the state, in that the state provides the vary basis upon which he or she operates within the international economy. More precisely, Wallerstein asserts that there are:

'at least seven principle arenas of direct interest to them (entrepreneurs)': “(1) States set the rules on whether and under what conditions commodities, capital, and labor cross their borders. (2) They create the rules concerning property rights within their states. (3) They set rules concerning employment and the compensation of employees. (4) They decide which costs firms must internalize. (5) They decide what kinds of economic process may be monopolized, and to what degree. (6) They tax. (7) Finally, when firms based within their boundaries

may be affected, they can use their power externally to affect the decisions of other states.

(Wallerstein 2004, 46)

What is so striking about this rather long list is not necessarily how clearly accurate it is – for those who hold critical positions in regard to global capitalism and state-hood – but how seemingly absent its central logic seems to be in regard to critical discourses on the historical development of the capitalist world-system.

The seeming cognitive dissonance toward the above basic truths that appears in the realm of international political discourse is a profound reminder of the dualism that has historically rested at the heart of capitalism. That is, while the near constant drum beat that surrounds the intensely utopian concept of *laissez-faire* rages on, the global market is made less and less free for those who cannot afford entrance. While the entrepreneurial class, or the capitalist class as it has been referred to thus far, tends to sycophantically promote the virtues of this notion, it clearly seems as though they are less than enthusiastic about the concept when taken to the international level. In fact, the role of the state in the promotion of the capitalist world-system is primarily that of freeing up the market not for new entrants, but for the preservation of the existing global economic order (Wallerstein 2004, 46). *Laissez-faire* is the most basic assumption of most capitalists, yet as it will be argued in the next section, it stands little chance of being utilized for all humanity. Put rather simply, if the global capitalist system was to be truly *laissez-faire* in nature there would be very little chance that any one state in particular would be able to accumulate the necessary financial and otherwise resources to be autonomous and able to exercise power on the international stage as it is understood in the confines of orthodox sovereignty.

The role of the sovereign state in addressing the needs of the ecosystem has, until now, been purely that of enabler of bad habits. From the ecocentric view, national governments have been net aides to the growth of the global capitalist class, which in turn depends upon the tacit approval of states

to extract resources of all kinds, regardless of its effect upon the global ecosystem and human equality. Argued by Hillary French, “National governments are ill suited for managing environmental problems that transcend borders, whether via air and water currents or through global commerce” (French 2003, 460). This rather bleak assessment of the potential role of the state in both creating and implementing global ecological governance regimes can perhaps be tempered by pointing out that states still are, again, the institutions that possess enough financial, political, and otherwise power to effectively alter the trajectory of the state from one of ecological destroyer to one of ecological restorer. I argue that of more importance than examining the role of the state is the examination of the economic frameworks that nation-states have been co-opted by. We must remind ourselves that “Only two hundred years ago there were no economists known by that name, and economic theory was a branch of moral philosophy. Economics as we know it today hardly existed, and what did exist was called “political economy,” indicating that it was part of national policy more than anything else and that it dealt with such matters as taxes, public debts, and foreign trade” (Fusfeld 1966, introduction). One does not however need Fusfeld's brilliancy to remind oneself that the limits to growth theorem predicted this undesirable state of affairs in the late 1970s. The original *Limits to Growth* report (Meadows, et al., 1974), released in 1974 painted a bleak picture indeed. After running a series of computer simulations – some of which have routinely been unsurprisingly panned by mainstream economists – the assumption was bleak at best. Andrew Dobson summarizes the report in *Green Political Thought*, “The result is still an end to growth before the year 2100 [2050 in the 1992 report, p. 174]. In this case growth is stopped by three simultaneous crises. Overuse of land leads to erosion, and food production drops. Resources are severely depleted by a prosperous world population (but not as prosperous as the present [1970] US population). Pollution rises, drops then rises again dramatically, causing a further decrease in food production and a sudden rise in the death rate” (Dobson 2007, 55).

What we are left with is the same problem we started with, the prime inherent contradiction of

the capitalist world-system, the dependency on unlimited growth; what might accurately be called the perennial environmental problem of the twenty-first century. Again, Marie Mellor succinctly situates this problematic for us, “Where resources are limited, the question of who benefits and who loses cannot be passed off as a byproduct of the 'hidden hand of the market' or some personal failure of will, risk or effort. It is clearly revealed as a question of moral and political choices, of power relations and social justice” (Mellor 2006, 37). And yet, as I will lay out in the next section, limited resources have indeed been apportioned according to those entities in global society with the ability to take risk, not only with financial markets, but with the finite resources of the planet. To date, the capitalists have clearly won the battle, and it is made obvious by the existence of the global oligopoly of available capital on planet Earth.

III.

Oligopoly Capital and the State

Oligopoly capital is the manifest destiny of the capitalist world-system. Mainstream definitions of oligopoly are typically either over-simplified, in that they focus only upon the obvious – a market controlled by a small amount of players that collude to create a cartel monopoly – or they are bound up in the complexities of price theory, usually in the format of Cournot-Nash modeling, which merely suggests an alternative mode of competition. Samir Amin offers one of the better, ethically informed definitions of oligopoly when he states that “The dominant stratum of capital should be characterized as “oligopoly-finance capital,” not in the sense of referring to capitalists operating in the financial sector of the system (banks and others), but in the sense of capitalists having privileged access to the capital necessary for the development of their activities, which may concern various sectors of the economy (industrial production, commercialization, financial services, research and development)” (Amin, 2008).

It is important to point out that although there are few writings on the existence of the oligopoly of available capital on the planet, most of which will be outlined herein, there were a precious few economists in the 1970s who saw the development early on. One such radical economist was Luciano G. Coutinho, whose mammoth PhD dissertation was entitled *The Internationalization of Oligopoly Capital*. In its introduction he states:

since World War II, an unprecedented global expansion of the big oligopolies of the advanced capitalist economies has been changing the whole structure of international economic relations. In 1974, there are no less than 55,000 subsidiaries directly employing 11 million workers and producing more than U.S. \$300 billion outside their respective home economies. Trade has ceased to be the main form of international distribution of capitalist production. The international oligopolists are integrating the technological conditions of production and labor exploitation on a world-wide scale through new forms of international division of labor inside their own operations. Nearly one-third of the production of those oligopolists is already made abroad and the reliance on foreign markets to secure a high rate of accumulation and profitability apparently tends to increase.

(Coutinho, 1975)

Perhaps it goes without saying, but if there was an identifiable oligopoly of capital in 1975, one ought assume – mainstream economist or not – that there is a bigger, more dangerous one today.

The supportive role of the State is essential for the operation of the global oligopoly of capital. More directly, states act as oligopolists. “One of the hallmarks of globalization in the contemporary era is the ever-closer integration of national financial markets” (Cohen 2003, 215). With states' closer integration and therefore interdependence of financial firms on the private market, and governments' use of public funds in their own somewhat engineered market, monopoly-like activity is inevitable. Explained by Wallerstein, “The states are major purchasers in their national markets, and large states command an impressive proportion of purchases in the world market. They are frequently monopsonists, or near-monopsonists, for certain very expensive goods; for example, today, for armaments or superconductors” (Wallerstein 1999, 65). When states become the most prominent buyer in a market with multiple producers, states gain the ability to easily manipulate the global market for those products, and potentially any other products deemed globally important, creating a global

oligopoly by way of collective monopolistic behavior. It is, in effect, a form of collective economic hegemony.

The notion of hegemony, a central piece of the current international discourse on sovereignty, is also subject to the whims of the global economy. Strong states depend upon the cycles of the capitalist world-system to maintain dominance over weak states. Hegemony is in fact a crucial aspect of global political stability, for better or for worse, primarily because the interstate system is predicated on the existence of states powerful enough to do the worst of all deeds if deemed necessary to protect capital and other resources. The capitalist world economy, as has already been pointed out, demands the assistance of strong states *and* weak states. The always and forever present goal of the international capitalist class is the ceaseless accumulation of capital, and to maintain that Utopian tenet of endless growth, a regularly rotating cast of hegemonic states must appear from time to time. This is often exemplified by the so-called 'boom and bust' mentality of capitalism. Oligopoly is perfectly applicable to state-supported cross-territorial profit extraction because of its border-less nature. Oligopoly exists freely, outside of the realm of societal control, a seemingly innocuous outcome of international trade. However, it is not innocuous, it is state-supported on all fronts, and therefore profoundly affects the citizens of states.

The prevailing literature on oligopoly found in more mainstream economics attempts to explain oligopoly as nothing more than the natural outcome of an economic meritocracy, if indeed the concept is even broached. Some neoclassical economists go as far as to write about the possible advantages of oligopolistic markets. William J. Baumol, of Princeton University sings the praises of the 'prolific' production capacity that comes with "the high-tech oligopoly industries" (Baumol 2002, 26). It is due to this lack of ethical, or even objective discussion about the concept of oligopoly within the mainstream, that one must utilize the work of such 'radical' political economists as Ben Fine and Samir Amin, among others, as well as prominent sociologically-oriented thinkers like Immanuel Wallerstein.

Perhaps not surprisingly, even in some of the more Keynesian-like literature, such as that of John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society*, oligopoly is provided not ethical backing or critique, but is instead treated as nothing more than the 'oligopolistic sector of the economy'. Galbraith states, "In the typical industrial market – steel, machinery, automobiles, most nonferrous metals, chemicals – a relatively small number of large firms enjoy, in one way or another, a considerable discretion in setting prices. In these markets – the ones characterized by what economists call oligopoly – as capacity operation is approached, it becomes possible to mark up prices" (Galbraith 1958, 157). The word oligopoly appears nowhere in Nobel Prize winning economist Paul Krugman's often used textbook *Macroeconomics* (Krugman, 2009). Neither does it appear in any of the major works of economic philosophy consulted within the background reading done in preparation for the writing of this paper. While oligopoly ought to be, under the current circumstances, a highly debated concept within the general discourse on global economics, it is generally not, and arguably when it is, it is justified as some kind of natural feature of the global market.

The grand master of so-called 'free market capitalism' himself, Milton Friedman, explains oligopoly without naming it, and in fact argues that 'Private monopoly – control over a particular commodity by one producer or a cartel of producers ... prevents prices from expressing freely the conditions of demand or supply', 'interfering with the transmission of accurate information' (Friedman 1980, 16-17). Not only does Friedman misstate the definition of monopoly, but in doing so actually gives the reader a wonderfully concise and accurate definition of oligopoly – that is, a 'cartel of producers'. If we are to accept Friedman's definition of monopoly, we can then safely state that there are, even within the confines of one nation-state, monopolies of the media, the military industrial complex, the pharmaceutical industry, and arguably many others. However, they are not monopolies, but oligopolies of scale, which abound in virtually all industrialized economies, and exceedingly so in the economies of the global North, again, aided by the (de)regulatory powers of the state.

Let it be made abundantly clear that I am asserting that there exists a global oligopoly of the available capital on the planet. However, as mentioned above, there is a curious lack of writing on the subject of international oligopoly capital, especially within the limited neoclassical economic framework so much of today's economic literature and discourse is framed with. Foster, McChesney, and Jonna also remark upon this lack of emphasis within economics discourse in their article *The Internationalization of Monopoly Capital*: “Indeed, the dominant neoliberal discourse – one that has also penetrated the left – assumes that the tendency toward monopoly has been vanquished” (Foster, McChesney, and Jonna, 2011). They also write of the rise – post 1970s – of a 'new phase of global monopoly-finance capital in which world production is increasingly dominated by a relatively few multinational corporations able to exercise considerable monopoly power' (Ibid.), which is essentially oligopoly. Radical economist Samir Amin writes extensively on the issues of the triadic oligopoly of financial capital. That is, 'the triad' has controlled, for quite a long period already, the vast majority of the available capital in the world-system (Amin, 2008). Even such mainstream sources as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD] goes as far as to state that “the composition of the world's top 100 TNCs [transnational corporations] confirms that the triad countries [the United States, the European Union, and Japan] remain dominant” (UNCTAD, 2008).

Wallerstein defines global capitalism simply as 'the modern world-system, in at least part of the globe since the long sixteenth century'. The modern global capitalist world-system is one foolishly dependent upon 'the endless accumulation of capital' (Wallerstein, 1999). The natural inclination of capitalists, be they local, national, or global in reach, is to strive for monopoly, knowing there is little to no likelihood they (their firm) will reach such capitalistic nirvana, not unlike the Buddhist monk seeking enlightenment, fully aware he or she may not get there in this lifetime. The closest the global capitalist class can come is the creation of an international oligopoly. “What sellers always prefer is a monopoly, for then they can create a relatively wide margin between the costs of production and the

sales price, and thus realize high rates of profit... Of course, perfect monopolies are extremely difficult to create (partially because they are illegal in most industrialized countries), and rare, but quasi-monopolies are not” (Wallerstein 2004, 26 – emphasis added). Simply put, *global oligopoly is the result of monopoly-like activities on behalf of the international capitalist class*. This class might be more aptly named 'the accumulation class', for the ability to endlessly accumulate capital is what separates the 'capitalist class' from the 'consumer class', and while the state is both consumer and accumulator, it is in *massive accumulation* that monopoly-like activity takes shape.

Global oligopoly is the natural outcome of an interstate system dominated by global capitalism. All one needs in order to develop an oligopoly at the global level, “is the support of the machinery of a relatively strong state, one which can enforce a quasi-monopoly” (Wallerstein 2004, 26). In a general sense, Wallerstein sees oligopoly as the natural outcome of the global capitalist world-system, pushed forward in time by the naïve attempts of liberal internationalism to export what Galbraith called 'the affluent society' to the rest of the world.

In explaining the rise of laissez-faire capitalism, the utopian notion that makes oligopoly a possibility on the global scale, Karl Polanyi states:

to antedate the policy of laissez-faire, as is often done, to the time when this catchword was first used in France in the middle of the eighteenth century would be entirely unhistorical; it can be safely said that not until two generation later was economic liberalism more than a spasmodic tendency. Only by the 1820s did it stand for the three classical tenets: that labor should find its price on the market; that the creation of money should be subject to an automatic mechanism; that goods should be free to flow from country to country without hindrance or preference; in short, for a labor market, the gold standard, and free trade.

(Polanyi 1944, 141)

If it were not for the dubiously accepted mythology of the 'self-regulating market', 'the invisible hand', or the other names this mystical idea is disguised under, economic liberalism would have stood no historical chance. “Our thesis is that the idea of a self-regulating market implied a stark utopia. Such

an institution could not exist for any length of time without annihilating the human and natural substance of society; it would have physically destroyed man and transformed his surroundings into a wilderness” (Polanyi 1944, 4). Instead, it might be argued, we have found ourselves in a liberalized forest of international economic disequilibrium, where the wealthy and powerful states of the global North dominate those of the global South. In the introduction of his profound treatment of the history of economic ideas, Fusfeld states, “Economists have become the high priests of a world of money, wealth, and aspirations for material goods. Like the Schoolmen of the Middle Ages, they define for a secular world the relationships between man and man, man and nature, man and society. Their often esoteric and highly complex theories are translated into a folklore understood by millions and into policies adopted by nations” (Fusfeld, 1966). A deep discussion on the role of oligopoly in the development of this ecologically disastrous philosophic framework can perhaps go a long way toward helping humanity achieve a deeper understanding of the perils of the capitalist world-system.

While the term oligopoly does not come up in reading Polanyi's greatest work, *the Great Transformation*, the theoretical foundation for the development of oligopoly cum global capitalism was finely lain, for he understood more than most at the time the direction we were heading, as exemplified by Samir Amin's praise of Polanyi's clairvoyance: “In a frontal attack on the capitalist utopia he showed that labor, nature, and money could be treated as commodities only at the cost of the alienation and degradation of human beings, the pitiless destruction of the planet's resources, and the subversion of the government-money relationship to the profit of financial speculators. These three basic features of liberalism's irrationality were to surface again after 1980.” (Amin 1998, 40) I assert that oligopoly is in fact nothing more than the highest achievement of the capitalist world-system; its 'manifest destiny'. However, it is a bit of a dualistic concept, for the existence of oligopoly at the global level is also perhaps the clearest sign of the impending collapse of global capitalism as a historical world-system. Wallerstein argues that “We are in the period immediately preceding bifurcation. The present historical

system is in fact in terminal crisis. The issue before us is what will replace it. This will be the central political debate of the next twenty-five to forty years. The issue of ecological degradation, but not of course only this issue, is a central locus of this debate.” (Wallerstein 1999, 85) The immense concentration of ownership of the means of production, or capital, that oligopoly provides is one of, if not the most dangerous engines of ecological devastation known to man.

The paradigmatic shift to the ecological within the social sciences may in fact become the most direct and potentially effective challenge to capitalism as a belief system within the academic sphere since the rise of Marxism. While I am not intent on challenging global capitalism with global socialism, it is my intent to address the inherent inconsistencies therein. This is the 'intellectual emergency' that is presented by the phenomenon of ecological degradation. By addressing – directly versus indirectly, as it has been for so many decades now – the effects upon the ecosystem derived from the dominant liberal economic belief systems of the modern age (the Anthropocene), social scientists are beginning to examine the social and political fallout of unsustainability. And conversely, our newly deepened examination of unsustainability forces an extension of the various critical analyses of the capitalist world-system. This is, in fact, a major purpose in the work presented here.

The mainstream discourse on the subject of 'sustainability' has historically been based in the arguably unrealistic concept that some glorious new technologies are going to save humanity from its diabolically unsustainable behaviors, landing us in a shiny new technologically advanced 'sustainable future'. This future-bound developmentalism is at the heart of the problem facing humanity in the Anthropocene; the focus is on future sustainability, as opposed to decreasing current unsustainability. In his book *The Politics of Actually Existing Unsustainability*, John Barry addresses this head on, asking the question “How can we get maximum human flourishing while staying within the regenerative capabilities and thresholds of the sustainable use of the various ecological resources of our finite planet” (Barry 2012, 27)? This same question is also at the heart of Wallerstein's above assertion

that 'the issue of ecological degradation' is at the heart of the current debate about how to address the impending crises of the capitalist world-system. Ecological degradation and the politics that arise from it, or *ecopolitical reality*, is in the locus of the debate about what the characteristics of the new world-system *ought* resemble. More precisely, I am arguing that the two issues that must be directly and critically dealt with in the initiation of that process of debate, are the orthodox vision of sovereignty and the fundamentally anti-human and anti-ecological problem of oligopoly capital, which could be seen as the natural outcome of the growth-or-die scenario invented by the mythology of capitalism.

IV.
Ecopolitical Reality in the Anthropocene

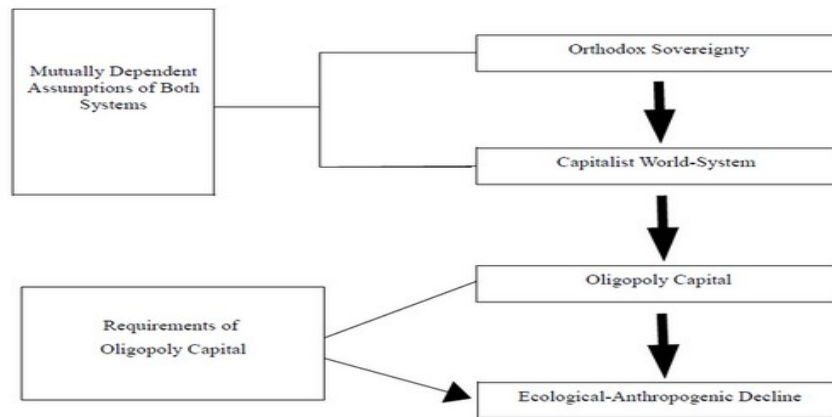


Illustration 1: The Decline of Anthropocene Humanity

The above graphic is an attempt to map out what I assert is the interdependent relationship of sovereignty and oligopoly capital in the decline of Anthropocene humanity. The boxes on the left side, *mutually dependent assumptions* and *requirements of oligopoly capital* represent the basic underlying assumptions that perpetuate the knowledge frameworks presented on the right side of the graphic. The

basic requirements of *oligopoly* and of *orthodox sovereignty* have been laid throughout. If one refers back to the 'three basic assumptions of orthodox sovereignty' - the principles of *nonintervention*, *anarchy* among states, and the rejection of *binding adjudication without consent* – with minimal effort, one can foresee how these basic assumptions, if upheld, also go far in allowing for the development of oligopoly capital. More precisely, these three assumptions are of base-level importance for the continued operation of the capitalist world-system, with oligopoly capital being, again, its manifest destiny. Oligopoly itself, as may be extrapolated from the above discussion, demands above all the basic assumption of *immunity from governmental interference in the market activities of the oligopolist*. That is, in order for the global finance-capital oligopoly to continue to operate, the governments of the countries of the global South must stay somewhat neutral in regard to the oligopolistic activities of the countries of the global North. In fact, one could assert that oligopoly demands the 'dependent accumulation' of goods produced in the North by the populations of the South, with the help of their cheap and relatively unregulated labor. The historicity of the dominant countries of the North dictating the economic parameters for the world-system has been historically analyzed by Andre Gunder Frank. “The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilization... It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilization into their midst, i.e., to become bourgeois themselves. In a word, it creates a world after its own image” (Frank 1979, xix).

The right side of the preceding graphic represents the process by which Anthropogenic decline is arrived at. As it has been written about at length thus far, the basic theoretical assumptions of both orthodox sovereignty and the capitalist world-system are essentially mutually exclusive. That is, without the support of the state and its underlying assumptions found in orthodox sovereignty, the capitalist world-system would have little to no chance of continuing past a certain point of

concentration of ownership of capital. Similarly, the symptoms of Anthropogenic decline are exemplary of the basic requirements for a functional oligopoly of available capital, precisely what is demanded of the capitalist world-system if it is to function at its most optimum peak efficiency. The interdependence of all of the basic assumptions present in the graphic represents what has been referred to herein as 'ecopolitical reality'.

The global system as we know it is gasping for its last breaths of air. The economic, human-centric vision of the Earth as both our source of life and our eternal dumping ground is no longer, nor has it ever been, sufficient to address the needs of the global ecosystem. At the same time that we are witnessing the near collapse of some finite ecosystems and the very real threat of collapse of the global ecosystem itself, we find a level of consolidation of ownership of natural resources – and the capital needed to extract and sell those resources – never before witnessed in the history of the industrial age. Hence, the Anthropocene. The wishful thinking and willful blindness to the facts of ecopolitical reality that abound in our time simply have to end if we are to stand even the most minute chance of restructuring global society in a way that prevents the further ecological devastation brought about by the Anthropocene Epoch. Futurist Richard A. Slaughter: “Rather, it is a time for calls for lucid thinking and genuinely new ways of navigating the near-future environment. Far too much of what is optimistically called 'new thinking' occurs within the circumscribed mind-spaces and stereotypical regimes of the currently dominant powers that be” (Slaughter, 2012). The Anthropocene is the grand wake-up call that humanity has had coming since the onslaught of the industrial revolution.

The acknowledgment not only that the global ecological system can no longer operate healthily as part of a capitalist world-system, but that political reality must take into deep consideration that of the ecological, leads naturally to the concept of ecopolitical reality. Simply put, ecopolitical reality means accepting the social-political paradigmatic shift to the ecological; a politics no longer accepting of ecological concerns as mere externalities of politics and economics. The subjects of sovereignty and

oligopoly capital have been taken up in tandem precisely because they are each exemplary of the pre-Anthropogenic reality that must now be unlearned, and indeed dismantled piece by piece. In order to effectively do the work of assembling *actually existing* ecopolitical reality the underlying assumptions of the global system as it is must be completely re-examined. It is argued in that *orthodox sovereignty* and *oligopoly capital(ism)* are two knowledge frameworks that are laden with these pre-Anthropogenic assumptions. By looking at these conceptual formations through an Anthropogenic lens the proverbial 'we' might be brought closer to an understanding of the new ecopolitical reality that is in existence today, regardless of humanity's preparedness.

Oligopoly capital viewed through a pro-ecological lens is vastly less innocuous than the international capitalist class typically suggests. A simple look at the rate and size of global mergers and acquisitions speaks volumes about the rate at which the rich countries of the North are extracting the human and nonhuman resources of the global South, obviously leading to deeper and faster ecological decline. According to Janet Lowe, “Many of today's massive corporations are larger than most nations in which they do business. Of the 213 nations on the earth, there are only eight – the United States, Japan, (the former) USSR, France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Canada – that report gross domestic products greater than the assets of the world's leading banks” (Lowe 1992, 5). To the international capitalist, this gross concentration of ownership of capital displays nothing more than the natural course of capitalistic accumulation. As far back as 1950, oligopoly has been seen by the capitalist class and its apologists, traditional macro-economists, as nothing more than 'monopoly by merger', and in some cases even as the answer to the global unpopularity of monopoly. In a paper written in 1950 by George Stigler for the 16th Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association, it is written that “the new goal of mergers is oligopoly.” (Stigler, 1950)

If 'megacorporations' have become so large that they often eclipse the entire budget of the countries in which they operate, therefore challenging not only the financial power of various nation-

states, then the political power of their people to object to the corporate use of finite resources that ostensibly belong to said populations is all but gone. Where these megacorporations have ceased to be able to control an adequate amount of capital to continue their operation, Sovereign Wealth Funds (SWFs) have become the latest governmental tool used to prop up the capitalist world-system. This is also a result of the fact that fluctuating financial markets have begun to challenge the autonomy and overt power of nation-states and even that of their sovereignty. In fact, 'SWFs exist to preserve local autonomy and state sovereignty by harnessing the power of finance (Monk, 2011). Utilizing this logic, it could be said that one of the many ways in which the state works to prop up what Samir Amin referred to as the system of 'oligopoly-finance capitalism' (Amin, 2004) is the use of SWFs. There has been extensive debate within the economics community about the definition and purpose of SWFs, but what remains clear is that they are financial vehicles used to invest public money into international private markets. Helleiner asserts that "SWFs offer states an opportunity to reassert sovereignty and authority over financial markets in the context of a world seemingly at the mercy of financial globalization" (Helleiner, 2009). This might lead some to suggest that SWFs hold the key to tamping down on the redistributive power of the financial oligopoly, but this would be mistaken. To the contrary, SWFs simply make states bigger players in the increasingly financialized capitalist world-system, by availing public money for private profits. Reserve investment corporations, one of many types of SWFs, are often used for this purpose (Monk, 2011).

There have been numerous, I would argue obligatory, international agreements developed to help curb the ecological and otherwise effects of the growth of global capitalism, and global corporations in particular, but it would be naïve at best to assert that these agreements have made even the slightest dent in the forward march of the megacorporation. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), for example, has no true mechanism within it to handle 'competitiveness issues' at the international level, nor is there any other organization that offers the ability to create international

enforceable guidelines for how individuals and countries are to be treated within the capitalist world-system (Lowe 1992, 96). As discussed previously, the increasingly financialized nature of the global system makes oligopoly only more attainable and inevitable than ever before. According to Samir Amin, “There is a grand oligopoly composed of about ten leading international banks (followed by about twenty others of lesser capabilities), a network of institutional investors (pension funds and collective investment funds among others) managed by subsidiaries or associates of those banks, insurance companies, and groups of major firms also largely associated with the dominant banks. This financial oligopoly is the effective chief of the fifty or hundred biggest financial, industrial, agribusiness, trade, and transportation groups” (Amin, 2004).

The question that few in the political economic realm have asked is what the ecological effects of this oligopoly of capital, maintained by the global North, are upon the Earth system, and indeed upon the human-nature nexus. This is the political economic essence of ecopolitical reality. The economic and global political domination of the South by the North is accomplished by way of ecological plunder in the form of unsustainable use of the available finite resources of the South, sold or gifted to the North at whatever price is necessary for the continued subsistence, for most but not all of those populations. Examining the effect that this has upon the relationship of humanity to nature is of key importance for the social scientist of the twenty-first century and beyond to maintain relevance and to develop practical solutions to the myriad challenges this sickly system brings.

V.

The Decline of Anthropocene Humanity

The 'decline of Anthropocene humanity', as it is understood herein, is a direct result of not simply the existence of Industrial Revolution, but of the economic system that has resulted, namely that of the capitalist world-system. The spacial characteristics of the Anthropocene are such that borders scarcely matter, at least in regard to the ecological degradation caused primarily by the massive

concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere following the domination of the global economic system by capitalism. Crutzen states that “Human activities have become so pervasive and profound that they rival the great forces of Nature and are pushing the Earth into planetary *terra incognita*. The Earth is rapidly moving into a less biologically diverse, less forested, much warmer, and probably wetter and stormier state” (Steffen, Crutzen, and McNeill, 2007). This is the Anthropocene.

Some mistakenly point to globalization as the root problematic, but such a claim is not warranted, nor accurate, for globalization has been with us far longer than has industrialization. What has not been with us as long is the globalization of capitalism. This is also the Anthropocene. Production is now global, which means that the labor and otherwise resources of the global South are now indentured to the megacorporations of the North. “In a so-called 'global factory', different countries might host the research center, fabrication plant, assembly line, quality-control operation, and so on” (Scholte, 1997). According to the head of Levi Strauss, “Our company buys denim in North Carolina, ships it to France where it is sewn into jeans, launders these jeans in Belgium, and markets them in Germany using TV commercials developed in England” (Ray 1993, 103). The impacts of the supraterritorial space in which global capitalism operates obviously holds strong implications for the global ecosystem. It goes then without saying that what follows the cheapening of labor is a weakening of the impact of environmental-ecological governance regimes.

It can safely be argued, as it is by Scholte and others, that there is a negative relationship between the further transterritorialization of capital and production, and that of the protection of states' resources, or sovereignty. As capital flows more freely, ecological rule regimes tend to remain stagnant or weaken. “Sovereign statehood depends on territorialism, that is, on a world where events occur at fixed locations either within territorial jurisdiction or at designated points across tightly patrolled borders” (Scholte, 1997). However, if we are to take the orthodox position on sovereignty, the basic assumptions remain quite well intact, and the role of the state has been elevated. If there is any ill

effect upon the functioning the state within the interstate system, it seems to lie in the fact that the globalization of capital and production has created a bifurcation of the role of the state. That is, between playing the role of 'global oligopolist', as discussed earlier, and the role of enforcer of the primary rules of sovereignty, however they may exist in any given state. Is the rise of extraterritorial production and oligopoly capital evidence of the impending end of sovereignty? If so, can the state remain a strong organizing force within humanity? Given the information I have covered herein , it should appear logical to suggest that sovereignty, as a dominant knowledge framework, is being challenged by the capitalist world-system, and its manifest destiny, oligopoly capital, not the demands of political ecogism.

The territoriality of the concept of sovereignty seems almost outdated at this point in history. But what does not in any way seem outdated is the concept of the state. One might go as far as to say that sovereignty is indeed a mute point, as long as the role of the state is moved beyond that of being wholly dependent upon sovereignty. Orthodox sovereignty is, for the parsimonious purpose it serves in this paper, still deeply embedded within the international system of states. In fact, as outlined above, the orthodox assumptions of sovereignty in fact make up the basic support system that the capitalist world-system, and its resulting oligopoly of capital, depend upon.

In the end, this is not merely a paper about sovereignty, nor the role of the state, nor the Anthropocene; it is a paper about how all the basic assumptions present in sovereignty – in its orthodox form – and oligopoly capital aid in the decline of Anthropocene humanity. The state is perhaps the winner here. Sovereignty, while it is still alive and kicking, is indeed becoming less and less important in the face of more and more economic and otherwise state interdependencies. The state, on the other hand, is not only an increasingly important aspect – if not outright arbiter – of the capitalist world-system, it also may pose the most real threat to the continued depletion of the Earth's environmental systems. The policy choices of the state ultimately clear the way forward, with or without sovereignty

as an ally. John Barry succinctly summarizes the potentialities of the state in regard to global environmental governance, in saying “Canards about market environmentalism or hopefulness about global civic voluntarism notwithstanding, it is impossible to envision the adaptations necessary for long-term sustainability without far-reaching, effective international cooperation. States are surely not the only agents of global environmental governance, but it goes without saying that they must be one such agent” (Barry 2005, 181). In this sense, the focus becomes the future of the state as an international actor, and sovereignty is but a secondary consideration in the development of solutions to the challenges of the ecosystem. Nevertheless, sovereignty itself must also be taken to task once again, with the goal being to adequately redefine its relevance and use-value.

Conclusions

My intention here has been to provoke an academe-wide dialogue about two theoretical notions – *orthodox sovereignty* and *oligopoly capital* – that have profound effects upon not only the international political system, but of arguably more importance, the global ecosystem. It is the hope that by provoking this academic discussion, a true sociocultural and political re-examination of these underlying assumptions may be the outcome. It is a tall order, but nevertheless an order to that must be administered if political theory is going to retain relevance in a space in history seemingly reserved only for those ideas that exhibit immediate expediency. In response to those who regularly claim political theory has no effect upon policy, I quote Phillip Pettit, who asserts that “If political philosophers did not exist, we would have to invent them” (Pettit 1997, 4).

In the Anthropocene epoch, I believe it can be reasonably argued that there no longer exists the luxury of slow, incremental change in regard to addressing the needs of the Earth system, as well as the needs of humanity that do not involve the further commoditization of society. As Paul Cruzen argued, “About 60% of ecosystem services are already degraded and will continue to degrade further unless

significant societal changes in values and management occur” (Steffen, Crutzen, and McNeil, 2007). Orthodox sovereignty, as it exists now, is incompatible both with addressing the needs of humanity and those of the ecosystem, for it clearly, as explained herein, has a direct and ongoing positive effect upon the development of what I have identified as the 'manifest destiny of the capitalist world-system' – oligopoly. The assertion here is that oligopoly itself may in fact be the most devastating instigator of Anthropogenic climate change, and therefore it must be challenged. For global oligopoly to be adequately challenged, so must the capitalist world-system, again, a daunting task.

The global organization of human society is such that 'business as usual' will lead to the undesirable situation humanity is headed toward: collapse. The *market-government-humanity-ecosystem* hierarchy that is in existence today, made so dreadfully obvious by global oligopoly, must also be challenged. Obviously, this is no small feat, but neither was the Industrial Revolution, the advent of the Internet, and the invention of the rest of the disruptive technologies used to fuel the above organization of human society on Earth. Human capacity for change is as easily documented as human capacity for fear of change. That change requires, perhaps above all else, the determination to re-qualify the underlying knowledge foundations that have brought us thus far. Mark Bevir states, “The subject positions that a discourse creates derive not from pre-discursive social relations or biological facts, but from political strategies and the structural relations between concepts in discourses” (Bevir, 2011). It seems now that the question that must be collectively asked, and debated the world over, is how will states, regardless of their views of sovereignty, be made to more adequately address the needs of humanity while also addressing the needs of the global ecosystem. This is the intellectual emergency of our time.

The one positive characteristic of oligopoly capital is that it cannot last forever. Fortunately, nor can the capitalist world-system, unless of course humanity is content to allow the collapse of the ecosystem that all human and nonhuman entities depend upon for their very survival. Some will surely

argue that there is no longer any way to challenge the growing power of the megacorporation and its transterritorial ownership and movement of capital, but they too must answer the riddle of how humans shall continue to flourish on the planet if the ecosystem is not allowed to flourish equally. The global ecosystem wins this game in the end, not the materialistic and otherwise demands of a small minority of humanity, the capitalist class. It is up to those of us who have dedicated our lives to the examination of these various knowledge foundations to realize that the paradigmatic shift to the ecological has irrevocably changed the trajectory and importance of global political theory in the Anthropocene age.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Zev Trachtenberg and John Barry for originally seeing the promise of my theoretical notion and suggesting I submit it for consideration in the panel at WPSA. This paper would have not been possible without the valuable guidance of my academic adviser at Portland State University, Birol Yesilada, and the amazingly helpful librarians at PSU's Millar Library. I also have to thank my fellow graduate student Matthew Cunningham for suffering through early readings. Most importantly, I would like to thank Thom Kuehls at Weber State University for providing invaluable critical feedback on an earlier draft of the paper. And finally, I'd like to thank the great Andrew Dobson for offering his feedback and answers to my questions, as well as being an inspiration. I owe a debt of gratitude to all these people.

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