
Diagnosing the Fault Lines of Globalization in a Post-Truth Era

RODRIGO CHACÓN

ABSTRACT:

Scholars of International Relations (IR) confront the unenviable task of conceiving and representing the world as a whole. Philosophy has deemed this impossible since the time of Kant. Today's populist reaction against "globalism" suggests that it is imprudent. Yet IR must persevere in its quest to diagnose emerging global realities and fault lines. To do so without stoking populist fears and mythologies, I argue, IR must enter into dialogue with the new realism in philosophy, and in particular with its ontological pluralism. The truth of what unites and divides us today is not one-dimensional, as the image of a networked world of "open" or "closed" societies suggests. Beyond anonymous networks, there are principles such as sovereignty; there are systemic dynamics of inclusion/exclusion, and there is the power of justifications.

No human world destined to outlast the short life span of mortals
within it will ever be able to survive without men willing to...say
what is.

— HANNAH ARENDT¹

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In 1938, the German philosopher Martin Heidegger described modernity as the Age of the World Picture.² What may have appeared then as an abstruse reflection on Western metaphysics and its fate is now a most pressing concern. Indeed, without paying heed to the way the world has been represented in the last decades, we can hardly make sense of the contemporary crisis of the liberal world order. Something seems to have gone awfully wrong with our framing of the earth as a “globe” that can be pictured and shaped into a “global economy” with a “global environment” and a “global humanity.”³ The frameless images of the “global village” that emerged in the late 1960s are now a primary target of populist movements worldwide. Suffice it to recall Tom Friedman’s 2004 utopia of a “flat world” of “free market vanilla.”⁴ What was then glib and perhaps foolish, appears today as dangerously blind. For it is against such “realities,” as imagined and acted upon by global elites, that populist movements today affirm their own mythologies.

What can be done to address this predicament? Here I want to propose a response on two fronts — philosophy and international relations (IR) theory. On the philosophical front, we must embrace the view of those who thought most deeply about the framing of the earth as picture, and whose thought ushered in the postmodernism that is today blamed for our post-truth conundrum. For Heidegger and his teacher Edmund Husserl, it was always clear that facts are produced by scientific communities, if only because they must be established as such by other researchers.⁵ It is also clear that such facts, especially the numerical data or indicators favored today, bear a flimsy relation to reality. Numerical data can be reliably reproduced, such that researchers could in principle obtain identical scores on identical information with identical measurements (say, of unemployment).⁶ Yet such data are at best re-representations of reality (numbers representing categories representing persons). Most importantly, they are also meaningless; they are parasitic on interpretations that grow out of our prescientific experience of things.⁷

Still, no serious postmodernist — at any rate, neither Husserl nor Heidegger — ever denied the existence of truth or reality. What they sought instead were ways to get closer to reality, to cultivate greater awareness of its manifold realms. What we need from philosophy, then, is a new realism that avoids two extremes: the objectivism of those who claim to represent the world as it is in itself — viewed (impossibly) from nowhere — and the constructivism of those for whom there is nothing given beyond the narratives we construct on an inscrutable reality.⁸

As concerns IR theory, the cultivation of a neo-realist attitude (in the sense described above) implies an embrace of grand theory but duly

chastened by an awareness that “the world does not exist.”⁹ That is, we need to represent the world as accurately as we can, explaining the complex dynamics that link, and separate, its various regions. But we must do so knowing that there is no world that can be apprehended as a whole, and also no world in which “everything is connected to everything else” — where the proverbial butterfly in the Amazon beats its wings to change the weather across the world.¹⁰ I shall call the proposed attitude an ontological pluralism that responds to new realities.

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Section I in what follows seeks to make sense of the contemporary crisis of truth, and specifically of the perception that political discourse has become disconnected from “objective facts.”¹¹

The phenomenon of post-truth politics, I argue, is, first of all, a response to socio-economic uncertainty on a global scale. Post-truth myths of national greatness (for example) compensate for a widespread sense that governments have lost control over their territories.¹² Post-truth, however, is not only the language of populist mythology. It is also the language of neoliberal political economy, which has long emphasized the “objective unknowability” of political-economic systems.¹³ From this perspective, reality not only seems increasingly uncertain, but it *is* so, largely due to emergent phenomena which result from network interactions on a global scale.

Section II introduces the new realism in philosophy as a response to the post-truth crisis. The social sciences have been dominated in recent decades by two opposed convictions: objectivism and constructivism. Objectivists hold that there is (or must be) an objective reality, which is the matrix, or the organizing principle, of the world we perceive.¹⁴ Constructivists hold the opposite, namely, that there is no objective reality, or reality “in itself,” to which we can have access: as soon as we perceive reality, it ceases to be “in itself” and becomes “for us.”¹⁵ I argue that the dominant ideologies of our time — neoliberalism and populism — oscillate between objectivism and constructivism and that the pluralist ontology of the new realism is an answer.

Section III concludes by providing a critical account of two recent attempts to theorize contemporary globalization and its fault lines. Anne-Marie Slaughter’s account of the “networked world” is a prime example of the objectivist attempt to picture the world in itself, viewed from nowhere,

and to describe its underlying structure as “nothing but net.”¹⁶ I argue that her work is a most helpful description of a key reality of contemporary globalization — its networked infrastructure — which however conceals more than it reveals. For a more truthful account of the fault lines of our world, I contrast Slaughter’s view with Saskia Sassen’s *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy*.¹⁷

OUR POST-TRUTH PREDICAMENT

“Post-truth” became the 2016 word of the year for reasons beyond the obvious. Among other explanations, scholars have argued that politics have become unmoored from “consensual facts” which have become “discredited as products of a privileged establishment.”¹⁸ Consensual facts may range from general propositions — “a rising tide lifts all boats” — to “expert lies,” such as the Laffer curve.¹⁹ Against such facts (or lies), politicians have affirmed “alt-facts” supported by media, think-tanks, and a partisan base.²⁰ Alt-facts, in turn, are so removed from reality that they have been rendered as bullshit (in the technical sense), that is, as an expression of a total lack of concern with truth, or complete “indifference to how things really are.”²¹

And yet, it is far from clear that politics was ever based on truth or, as the *OED* suggests, on “objective facts.”²² After all, the latter are arguably as made up as political myths; they are constructions of scientific communities which represent a tiny sliver of reality.

Recent social science and policy suggest two main answers to this predicament. One is to say that the measure of the real is whatever current science establishes as such.²³ I shall call it the objectivist answer. The opposite, constructivist, answer is to question “global facts” in the name of “local values” or “social meaning,” such that the measure of the real is whatever particular communities define, or legislate, as real.²⁴ The problem with the objectivist view is that current science tends to deny that the real can be known; indeed, a particularly influential strand defines the real by its “objective unknowability.”²⁵ The problem with the constructivist view is that it is premised on the very ontology of unknowability it seeks to challenge.

As scholars across disciplines and political persuasions have argued, we live in a world of uncertainty where the systems that sustain our life — economic, ecological, political — have become unstable and perhaps essentially unpredictable.²⁶ Where there is not even a “probability distribution of outcomes,” as has been said of global warming, it is hard to speak of stable “facts of the matter.”²⁷ The same is true where the economy produces

multiple equilibria or politically intolerable non-equilibria. When the world financial system rises or collapses as one unit following its own inscrutable logic, the sense that the world has a stable structure vanishes; the view that all we have are evolving “narratives” as we have evolving weather forecasts becomes part of ordinary language.²⁸ From this perspective, our post-truth era may be an awakening to complex realities that had remained hidden.

Perhaps the most important and influential response to this situation is resilience governance. Resilience is generally understood as the capacity of systems — from bodies to economies to cities — to bounce back from often unforeseen disturbances or shocks. As an approach to problem-solving, resilience governance does not set “linear goals” but rather proposes an “experimentalist” process of adaptation and learning, which has been applied to issues as diverse as conflict-management,

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terrorism, economic crises, urban planning, and climate change.²⁹ Part of the appeal of this vision is its transcendence of modernist binaries such as nature/culture, subject/object, and mind/matter,³⁰ which, it is argued, have become obsolete in a world of new socio-ecological realities and subjects like “environmental cancer” or “climate refugees.”³¹ Resilience governance rests on an ontology of “unknown unknowns,” which has transcended the modernist belief in “fixed essences and linear causal change.”³²

For the most radical strands of resilience thinking, the post-truth era would have to be welcomed as a liberation from fixed notions of what constitutes “true” success or failure in policy, and thus as an opportunity for “growth and development” through constant learning and self-transformation.³³ What we learn about is not only ourselves — especially our minds — as systems that adapt to changing environments, but also about the countless ways we may connect to each other to address global problems and build stronger and more flexible communities.³⁴

However, this vision is beset by two major problems. First, its ontology of unknown unknowns (i.e., of problems and opportunities we cannot even imagine) tends to revert back to known unknowns.³⁵ An enormously

influential case in point is Douglass North's view that the "non-ergodic" world in which we live has no "stable underlying structure."³⁶ Here we (allegedly) know what "the world" lacks. Indeed, we (somehow) know that "the 'reality' of a political-economic system is never known to anyone..."³⁷ And yet, we *do* know a solid reality which stands outside the maelstrom of constant change, namely, the institutions that shape human interaction to solve collective-action problems.³⁸ Thus, neoliberal political economy incurs in the fallacy of trying to prove non-existence (we "know" that there is no reality to be known), at the same time that it dogmatically affirms the possibility of guiding change through institutional design. The second — and deeper — problem is that both versions of resilience governance (radical-experimentalist and institutionalist) seem to leave us "clueless about the true telos of human striving."³⁹ Indeed, resilience may become an end in itself, thus inviting the charge that it does nothing to challenge the structural conditions that require us to be resilient in the first place.⁴⁰

The strongest response to neoliberal political rationality may be labeled "populist" by virtue of its grounding in popular politics and moral agency. A populist approach flips the above image around. To place our hopes in the anonymous matrix of global governance and its questionable steering capacity is to surrender autonomy.⁴¹ To view the world from no-one's standpoint as a network of networks with no center and no direction, is to forfeit (or conceal) the only window into the real — the first-person standpoint of free agents capable of a sense of justice. From a human standpoint thus defined, "objective unknowability" is willful blindness or moral obtuseness. For example, it is willful blindness not to see the reality of an exploitative political-economic system.⁴² To decry the populist descent from objective facts into post-truth is ideological mystification which conceals neoliberal indifference to domination — an indifference disguised as "objectivity" or "axiological neutrality."⁴³

From a people-centered perspective, the post-truth era may be a moment of clarity about the limits of objective facts in the political realm. As noted earlier, such facts may turn out to be "expert lies" which nevertheless are the basis of the rule of experts — the reason why "those who know" are supposed to rule over the populists who demand "simple solutions."⁴⁴ This may help to explain the appeal of leaders who blatantly lie, or make up "alternative facts": in the eyes of their followers, they are at least sincere or radically honest — even in their lying. But there is a deeper reason why post-truth may be a moment of clarity. Without the light of the public, or without politics, objective facts may never be acknowledged. After all, it is one thing to know something (say, that I am late to a meeting) and another

to acknowledge it.⁴⁵ Similarly, people may know that climate change is real, but to acknowledge it may require that their opinion be heard and their perspective be seen (on that as well as other issues).

Thus, the post-truth era confronts us with the following predicament. On one hand, we have transformed our planet to such an extent that some of its fundamental realities can only be understood from the supra-human standpoint of a science that “sees” what no individual can see or even conceive (for example, current levels of carbonic gas as equivalent to the Pliocene, some 2.6 million years ago).⁴⁶ On the other hand, our survival as a species may depend on acknowledging such inconceivable truths. But for such a work of acknowledgment to be effective, there must be political spaces and sovereign authorities.

Differently put, “post-truth” may ultimately be an expression of an opening chasm between conceptions of truth. On one side, there is the objectivist truth of complex emerging systems, as (paradoxically) seen from the systems themselves — for example, the truth of ancestral climate, as detectable by instruments; or the truth of human behavior, as “known” to the market or the Internet of Things. On the other side, there is the old truth of the things themselves as they appear to the senses — the blooming flower and the shining deed as visible in broad daylight to human beings everywhere. The objectivist truth of complex measurements and big data is in itself meaningless. From the human standpoint, by contrast, we cannot see without frames or horizons of meaning, which only exist between us, or in the correlation between mind and world.

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THE PROMISE OF THE NEW REALISM IN PHILOSOPHY

The fundamental fault line of our time may not lie between “open” and “closed” societies, that is, between societies that can (or cannot) connect to networks and embrace emerging complexity.⁴⁷ Rather, the

fundamental division may lie between those who see the world through the eyes of complex systems and those for whom such a sight is dehumanizing — a pseudo-truth or ideology which may perpetuate a brutally exploitative socio-economic system.⁴⁸ To understand this divide as perceived from each side, a brief foray into the new realism in philosophy will be helpful.⁴⁹

The old realism holds that there is (or must be) a fundamental layer of reality which is the matrix, or the organizing principle, of the world we perceive.⁵⁰ This fundamental layer has been found (*inter alia*) in water, atoms, eternal substances, divine creation, or “electrons, chemical elements, and genes,” as is widely believed today.⁵¹ The old realism became discredited in the 18th century when post-Kantian philosophy showed that reality does not determine what we perceive but vice versa: as soon as we try to establish something real — independent of human perception, or “in itself” — it becomes “for us.”⁵² Thus, the objectivist truth about things in themselves was replaced by the constructivist truth of what we can conceive or articulate.

This confrontation may be at the heart of the contemporary divide described earlier. Neoliberal political economists and proponents of resilience governance are old realists who claim to know the generative matrix of the world we perceive. Like the Kantian thing-in-itself, the matrix is anonymous and unknowable — it is an “unknown unknown” — and yet it operates behind our backs to generate what we call real. It is made up (as far as we can tell) of countless networks of self-adaptive systems operating everywhere — in our brains, cities, financial markets, the world wide web, European politics, and the earth’s climate.⁵³ Against this image, populist movements remind us that “appearance and perspective are essential parts of what there is”;⁵⁴ or, in the language of Critical Theory, that “theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose,” existing in “social and political time and space.”⁵⁵ Thus, there is no anonymous matrix operating behind our backs. Any such thing is our own creation; hence it cannot (or should not) determine us.

BEYOND OBJECTIVISM AND CONSTRUCTIVISM

The New realism breaks this impasse by arguing that objectivism (the old realism) and constructivism are both untenable, and yet their insights can be incorporated into a pluralist ontology. The old realism holds that there is a mind-independent reality which is always there regardless of human knowledge or action (say, the reality of electrons, chemical elements, and genes). This ontology is incoherent because it excludes mind

from what there is; or because it is impossible to (fully) separate what is “given” (e.g., the real electrons) from what is “added by the mind” (e.g., the name and the location in time and space we assign them).⁵⁶

Yet the opposite extreme is also untenable, namely, the constructivist view that the very notion of the “given” is a myth; or that we create all things by creating the time and space in which they appear. Though we may carve up reality in indefinitely many ways, as indefinite as the ways we can arrange books in a library, we cannot do this in just *any* way — after all, we must arrange books (and we can only do this because there are books). Similarly, though someone must have picked out the shining object called “gold” without which it would not exist (as such), the fact that someone picked it up in the first place can only be explained by virtue of gold’s essential properties. Gold is what it is because of its atomic structure; not because we name it “gold.”⁵⁷

Thus, according to the new realism, knowledge is possible, and so is truth. Knowledge is possible because reality, in itself, has a certain articulation. We know, for example, that whales are not fish; that all bodies are extended; and that gold is an element with the atomic number 79. The names and numbers we use are, of course, constructions, but not the realities they describe.

EVERYTHING EXISTS — EXCEPT THE WORLD

Once social constructivism and objectivism have been rejected, philosophy and social science need no longer seek for the ultimate ground of things in Nature or Society — and can let things be. The result is a pluralist ontology of indefinitely many fields of sense, in which atoms and genes exist as much as trolls and witches, depending on the field of sense in which they appear. Indeed, in this ontology, everything exists — from black holes and dark matter, to states, dreams, numbers, and non-realized possibilities — except the world itself.⁵⁸

To clarify what this means and why it matters — especially for IR, as a discipline that is continuously representing the world — it is necessary to specify the meaning of existence. Existence (from *existere*) means to “to stand out” or “to stick out” from a background; for example, a rhinoceros may exist in a field (or, say, in a museum); a hammer in a workshop; a troll in Norwegian mythology; a failing grade in a classroom; democracy in a city or state.⁵⁹ Something that cannot be distinguished from anything else cannot exist and is not even conceivable — as inconceivable as a “super-object” which comprises absolutely everything.⁶⁰ As

soon as we try to imagine a super-object or a “final theory of everything,”⁶¹ a background will appear, such as the universe or our mind as creating that object. Postmodern theory has summed up this insight in the claim that “there is nothing outside of the text.”⁶² But one can say more simply that nothing exists independently of contexts; and (as a crucial corollary) that “the frame itself is part of the framed content.”⁶³ The way an object appears, its “mode of presentation,” constitutes its meaning or sense.⁶⁴ For example, depending on the field of sense in which a hand appears, it is “a whirl of atoms, a work of art, or a tool.”⁶⁵ Existence thus implies perspective, meaning, a framing, and a clearing of human knowledge which makes visible whatever is or exists.⁶⁶

One key implication is that the world, conceived as the totality to which we belong, cannot exist — not only because it is not an object of possible experience (who has ever smelled or touched the world?), but also because it is inconceivable. Again, as soon as we try to imagine the world as totality, a background will appear, which would have to be included into a more comprehensive totality, leading to an infinite regress. If anything, it is more accurate to say, as Heidegger suggested, that the world is “the domain of all domains,” where (for example) the domain of politics coexists with the domain of the natural sciences.⁶⁷ This should also allay fears of relativism or nihilism. Witches exist in the domain of mythology, but they do not exist in the universe, that is, in “the experimentally accessible domain of the natural sciences.”⁶⁸ Similarly, Germany exists in the domain of politics, but it does not exist in the universe.⁶⁹

BACK TO THE THINGS THEMSELVES

Whereas in the modern understanding the common world of ordinary experience is a product of science or society — that is, of scientific discoveries or social constructions — the new realism returns to the ancient understanding of experience as mediated by common “things” or “affairs.” As indicated by etymology, things gather people — for example, around the republic (*res publica*) or the *Althing* (the Icelandic parliament) or the “political things” (the ancient Greek *ta politika*).⁷⁰ In this conception, our experience of things, or matters of concern, is logically prior to our experience of objects or matters of theoretical inspection. Whereas scientific objects, such as DNA, are detachable from local circumstances and perspectives, everyday things are necessarily experienced as present or “given.” The same may be said of matters of fact: it is a fact, for example, that the space shuttle Columbia disintegrated on February 1st, 2003; yet, for perhaps most of the world’s population, this fact is not a “thing”: it remains meaningless.

In a neorealist ontology, matters of fact are a very small province within all that is given in experience. As Bruno Latour has noted, there are vast realms of beings which are neither fact nor fetish, that is, neither constructed nor eternally given — among them, God, art, colon cancer, desire, and laws. These are “matters of concern”⁷¹ or “associations” at the center of vast webs including people, states, and scientific communities. Matters of concern today include “acid rain, ozone depletion, pesticide tolerance, carrying capacity, overpopulation, species loss and...climate change.”⁷² It would be too simple to say that these are socially constructed objects. They *are* in the sense that they are established by scientific communities, but they are also real — as real as, say, rocks. Yet it would also be wrong to say that they are permanently given or natural.

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Let me now suggest how the new realism in philosophy may help us address the post-truth predicament in IR.

TOWARDS A NEW REALISM IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The field of International Relations must be able to theorize the world, yet any account of the world as a whole is false. Bluntly put, any picture of “the global economy” or the “global environment” or “global humanity” should be exposed as a false abstraction as populist movements have done. Still, the fact that there *are* global realities and matters of concern, such as climate change or financial meltdowns or systemic social expulsion, means that IR must persevere in its quest to represent the world. It must do so, I shall argue, by fostering a plurality of perspectives, and more specifically, of ontologies. In what follows, I illustrate this point with two pictures of the world that describe true realities, albeit on different ontological levels.

**“NOTHING BUT NET”:
 THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM AS A NETWORK OF NETWORKS**

Perhaps the most powerful way of picturing the truth of what unites and divides us today is network theory.⁷³ Networks are “emergent struc-

tures” which evolve from complex interactions in realms as diverse as brains, terrorist cells, soccer teams, ant colonies, the world wide web, financial systems, and global cities.⁷⁴ As Anne-Marie Slaughter has presented, through the lenses of network theory (and through satellite vision) the world today appears as “nothing but net.”⁷⁵ The most prosperous regions of the globe are linked through dazzling numbers of interactions that transcend borders. Most importantly, in contrast to earlier phases of globalization, contemporary connections are marked by “simultaneity,” where systems such as international finance “operate as units in real time on a world scale.”⁷⁶ We live in societies where everything seems to flow — capital, information, technologies, images, sounds, symbols — and, more troublingly, where such networked flows give rise to networked threats: global warming, pandemics, terrorism, nuclear waste, species loss, and dead oceans.

To both sustain (and augment) global flows — and to respond to their effects — there are about 2,000 global regulatory regimes, 60,000 global NGOs, and a vast array of governance networks.⁷⁷ The latter resembles a marbled cake, in which global and national authorities mix with multiple stakeholders to try to steer global processes which otherwise follow their own logic.⁷⁸ Global cities, linked to multinational firms, universities, and civil society organizations, play a key role in this regard. So, do multiple clubs of leading states, including the G20, which works as the “steering committee of the world economy.”⁷⁹

Networks, in short, are ubiquitous today. They are seen as the key to successful governance, thanks to their speed, adaptability, and scalability.

In the networked vision of the world, the fundamental fault line is between open and closed societies. Open societies are participatory, transparent, and self-organized rather than hierarchical.

They are at the heart of grand strategy, as is massively illustrated by China’s planned multi-trillion investment in the “One Belt One Road” project. And they are widely touted as sources of prosperity, power, and leverage, notably for small or developing states, like Switzerland or Mexico, which function as nodes in diplomatic and trade networks.

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Open societies are participatory, transparent, and self-organized rather than hierarchical.⁸⁰ Government is based on a strategy of “open order

building”⁸¹ which allows for the “participation of the many” as well as for private-public partnerships to solve public problems.⁸² Diplomacy is also networked and based on the incorporation of non-state “web actors” into a strategy of “engagement.”⁸³ The largely implicit normative ideal of the networked vision is “resilience” and “self-reliance.”⁸⁴ Though according to Slaughter, there’s a price to pay for networked government in greater vulnerability to networked threats and government surveillance, this is a price worth paying. Indeed, in her view “[a] measure of insecurity is the price of liberty and democracy.”⁸⁵

HOW REAL IS THE NET?

The appeal of the networked view of the world is undeniable, particularly on the level of ontology. Our situation as a species not only seems to be, but *is* increasingly unstable, largely due to networks of complex, emergent, and self-organizing systems.⁸⁶ Society and environment are linked in unprecedented and irreversible ways, which have given rise to new socio-ecological realities such as ozone depletion, environmental cancer,⁸⁷ and climate refugees. A similar phenomenon has taken place in a global economy marked by extreme levels of financial-ization, where economic booms and busts largely follow the network effects of financial markets.⁸⁸ Even democratic politics, it seems, has become global and dependent on participation in international regimes and policy networks.⁸⁹ The resulting perception that foreign forces control our lives — or, in more sober terms, that we have reached a phase of “multilateral overreach” which “excessively limits sovereignty” — fuels global populism, thus increasing the risk of democratic deconsolidation.⁹⁰

Yet it is here that we must be particularly careful to distinguish between layers of reality. Emergent socio-ecological and economic risks (such as climate-related disasters, protracted economic recessions, food-price shocks, and health epidemics) are undeniably real.⁹¹ They are matters of fact which have become matters of concern, gathering people, states, and scientific communities around them. But what, exactly, is their ontological status? And how do they come to sight, and for whom?

According to the new realism in philosophy, as we saw, “appearance and perspective are essential parts of what there is.”⁹² Existence implies, more generally, a background, a framing, and a clearing of human knowledge which makes visible whatever is or exists. Now consider Slaughter’s picture of the world as “nothing but net.”⁹³ As printed in *Foreign Affairs*, it exists in space, seen from a satellite, with no frame except the dark universe.

It is a representation of some of the most connected regions of the world as they appear from space at night. The perspective of a former high-ranking official in the State Department thus appears as all-encompassing — and, in effect, as no perspective at all, as presenting the world in itself, viewed from nowhere (on earth).

From the perspective of ontological pluralism, the problem with the networked view of the world is its monism or the collapse of a heterogeneous reality into web-phenomena. As I have argued, networked threats are real matters of concern, and the myriad networks of governance that respond to them are also real. Slaughter's view is a most useful guide to navigating this emerging reality. But it also muddles fundamental distinctions.

In her view, networks become, quite literally, everything: ways of seeing, deciding, living, and being. Networks allow us to know problems that states cannot see (for example, through webs of global cities which are close enough to local problems). Networks aggregate information to address collective action problems. Networks foster resilient and self-reliant lives. And networks are also the fundamental layer of the world we live in — as self-organizing systems which can be found in financial markets as much as in the earth's climate, the human brain, and global politics.⁹⁴ In this one-world ontology, politics, economics, and normative ideals are presented as realities on the same plane. Yet, if one considers their meaning and the fields of sense in which they appear, one can readily see that they are heterogeneous — with important consequences.

WHAT THE NET VIEW LEAVES OUT: THE PERSISTENCE OF POLITICAL THINGS

Simply put, politics is not essentially about networking or open-order building; it is about collective self-actualization. A serious response to our post-truth predicament must say this much. There is, strictly speaking, no such thing as a global politics of networks, for that would presuppose (among other things) a collective intentionality — a “we” — comprising the globe. Why this matters may be seen more clearly if one considers the meaning of sovereignty Slaughter advances.

Sovereignty as the ground of modern politics, cannot be (as Slaughter suggests) about “compliance with international regulatory regimes.”⁹⁵ It is rather a foundational legal principle and an expression of “illimitability, perpetuity, and indivisibility.”⁹⁶ As one of the foremost constitutional theorists of our time puts it, “any limit on sovereignty eradicates it, any division of sovereignty destroys it.”⁹⁷ Sovereignty exists both as a governmental

competence or ability, and — more fundamentally — as “an expression of the autonomy of the political realm.”⁹⁸ To conflate both levels is to propose a world without politics, and to undermine autonomy. It is also to miss what actually moves ordinary citizens — the “thrill of having one’s life in one’s own hands,” in Martii Koskenniemi’s apt description of sovereignty⁹⁹ — and thus, inadvertently, to stoke populist fears and mythologies.

Can we do better? We can, I have argued, by making fundamental distinctions, which have long been recognized in philosophy and political theory. Sovereignty is not the same as government; a principle is not the same as an ability or competence.¹⁰⁰ Sovereignty as a competence may be “pooled”; a principle cannot — it makes no sense. It is hard to tell why these distinctions have been forgotten. It may be a kind of *déformation professionnelle* which allows IR scholars to gloss over the history of political theory, or it may be a generalized blindness to ontological questions. In this latter vein, I have suggested that perhaps the dominant vision of the world today — the network vision — is not truthful because it falls into the trap of objectivism when it assumes that there is a fundamental layer of reality to which states must adapt. This objectivism about the really real networks seems to lead paradoxically to a constructivism about sovereignty and politics more generally. What we mean by sovereignty, or what states make of it, must respond (in this vision) to the increasing thickness of global connections. As if there were nothing between — or beyond — objective facts and constructed norms.

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Beyond facts and norms, I have argued, there are “things” such as climate change or climate refugees that gather people, states, and scientific communities around them, and there are also principles like sovereignty. As I shall illustrate in what follows, there are also perspectives and framings. Indeed, once we adopt a different theoretical perspective, the world appears completely different, with fault lines in spaces that were deemed stable, and (most importantly) with effects over the long run that remain invisible in the one-dimensional view of the world as a network of networks.

BRUTALITY AND EXPULSION: THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM VIEWED FROM ITS EDGES

According to Saskia Sassen, the reality of the political-economic system we live in becomes discernible when viewed from its systemic edges. In Sassen's recent diagnosis of our condition, this reality is defined by "emergent systemic trends," which often take the form of networked threats.¹⁰¹ Yet, in contrast to the neoliberal institutionalist ontology of "unknown unknowns," these trends are quite knowable. Taking history into account, we find their origins in a particular picture of how to run the economy, and thus in purposeful human agency and policy. The networked world of global cities and global finance is not simply the result of the digital revolution, but emerges from the shift away from Keynesian political economy towards a "global era of privatizations, deregulation, and open borders for some."¹⁰² This shift follows the logic of a global capitalist economy that has exhausted its capacity to extract value from local workers and natural resources, and is thus led to finance and imperialist land grabs as key engines of wealth production.

In contrast to the Keynesian era, which was based on mass production and consumption, the current era of financial capitalism, beginning around 1980, is based on securitization.¹⁰³ This implies a shift in the logic of banking: from selling money owned by the bank to selling something a bank does not have, for which it needs to turn the "broadest-ever" range of "entities and processes" into securities.¹⁰⁴ It is the explosive growth of financial instruments, ascending in 2008 to ten times the value of global GDP (600 trillion USD), that has made the current economy particularly crisis-prone.¹⁰⁵ Thus complexity is (at least in part) produced by us, through forms of knowledge, technology, ideology, and law.¹⁰⁶

The same logic of extraction extends to the Global South. Fueled by growing demand for industrial crops and an ensuing spike in the price of commodities, multinational firms and governments have acquired massive amounts of land, amounting to eight times the size of the UK (in the period between 2000 and 2010).¹⁰⁷ As profits rise and land is degraded, the demand for more land increases with brutal consequences. Among them, we may name the expulsion of small farmers; the vanishing of flora and fauna (replaced by monocultures); growing toxicity in surrounding areas; the formation of slums for expelled populations; and hunger as export crops replace traditional products.¹⁰⁸

This should suffice to illustrate the importance of adopting multiple perspectives on our global situation. Indeed, from the perspective of

Marxist political economy, the fundamental fault line of globalization — what makes or breaks it — does not lie between open and closed societies, but between open societies and the growing number of people they expel. Seen through the eyes of the McKinsey “Connectedness Index,”¹⁰⁹ Singapore may be the most open society, followed by the Netherlands and the United States.¹¹⁰ But at the level of lived experience, measured by openness to absorbing global crises — refugees in particular — Pakistan, Iran, and Syria are far more open.¹¹¹

From a Marxist perspective, networked threats to people and the biosphere are as real as the “global commons” problems described by neoliberal institutionalism. But the perspective, the language, and the level of reality it sees make all the difference. The commons — water reserves, fisheries, arable land, clean air — are hardly common in an age of land grabs and water grabs and dead oceans. Nor must they generate collective action problems which can only be solved through markets (in emissions, for example). However intractable our problems may be, they were created by humans — by political decisions and purposeful human agency. The first step that we scholars must take to address our planetary crises, is to picture the world from multiple perspectives and dispel the neoliberal myth that there is no socio-economic reality that can be known.*f*

ENDNOTES

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- 3 Cf. Benjamin Lazier, “Earthrise; or, The Globalization of the World Picture,” *American Historical Review*, Vol. 116, No. 3, June 2011, 602–630, 606.
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- 5 Cf. e.g., Edmund Husserl, “Philosophy as Rigorous Science,” in Quentin Lauer (trans. and ed.), *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 146.
- 6 Nehal Bhuta, “Governmentalizing Sovereignty: Indexes of State Fragility and the Calculability of Political Order,” in Kevin E. Davis (et als.) (eds.), *Governance by Indicators: Global Power Through Quantification and Rankings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 152.
- 7 For a concise statement, see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “Preface” to *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Donald A. Landes (London: Routledge, 2012), lxx-lxxxv, esp. lxxii: “The entire universe of science is constructed upon the lived world.” (I elaborate this point below.)
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- 9 Ibid.

- 10 Ibid., 23. Cf. Albert-Laszlo Barabasi, *Linked: How Everything Is Connected to Everything Else and What It Means for Business, Science and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).
- 11 The Oxford English Dictionary defines “post-truth” as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief” <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/post-truth>>
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- 13 See David Chandler, “Resilience, Complexity and Neoliberalism,” in David Chandler and Jon Coaffee, (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of International Resilience* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 135–146, here 137.
- 14 Cf. Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 8.
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- 16 Anne-Marie Slaughter, “How to Succeed in the Networked World: A Grand Strategy for the Digital Age,” *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 95, no. 6, November/December 2016: 76–89, 77.
- 17 Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014).
- 18 Michael Lynch, “Post-Truth, Alt-Facts, and Asymmetric Controversies (Part I)” <<http://first100days.stsprogram.org/2017/02/06/post-truth-alt-facts-and-asymmetric-controversies-part-i/>> (Accessed March 19, 2018)
- 19 Wolfgang Streeck, “The Return of the Repressed as the Beginning of the End of Neoliberalism,” in Heinrich Geiselberger (ed.), *The Great Regression*, 159.
- 20 Michael Lynch, “Post-Truth, Alt-Facts, and Asymmetric Controversies (Part I).”
- 21 Harry Frankfurt, *On Bullshit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 34.
- 22 <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/post-truth>>
- 23 Cf. Wilfried Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 83: “science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not.” This is the standard presupposed in the phenomenon of global governance by indicators. For recent analysis and critique, see Kevin E. Davis (et als.) (eds.), *Governance by Indicators: Global Power Through Quantification and Rankings*.
- 24 Cf. Sheila Jasanoff, “A New Climate for Society,” *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol. 27, No. 2-3, 2010: 233–253, 236.
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- 26 Cf. Jedediah Purdy, *After Nature: A Politics for the Anthropocene* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015), 40–48, and Douglas C. North, “Dealing with a Non-Ergodic World: Institutional Economics, Property Rights, and the Global Environment,” *Duke Environmental Law and Policy Forum*, vol. 10, No. 1, Fall 1999: 1–12.
- 27 North, “Dealing with a Non-Ergodic World,” 2.
- 28 William Davies, “The Age of Post-Truth Politics,” *The New York Times*, August 24, 2016.
- 29 David Chandler and Jon Coaffee, “Introduction: contested paradigms of international resilience,” in *ibid.*, 4–5.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Cf. Jasanoff, “A New Climate for Society,” 235.

- 32 David Chandler and Jon Coaffee, "Introduction: contested paradigms of international resilience," 4–5.
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- 34 Schmidt, "Intuitively neoliberal?," 418–9.
- 35 Chandler, "Resilience, Complexity and Neoliberalism," 141–42.
- 36 North, "Dealing With a Non-Ergodic World," 2. For the impact of this way of thinking on international organizations and aid agencies, see Schmidt, "Intuitively Neoliberal?" and the World Bank's *World Development Report 2014: Risk and Opportunity — Managing Risk for Development* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2014).
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- 45 Linda M. Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 139.
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- 47 Cf. Slaughter, "How to Succeed in the Networked World," 78.
- 48 Cf. Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (as discussed below).
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- 50 Bernstein, *Between Objectivism and Relativism*, 8.
- 51 Peter Godfrey-Smith, *Theory and Reality: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Science* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 173.
- 52 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, 54, cited in Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 4.
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- 77 Sabino Cassese, “Governing the World,” in Sabino Cassese (ed.), *Research Handbook on Global Administrative Law* (Northampton, Mass.: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016), 503.
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- 94 Slaughter, *The Chessboard and the Web*, 38.
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