

The Global Climate Has Always Been Broken: Failures of Climate Governance as Global Governmentality

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International climate governance is commonly referred to as a failure, due to the inability of states to take substantive action against anthropogenic global climate change. This raises an important question: if international collective action is required so as to heal, fix, or prevent further damage to the global climate, have we ever had a concept of the global climate that was not damaged, broken, or in need of international governance? This article argues that we have not. Today's naturalized concept of a 'global' climate emerged in international relations only as recently as the late-1980s, framed from its outset as a broken or damaged global object resulting from failures of governance to steward the Earth. By combining the Foucauldian tools of governmentality and genealogy, this article traces how an implicit 'rationality of powerlessness' has undergirded the global climate since its international political inception; from the 1979 World Climate Conference, to its global spread in the mid-1980s by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), to its naturalized meaning today. This powerlessness, crystalizing in explicit political failures of governance, is shown to be an implicit global governmentality: a shaping, conducting, and governing of thought and action, by a concept of global climate change that is at its conceptual root *always already broken*, thereby engendering failure in a Sisyphean quest to fix what is conceptually unfixable.



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“In short, there is a problem of the regime, the politics of the scientific statement... [and] of how and why at certain moments that regime undergoes a global modification.” Michel Foucault (1976)¹

“What we are doing now is killing this [climate governance] process. The signal we are giving the outside world when millions are watching will be: ‘We failed. The UN system failed’.” Delegate at UN-FCCC Climate Negotiations, Copenhagen Denmark (2009)²

Introduction

According to the latest report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), our planet Earth is in serious trouble. “Warming of the climate system is unequivocal”, the IPCC declares, “and since the 1950s, many of the observed changes are unprecedented over decades to millennia.”³ These changes are the result of humanity’s addiction to fossil fuels, in which the combustion of carbon molecules to generate energy for transportation, agriculture, and economic production, has simultaneously spewed excessive amounts of carbon dioxide (CO₂) into the air. Incoming radiation from the sun is captured by this CO₂ and other greenhouse gases (GHGs) stuck in the atmosphere, altering its composition of radiative energy because it is unable to escape the Earth and radiate back outwards into space – thereby warming the globe like a greenhouse. This planetary ‘greenhouse effect’, or global warming, is now catalyzing a human-induced, or ‘anthropogenic’, global climate

1 Foucault, M. (1994) ‘Truth and Power’, in Faubion, J.D. (ed) *Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, London: Penguin Books, p. 114.

2 Delegate quoted in Dimitrov, R.S. (2000) ‘Inside Copenhagen: The State of Climate Governance’, *Global Environmental Politics*. 10(2), p. 21.

3 IPCC (2013) ‘Summary for Policymakers’, in Stocker, T. et. al (eds) *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 4.

change that portends catastrophe for the future of humanity writ large. Indeed, regardless of state or nationality, global climate change threatens “rising sea levels and population displacement, increasing severity of typhoons and hurricanes, droughts, floods, disruption of water resources, extinctions and other ecological disruptions, wildfires, severe disease outbreaks, and declining crop yields and food stocks”.⁴ As a global problem that clearly transcends the borders of sovereign states and threatens the very existence of international relations with systemic collapse, “climate change has ascended to the realm of high politics.”⁵ This raises a paradoxical question of paramount importance, however: why is it that an increasing scientific certainty and political recognition of global climate change, and its portent of catastrophic danger, elicits continuous and seemingly intractable failures of international governance? “Put simply,” notes Paul Harris, from the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 and its attempt to regulate carbon emissions, to the Copenhagen Accord of 2009, “with too few exceptions, the politics of climate change, despite being increasingly energetic, has failed.”⁶

This commonplace narrative of failure presupposes a number of implicit or naturalized assumptions about global climate change, international relations, and global governance that this short article will problematize and examine. How? Take, for example, the frequent lamentation that, “The failure to generate a sound and effective framework for managing global climate change is one of the most serious indications of the challenges facing the international order.”⁷ True, although climate change is indeed a daunting and ineluctable challenge facing humanity, here, statements such as this contain many tacit assumptions that can still be unpacked. For instance, the climate is simply taken for granted and deemed a natural and global object. What has ‘failed’, therefore, must simply be attributed to its

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4 Mazo, J. (2010) *Climate Conflict: How Global Warming Threatens Security and What to Do About It*. London: Routledge, p. 13.

5 Carter, N. (2013) ‘Climate Change and the Politics of the Global Environment’, in Beeson, M. and Bisley, N. (eds) *Issues in 21st Century World Politics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 177.

6 Harris, P.G. (2013) *What’s Wrong with Climate Politics and How to Fix It*, Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 2.

7 Held, D. and Hervey, A. (2011) ‘Democracy, Climate Change, and Global Governance: Democratic Agency and the Policy Menu Ahead’, in *The Governance of Climate Change: Science, Economics, Politics and Ethics*. Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 96.

explicit governance, implying that the opposite of this failure is somehow a *successful* governance of climate change that might contribute to fixing or to healing the anthropogenic damage now done. Yet – has there *ever* been a successful “sound and effective” international governance of climate change? Extending this line of questioning, we may further problematize the taken-for-granted concept of the climate as a global, natural, or immutable object. Has our concept of the ‘global climate’ ever existed, or been conceptualized, without being associated with, demarcated by, or framed and grounded upon, notions of damage, broken-

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ness, or failure? Have we ever thought of a ‘global climate’ without tacitly conjoining these notions of damage and brokenness, to failures of governance? In short, this article asks: is it even possible for us today to *think* of the concept of global climate change, without associating it, implicitly and subjectively, with a broken global object that conjures thoughts of powerlessness and failures of governance? This article argues that it is not. Upon historical examination, our contemporary and naturalized understanding of ‘climate change’ did not always refer to a natural, global, universal, nor immutable object enveloping the Earth. Instead, the global climate first emerged into being as a thinkable political concept as recently as the late-1980s, when it was constructed through international conferences as something already broken, damaged, and in need of repair, due to failing regimes of international governance to steward local, regional, and state-centric sovereign climates. Hence, to ascribe to international relations today the task of fixing a global climate that at its conceptual root is always already broken, is a Sisyphean endeavor. It is an objective call to fix what is, upon deeper analysis and interpretation, subjectively unfixable. What failures of international climate governance do illustrate, however, is how the concept of ‘global climate change’ governs conduct and thought from levels of the self to that of the globe, ranging from the micro-scales of one’s own carbon-footprint to the macro-scales of the international economic and political systems and the planetary Earth sciences.⁸ In short, thinking the concept itself facilitates a global governmentality, in which governing works *through* these endemic political failure(s) to fix a damaged and broken climatic object. It

⁸ Methmann, C. (2011) ‘The sky is the limit: global warming as global governmentality’, *European Journal of International Relations*. 19(1), p. 9.

operates, as is illustrated below, through an implicit ‘rationality of powerlessness’, resulting from humanity’s awareness of the power and unpredictability of Nature.

It must be noted that this article does not question nor detract from the accuracy of climate science, nor from the seriousness of the threat of climate change for the future of humanity. Instead, it is intended to critique naturalized or ossified assumptions about its present political conceptualization and governance, so that the potential to move beyond these static concepts and political barriers, to new spaces of possibility for thought and action, may be pursued. This article’s argument will be demonstrated in three steps. First of all, a brief overview of the “global governmentality debate” will be provided.⁹ Secondly, emphasizing the importance of combining governmentality with genealogical methods, a short history of our present understanding of global climate change and international governance will be traced. This section will examine how the ‘ontology’ of an international or global climate, or what the climate ‘is’ or has been conceived of as an object, has changed over time. Finally, this article will sketch out how this concept and ontology of a ‘global climate’ was constructed out an underlying ‘rationality of powerlessness’ that emerged in 1979 in the First World Climate Conference. When shared computational methodologies were spread internationally in the late-1980s by the IPCC, it legitimated and standardized a global epistemology or way of knowing the climate, which tacitly used and embraced the broken and failing ontology that emerged in 1979. This article then concludes by questioning how we may fight against the future failings of our global climate regime, when ‘failure’ itself appears woven into the DNA of global climate change itself. In fighting this monster, are we consigned to become it? How can a concept made of and through rationalities of failure, overcome failure? It is research into these questions that this short article hopes to catalyze.

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International Governance and Global Governmentality

After decades in which Michel Foucault’s concept of governmentality “barely registered” in the discipline of International

⁹ Vrsti, W. (2012) ‘Universal but not truly ‘global’: governmentality, economic liberalism, and the international’, *Review of International Studies*. 39(1), p. 2.

After decades in which Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality "barely registered" in the discipline of International Relations (IR), a recent "Foucault effect redux" has now inspired IR scholars to embrace and apply his analytic of power, practice, and subjectivity, to problematiques of the macro-scale: the international and global.

Relations (IR), a recent "Foucault effect *redux*" has now inspired IR scholars to embrace and apply his analytic of power, practice, and subjectivity, to problematiques of the macro-scale: the international and global.¹⁰ Although IR scholars agree on a broad and general definition of governmentality as "a 'conduct of conducts' and a management of possibilities", with "conduct" referring to both the ability to lead others, and as "a way of behaving within a more or less open field of possibilities",¹¹ a so-called "global governmentality debate" has recently broken out. Critics restrict governmentality to the liberal state, while proponents claim that it may also analyze how subjectivity interacts with global problems and practices, too.¹² Constraints of space prevent a full examination of this debate in the current article;¹³ so, governmentality refers here simply to the constitution and orientation of subjective thought, and to the possibilities of agency, or thinking, within implicit yet socially-acquired conceptual boundaries. In short, governmentality examines how and why people think and act the way they do, when there is no direct application of force, discipline, or sovereignty, dominating or threatening them from above to force specific conducts or behaviors from them.¹⁴ In this article, applying governmentality to the naturalized assumptions surrounding climate governance allows for the diagnosis of subtle yet "eternally optimistic, but congenitally failing practices", which prescribe a *telos* or end through which to "conduct the conduct" of subjectivity and agency.¹⁵ As we will see below, through the very conceptual framing of global climate change itself, governmentality is indeed able to go global in both ontology and epistemology, as so to 'govern' thought *through* purported failures of international governance. A global governmentality,

10 Walters, W. (2012) *Governmentality*. Abingdon: Routledge, p. 82.

11 Foucault, M. (1994) 'The Subject and Power', in Faubion, J.D. (ed) *Power: Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984*, London: Penguin Books, p. 341.

12 For an excellent introduction to both sides of this debate, see Neumann, I.B. and Sending, O.J. (2010) *Governing the Global Polity*. New York: University of Michigan Press and Joseph, J. (2012) *The Social in the Global: Social Theory, Governmentality and Global Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

13 However, for a more in-depth account see Hamilton, S. (2015) 'Add Foucault and Stir? The Perils and Promise of Governmentality and the Global'. *European Review of International Studies*. 1(2), pp. 129-141.

14 Neumann and Sending, *Governing the Global Polity*.

15 Dean, M. (2010) *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society*. London: SAGE Publications, p. 85.

therefore, is not only constitutive of failures of international climate governance, but undergirds the concept of global climate change itself.

Going Global: Governmentality and the Climate

As Methmann and Oels have each argued, global climate change constitutes a paradigmatic case for analyzing practices of a global, rather than a local or state-centered governmentality. “‘Rendering climate change governable’ is a perfect example of a genuinely global governmentality,” writes Methmann, “as it is constructed on a planetary problem-space: the disturbance of the earth’s carbon cycle.”¹⁶ For Methmann, the creation of a new carbon market through the Kyoto Protocol’s Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), and its concomitant failure, exemplifies governing through a depoliticisation of climate change: connecting the local and the global through a carbon footprint and market in a globalized space of “carbon governmentality”. Failure, in this case, normalizes the (neo)liberal status-quo, as the CDM is ultimately abstracted away from the social and economic structures actually causing climate change. Likewise, for Oels, market-based solutions that disclose and attempt to govern global climate change through economic strategies actually exemplify a global shift in governmental ‘rationality’, which can be defined as a specific style of conduct and thought, or way of rendering reality thinkable.¹⁷ In this case, climate change shifts underlying political rationalities from that of a ‘biopower’ grounded in the organization and preservation of life, to that of an advanced liberal (i.e. neoliberal) governmentality extended over the entire planet: “climate change [is thus rendered] governable ... as an issue of state failure requiring market-based solutions or the creation of markets.”¹⁸ The global climate, therefore, becomes an object governed and depoliticized by the inexorable failures of neoliberal international political economy.

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However, both of these accounts of a global (climate) govern-

16 Methmann, ‘The sky is the limit’, p.3; Oels, A. (2005) ‘Rendering climate change governable: from biopower to advanced liberal government?’. *Journal of Environment Policy & Planning*, 7(3), p. 185-207.

17 Miller, P. and Rose, N. (2008) *Governing the Present: Administering Economic, Social and Personal Life*, Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 16.

18 Oels, ‘Rendering Climate Change governable’, p. 201.

The climate, in other words, is simply a global thing. mentality err in two crucial respects. Firstly, they conflate governmentality with liberalism, consigning it to a top-down or preordained liberal-market structure only. As IR scholars such as Corry have noted, “Put bluntly, in the current debate global governmentality is either imagined as a (nascent) world-wide regime of liberal power or (for the critics) as a configuration of governance tools only able to survive in patches where liberal states (or states susceptible to liberal rule) already exist.”¹⁹ Instead of being preordained in this fashion, any analysis of subjectivity and diagnosis of governmentality should be nominalist, or bottom-up, detected from the study and interpretation of empirical practices themselves. Secondly, Methmann and Oels both assume that the global climate *itself* is a universal or natural object, to be taken for granted as such. The climate, in other words, is simply a *global* thing. “Climate politics takes place in a genuinely global climate polity” that is enabled by the existence of an appropriate problem space of the Earth’s global carbon cycle, which has, according to Methmann, defined climate politics since 1896 when Svante Arrhenius published his “path-breaking work” on human-induced climate change.²⁰ A problem arises immediately, however, given that Arrhenius’s work was “not widely read”; attempted to account for the onset of ice-ages rather than analyzing anthropogenic carbon emissions; and that the carbon - or CO₂-theory of global warming was virtually abandoned by climate scientists until well after World War II.²¹ Likewise, climatic change *itself* barely registered on the radar of international governance or ‘high politics’ until the late-1980s.²² The point here is that even scholars embracing governmentality have fallen into the habit of using naturalized objects or concepts as preordained universals within their analyses of climate change. Hence, a new historical interpretation is justified and warranted. This will be provided below, through a short examination of the international governance of global climate change.

Conducting a Genealogy of Global Climate Governance

This section provides a brief history of how the concept of ‘glob-

19 Corry, O. (2013) *Constructing a Global Polity: Theory, Discourse and Governance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 52.

20 Methmann, ‘The sky is the limit’, p. 9.

21 Fleming, J.R. (1998) *Historical Perspectives on Climate Change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

22 Brenton, T. (1994) *The Greening of Machiavelli: The Evolution of International Environmental Politics*. London: Earthscan Publications.

al climate change' emerged within practices of international governance. It responds to the call of governmentality scholars to embrace genealogy, because if governmentality "is to maximize its transformative potential in relation to the political sciences [and IR]" by eschewing the *a priori* assumptions invoking top-down liberal economics noted above, "then the interaction with genealogy needs to be clarified and intensified."²³ Why? A genealogy is a unique way of writing and thinking about the history of everyday practices, concepts, or objects that we assume to be natural or universal. Through a nominalist, inductive, or bottom-up perspective that eschews "presentism", or the reifying of our everyday ways of thinking as ahistorical or uniform across time, it can open new conceptual spaces by showing how practices and objects actually came into being in contingent and unexpected ways – ways previously concealed by presentist thinking.²⁴ The genealogist's goal is to uncover "the secret that they [the universals being examined] have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms" throughout "the long baking process of history."²⁵ A genealogy, in other words, reveals how the way we think is both historically contingent, and is the result of hitherto unpredictable twists and turns of past practices, which have been forgotten to us in the present yet continue to delimit the boundaries of our own rationalities, thoughts, and governmentalities.

The first step in any genealogy is to *problematize* a referent that is deemed to be uncontroversial, unproblematic, and ahistorical.²⁶ For instance, even governmentality scholars such as Methmann and Oels simply assert that "climate politics takes place in a genuinely global polity", because it is "first and foremost visualized as a global problem ... which constructs global warming as an inherently global field of visibility."²⁷ Indeed, it is assumed as obvious and commonsensical that the climate is, and has always been, *global*: "Climate change

Indeed, it is assumed as obvious and commonsensical that the climate is, and has always been, global: "Climate change is a global issue that requires global response... [It] is a classic global commons problem" afflicting international governance.

²³ Walters, *Governmentality*, p. 114.

²⁴ Dreyfus, H.L. and Rabinow, P. (1983) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed., Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

²⁵ Foucault, M. (1981) 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' [NGH], in Rabinow, P. (ed) *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought*. Toronto: Penguin Books, p. 78-79.

²⁶ Koopman, C. (2013) *Genealogy as Critique: Foucault and the Problems of Modernity*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.

²⁷ Methmann, 6; also, see Corry, *Constructing a Global Polity*.

is a global issue that requires global response... [It] is a classic global commons problem” afflicting international governance.²⁸ Therefore, the climate as a global object, as existing within regimes of international governance, becomes a problem to be explored genealogically.

The next step is to select an empirical *practice* to trace this problematic climatic object throughout history. For Foucault, “to start with these concrete practices and, as it were, pass these [problematized] universals through the grid of these practices”, is the essence of genealogical analysis.²⁹ This article uses international conferences as a practice through which the international governance of climate change is expressed, most prominently today in the UN’s Framework Convention on Climate Change (UN-FCCC), and in declarations and protocols such as the ‘Conference of the Parties’ (CoP), including the famous Kyoto (1997) and Copenhagen (2009) Protocols. Indeed, CoP15, the 2009 Copenhagen conference, witnessed the “global political elite” meeting “to finalize humankind’s response to global climate change ...[in] the highest concentration of robust decision-making power the world had seen.”³⁰ Our question, thus, becomes not *why* this accord failed, but how the global climate as a political object is conceived and thought of within this practice of international governance.

Third, every genealogy must interpret the underlying ‘rationalities’ or ‘styles of thought’ undergirding, framing, and locating the problematized practice within its social background, context, or world.³¹ As Lemke points out when drawing from Foucault, it is not the practice itself but the historical *rationality* that genealogy and governmentality attempt to uncover and diagnose, that grants these tools insight into historical modes of subjectivity.³² As outlined above, our contemporary rationality undergirding global climate change and international governance is saturated

28 Xinyuan, D. (2010) Global Regime and National Change, *Climate Policy*, 10, p. 622-623.

29 Foucault, M. (2010) The birth of biopolitics: lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 3.

30 Dimitrov, R. S. (2010) Inside Copenhagen: the state of climate governance. *Global Environmental Politics*, 10(2), p. 18.

31 Miller, P. and Rose, N. (2011) *Governing the Present: Administering Economic, Social and Personal Life*. Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 30-39.

32 Lemke, T. (2002) ‘Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique’, *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society*, 14(3), p. 55, Dreyfus, H.L. and Rabinow, P. (1983) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

by lamentations over governance failure and pending catastrophe: it is, as is explored below, a rationality of *powerlessness*.

Finally, the most crucial component of a genealogy is what grants it its ethos as a denaturalizing critique of our present assumptions: the uncovering of the moment of singularity, “eventalization”, or the *emergence* of our contemporary and modern rationality into historical being.³³ This moment of emergence will be illustrated below in two international conferences that each fostered an ontology (i.e. *what* the climate is) and epistemology (i.e. *how* we can know what the climate is) of what we take for granted today as global climatic change.

A Rationality of Powerlessness: How Our Global Climate Emerged as Broken?

Failures of climate governance are typically attributed to the selfish nature of states. “The failure of international negotiations to achieve agreements that will do more to avert catastrophic climate change – their stated objective from the outset – can be largely attributed to the cancer of Westphalia.”³⁴ Examined with the genealogical tools outlined above, however, inconsistencies in this account allow for a rather different narrative to materialize. Take, for instance, the seemingly universal assumption about ontology: that the climate is a natural object or thing that has always been global in scope. Even a cursory look into the history of this problematized object reveals that as recently as 1946, the concept of a ‘global climate’ was virtually nonexistent within states and regimes of international governance. To take only one example, the U.S. Weather Bureau considered the climate as a sovereign “natural resource ... part of the natural endowment of a country”, and hence it was “axiomatic” that “the outdoor climate cannot be changed, except on the smallest scale ... [and in] contrast to mineral resources, climate is inexhaustible.”³⁵ Climate was considered as a local, regional, state resource. Likewise, in 1966, the U.S. National Research Council (NRC) stressed that regional climatic changes would have only “locally catastrophic effects”, without fram-

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³³Foucault, *NGH*, 86; Walters, *Governmentality*.

³⁴Harris, *Climate Politics*, p. 63.

³⁵Landsberg, H. (1946) ‘Climate as a Natural Resource: Section of Industrial Climatology, U.S. Weather Bureau’, *The Scientific Monthly*. 63(4), p. 293.

ing, nor positing climate change in either international or global terms.³⁶ The point here is that statist ontologies of climate were previously limited to localized, regional, and bounded objects, akin to other natural resources and thus primed for economic exploitation within each state's sovereign borders.³⁷ Yet, if this was the case, then when, and how, did these multiple sovereign 'climates' merge into a singular object of international or global governance?

This article lacks the space to explore the massive and complex historical relationship between climate and the state in its entirety. As outlined above, it instead seeks to historicize the political rationality underlying international conferences on climate change, so as to reveal where, and how, our contemporary thinking first emerged. Indeed, the very first international conference on climate change, 'The First World Climate Conference', was held by the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) only as recently as February 1979. However, IR scholars are fond of asserting that the first major international meeting of states discussing climate change was the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, which was one "of the biggest international environmental events that have ever taken place" and which conveniently "provides an excellent snapshot of the state of global environmental attitudes at the time it took place".³⁸ Notably, analyzing the 1972 Conference's final "Declaration" of "26 Principles" that were to act as the bedrock for future international environmental governance reveals absolutely no mention of climate change whatsoever.³⁹ Instead, the 26 Principles of the 1972 Declaration focus explicitly on "the human environment", aiming to make the world aware that "a stage has been reached when, through the rapid acceleration of science and technology, man has acquired the power to transform his environment in countless ways and on an unprecedented scale." Hence, because "Of all

36 From Edwards, P.N. (2001) Representing the Global Atmosphere, in Edwards, P.N. and Miller, C.A. (eds) *Changing the Atmosphere: Expert Knowledge and Environmental Governance*. New York: MIT Press, p. 32.

37 The history of the concept of climate and its relationship to the state is too expansive for this short article. Instead, see Fleming, *Historical Perspectives on Climate Change*; Weart, S.R. (2003) *The Discovery of Global Warming*. London: Harvard University Press.

38 Brenton, *The Greening of Machiavelli*, p. 12, 13, 164; Rowlands, I.H. (1995) *The politics of global atmospheric change*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 70.

39 Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment - United Nations Environment Programme, June 1972, Available at: <http://www.unep.org/Documents.Multilingual/Default.asp?documentid=97&articleid=1503> (Accessed: 30 May 2015).

things in the world, people are the most precious”, it is the potential of the Earth to provide resources for the benefit of “all mankind”, that is the overarching concern of the 1972 conference.⁴⁰ As one section declares: “The Conference [is] launching a new liberation movement to free men from the threat of their thrall-
 dom to environmental perils of their own making.”⁴¹ The goal is to conquer and control Nature, not to steward it. Now, climate change is indeed mentioned here in the 1972 Stockholm conference for the first time by state policymakers and officials (and not simply between scientists or climatologists), appearing in the conference’s ‘Recommendation 79’, a section on pollutants. Yet this small mention merely advocated further study of “the causes of climatic changes [and] whether these causes are natural or the result of man’s activities.”⁴² This brief mention was not referring to the same global climatic object with which we are now familiar today, but instead to many local and regional “climatic zones” that should facilitate cooperation between nations sharing similar but disparate climates.⁴³ The point here is that the climate, and global climate change as a concept, is nonexistent within international politics and conferences concerning the environment. Instead of safeguarding or protecting the climate and the planet from harm, when interpreted genealogically, the dominant style of thought or rationality underlying the 1972 Stockholm Declaration is actually one of securing “mankind’s” technological control and use of the “resources” of Nature at “his” disposal. It is a rationality of *control* over Nature.

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Although there were smatterings of scientific gatherings, no international conference between state leaders or officials on the topic of climate change appears until the 1979 First World Climate Conference in Geneva, Switzerland. Interestingly, although climate change is indeed an issue of the 1979 conference, it is still not regarded as being global in scope, nor is it even primarily considered as anthropogenic or human-induced.⁴⁴ Instead, the

40 Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment.

41 Brief Summary of the General Debate - Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, United Nations Environment Programme (1972), Available at: <http://www.unep.org/documents.multilingual/default.asp?DocumentID=97&ArticleID=1497&l=en>, p. 34. (Accessed: 30 May 2015)

42 Report of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment (1972), p. 12.

43 Ibid., p. 20-21, 26.

44 ‘The Declaration of the World Climate Conference’, *Declaration and Supporting Documents*:

Conference continues the established practice of treating the “climate” primarily as many local, regional, and national spaces: “All countries of the world are vulnerable to climatic variations, ... The climates of the countries of the world are interdependent.”⁴⁵ Secondly, as highlighted in the Conference’s keynote speech by Robert M. White, the impetus of the conference was still not to safeguard the Earth, nor to prevent pending climatic catastrophe. Instead, following from the rationality underpinning the Declaration of the 1972 Stockholm conference, it was to learn how to better harness national and regional climates as *resources* for economic development and exploitation. “We must therefore begin to think of climate itself as a resource to be allocated wisely”, White stressed, “contribut[ing] to a bright future for mankind by national and international actions to provide for the wide use of climatic resources to improve the economic and environmental welfare of people”.⁴⁶ At this point, therefore, and in accordance with other historical accounts of the epistemological development of climate change at this time,⁴⁷ regional or national climate change remained the political norm. The ontology of climate concerned a local and regional object. Although CO₂ was indeed discussed sporadically, the purpose of the 1979 Conference was not to caution humankind about the portent or threat of anthropogenic global climate change; it was to teach states how to use and exploit their own sovereign climate for effective economic development within their own borders.

By 1979, although the economic and regional focus on sovereign climates remained dominant, the underlying political rationality framing the First World Climate Conference was no longer the retention and promotion of humanity’s control over Nature.

Interpreted genealogically, a pronounced shift in thinking between the 1972 and 1979 conferences can be detected. By 1979, although the economic and regional focus on sovereign climates remained dominant, the underlying political rationality framing the First World Climate Conference was no longer the retention and promotion of humanity’s control over Nature. Instead, it had transformed into an increasing awareness and fear that, despite rapid advances in technology, control over Nature was illusory: a newfound vulnerability and uncertainty concerning hu-

World Climate Conference: A Conference of Experts on Climate and Mankind, World Meteorological Organization (12-23 February, 1979).

45 ‘Declaration’, *World Climate Conference*, p. 3.

46 White, R. M. (1979) ‘Climate at the Millennium: Keynote Address’, *Proceedings of the World Climate Conference: A Conference of Experts on Climate and Mankind*, World Meteorological Organization, 12-23 February, p. 5, 1.

47 Weart, S.R. (2003) *The Discovery of Global Warming*, London: Harvard University Press.

manity's relation to Nature and its power, unpredictability, and instability, was emerging. "What is new," White stressed, "is the realization that vulnerability of human society to climatic events has not disappeared with technological development."⁴⁸ Suddenly, the notion of transnational "man-induced climatic changes" enters the conversation when a "new world condition" of climate is hazarded and heralded for the coming millennium, simultaneously highlighting the interconnectedness of nations to their own and to the world climate: "The importance of climate, recognized in these Conferences, suggests that the time is at hand to view world affairs through a climatic prism."⁴⁹ Crucially for this article, this mention of the world climate represents the genesis of the now-familiar concept of a 'global climate' within international governance. It is the event through which global climate change congeals into being at the level of international political rationality. Note that this 'climatic prism', however, is not borne through a neutral or scientific discourse that transposes or degrades a functioning, normal, or healthy world climate downwards, into a "man-induced" hazardous anthropogenic climatic change. Instead, global climate change emerges from the outset through a political rationality framed at its root by fear, uncertainty, and under the threat of the failure of human society to develop and to sustain the agricultural and economic resources required for its survival. It is not a rationality of control, but of *powerlessness*. And yet, from this rationality grows the fledgling notion that there is something larger in scope than the parceled, individual, sovereign economic climates previously commonplace and commonsensical within states and international governance prior to 1979.⁵⁰ The "possibility that actions by individual nations may influence climates of others" now catalyzes and legitimates the consideration of a possible 'world climatic prism' and "global climate change" that transcends local and regional scales and borders. The global climate emerges here in international politics as an object of governance – yet one now predefined as always already broken and damaged, latent with global scope and potential, and projecting a tacit rationality of

48 White, 'Climate at the Millennium', p. 3.

49 White, 'Climate at the Millennium', p. 5.

50 It should be noted that 1979 was a watershed year for 'global' events that would also have intersected with the First World Climate Conference, such as the election of Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom, the Three Mile Island nuclear accident, etc., yet these cannot be discussed nor interpolated here due to space constraints.

powerlessness within which ‘mankind’ finds itself when realizing its own vulnerability in relation to, and failure to conquer or to overcome, Nature. Take, for instance, the opening statement of the summary of the Toronto ‘World Conference on The Changing Atmosphere: Implications for Global Security’ from 1988, which highlights both the proliferation and the normalization of this new rationality within international politics. “Humanity is conducting an unintended, uncontrolled, globally pervasive experiment whose ultimate consequences could be second only to a global nuclear war”, the statement reads. “These changes represent a major threat to international security and are already having harmful consequences over many parts of the globe.”⁵¹ The comparison between conferences in 1972, 1979, and 1988, is clear: “mankind’s” control over the Earth and its regional sovereign climates has failed, and a ‘global’ climate has now emerged into international political consciousness from its outset as an uncontrollable, unpredictable, and inherently broken and damaged object resulting from international failures to govern the global climate accordingly.

Naturally, these past references to ‘sovereign climates’ and using a state’s ‘climate as a resource’ now seem alien or outrageous. They are easily omitted from present literature as irrelevant, outdated, or eccentric. Naturally, these past references to ‘sovereign climates’ and using a state’s ‘climate as a resource’ now seem alien or outrageous. They are easily omitted from present literature as irrelevant, outdated, or eccentric. To analyze and interpret such empirics and texts is the point of connecting genealogy to (global) governmentality: to trace how our modern and tacit political rationalities, which conduct our conduct at the subjective level, first emerged into being. It is, thus, crucial to remember that in 1979, the First World Climate Conference was “considered as the most profound and comprehensive review of climate and of climate change in relation to mankind yet published.”⁵² Yet, this landmark review admits that its findings concerning climate change were not yet global in scope. Why? “At present,” the Conference concludes, “new applications [and] methodology is largely being developed on an ad hoc limited national ‘needs’ basis. This leads to redundancy and the development of products that do not necessarily make use of the best methodology.”⁵³ In short,

51 Conference Statement: Summary (1988) *The Changing Atmosphere: Implications for Global Security*, Conference held June 27-30, 1988, in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, p. 292.

52 Foreword, *Proceedings of the World Climate Conference*, viii.

53 ‘Declaration’, *World Climate Conference*, p. 23.

each state was using its own distinct concepts, methodologies, and knowledge to delimit what each bounded sovereign climate was, thereby leading to incommensurable ontologies and epistemologies of climate at the international level. In other words, states could not blend multiple sovereign climatic resources into a uniform global object. In order to become truly global, not only did sovereign climates have to be re-conceptualized into a single global climate, but disparate states first had to bring this climate into being in the same way, using commensurable methodologies and technologies that could collectively define what this shared (conceptual) climate actually was. In order to discuss a global climatic object within practices of international governance (i.e. ontology), states first needed to be *governed* in a manner that would make the study and knowledge of climate commensurable across their borders (i.e. a shared epistemology). Indeed, “Programmes must be set up to assist [states] to participate fully in the World Climate Programme through training and the transfer of appropriate methodologies”, declared the 1979 conference, requiring “an inter-disciplinary effort of unprecedented scope at the national and international levels.”⁵⁴ A global or macro-object of climate required a uniform and commensurable scientific epistemology to be established and shared within the micro-levels of each state. Indeed, after 1979, a “hardening of the scientific view gave rise to further rounds of scientific work”,⁵⁵ with international conferences at Villach, Austria (1985) and Bellagio, Italy (1987) echoing these claims (and the underlying rationality) of 1979’s call for a global scientific body to unify global climatic knowledge in order to catalyze international climate governance.

This “international effort” towards methodological homogenization was finally established in 1988, allowing the previously disparate sovereign understandings of climate to adopt and share the global concept of climate first raised at the 1979 World Climate Conference. As Edwards writes, the “scientific expertise, technological systems, political influence, economic interests, mass media, and cultural reception” of global climate change were finally realized in 1988, through the “global knowl-

This “international effort” towards methodological homogenization was finally established in 1988, allowing the previously disparate sovereign understandings of climate to adopt and share the global concept of climate first raised at the 1979 World Climate Conference.

⁵⁴ ‘Declaration’, *World Climate Conference*, p. 6.

⁵⁵ Brenton, *The Greening of Machiavelli*, p. 165.

edge infrastructure” of the IPCC.⁵⁶ Founded in 1988 by the WMO and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the IPCC served to combine science and politics into a new political hybrid between scientists and policymakers: “the most important institutional innovation in the history of climate science”,⁵⁷ serving as the international authority to create, legitimize, and justify the epistemological and ontological standards of “how weather and climate data ... get created in the first place, how they are transformed into intelligible and reliable information, and, most important [*sic*], how that information becomes knowledge.”⁵⁸ Prior to 1988, there was no international authority to legitimate and unify methodologies for climate science, and hence to define what a global climate actually *was*. With the IPCC’s formation, however, we find in its first Overview Report of 1990 the agreement that its “measures . . . require a high degree of international co-operation with due respect for national sovereignty of states [*sic*]”, and yet “the convention should recognize climate change as a common concern of mankind and, at a minimum, contain general principles and obligations” to gain adherence of the largest possible number of states.⁵⁹ Here, in the first unified methodological and international declaration of climate change as a global concern, “climate change would affect, either directly or indirectly, almost every sector of society, [and so a] broad global understanding of the issue will facilitate the adoption and implementation of such response options . . . [meaning that] Further efforts to achieve such global understanding are urgently needed.”⁶⁰ Indeed, as Hulme has argued, this “globalised knowledge” and understanding from the IPCC “erases geographical and cultural difference” by collapsing previously local, regional, and sovereign understandings of climate, into a homogenized or global object that “[claims] to offer the view from everywhere.”⁶¹ This planetary normalization of climate operates through standards easily detectable by governmentality’s toolkit: a standardizing global average temperature; the policing, regulating, econ-

56 Edwards, P.N. (2010) *A Vast Machine: Computer Models, Climate Data, and the Politics of Global Warming*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, p. 8.

57 Ibid, p. 16.

58 Ibid.

59 Overview Report, IPCC, 1990.

60 Overview Report, IPCC (1990), p. 60.

61 Hulme, M. (2010) ‘Problems with making and governing global kinds of knowledge’, *Global Environmental Change*. 20, p. 559.

omization, and calculating of carbon; and the marketization of the climate itself, as Methmann and Oels have described. As Oels noted, “the IPCC may thus be understood as the administrative space created by governments where they expanded their biopolitical mission of using and optimizing the forces and capacities of ‘life’ to the entire ‘planet’.”⁶² Yet what this article highlights is how this planetary expansion of the IPCC disseminated the conceptual ontology and epistemology of ‘global climate’ that first emerged in 1979, fostering a shared international understanding of what the global climate was, and how it could be studied and known; at its conceptual root, through a rationality of the powerlessness of states and people alike to govern this broken object accordingly.

Conclusion: Governing through Failure

A global governmentality is not limited to liberalism, carbon, nor to the actions of states alone. As this article has argued, a global governmentality can operate by simply producing and shaping how a concept can be thought of or made thinkable, governing conduct from micro to macro levels by delimiting conceptual pathways for action. The global climate has been argued here to be just such a concept. Prior to 1988, states and the international system lacked the ontology and epistemology to think of a single, shared, and global climate. Through the unification of international social and technological infrastructures linking technologies of general circulation models (GCMs) used within the IPCC, to the concept of ‘climate’ used within every single state, a “global knowledge” of a global climate was indeed legitimated and disseminated to peoples and to states alike. This knowledge now spans micro-levels of the self to macro-levels of international and global governance. What the brief genealogy provided here has revealed, is that this naturalized concept and knowledge of a ‘global climate’ that is embraced by the IPCC and international conferences, first emerged into historical and political being in a specific yet forgotten way: through an implicit political rationality of powerlessness and its concomitant failure to control Nature, first detectable in the 1979 First World Climate Conference. Here, the sovereign climates belonging to

⁶² Oels, ‘Rendering climate change governable’, p. 198.

each state began to merge over and transcend the borders of the international, suddenly crystalizing into a singular global object – yet one subjectively and conceptually pre-defined as always already damaged and broken. Thus, anthropogenic global climate change is, and has always been, in dire need of an international governance that is consigned by the underlying political rationality bringing it into being, to fail. Simply put, there was never a knowledge of a ‘normal’ or healthy global climate within international political discourse. From its outset, our global climate has *always* been broken.

The Anthropocene, and notions of previous states or stages of global climatic change, reside only in the echo of this political rationality and the failure(s) it now elicits.

The Anthropocene, and notions of previous states or stages of global climatic change, reside only in the echo of this political rationality and the failure(s) it now elicits. When in 1992 the first UNFCCC declaration claimed to “Reca[ll] the pertinent provisions of the Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, adopted at Stockholm on 16 June 1972”, and declared that “change in the Earth’s climate and its adverse effects are a common concern of humankind” at a “global” level,⁶³ it was not actually referring to a universal or ahistorical climatic object, nor to a consistent political goal. Instead, it was channeling and disseminating the implicit rationality of powerlessness that underpins this assumed and commonsensical concept of global climate change and international climate governance, now made most explicit in failures such as the 1997 Kyoto Protocol and the 2009 Copenhagen Accord. Indeed, to even think of these events and the global climate change they portend, is thus to be governed, albeit implicitly, by a governmentality that operates and is reinforced by the same congenital failures of governance that it laments. It is a governmentality that governs through this endemic and Sisyphean *telos* to fix what, at its political and conceptual root, is unfixable. To explore this global governmentality is therefore to tease-out the thinkable limits of this global climatic object, how it emerged and what it does to thought and politics, and to critique its historical constitution so as to bend and move beyond the static and inveterate political failures associated and conjoined with it. And yet, an awareness of this rationality of powerlessness underlying climate governance should not stop us

⁶³ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992). Available at <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf>, p. 2.

from trying to think and imagine new spaces or ways to facilitate successes, albeit from alternative conceptualizations of the global, the climate, Nature, and of our own international relations and political subjectivities. This is the difficult task of thought. It is to these new and hitherto unpredictable ways of thinking the climate into being that this article hopes to contribute.