Faculty Scholarship

8-18-2021

Unacceptable Agency Part I of The Problem of an Unloving World

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ABSTRACT

The Earth System Governance Project is the largest scholarly body in the world devoted to articulating governance of the Earth's systems. It recently published a "Harvesting Initiative" looking back on the first iteration of its Scientific Plan. This paper contributes to the *decolonial and constructive critique* of the theory of *agency* in that Initiative and argues that it displays "fragmentary coloniality" especially around problematic authority relations in governance. By turning to work on "worlding," the paper argues for radicalizing questions of authority, leading us to focus not on agency but on moral relationships – work for a sequel to this paper.

KEYWORDS: Earth System Governance, Agency, Authority, Coloniality, Worlding, Love

INTRODUCTION

The Earth System Governance (ESG) Project is the largest body of scholars in the world devoted to articulating governance of the Earth's systems. Currently housed at Universiteit Utrecht, a university widely regarded for its research into sustainability, the Project has taken the floor at the United Nations General Assembly and is frequently affiliated with major international organizations such as UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme). Environmental philosophers concerned with the ideology shaping international governance in our age of "planetary" politics (Dryzek and Pickering 2019, Chakrabarty 2021) should pay attention to ESG's discourse. More specifically, they should critique it.

The Project operates through a Science and Implementation Plan (Burch, Gupta, Inoue, Kalfagianni, Persson, et al. 2018) lasting roughly a decade per iteration. The plan provides the *epistemic matrix* for investigating, articulating, and advocating for ESG. As the first Plan (Biermann, Betsill, Gupta, Kanie, Lebel, Liverman, Schroeder, and Siebenhüner et al. 2009) concluded, the Project undertook a "Harvesting Initiative" involving dozens of scholars, multiple volumes in a Cambridge University Press series,

and frequent use of meta-analyses of hundreds of publications across dozens of journals and book publishers. The Initiative was designed to study the findings of the first Plan.

 This paper contributes to *decolonial critique of the ESG standard discourse on agency* from the time of that Initiative. My approach will be to examine ways in which the background social world of ESG discourse reproduces moral ambivalence allowing the long unwinding of European imperialism to maintain some of its normalized status according to what Mignolo and Walsh (2018) call the "Colonial Matrix of Power" (CMP). In such a critique, the CMP is maintained in part by the epistemic matrix of ESG standard discourse and its Plans and Initiative.

 That is the *historically specific* and *technical-scholarly* articulation of my approach. But the *philosophical* question I want to raise in the background of this paper is simpler. It amounts to wondering *whether the picture of the acceptable world imported into Earth System Governance standard literature (forthwith: ESG-SL) – the official programmatic literature of the project such as the Scientific Plans or the Harvesting Initiative – is unloving*. This question was inspired by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2020), a leader in "decolonizing" methodologies. By asking whether research involved love for each other, Smith opened a simple, moral question that should be asked of any epistemic endeavor, especially those issuing from "Western Modernity" (Mignolo 2011) as ESG does.

 In asking my question, I use "love" prosaically as a relation of appropriate care and trust sustained over time and constitutive of the identity of those caring and trusting. As such, *love demands justice*; for how can care be appropriate without considering justice? At the same time *justice demands love*; for how can justice be realized and stabilized in the world without appropriate care and trust sustained over time, going into the heart of the identity of those who support it?[2] By using a prosaic and general understanding of love, I do not mean to avoid love's, care's and justice's complexities (Ferguson and Toye 2017), but rather to involve a powerful network of strongly moral concepts in the background social world of ESG-SL *where these concepts do not usually appear*. I don't mean to sort out love's knowledge, but to refuse ESG-SL an avoidance of love.[3] I mean to draw attention to the poor "facilitating environment" (Nussbaum 2001, chapter IV) that ESG-SL fragmentarily reproduces.

 The importation of an unloving world into the background social world of ESG would not be the intent of the framers of ESG-SL. My hunch is that it would result from working within an antagonistic world as the framers of ESG-SL see it realistically. I am

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[2] The second part of this biconditional is supported by such canonical liberal works as Rawls 1971, chapter VIII. It need not be seen as especially unusual in political philosophy.

[3] A feature of my approach will be to involve elements of fairly recent anglophone moral philosophy by, e.g., G.E.M. Anscombe, Stanley Cavell and Martha C. Nussbaum, etc. in *conceptual solidarity* with decolonial critique. This is meant to bring out the potential for moral philosophy in decolonial studies and to disorient anglophone moral philosophy in its conventional contexts.

confident that their intent is to show care for this world and its member humans and non-humans, for its living systems and geological inheritance, and to do so in a way that opens governance up beyond the imperial nation state in a way that is trustworthy. Their intent is thus loving in a broad way. *The problem, however, is that the view of the world in which they act seems to be of an unloving world.* Their terms of analysis appear to have *accepted* such a world. But this should be unacceptable to anyone, such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who holds that we ought to reproduce loving environments through our epistemic work.

Let me give an example of an unloving world and how it can be reproduced culturally. Imagine that we are raising a child in our community, a community troubled by bullies. The child will encounter them. If we want to teach the child to be *prudent* around them, should we teach that these bullies should be listened to, i.e., that they have authority? No. Learning that *bullies ought to be listened to* or that *bullies have authority* does the child an injustice. If the bullies are unjust and, in their bullying, have no authority as such, then we have thwarted the cause of justice in the child and, by making our child complicit in injustice, have harmed them. Some social worlds are unacceptable, and the only way to approach them is to *deny them authority*.[4]

Now say that we are taking about a *world order,* not just a bunch of bullies. One might say: *Any "care" worthy of the name must start from reality.* Should we accept an unloving world when doing so is "realistic"? Or should we refuse to give such a world authority? My concern is with the "realism" of assuming an unloving world. What kind of reality have we reproduced by accepting it?

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[4] Susan Neiman expresses this viewpoint well. Reflecting on monuments in the Southern United States of America and their effects on Black Americans, she compares the presence of Confederate monuments to the absence of Nazi monuments in Germany. Neiman is an Atlanta-born, Jewish American woman who's lived and worked in Berlin for decades:

> Germany has no statues of Nazis, but I've tried to imagine how I'd feel if it did, lining those streets I have come to love. Would I think, This is a statue of someone who would have killed me if given half a chance? Would I get used to the statue and simply walk by, suppressing fear and resentment all the while? I am certain I could not have stayed, or chosen to raise children, in a place where every town chose to erect a monument to Johnny Reb– call him Hans Wehrmacht – for all those who died serving the Nazi regime. But why is that (Neiman 2019, 264)?

Johnny Reb is the imaginary, iconic Confederate rebel and is an actual figure of statuary all over the Southern United States, the result of post-reconstruction efforts to *recreate* nostalgia for the Confederacy decades after the Confederacy had been defeated and dismantled. "Hans Wehrmacht" is a made-up analog for Nazi Germans, playing off of the everyday name "Hans" (like "Johnny") and the "Wehrmacht," the plebian armed forces of the Nazis, as opposed to the "elite" Waffen S.S. In the passage above, Neiman refuses to give the "bullies" authority by letting them have statues in their honor, *and* she suggests that many people in the Southern United States of America have accepted their authority by allowing their statues to stand in many a public square. The analogy to ESG-SL is that letting "bullying" relations stand in as authoritative for governance normalizes and reproduces them.

It could appear that the "realism" of the unloving world we might find as an acceptable background to ESG reproduces what social critics call "coloniality" (Mignolo and Walsh 2018), albeit fragmentarily. By reproducing its background social world, could ESG-SL be continuing the ongoing inertia of the slow unwinding of European imperialism?[5] Could ESG *be prolonging the historical inertia of European imperialism* despite ESG's best intentions? I am confident that the researchers of ESG-SL do not intend such a thing. Yet given the history of Western knowledge (Mignolo 2011), it would be surprising if one found that coloniality did *not* shape discourse such as ESG-SL.

For those familiar with decolonial criticism, these conjectures won't be revelations. Still, given the influential, discursive architecture that ESG has been creating, they are important to state and to develop – and not least to help ESG researchers align their discourse with their care. That being so, I intend here to bring out *the background social world* implicit in two important texts on agency in ESG-SL: (1) the recent Harvesting Initiative volume on agency research over the past decade (Betsill, Benney, and Gurlak 2020), and (2) Biermann's chapter on agency in *Earth System Governance: World Politics in the Anthropocene* (2014). Overall, I plan to draw out how features of the social world implicit in ESG-SL plausibly reveal *fragmentary coloniality* in ESG-SL, especially around authority relations in governance. Doing so allows me to raise the question of how to deepen a decolonial critique of ESG. I then draw on work by (3) Inoue, Ribeiro and Resende (2020) concerning their idea of "worlding" governance in order to radicalize questions of authority. Marking unacceptable agency by radicalizing autonomous relationships within matters of governance is important for leaving colonialism's "insidious loops" (Whyte 2018). It involves (i) rejecting (to begin with) ambivalent sources of authority and (ii) viewing governance as separable from every single actor. Doing so, however, leads to further study of *moral relationships* rather than "agency" – the work of a future paper.

I. Agency as Might: The Harvesting Initiative

Part I draws out features of the social world implicit in the theory of agency summarized by the Harvesting Initiative.

In this part of the paper, I will discuss some of the assumptions of ESG-SL regarding agency, including the standard definition of agency (SDA). Then, I'll mark some ambivalent areas within these. Finally, I'll explain my worry that agency in ESG-SL is understood, at least in part, as *might*.

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[5] The expression "the slow unwinding of European imperialism" was suggested by Stephen M. Rich in commentary on a different paper (Bendik-Keymer 2021b), which might be seen as akin to the work of this paper.

It's a good idea to examine the Harvesting Initiative discussion of agency especially with respect to the *theory* of agency. The Harvesting Initiative is an extensive survey of the literature in ESG over the decade of its first scientific plan. The authors of the Harvesting volumes examined key thematic foci of the scientific plan from a number of different angles and sought to determine synoptic answers to a variety of questions both of methods and of findings. One of the foci of the authors surveying agency in ESG-SL over the decade previous to their writing was the *theoretical understanding* of agency. Thus, within the architecture of their book, *what there is to say about the theory of agency* was localized within a specific study.[6] There, looking over the work of a decade, the authors determined that there is a need for *more* theory of agency:

> Very few publications [within ESG] ... reflect on the theoretical concept of agency or the implications of conceptualizing an agent as an authoritative actor (Scobie et al. in Betsill et al. 2020, 26).[7]

> Nonetheless, they did determine some things:

The Standard Definition of Agency
Begin with the authors' determination of the ESG-SL definition of agency. Let's call this the "SDA," "the standard definition of agency":

> Within the ESG project, an agent is defined as an authoritative actor able to prescribe behavior and to govern (Scobie et al. in Betstill et al. 2020, 26).[8]

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[6] This point is important, for it takes the systematic nature of the Harvesting Initiative at its words as an *architectonic* initiative where teams of researchers scour the extant literature in light of specific thematic concerns, e.g., the theory of agency. Thus, if one objects to my focus on the one chapter of the initiative as neglecting the other chapters of the volume, they must, it seems to me, reject the overall methodological intent and delegated authority of the initiative as a whole. The chapter, "Conceptualizing Agency and Agents in Earth System Governance," is where we *should* go to see what has been happening with the theory of agency.

[7] The authors also concluded that there is a need for "comparative views" of agency (Scobie et al. in Betsill et al. 2020, 37), of which I think we might include decolonial ones.

[8] It's important to emphasize that, even if there are outlier concepts of agency in ESG discourse, the architectonic structure of the Harvesting Initiative within the ESG (10 year) Science and Implementation Plan (Biermann et al. 2009) and the role of the chapter on theory of agency within that Initiative *does* underline how a standard definition is reiterated and produced at just this moment in the text. Objecting that there is variety in the discourse again *denies the architectonic nature of the plan* and the *authority granted to the authors of specific chapters within it*.

This definition traces back to the early conceptualization of agency in the scientific plan and is reflected in Biermann's (2014) work.[9] A few things are immediately noteworthy about the SDA: First, *an "agent" in ESG-SL is not any agent*. In standard, academic discourse in the social sciences and the humanities, "agency" means roughly the power to act. Agents are actors who form intentions and can act on the basis of them (Anscombe 2000). This is not the case with "agents" in ESG-SL. They are not just any actors but are like governmental *agencies* – e.g., a welfare agency – an institution that has the putative authority to administer people's lives in specific ways. *Not every actor is an agent in ESG-SL.*[10]

Second, *the authority of agents in ESG-SL is ambiguous*. The *source* of authority isn't marked, and so it is unclear whether "authority" implies legitimacy or power over people in their minds. Authority is a contested and equivocal concept, something that sociologists have long known (Sennett 1980). The ambiguity of authority in the SDA is redoubled by the focus on "prescribing behavior" for people, and institutions.[11] Such language might make sense when speaking of children, but the SDA is not a definition intended for childcare institutions! Rather, it concerns adults who are perfectly capable of leading their own lives by their own lights. That we speak of prescribing *behavior* for adults suggests already that *authority could be experienced as heteronomous*.[12]

Third, the focus on the agent being "able" to "prescribe behavior and to govern" suggests that *there is something other than the expression of legitimate norms at issue*. An authoritative actor whose authority were legitimate would, just by acting, *convey* – not prescribe – normative actions. No further "ability" is needed than the acting in light of the legitimate norms. But that some such extra ability is needed should lead one to

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[9] Biermann, perhaps the most prominent founder of ESG, was arguably its greatest proponent and organizer within its first decade, despite the project being undeniably a collective, international effort. His leadership of the project was clear, including in the first ESG Scientific Plan (Biermann et al. 2009). His (2014) book was also the first book-length overview of ESG, cementing the first major university press (MIT) series in the field. Currently, he is the editor in chief of ESG's open-access journal, *Earth System Governance,* and also helps edit more than one book series out of Cambridge University Press.

[10] This might already be taken to be colonial. Consider, for instance, some indigenous law (Mills 2017, Boisselle 2017) where every actor in involved in governance by virtue of living within the roles and responsibilities of indigenous law, something that is not external to moral life but is coextensive with it. To split agency and actors by introducing governance as a *contingent* term bears, to my mind, imperial traces of *intervening* in indigenous governance to establish authority *apart from* actors. However, in this section I will not focus on the SDA's disempowerment of everyday actors.

[11] Rather than maintain the confusion of saying "an agent prescribes behavior for an actor," I will explicate actors in terms of people and institutions. This leaves out the question of other forms of life, which ought to be accommodated by a theory of agency. That they are not, even in the SDA for a project focused on the *Earth* (!), might be seen as yet another colonial trace, one that I will not pursue at this time. See, however, my ongoing stream of articles on the Capability Approach (CA) and other species for some directions in which we might go to further decolonize ESG (and the CA) – e.g. Bendik-Keymer 2021a.

[12] By "heteronomy," I mean living a life that does not make sense to you when what is supposed to make sense is imposed by others or by social systems.

wonder whether we are talking about something other than the conveying of legitimate norms in the eyes of everyone in a community. The worry is that *we could be looking at some kind of power over others, an ability to make people behave in such and such ways, calling this "governing" and resting on a non-seamless "authority."*

Consent, Participation, and the Shadow of Power over People and Things
However, these worries seem premature. As the Harvesting Initiative lead editors on the topic of agency quickly clarify, consent and participation are supposed to be at the center of the power of acting on the basis of agents' prescriptions:

> The analytical problem of agency … evolved from the idea that governing changes in the Earth's system effectively requires the *consent and involvement* of a broad range of actors (Betsill et al. 2020, 7, emphasis mine).

One might take this to be a recognition of the moral importance of autonomy and of power generated only with others, collectively. Governing here would involve that to which the governed agree, that in which everyone governed plays a part. Still even here there is some ambiguity, for why is such collective autonomy and participation "required"? Is it because every actor deserves to be respected as a self-determining being? But then why wouldn't every actor be an agent, i.e., governing themselves?[13] Or are the participation and consent of people and institutions required, because without them prescribing their behavior, things get unruly? In such a case, consent and participation aren't required for moral reasons but as a matter of consequence.

This worry increases when one considers some further and possibly contradictory features of agency in the Harvesting Initiative review of theoretical understandings of it. For instance, at one point, the surveyors remark that in some ESG-SL discussions of agency, a strange return to the vicinity of standard social scientific and humanistic discourse around agency takes place:

> Agency has been [also] understood … as the capacity to act or make things happen… (Scobie et al. in Betsill, 2020, 27).

Here at first, it appears that agency is simply the power to act as it is standardly understood in action theory. But the addition of "mak[ing] things happen," while

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[13] In "Modern Moral Philosophy," G.E.M. Anscombe (1958) famously ridicules Kant for the idea that one could be one's own "legislator," since there is only one person to vote. But, leaving aside her assumption that all law giving is vote-based (which is clearly false), the idea of self-governance needs only the recognition that we often do not act as we think we should. In such cases, the "me" and the "I" – object and subject – are different, and I must hold myself to what is right.

consistent with "agency" as defined in English,[14] introduces what we might call a *consequentialist ambivalence* into the discussion of agency. Agency becomes split between *acting for a purpose* and *acting for effect*. This difference is real, because purposes have a meaning to the communities in which they are experienced as such and, *as those purposes*, come under critique based on the description of the purpose in question. But effects happen to people and to things. Moreover, they are separable from the actions – and their intentional purposes – involved in them. This is why people focused on effects can say, logically, that the effect often does not depend on the intent. When we are talking about effects, we are no longer talking about purposes but about happenings, which is what the authors explicitly note. *Under what kind of world is the problem whether someone has "made something happen" rather than, e.g., acted for a legitimate purpose?*

If this worry still is too peripheral to see it straight ahead of us, further remarks by the Harvesting Initiative authors concerned with the conceptualization of agency bring the worry to the fore. The authors note that, for some discussions of agency in ESG-SL,

> Inducement or seduction ... can be a source of authority (Scobie et al. in Betsill, 2020, 28).

One might grant that each noun – "inducement," "seduction" – has a basis in a literature where such words are terms of art for particular kinds of practices in which persuasion occurs through incentive-giving and other means. But this scarcely changes the point that what is at stake in such relations is *swaying people when they might not otherwise consent or participate*.

The problem is that when tropes of influence predominate (see also Scobie et al. in Betsill, 2020, 29, 37), we begin to enter the realm of subtle forms of *might*. People and institutions are then taken as objects, not as subjects, and the question is how to manipulate them for one's own purposes, or, more euphemistically, how to "influence," "induce" or "seduce" them. If the concern here isn't clear, think how we should view our friends going down the street to a party where the question the hosts have is how to influence them so as to induce, or if need be seduce, them to do things. *People can live their own lives by their own lights*; to try to manipulate them is to think about how to have power over them. One then seeks a subtle form of might, not right.

Moments like these that I've cited bring out the troubles seemingly latent in the SDA. They lead me to ask when, for instance, the authors of the Harvesting Initiative discussion of concepts of agency speak of agency "in contexts of limited power" (Scobie et al. in Betsill, 2020, 30), what kind of "power" it is that can limit agency's "power"? Are these the same two senses of "power"? But two senses of power have been with us all

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[14] "[A]ction ... such as to produce a particular effect," *Oxford American Dictionary* (2005-2011), "agency."

along in this discussion so far. The focus on consent and participation leads to power made *with* those involved, whereas tracking down the traces of might leads to the shadowy presence of power *over* people and things.

II. Traces of Domination & Warfare: Biermann's *Earth System Governance*

Part II examines agency in the canonical account of ESG by the Project's first leader, Frank Biermann.

An ambivalence around power and agency emerges in the Harvesting Initiative looking back over a decade of ESG research, analyzing the theory of agency involved in ESG-SL according to the architectonic logic of ESG's first Plan (Biermann et al. 2009). That might lead us to ask, *what kind of social world is in the background of ESG-SL ten years into the project?* Before reflecting on this question, I want to draw out some of the moral features of the social world implicit in Biermann's foundational overview of ESG. My main goal in this part of the paper is to show how what I will call *power as domination* and *the world as warfare* co-exist in Biermann's text as acceptable forms of agency alongside consent-based and cooperative forms of agency. I want to underline the ambivalence we have already seen.

There's an ambiguity appearing within the indications of agency in Biermann's 2014 ESG overview and agenda setting for "world politics in the Anthropocene," "a new model for effective global environmental governance in an era of human-caused planetary transformation and disruption," (Biermann 2014, publication blurb). The ambiguity is between *legitimacy* and *force* when considering the sources of agency. Is the power of agency dependent *on legitimacy* or can it be secured *through force*? What kind of power would agency then involve? Let's consider a set of claims all appearing in one condensed discussion (Biermann 2014, 48):

(i) "Authority ... is the *legitimacy* and capacity to exercise power" (emphasis mine).[15]

(ii) "The authority of states varies ... with their power which may derive from military *might*, economic *strength*, or diplomatic and cultural *domination*" (emphases mine).

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[15] Notice that the addition of "capacity to exercise power" in addition to "legitimacy" repeats the subtle concern of defining agency as being "able" to "prescribe" behavior when the agent is already "legitimate." The shadow of needing to make things happen – that is, of *might* – can be seen here, even during the nod to authority as legitimacy! Might seems to be seeping into everything governmental here.

One can sense a contradiction here, but leading into this discussion, Biermann explicitly asks, "What is the source of authority [for actors who become agents in the SDA sense] (Biermann 2014, 48)?" *Biermann is aware of turbulence around the source of authority.* His question suggests that there can be uncertainty as to how authority is grounded, which is equivalent to uncertainty about the precise meaning of that authority. Authority that is legitimate in the moral sense – let us say authority that is consistent with people's autonomy – is *protective* of people's guiding lights. Thus it is and deserves to be a guiding light. But authority that issues from power over others despite their agreement – let us say authority that is consistent with people's heteronomy – is *dismissive* of people's guiding lights. Thus it is not and does not deserve to be a guiding light. When such an authority is bellicose and domineering, one might even call it "imperial." One might then ask, although Biermann is aware of turbulence around the source of authority, do the contradictions of that turbulence trouble his argument?

To be fair, the idea of acknowledging that a kind of "authority" issues from such *violent* sources as military might, such *divisive and negligent* sources as economic competitiveness (understanding "strength" in context as strength relative to other economies in a competitive, global market system), and such *epistemically unjust and institutionally reprehensible* sources as cultural domination may simply be a reflection of the reasons actors decide that some institution protects their interests and so merits their allegiance and support. But this only displaces the worry. *For now actors are accepting warfare, competition, and cultural repression as facets of the world in which their interests are protected.* They then grant authority to an agent to perpetuate a *non-consensual, non-participatory* world outside their in-group (i.e., the collection of actors formed around and by the agent in the SDA sense). Perhaps what one gains here is a view of legitimacy that *allows* for the world as warfare and the practical necessity of competition and domination. But then what kind of world have we accepted, killing others off to keep them in line or to stake our claims, beating them out in competition, or squashing their cultures with our own?

Some wars may be just, but how can domination ever be? Given the SDA that Biermann (2014) roughly holds ("Agents differ from actors insofar as they have been granted authority by other actors," 47), the world of ESG is *conflicted*. Authority is equivocal and ambivalent. It can mean right, and it can also mean might. *It reads as tending toward consent and participation, but it holds onto domination and antagonism.* Thinking about these mixed qualities and about the confusion of authority involved therein, we might agree that the background social world of Biermann's canonical text is realistic in the sense that it is reflects the conflicted state of the international order in its coalescence from out of the history of European imperialism. But we might also wonder why we should accept such a world and recognize its "agents" (cf. Coulthard 2014).

III. Fragmentary Coloniality

Part III weighs the concern that ESG-SL displays "fragmentary coloniality" especially around problematic authority relations in governance.

ESG-SL seems to involve what I call "fragmentary coloniality." Following Mignolo and Walsh (2018), let's understand coloniality as the epistemic order that normalizes, legitimizes or reproduces the "Colonial Matrix of Power" (CMP). The CMP is a contingent, historically specific matrix that took form within and following the Renaissance and has become co-extensive with modernity as its "darker side" (Mignolo 2011). Coloniality is the epistemic dimension of the CMP, in which the CMP's systems and supporting practices and institutions of "universal" knowledge rationalize the intertwined histories of multiple, society-structuring processes of the CMP, advancing the "global" assumptions that they involve.

According to Mignolo and Walsh, the CMP interlinks *capitalism, racism*, and *patriarchy*. In addition, First Nations and ally scholars such as Coulthard (2014) and Pasternak (2017) have made a good case for the inclusion of n*ationalism* and *industrialism*. This can be elaborated on the basis of "land abstraction" (Bendik-Keymer 2021b, developed from Coulthard 2014) – the rendering merely instrumental of ecologies as properties in capitalist transactions, the subversion of land's moral status by nation-state sovereignty over them, and the approach to the Earth as an extractive or exploitable resource for production in industrialism. The CMP's world – or specifically, "globe" – continues the dynamics that coalesced within European imperialism, taking the world as *irreparably colonized, desirably capitalist, presumptively nationalist* (with *inter*nationalism as the central planetary governance logic!), and *inevitably (post)industrialist* – maintaining patriarchal and racist historical advantages, exclusions, and inequities as inherited privileges of such social processes and systems. The range of relations in these entangled historical systems tend to reinforce each other's authority even in their antagonisms and during their apparent waning (Mignolo and Walsh 2018), while their coloniality claims to make sense of the entire world in the CMP's terms and covers over the preservation of historically acquired privileges and inequality.

That is the broad-brush-stroke picture of coloniality and the CMP as it has been historically violent in its power over people and the countless species and "Earth beings" (de la Cadena 2015) of this world of life. But part of our *post*-colonial situation is that we endure the ongoing inertia of the long unwinding of European imperialism and the CMP, often now in subtle, partial, or weakened forms.[16] Settler colonialism continues violently; imperialism's history shapes the globe and the international order; coloniality shapes our discourses and institutions still. *Obviously ESG-SL is not in direct support of*

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[16] Joel Wainwright first helped me understand this point, that the "post"-colonial refers to the *continued* injustices, confusions, and ambivalences born of colonialism's history.

the CMP. The ESG Project's intentions are clearly opposed to, e.g., an unfettered profit-motive, racism, sexism, and unsustainability (Burch, Gupta, Inoue, Kalfagianni, Persson, et al. 2018). *But ESG-SL contributes to the inertia of the long unwinding of European imperialism by remaining entangled in elements of coloniality.* These elements make ESG's coloniality "fragmentary."

Consider how basic a concept as agency in the Harvesting Initiative volume devoted to it cannot shake the need to have an effect on things, i.e., to be a form of might. "Agency" means roughly the power to act. Agents are actors who form intentions and can act on the basis of them. Intentions have a point, that is, a purpose. These purposes provide the meaning of the action in question (Anscombe 2000). Thus, if I intend to A, my action is a token of A'ing (if I intend to write this paper, what I am doing now is an instance of paper-writing). To intend to produce effects or to influence others or courses of events is either redundant or beside the point. It is redundant when any A'ing produces the effect of A and influences the course of events to result in A. It is beside the point when what is considered are effects or influences in addition to A'ing. *To focus on agency as if it is to be examined for its power to push things around in the world, rather than in its capacity to realize intentions, is odd indeed. It's to conceptualize agency for its might rather than for its point.* Such a view of agency supports and coheres with power over people and things.

Then notice that the presence of warfare in the background of the world as articulated in Biermann's canonical text appears to attest to "the limitations of the Westphalian … [order]" (Inoue, Ribiero, and Resende 2020, 63) where nation states are self-interested and sovereign, structurally opposed to each other and "fragmented" (Gardiner 2011) in matters of common governance. *When such antagonism is seen as a basic condition of the world, antagonistic relations become normalized as a result, rather than immediately rejected as morally problematic.* We might then accept that antagonism occurs "up to a point," or view power as "having" to engage in antagonism. In such instances, though, *authority begins to involve a positive relationship with antagonism,* because only on the basis of managing the antagonism of "the" world can something be said to engage with "the" world truly, and only on the basis of winning out amidst the antagonism of "the" world can someone or some institution be said to be worth following in that world as succeeding within it. Assuming an antagonistic world as part of the construction of authority in that world *normalizes antagonism.*

Finally, think how accepting that "authority" may flow from *cultural domination* as Biermann admitted actively represses not just specific cultures but a pluralistic ontology that "consider[s] humanity as non-homogenous" (Inoue, Ribiero, and Resende 2020, 63). The problem here is two-fold. First, power over others involves determining their lives for them, not with them. It is essentially heteronomous. Only in some cases – e.g., when caring for a child and only up to a point – is it legitimate. Power over adults of sound mind is always heteronomous for those adults. We should remember that canonical

cases of power over others include every form of domination, many forms of oppression, and most forms of inexcusable coercion, manipulation, seduction, inducement, etc. Decolonial activists and thinkers (e.g., Coulthard 2014) rightly emphasize self-determination against such forms of power.

Second, accepting cultural domination in the formation of authority leaves open the possibility of the epistemic erasure Whyte (2018) calls "vicious sedimentation" as well as the denial of radical autonomy between different worlds, including in the very meaning of such things as "culture," "society," "world" (!), and "authority" (Viveiros de Castro 2004, Boisselle 2017, de la Cadena 2015). This is to internalize cultural erasure – including cultural genocide – in the form of "authority" one accepts in "agents" who are party to "governance." It is to do so *in the name of a planetary system of governance* that is purportedly *normalized by a massive, international, scholarly effort with an architectonic Plan*.

It's not surprising, then, to worry about coloniality in ESG-SL. Looking at the Harvesting Initiative and Biermann's canonical text, what social world do we glimpse, albeit fragmentarily? *ESG's world is a morally ambivalent one where legitimacy, authority, power and agency are equivocal, ambiguous, and uncertain and where "not all actors are agents in governance processes"* (Biermann 2014, 47). Contrast that world with some indigenous social worlds where the converse is the case and all actors are agents (Boisselle 2017). ESG-SL's world seems to involve a "mainstream ontology" (Inoue, Ribiero, and Resende 2020, 63)[17] that implies power over others in subtle ways, continually reasserting itself even within formulations that appear to be focused on power enacted with people rather than as might over them.

In such a light, ESG-SL reproduces coloniality in fragmentary ways, despite its intentions. *The CMP depends on a tacit or explicit acceptance of control over others* under the logic of maintaining human and non-human populations, the establishment of authority in the state, the prefiguration of human and non-human life as self-interested and competitive; a view of wealth, sovereignty, legitimacy, and community as abstract from Earth's ecosystems and thus not morally requiring sustainability; and the view of the Earth as primarily instrumental or exploitable (Mignolo and Walsh 2018). Moreover, the mechanism for control over others favors administrative rationality (Dhillon 2017), "thin" moral systems such as consequentialism where influences and effects on the world are the focus of evaluation (Anscombe 1958), and gives rise to simplified moral systems haunted by the lack of people sharing in community (Bendik-Keymer 2020a, chapter 2). ESG-SL's understanding of agency, including the SDA, does *not* directly support such things, but *it does leave room for them to pass by unnoticed, introducing moral ambivalence into people's understanding of authority such that a condition of coloniality obtains*. By getting us to view violent agents who *may* do these

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[17] Here, "mainstream" implies, to my ears, the inertia of the CMP, specifically concerning the hegemony of the *nation-form* imposed on the globe through the history of European imperialism.

things as "authoritative," ESG-SL makes us complicit with them, even while insisting that ESG denies imperialism and unsustainability. The way I'll put this is that *moral ambivalence around authority displays one fragment of coloniality still in ESG-SL.* The fragment is something the CMP depends on, assumptions that it needs and thus includes.

Second, when the "state remains the center of gravity" in discussions of agency and governance in ESG-SL (Betsill et al. 2020, 36), a much sharper fragment of coloniality appears. Decolonial scholars, activists, and critics tend to focus on the imperialism still bound up in the forms of the state (Coulthard 2014, Dhillon 2017, Pasternak 2017). ESG-SL remains focused on states as authoritative. The antagonism they internalize between themselves as they structure the "globe" then further normalizes forms of power over people and control and manipulation of the environment. In this light, it is ESG's residual internationalism combined with its acceptance of immoral agents as being "authoritative" in matters of governance – subject to inquiries about norm-building, diplomacy, social change, norm-architecture, and the like – that makes ESG and its SL both morally problematic and in need of sharp decolonial critique. ESG-SL has not gone far enough to radicalize authority relations in governance and to thus challenge the reproduction of the colonial matrix of power.

IV. Radicalizing Authority Relations: "Worlding"

Part IV discusses work on "worlding" by decolonial ESG scholars Inoue, Ribiero, and Resende, explaining how it radicalizes questions of authority.

The epistemic matrix called "coloniality" was joined historically with the project of administering life around the globe – a form of "power/knowledge" (Foucault 1980) epistemically transforming or quieting populations by discrediting their ways of knowing and of making epistemic assumptions uniform through inculcating people in "universal" ways of knowing. Since coloniality involves constructions of knowledge as "universal," it has historically constructed "global" assumptions (Mignolo and Walsh 2018), projecting "the" uniform world that it repopulates with diverse cultures. This underestimates the radically autonomous nature of different social worlds and lays claim to understanding the unconditioned (Mignolo 2011; Bendik-Keymer 2020a).[18]

ESG-SL appears at times to be party to this underestimation, beginning first with the project of making ESG's mode of knowledge *global*. ESG's Project is to articulate

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[18] The underlying ontology here is a plural world ontology involving negation as the limit of worlds, combined with the dialectical drive of people (and other forms of life) to make sense of things (in their own, species-specific ways). It supports the picture of "translation" between worlds that Viveiros de Castro (2004, 20), following Simondon, calls "transduction," in which marking the limits of understanding between worlds actually serves best to indicate "the" world they do *not* share.

governance with and for the entire *world* (e.g. Biermann's subtitle to his book: "*World politics in the Anthropocene*"). But the Project has imported a *specific social world* into its theory of agents around "the" world. Supposing that the world is at best the marker of a limit to our social worlds (Bendik-Keymer 2020b), and that living in "the" world involves many social worlds, not one, how should we critique the background social world of "agency" when we take up questions of governance, power, authority, and legitimacy while wary of their fragmentary coloniality?

One thing we can do initially is to approach the social world in the background of ESG-SL through the literature on "worlding" – the making conscious of the particularity of a given social world co-existent with the possibility of many different kinds of social worlds on our planet.[19] *Emphasizing worlding exposes how ESG-SL should break open its theory of agency to much more deeply autonomous authority relations between worlds and, having done so, move toward conceiving of governance in terms of moral accountability between worlds grounded in autonomy within each world.* All this is to say that in the way ESG understands authority, it should open the space for social worlds of moral accountability, rather than reproducing an unloving world.[20] We should *radicalize our concern with autonomy* so that no view of "agency" reproduces moral ambivalence in people's worlds by assuming that they must internalize or accept as "agents" forms of power over them.

Inoue, Ribiero, and Resende (2020) – all ESG authors – use the neologism of "worlding" to explain their pluralistic ontology as a framing approach to planetary governance, including planetary justice.[21] On their understanding, worlding makes perspicacious how on Earth, there are many worlds, not one:

> Many worlds mean that on a single planet – the Earth – there is a multiplicity of worlds that intersect, overlap, and conflict, and which are co-constituents and co-vulnerable (61).[22]

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[19] "Worlding" should be placed alongside the newly popular neologism, "pluriversal" thinking or "pluriversal politics" (Escobar 2020), but the authors I'll discuss do not differentiate "worlds" from "universes," although we will see that they do make passing mention of the "pluriverse." De la Cadena (2015) discusses worlding, as do some of her interlocutors (Micarelli and Verran 2018). De la Cadena also draws on Viveiros de Castro.

[20] A main idea here is that love requires accountability in what R.J. Wallace (2019) calls "the moral nexus."

[21] The three authors also single out "a demand for a new global justice project" (60) in their framing of the socio-political context of their article. Inoue, too, is an active member of the ESG Planetary Justice Taskforce and has spoken of worlding with approval in the 2019 taskforce meeting in Oaxaca, Mexico during a discussion of the understanding of planetary justice.

[22] The possibility of "intersecting" worlds leaves open a range of ways to think of connections between worlds, including "world-traveling" (Lugones, 2003, chapter 4, originally from Lugones 1987), "partial connections" (de la Cadena 2015) or "controlled equivocations" where the relation is one of "disparateness" (Viveiros de Castro 2004), depending on how one conceives of the recalcitrant irreducibility of worlds to each other.

These ESG authors do not explicitly define what "worlds" are, to my knowledge, but we can infer some of what a world is from what they say about worlds.[23] Most basically, they note that different worlds have different ontologies, and that "different ontologies ask for different epistemologies and methodologies" (62). The idea seems to be that a world is, at the least, the horizon for how people can be. As such, it implies fitting ways of knowing how things are. Studying different worlds may thus call for different approaches on the part of those outside of them.

When it comes to questions of governance, one core issue in worlds is the form, substance, even location of authority – for this is what epistemologies, methodologies and their ontologies both articulate and depend on, and they in turn underscore how, when, why, and what legitimacy could be when it comes to beings within an ontology "governing" or being "governed" (and what these things might even mean, cf. Viveiros de Castro 2004). Take methodology. Someone from the outside who would like to understand the world of the Algonquins of Barriere Lake should become a responsible ally first – this taking a great deal of time, work, advocacy, and service to even open up the beginning of possible reciprocity and openness (Pasternak 2017). How different this is from studying the world of Manhattan in the late 20th century, which might be done as impersonally as one wants (Reggio 1982). What can we say of a world where knowing *depends on good relationships* with those who are known (including, personified, the land; cf. Boisselle 2017) – as opposed to a world where the aesthetics of profundity are spectatorial and impersonal, where governance seems impossible (i.e. where everyone can simply be surveyed without permission and seen from above – cf. Foucault 1995 – as in Reggio's film issuing in despair over the destruction of the Earth)? *Worlds provide the horizon and logic of what makes sense for entire ways of being* (cf. Heidegger 2010). The logic of a world orients people generally in the course of daily practice as to how their lives can make sense. In turn, worlds involve an array of practices and connotatively rich moral considerations as to how people and their non-human relatives (Whyte 2018) can or should be.

Our participation – or non-participation – in worlds is complex. Following Amaya Querejazu, the authors hold that worlds should be understood both as "incommensurable" (61) and yet as "interrelated" (62):

> [R]eality is not a universe made of different realities but is *per se* a plurality or a pluriverse (62).

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[23] Given the relative brevity of their work next to the ample work of others (e.g. de la Cadena 2015), it may seem odd to focus on the ESG authors. But doing so is important for showing the internal ambivalence in ESG's scholarly community *itself* and for suggesting that the post-colonial situation of ESG *already* involves decolonial options.

If the authors also accept the point Lugones (1987) emphasized that one can exist in several worlds at once, urging us to develop a sense of "play" so as to be able to "travel" between worlds, even in a single given place and time, what should authority in governance be when we can be led by many lights in many directions at once?

The key thing here, I think, is a *two-stage ontology*. The general ontology the Inoue, Ribiero, and Resende advance is pluralistic. *There can be many worlds.* We may find that we then exist in *a* world within that background plurality. The consequences of this admission are powerful for ESG. If the general ontology of worlding is true, then (63, my rephrasing):

(1) Other kinds of knowing apart from academic social science should become part of the approach to ESG.[24]

And:

(2) It becomes important to "overcome the Westphalian theorization about the [international and nation-state based] world, such as the ... top-down formulations [e.g. of nation state and subjects]."[25]

Why should both of these, but the second especially, be so? How are they linked? The answer is that they are linked through *questions of authority appearing at the juncture between worlds* (cf. Vivieros de Castro 2004). There, a *commitment to deeply autonomous authority calls into question the coloniality of knowledge and the residual imperialism of the nation-state*, both aspects of the CMP. Moreover, the background to these questions is consistent with a meta-epistemological claim about sense, namely, that people make sense of the world in different ways. Sometimes we cannot *translate* these ways of making sense into each other, because they involve incommensurable concepts and modes of reasoning. Still, understanding that people need to make sense of the world, it should be possible to *relate* different worlds to each other at least partially (de la Cadena 2015). Justice, on this view, would then seem to imply a commitment to people's autonomy *between* their worlds (Bendik-Keymer 2020a), an autonomy generalized within the pluriverse (Escobar 2020).

Here, autonomy would not mean individual self-sufficiency; nor would it need to imply "rational will according to universal law," but something weaker and more modest: living a life that makes sense within your world, including in the ways that, criticizing

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[24] This, even if academic anthropology is a location for counter-colonial and epistemically plural thought. Consider Escobar 2020; de la Cadena 2015; Viveiros de Castro 2004.

[25] Again, consider Mills 2017 and Boisselle 2017 for non-top-down modes of nationhood and governance. Consider Coulthard 2014 and Pasternak 2017 for the violence to communities and their modes of life caused by presuming governance to reside primarily in the nation state.

your own world, it becomes needed to make more sense out of it. The moral force of this autonomy would be the way it implies holding open the need for people's self-determination – and the indignity people face in being forced to deal with a world that makes little to no sense to them. In this way, although the authors do not explicitly take this turn, their view seems to imply a commitment to the gradual interweaving of autonomy around the planet. One of the remarkable things about decolonial discourse (e.g. Escobar 2020, Mignolo and Walsh 2018) is that it reclaims "autonomy" as a general moral and resistant notion, taking it away from a narrow identification with Kantianism. So do Coulthard (2014) and Boisselle (2017).

Accepting that there are many confusions to address in worlding,[26] the kernel of truth in it does makes sense. People live their lives in social environments that organize how things can make sense, what can makes sense, and what cannot. Their environments are never seamless or total (cf. Lugones 1987). There are many unclarities in a given world. Yet the things that can make sense in social environments often do so with great intricacy, involving tight and extensive implications. The subtleties are immense and often seemingly infinite, going as far as the mind can figure. Unsurprisingly, then, things in a given social environment can be incommensurable with things in other environments. Still, there is room for relating the two different environments, because they share something basic – people's drive to make sense of things (cf. Biehl 2005, Rancière 1991) – and because there is much that is unknown, conflicted, and uncertain in any given environment. In other words, despite the tight organization of a world, there is room to grow and to "project" understanding (Cavell 2000) as well as to find other worlds productively disrupting one's own in ways that can make – even if strangely – sense (Viveiros de Castro 2004).

One advantage of worlding's approach to human civilizations on this planet is thus that it helps us become conscious of worlds that people assume are undeniably real and thus must be accommodated – for instance, the background world of ESG-SL. *There are other worlds than that world.* But a deeper advantage of worlding is perhaps more important for making loving worlds: *Worlding helps us understand the importance of autonomy in authority relations within people's worlds and the extent to which governance must utterly involve the "autonomy" of those beings (not just humans!) that make up a given world* (cf. Bendik-Keymer 2021a). When *worlds organize the sense in people's lives through their cultures and societies,* including the very "concept of the

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[26] Much more needs to be said about the content and implications of a two-stage worlding ontology and a correlative two-stage normative ordering. Would, for instance, the one thing that must be rejected from any given world be the imposition of heteronomy? What would the consequences be, then, for revising – or more accurately, *restructuring* – worlds that involve heteronomy within themselves or toward other worlds? Must worlds within the pluriverse that involve domination be remade, and if so, by whom and how? The specter of imperialism appears again here, *even if it is the imperialism of autonomy* (Is there such a thing? How is it possible?).

social" for people in a given world so that they are construed as "theoretical agents" in their own right, not as "passive subjects" of a given Science and Implementation Plan (Vivieros de Castro, 2004, 4), it can never be acceptable to take authority away from actors *a priori* as the SDA does, and it can never be acceptable to include fragments of cultural domination, seduction, and might in the ways we conceive of agency between worlds. That gets everything backwards. Whatever "governance" between worlds might be, it needs to be *grown out of* different worlds in ways that respects the irreducible gaps that inevitably occur between them. This leads to moral relationships[27] as a guide to governance *between* worlds, not acting *on* worlds to make the beings in them do things that a given "agent" thinks makes sense.

<p style="text-align:center">V. Governed by the Relationship</p>

Part V discusses Whyte's notion of "insidious loops" and concludes with ways for ESG to leave them: (1) by rejecting ambivalent sources of authority and (2) by ceasing to view governance as separable from every single actor. Doing so, should lead us to study moral relationships rather than agency – work for a sequel to this paper.

A philosophical question emerges here that is important for thought about justice. The first conventional meaning of "reality" is that it is "the state of things as they actually exist as opposed to an idealistic [notion] of them" (*Oxford American Dictionary,* 2005-2011). But the second conventional meaning of "reality" is "the state or quality of having … substance." It may be true that the international order of the slow unwinding of European imperialism involves a conflicted understanding of authority internalizing might and domination. That may be "the state of things as they actually" are, and many a "social science" may pride itself on thus being "realistic" in letting that order frame "how things get done." But from the standpoint of justice, *such a world is unacceptable* – and so are the epistemologies that normalize it*. Such a world is insubstantial, because it perpetuates injustice.* From the point of view of justice, *where the substance of things are right relations*, the things that are should often not be. They are not true but false to our moral relationships. How can we ignore the speciousness of a claim to "authority" that comes from things like, but worse than, bullying? The "authority" is not legitimate.

The two-stage ontology of worlding and its commitment to a deep form of autonomy between worlds presents a "decolonial option" (Mignolo and Walsh 2018) that can help us root out what Kyle Whyte (2018) calls "insidious loops" in ESG-SL. Insidious loops are social practices – including epistemic ones – that reinforce injustices. They position people to repeat the forms of oppression that constitute ongoing colonization. A good example of an insidious loop is some forms of American

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[27] Whyte 2018 speaks of, e.g., "diplomacy," "reciprocity," and "accountability."

evangelical Christianity, in which sharp gender binaries and homophobic violence structure social relations alongside a blanket repression of open and honest discussion about the things that weigh on people's hearts and bodies (Cone 2015). Such a form of Christianity leads to the epistemic silencing of people who do not fit its mold and maintains a culture that doesn't look for oppression that has been driven out of sight. Insidious loops can be ideological. They can turn agents into self-silencing beings and inflect justice as punishment, not reconciliation.

Insidious loops can also involve ideological assumptions which may in turn join a number of loops, as systems within CMP such as patriarchy or racism do. *Background social worlds play a foundational role in many an insidious loop.* If the background social world, for instance, is unloving, then it may seem prudent to fight, compete, be selfish, and so on. Force might seem an acceptable way to secure authority, involving the domination of antagonistic others. A range of narcissistic behaviors focused on controlling one's circumstances and dominating others may emerge as apparently reasonable. After all, social environments that lack loving care are triggers for infantile narcissism and their allied "monarchies of fear" (Nussbaum 2001, 2018). Then, lacking a world we can trust, control of the wills of others and thus "having an effect" seem "acceptable."

As a way to avoid the worry that ESG-SL's picture of agency promotes insidious loops of its own by normalizing problematic authority relations, two things might help:

(1) To *reject ambivalent sources of authority,* and

(2) To *refuse viewing governance as separable from every single actor (*in ESG-SL terms, *the agency-actor divide should be collapsed*).[28]

We must reject ambivalent sources of authority as being authoritative, because they cannot establish an acceptable ground for action. When something is internally contradictory, it cannot serve as a justification that makes sense. That it does not make sense – that it contradicts itself – is precisely the problem. When we are faced with words that are used equivocally like "authority" in ESG-SL, possibly even *within* the SDA,[29] their ambivalence about what grounds authority belies grounds that are mutually contradictory. One cannot speak of authority as grounded in autonomy and authority as grounded in heteronomy in the same sense of "authority." It doesn't make sense.

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[28] This should be part of our response to the Harvesting Initiative authors' call for more reflection on "the implications of conceptualizing an agent as an authoritative actor" (Scobie et al. in Betsill et al. 2020, 26).
[29] Recall my concerns with (1) the ambiguous source of authority, (2) the shadow of power over others in prescribing behavior rather than conveying it, and (3) the stipulation of being "able" to effect changes – a prefiguration of agency as might.

Also, the idea that might makes right is internally contradictory and morally objectionable on its own. It is internally contradictory, because the meaning of might is that it imposes itself, rather than being taken up by the wills of others as right.[30] Grounding authority putatively in might is also morally wrong, because it tacitly sanctions domination. It violates the autonomy of people and the dignity of living beings.

The result of these arguments is that an acceptable form of agency is one in which authority is grounded in autonomy, that is, in social processes that make sense to people and are not impositions or abuses. *There should be no "agency" in institutions or people who rule by fear and threat. Rejecting ambivalent authority leads toward agency grounded in "autonomy" broadly – and decolonially – construed.*

Moreover, once autonomy becomes a necessary ground of authority, which is to say on the SDA of "agency," then it must flow back from agency to every actor. No actor should be heteronomous within the authoritative processes of governance bundled together under the guidance of (SDA) "agents." This reverses the delegation of authority that is constitutive of the SDA. Rather, all authority in the "agent" now depends on the autonomy of the "actors." But the autonomy of the actors is, most basically, self-governance, leading a life that makes sense to them by their guiding lights. In such self-governance, every actor is an agent in the SDA sense. *Thus, agency dissolves and flows back into the actors' own authority, and no actor is viewed as under the authority of an agent other than its own guiding lights.* The distinction set up by the SDA collapses, and we emerge with a view of actors as agents – a view, incidentally, both closer to the standard sense of "agency" in the social sciences and humanities and, ironically, in much indigenous law (Mills 2017, Boisselle 2017).

Yet once we accept the plural world ontology of worlding, we must also recognize that the autonomy of actors is open to many configurations and senses, including equivocations around what "autonomy," "actor," even a "world" are (Viveiros de Castro 2004, de la Cadena 2015). To follow out this recognition, ironically, only *radicalizes and deepens autonomy* – or the disparate notions like it in different worlds. To govern here implies self-governance so radical that it demands that worlds grow together into governance, rather than working according to a Project, Plan, or Initiative that *a priori* problematizes their authority.

Rather than confusing ourselves and creating insidious loops by internalizing ambivalent and objectionable authorities in our analyses and research, we should not lend reality to agency as might or the world as warfare in nationalistic, fundamentalist, anarchic, or economic terms (e.g. under the imperatives of "globalization"). Rather, *we should support processes that are capable of making sense to people by their own lights and that are considerate of this equal need to find a world that makes sense in others*. In

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[30] Right as opposed to might is often seen to imply rights. But a right is only such because its claims are right (i.e. morally justified).

simple terms, these processes are "anthroponomous," considering the pluriverse of the planet not just the individual autonomy of specific people to the detriment of other people and non-humans (Escobar 2020, Bendik-Keymer 2020a). *It is in the direction of seeking to articulate and to find governance in anthroponomous processes predicated from a plural world ontology that a decolonial ESG might want to head.*

But since authority and agency so reconstrued must track autonomy *between* worlds as well as within them, and then when within them, *between* people and relative beings (de la Cadena 2015), we might want to focus not on the power to act *per se*, but on the *ability to be in moral relationships*. If moral relationships grounded in autonomy should actually take precedence over discussions of agency – and this *for the sake of agency* – we might start looking for authority not in the eyes of others as is common in ESG-SL now, but in agents' moral responsibilities in relationships. *Then agents and their authority would depend on moral responsibility in their relationships.* Scholars of ESG would shift from looking for agency to *looking for responsible relationships as a guide to governance.*[31] By thus excising domination and fear from acceptable forms of agency, we might go some way to envisioning the conditions for loving worlds where agents – whatever or whoever these are – consider each other and their ways of life with bedazzlement (de la Cadena 2015) and wonder (Bendik-Keymer 2020b), being governed – not governing – *by the relationship*.

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[31] It's likely that such a shift would be of consequence for the study of Power, Democracy, and of Justice, among many other things standard to the ESG scientific plans. If only to begin with the study of Agency, however, the shift might already help us better understand better how "affiliation" can be a source of authority (Scobie et al. in Betsill, 2020, 28), "how diverse actors exercise authority" (Betsill et al. 2020, 4), and – moving beyond the Harvesting Initiative now – how "deliberative systems" within "global governance" might depend on moral relations for grounding collective responsibility (Stevenson and Dryzek 2014, chapter 2).

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