Introduction

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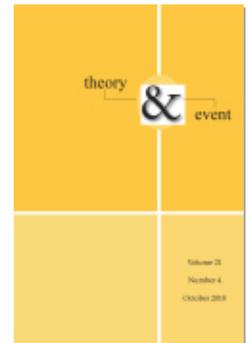
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Introduction

Kennan Ferguson and James Martel

In this issue we confront the ends of humanity: both in the sense of its goals and in the actual termination as a species. The essays in issue 21.4 engage with the limits of the human, the threat of violence and destruction and the way that humans are themselves endlessly violent and destructive, as well as the question of that limit itself, of how that limit can be conceptualized, expanded upon or actualized. The question of what to do about human ends, of how they can be altered or avoided, forms the core of this issue's essays, even where not named "biopolitics" or "termination." The authors are not, of course, of one mind on this question: some counsel a kind of acceptance of ends as such, while others engage in shaping those ends in ways that are creative, dangerous, and marked by new forms of possibility. Andrea Rossi engages with the way that philosophy has shaped our understanding of finitude, both of human subjects and of the world that surrounds us. In "The Finitude of the World: Economy and Ecology," Rossi looks at the development in the turn of the 19th century of a biopolitical, or more precisely a bioeconomic concept that conceived of limits as a set of constraints to be overcome. Turning to Bataille for a radically different understanding of finitude and limits, Rossi offers a way to rethink the human relationship to the world that sees the limit as an expression of life itself rather than as a challenge and a threat.

Daniel Cho's "Monotheism and its Vicissitudes" challenges the notion that monotheism is inherently intolerant (that is, intolerant of whatever is not itself, and any challenge to its monopoly). In a novel reading of Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*, Cho offers that Freud's reading of monotheism complicates this concept, rendering monotheism dual rather than singular and therefore inherently containing variety and difference within itself. Cho calls this a "constitutive equivocity." Comparing the Jewish form of monotheism that comes from Moses with the more "rigid" monotheism of Egypt's Akhenaten, Cho brings out the subtlety of Freud's analysis with important consequences for how we think about the meaning of singularity (the "mono" in monotheism) in theological terms.

Jens Bjering examines disaster movies in the late 20th and early 21st Centuries as a way to think the unthinkable, namely, the destruction of the world. Starting with Derrida's challenge to think of the end of

the world, specifically via a nuclear war, "Imagining the 'Unheard-Of' in Contemporary Cinema," develops a typography of films based on the degree to which the unimaginable becomes imagined. Some films promise a form of escape or renaissance and some are far bleaker but only a small handful of movies, such as Lars von Trier's *Melancholia,* actually imagine the end of the world as such. For Bjering, these movies serve as a way to allow such imagination into politics, and thus answer the challenge Derrida set down in a time when the possibility of the end of the world was just as dire as it is today, albeit in different forms.

Simon Townsend's "The Exploitation of Sacred Desire: Rethinking Georges Bataille's Political Theory," expands upon Bataille's argument that human beings are simultaneously moved to avoid the violence of nature—and especially the violent squandering of nature—even as they are also drawn to that very same thing. For Townsend, this ambiguous relationship with violence can have a destructive or a creative form. The creative form, a recognition of what Townsend calls "sacred desire" does not avert its recognition of the violent squandering of life and nature but engages with it creatively and in ways that "[do] not fall apart in the face of horror," (to quote Bataille). Looking at work such as that of J.G. Ballard, Townsend suggests how this can be done and what consequences this might have for questions of politics.

Ben Turner sees externality to human action in the ways both science and ideology rely on the claim to "necessity." Louis Althusser proposed that science and ideology oppose one another, but Turner sees in their operations a recognition of the intertwining of non-dogmatic and non-correlationist forms. Both Quentin Meillassoux and Catherine Malabou note that necessity and contingency are not antonyms but in fact operate in relation to one another. Combining their critiques of structuralism and post-structuralism allows a recognition of how science (not in its method, but in its practices) promotes the production of knowledge. "Science and Ideology Revisited: Necessity, Contingency and the Critique of Ideologies in Meillassoux and Malabou," thus takes from Marx the rejection of fideism in favor of both the necessity of contingency and the contingency of necessity (in Meillassoux's words).

Ivan Manokha also returns to Marx to transform him. What Manokha terms" platform capital," in his essay "Surveillance: The DNA of Platform Capital," highlights a new intersection of information and politics. This kind of informational politics is concerned less with the particulars of "big data" than with the architectures of the platforms upon which such data circulate. Using the recent case of the company Cambridge Analytica, Manokha shows how the harvesting of personal information has transformed capitalism itself, decentering value through production and replacing it with the capacity to predictively oversee consumption. When this is done in the open (as in

the case of Google or Amazon), its power is even greater; the outrage which greeted Cambridge Analytica mostly concerned the secretiveness of the process, not the ability to remobilize data itself.

Informational politics has also constricted and constrained the life of First Nations peoples, but Matthew MacLellan argues that certain forms of biopolitics have the potential to resist these pressures. The Canadian government has spent the past half-century attempting to transform Indigenous people into liberal subjects: individuated individuals whose rights are retained only in their own specific legal persons. In contrast, MacLellan shows, using the aggregative and collective modes of informational management central to the contemporary biopolitical state, First Nations have been able to demand a collective legal recognition. Where the infamous 1969 "White Paper" attempted to strip Indigenous people of their historical rights and communal identity, the aggregations of "population" which biopolitical formulations create can continue to enable the political engagement with Native Nations.

The final essays in this issue are part of a symposium held under the auspices of the Maxwell Chair at the University of Utah. *Theory & Event* is honored to host this location of contentious and revealing annual debate, where political theorists share emerging scholarship. These engagements are then debated and critiqued by two other theorists, providing a rich insight into the future of the discipline. Thomas L. Dumm here presents his provocation "On the Persistence of the Human," to which William E. Connolly and Matthew Scherer each respond. Here too, the question of the human, its limits and its possibilities, is the central question that these theorists engage.

Issue 21.4 concludes with five book reviews: John Protevi reviews William E. Connolly's *Aspirational Fascism: The Struggle for Multifaceted Democracy under Trumpism*; Kathy E. Ferguson reviews Clare Hemmings' *Considering Emma Goldman: Feminist Political Ambivalence and the Imaginative Archive*; Michael J. Shapiro reviews Fred Moten's *Black and Blur: Consent not to be a Single Being*; Oliver Davis reviews Davide Panagia's *Rancière's Sentiments*; and, Donald V. Kingsbury reviews Geoff Mann and Joel Wainwright's *Climate Leviathan: A Political Theory of Our Planetary Future*.