






Twinning the Pandemic and the Anthropocene: Crises, Challenge and Conciliation in the Anxious Witnessing of Nonhuman Agency
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Twinning the Pandemic and the Anthropocene: Crises, Challenge and Conciliation in the Anxious Witnessing of Nonhuman Agency

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Abstract

This paper seeks to situate the anxieties engendered by the COVID-19 pandemic within the framework of the Anthropocene to analyse the multi-faceted ramifications of human and nonhuman interaction. By connecting this ongoing global crisis of human health with the politics of climate change, it attempts to read the forgotten agency of the nonhuman microbe in the light of the rude disruption of the traditional understandings of biopolitics (where bare life has taken centre stage) and the difficulties it has brought in bridging the rift between abstract and concrete information, leading to the scapegoating of victims. It ends with the suggestion of preparation for greener futures by imagining human health within planetary health instead of an anxious wait for a return to pre-pandemic times.

Keywords: pandemic, Anthropocene, biopolitics, nonhuman, health.

What is the nature of the microbial sea, constantly lapping at the shores of man's dominion?

—Richard M. Krause, *The restless tide: The persistent challenge of the microbial world*, 1981

Problematizing the Pandemic Through the Anthropocene

The agency of the nonhuman is a leitmotif of the global tragedy that is the COVID-19 pandemic. It seems to reverse the traditional episteme of biopolitics, with many governments hesitant to release statistics used to wield control and call into question the exploitative and enervated institutions of capitalist healthcare. From epidemiologists to stock brokers, philosophers to quack doctors, it has not failed to stimulate imagination and reason in the lack of comprehension of this novel catastrophe. Nor has it escaped the purview of scholars working at the intersections of environment and politics who are obviously interested in this planetary event with its genesis in the natural world. It is not easy and perhaps oversimplistic to try and establish causal links between the pandemic and environmental change. But when connections are made between man's extractivism and loss of biodiversity, thereby increasing human exposure to zoonotic threats (O'Callaghan-Gordo & Antó, 2020), it does not seem unreasonable to invoke the anxieties of the Anthropocene to understand the undertows of the ongoing pandemic. Conversely, the crises

engendered by COVID-19 foregrounds the socio-political differentiation that is entangled with the complex human and nonhuman interaction of the Anthropocene.

Chemist Paul J. Crutzen and marine science specialist Eugene F. Stoermer first designated the Anthropocene as the commencement of a novel geological era (Chakrabarty, 2009) where the human is designated as a “geologic earth-writer within a material inscriptive lexicon” (Yusoff, 2016, p. 14). It posits changes brought about by human actions, namely burning of fossil fuels and activities like deforestation, that are further irritating the already unstable environment of planet Earth which makes human existence possible. Although the time of origin of the Anthropocene is still being debated, popular scientific opinion has suggested that a mid-twentieth century marker is stratigraphically ideal (Biello, 2015). It points to what is termed as the Great Acceleration, the onset of hyper development aided by industrial capitalism after the end of the two World Wars that continues to simultaneously safeguard and threaten human life at the expense of planetary health. In its traditional usage, the Anthropocene not only places humans in antagonistic opposition to nature, his activities read as pushing nonhuman agency to oblivion, it also implies re-writing man as nature, albeit contradictorily keeping man and nature separate, and draws man as a primary geomorphic agent capable of responsible domination of the world (Steffen et. al, 2007). Yusoff (2016) strongly challenges this proclamation. “As if the world originated for the conscience of man” (p. 17), she argues, “rather than the pleasure of snails or the proliferation of bacterial ingestations over millennia, or the shuffling of pebbles and erratic boulders, as if the genesis of the world was for ‘us’ alone” (p. 17). Seen in this light, the pandemic both cracks through the artificial binary between man and nature by reinstating man’s limitations against nature’s unpredictable whimsy and the profound capability of nonhuman microbes to infiltrate human bodies, while remaining invisible and often undetectable. It makes the Anthropocene more visible not simply as an epoch of man’s dramatic alteration of biodiverse habitats but how such changes can increase the chances of unpredictable and dangerous encounters with nonhuman species.

Alberro (2020) proposes that apart from making us reckon with the inextricable links between “wildlife trafficking, ecological despoliation and human health” (para. 4), the virus challenges our narrow definition of the “collective ‘we’” (para. 8), impelling us to admit incalculable nonhuman entities into our fold. This ruptures the common-sense understandings of Self and Other, where the latter has always been used as a master identity to define non-white people, women and queer identities. While it has been naive to psychologically separate the virus as that Other who leaks through another Other, the natural nonhuman world, considering it has travelled with us across the world in suitcases, aeroplanes, trains, sneezes among other things, and how despite worldwide inoculations and debates of achieving herd immunity there is growing consensus that one has to start learning to live with the microbe at least for the time being (Charumilind et al., 2021), it can prove fallacious to club together all humans under an undifferentiated level of suffering.

Before analysing the socio-political crises triggered by the virus, it would be appropriate to go a step ahead in understanding the far-reaching implications of its connection with another catastrophe that looms not very far in the future. As human health is inextricably tied with the environment, global warming bodes alarming signals for the already ill. A recent study in the United States demonstrates a correlation between prolonged intake of polluted air and higher COVID-19 mortality rates (Wu et al., 2020). By ignoring climate change, governments could further

increase the burden of their crumbling healthcare systems by aiding in the exacerbation of illnesses, especially at a time when the pandemic has been producing long haulers with complex physiological, psychological and cognitive issues (Brooks, 2022). Horn (2021) has drawn attention to the problematic twinning of the pandemic and the Anthropocene, remarking that the latter can be read “as a framework facilitating the course of the crisis” (p. 130). Without the Great Acceleration, that has aggressively led to both necessary and unnecessary modes of hyper global-mobility, the pandemic would have possibly remained an epidemic and contained without causing global havoc. Latour has termed the pandemic a “dress rehearsal” (2020, para. 1) for the climate collapse that the Anthropocene is leading us to. Likewise, the pandemic has been visualized as “neither a purely natural disaster nor a purely social one” (Horn, 2021, p. 131), implying that along with its contested nonhuman origins, humans are the carriers of contagion. The epistemic similarities between COVID-19 and climate change reveal that:

Both are escalations following a long latency period and suddenly surging upwards. In the case of Covid-19 this escalation took place at a breakneck speed. Not years, but days decided the course of the curve – leading to rising infection rates and deaths, overburdened health care systems, stress on vital infrastructure and brutal economic consequences. The combination of tipping points, the domino effects of collapsing systems, to which climate scientists keep alerting us, are confirmed by the pandemic in a textbook manner. Covid-19 demonstrates how everything is connected: infection rates affect the world of work, consumption and health care, which in turn affect national budgets, global supply chains, production processes and labor markets. These linkages recognize neither the boundaries of nature versus society nor national or continental divides within a globally networked world. (Horn, 2021, p. 131)

The consequences that climate change could have in the long run are drastically sped up as a dystopian nightmare by the pandemic. In an interview with Reid Frazier (2020), environmental reporter and writer Emily Atkin has jarringly remarked that COVID-19 is “like climate change on steroids”. The tipping points or what can be called “hard-to-predict moments of dramatic change in a complex self-regulating system” (Horn, 2021, p. 126) for the virus has been the “emergence of new, more transmissible virus variants, each of which [has led] to qualitatively fiercer challenges to humanity” (Bergholtz, 2022, para. 6). In the case of climate, tipping points like permafrost melting releasing ancient microbes from deep freeze (Goudarzi, 2016), changing ocean currents, deforestation, their combined effects, their magnified feedback loops related with each other, coupled with a 3.5 degree rise in global temperature could portend doom for our entire species (Bergholtz, 2022). Humans have brushed their shoulders with pandemics and epidemics since the practice of agriculture and the taming of animals for domestic purposes (Chakrabarty, 2021). Agriculture with its consequent domestication of animals facilitated “the evolution of animal pathogens into human pathogens” (Wolfe et al., 2007, p. 281). But the alarming rise of infectious diseases “were once separated by centuries, or at least many decades” (Morens et. al, 2020, as cited in Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 327). As we are moving deeper into the Anthropocene, “Human-caused ecological pressures and disruptions are bringing animal pathogens ever more into contact with human populations, while human technology and behavior are spreading those pathogens ever more widely and quickly” (Quammen, 2012, p. 40). Within 17 years since 2003, there have been outbreaks of at least five probable pandemics including SARS (severe acute

respiratory syndrome), H1N1 (influenza), chikungunya, Zika and a pandemic like hold of Ebola over several African countries (Morens et al., 2020, as cited in Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 328). This leads to the reasonably uneasy and fearful implication that “we have entered a pandemic era” (Morens & Fauci, 2020, p. 1077). What follows next is a brief attempt at comprehending the socio-political ramifications of the crises begotten by the pandemic.

Crises of Biopolitics: The Domino Effect

In this peculiar moment when the nonhuman virus has led to the willing (or unwilling) incarceration of societies under lockdown and unprecedented, protracted states of emergency have come to define global politics, many thinkers have sought explanations in Foucauldian notions of biopolitics to ground the present situation (Chandler, 2020a). Biopolitics refers to modern governance through biopower which means “an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations” (Foucault, 1978, p. 140). The core feature of biopolitical thought is the connection of politics and life, how life is to be politically governed as well as secured (Chandler, 2020a). Here, in the process of hierarchical, top-down formulation of life, as Agamben (1998) has stated, there emerges a divide between zoe, life as bare physical survival and bios, the privileged sphere of politics that considers the former expendable and malleable. Bare life, seen as powerless and inert, is either kept out of the sphere of politics or counted in as an entity to be civilized, which in turn endorses the hierarchies and coercions of power (Agamben, 1998). However, as Chandler (2020a, para. 2) has aptly remarked, the traditional “biopolitical critique of governance as the control and manipulation of life” fails in the face of the pandemic where the sick human body takes centre stage. Quarantining of the topmost people in power (like the UK prime minister) is a key affirmation of the overlooked fact that bare life and its governance do not actually separate themselves as natural and social artifice of existence as is imagined (Chandler, 2020a). This necessitates “new forms of Anthropocene authoritarianism [that] require going beyond biopolitical understandings” (Chandler, 2020a, Introduction section) of modern governance.

The agency of the nonhuman has been overtly revealing the structural inequalities of biopolitics that are usually treated as business-as-usual by setting off a chain of domino effects that have impacted every human institution imaginable. While the new “ethics of withdrawal” (Bargués, 2020, para. 5) implemented most explicitly through blanket imposition of lockdowns has been appreciated and obeyed by many like puritanical vows—the consequence being a worldwide rise in the work from home culture—it has further pushed the poor and the disabled towards the edge of jeopardy (Ram & Yadav 2021; Shakespeare et al., 2021). As the privileged have sought refuge in the domestic sphere, purchasing essential resources online, utilizing the explosion of commodified digitization, the subaltern whose daily source of meagre income is based on socialization, has succumbed to economic pressures. Butler (2020), in catching the pulse of the crises, poignantly remarks that though the pandemic “brings home the fact that we are implicated in a shared world” (para. 1), “[the] shared world is not equally shared” (para. 3). This awareness makes the Anthropocene a social agent and sovereign authority. It informs about man’s shared responses in the face of emergencies and the myopia he faces while being decentred by a nonhuman entity.

This viral takeover of human activities cannot be explained away by state authoritarianism as “we are collectively playing a caricatured form of the figure of *biopolitics* that seems to have come straight out of a Michel Foucault lecture” (Latour, 2020, para. 4). There is no easy parallel with previous repressive regimes (Chandler, 2020a) and placing the value of bare life over economic progress is a unique outcome of this calamity. Chandler (2020a) has remarked that “If we are the security threat as well as the subjects to be secured, then the separations of biopolitics can no longer hold” (para. 11). The global shutdowns leading to collapse of businesses and industries, the retreat of government officials to virtual screens, the loss of jobs leading to massive unemployment, the exodus of labourers to perish in oblivion, the frightening breakdown of healthcare systems are all outcomes not so much of blatantly resolute, cruel government systems eager to showcase their inadequacies but ones that fail immensely to counter-provide when the Anthropocene wrests human authority, undermining its “monopoly on agency” (Alberro, 2020, para. 6). The nonhuman strikes bare life and like dominoes, human institutions topple one after the other. The unsurprising parallel between the pandemic and climate change lies in their impact on vulnerable populations. While COVID-19 has gravely worsened the plight of migrant workers, with abrupt termination of their contracts or sudden repatriation without proper protocol (International Labour Organisation, 2021), the climate crisis affects the world’s poorest people whose culpability in the climate crisis is the least (Nishio, 2021). The crises in biopolitics engendered by the nonhuman has compounded systemic inequalities that will not go away anytime soon.

On the one hand, this catastrophe may reveal our unquestioning subservience to science operating under capitalist systems to make our planet subservient to human needs. Yet on the other hand, it is also a disaster of unheeding scientific warnings similar to naysaying climate change despite documented evidence. About fifteen years ago, a group of scientists in Hong Kong foreshadowed a crisis related to coronaviruses and warned that they were “well known to undergo genetic recombination” (Cheng et al., 2007, p. 683) which could lead to potential outbreaks in the future. To understand the inability of humans to heed warning signs, Parham (2020) takes the cue from Dipesh Chakrabarty in viewing the ideological bifurcation of mankind sharpened by the Anthropocene: the Latin homo versus the Greek Anthropos. While homo acts through reasonable, purpose-driven social consciousness, Anthropos acts callously with self-serving cumulative force (Parham, 2020). The failure of homo to hold back Anthropos “is why global warming, pollution or mass extinction (animal or human) may be difficult to stop” (Parham, 2020, para. 2).

The sense of fatalism unleashed by the nonhuman, accelerated by the Anthropos, has broken the backbones of human institutions operating under the agenda of biopolitical telos from which the modern man derives his place in the social order. Since the nonhuman does not discriminate in infecting individuals, despite socio-economic hierarchies, our biological vulnerability puts us at par. Thus, biopolitics has to be imagined differently from here on. We can no longer inquire about another’s condition “with complete indifference to the virus” (Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 336). The no holds barred escalation of biopower or biopolitics for profit and pleasure has led to a “crisis in the governance of human lives, a crisis of bio-power itself” (Chakrabarty, 2021, p. 336). Some of the complex challenges stemming from this dire situation shall be briefly explored in the next segment.

The Abstract and the Concrete: Challenges of Assimilation

In visualizing the pandemic as a temporal prison of a crisis of health alone, there is a danger of overlooking the humanitarian and ecological predicament that still looms ahead of us. The nonhuman's perverse interaction with human societies has unleashed myriad challenges that have rippled through the fabric of our globally interconnected existence. Apart from foregrounding the urgent need to drastically improve healthcare, it has brought to light the underappreciated role of health workers (or workers for that matter), psychological and physiological issues resulting from or compounded by lockdowns, the rise of deadly misinformation, the vulnerability of marginalized populations, overt racism, xenophobia and unprecedented economic collapse. In this global cacophony, nature too has come into focus. This has specifically happened through a sharp contrast with the manmade world—human mobility and tourism coming to a standstill—more precisely termed as the “anthropause” by Christian Rutz, a behavioural ecologist and his team (Anthes, 2022, para. 9), to situate the Great Pause in context of the conspicuous slowdown of human activity and its impact upon flora and fauna (Samurović, 2021).

Studies on the anthropause are still trying to reckon with the contradictory impacts of human isolation upon planetary health. Scientists have seen improvements in the quality of water, the decrease of noise pollution on land and below the sea, and the recovery of habitats interrupted by humans (Anthes, 2022). But with regard to animals, the effects have been varied. While the anthropause has allowed species biodiversity to improve (Anthes, 2022), showing a sharp decrease in road accidents of wild animals namely deer, bears and mountain lions, urban dwelling animals like monkeys, gulls and rats barely managed to eat with the closing of restaurants and absence of tourists (Samurović, 2021). The dual role played by humanity becomes more apparent when one studies the pandemic's impact on a place like Gough Island located in the South Atlantic Ocean, a crucial habitat for vulnerable sea birds (Anthes, 2022). While the pandemic postponed a project in the island to cull out giant mice that prey and feed on live bird hatchlings, making it difficult for new-borns to survive, the presence of those mice in that area are probably due to their arrival with nineteenth-century sailors, and ironically human intervention is now called for to take the predators away (Anthes, 2022).

Such diachronic and synchronic aspects of man's interaction with nature, seen through the framework of the Anthropocene, point to his potentialities both as a bringer of harm and a conscientious nurturer of ecosystems. But these studies are too abstract to be unravelled by ordinary citizens enmeshed in socio-political emergencies, unaided by capitalist governments who are either ambiguous about the dangers of climate change or prefer denial over data. As many as “139 elected officials in the 117th Congress” of the US refute “established scientific consensus” about global warming and its connection with human activity (Drennen & Hardin, 2021, para. 1). It comes as no surprise that these members have gained “more than \$61 million in lifetime contributions from the coal, oil, and gas industries” (Drennen & Hardin, 2021, para. 6). Politics becomes a barrier between scientific knowledge and public awareness, creating a challenge of translating abstract information into concrete discourses that percolate down to every social stratum. After all, wide-ranging impacts and connections between the pandemic and climate change are more easily discernible in the abstract “maps, graphs, bar charts” (Parham, 2020, para. 2) than in tangible matter visible to the naked eye. In the face of overwhelming threat, it is no

accident that contradictory and misleading circulation of misinformation that obscures scientific thinking, leads to fearful and paranoid mythmaking that finds an outlet in the creation of a scapegoat.

Incomprehension of the nonhuman microbe and the inability to situate the pandemic in a larger chain of human disruptions of biodiversity, led to the stigmatization of Asian people across the world as soon as the epicentre of the virus was tentatively located in the wet markets of Wuhan. Asians residing in the West have been “stabbed, beaten, bullied, spit on, pushed, harassed, and vilified based on the false assumption that they are to blame for the spread of COVID-19” (Lee & Yadav, 2020, as cited in Fan et al., 2021, p. 562). In India, COVID-19 has further bolstered Islamophobia after Indian authorities connected dozens of cases of its outbreak to a group of Muslim missionaries who gathered for their annual conference in Delhi in March, 2020 (Perrigo, 2020). Very soon fabricated videos of “the missionary group spitting on police and others quickly went viral on social media, exacerbating an already dangerous atmosphere for Muslims” (Perrigo, 2020, para. 2). Not unlike the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s when already stigmatized gay people were thrown out of their homes or left to die in isolation, seen as doubly sick, deviant and contagious (Anthony, 2021), the ongoing pandemic in giving a stigmatizing human face to the nonhuman, fails to comprehend the actual and larger stakes that this catastrophe seems to suggest. Although COVID-19 may have originated in Wuhan, “some scientists argue that its true origin story lies in the disruption of ecosystems” (Gee & Anguiano, 2020, para. 3). This is a challenging message to unravel, especially when misinformation and post-truth seem more acceptable and appealing in our contemporary scenario. But what needs to be more urgently considered is the environmental disruption that a handful are causing which puts everybody at risk. A recent report suggests that “The richest 1%...are by far the fastest-growing source of emissions” (Roston et al., 2022, para. 7). Unlike previous climate change studies that judged pollution on the basis of how much greenhouse gases a country emitted, it has now become essential to look at evidence that suggests “that the inequality between rich and poor people’s emissions within countries now overwhelms the country-to-country disparities” (Roston et al., 2022, para. 3). The challenge therefore of making links between the pandemic and the Anthropocene is not merely one that demands a dynamic, multidisciplinary approach; it is also in simplifying the connections for the masses without losing their complexities.

The nonhuman threat also poses a challenge to what can be considered (civil) rights by blurring the line between rights and privileges. As the virus becomes a decisive agent in top-down formulations of what constitutes bios and zoe, the favouring of one kind of life (or lifestyle) over another implies “privileges are exercised at the cost of...vulnerabilities” (Chandler, 2020b, para. 8). This becomes more concretely discernible when one sees for instance vacationers littering places or crowds thronging public places, defying lockdown restrictions, enacting a hierarchical choice that seems to imply “their bios matters more than the zoe of society’s most vulnerable” (Hull, 2020, para. 6). When raised to a principle, it “comes carelessly close to saying that those vulnerable lives don’t matter, or are expendable” (Hull, 2020, para. 6). Thus, the Anthropocene contests our sensibilities of independent existence and challenges us to gauge the “unintended and indirect

consequences of our actions on others and the planet itself" (Chandler, 2020b, para. 3). The much bigger concern of improving human health for the long run, which will collapse in the absence of planetary health as visualized in the figure below (Mackay, 2020), must replace the constant preoccupation over the frantic wait for things to return back to normal.

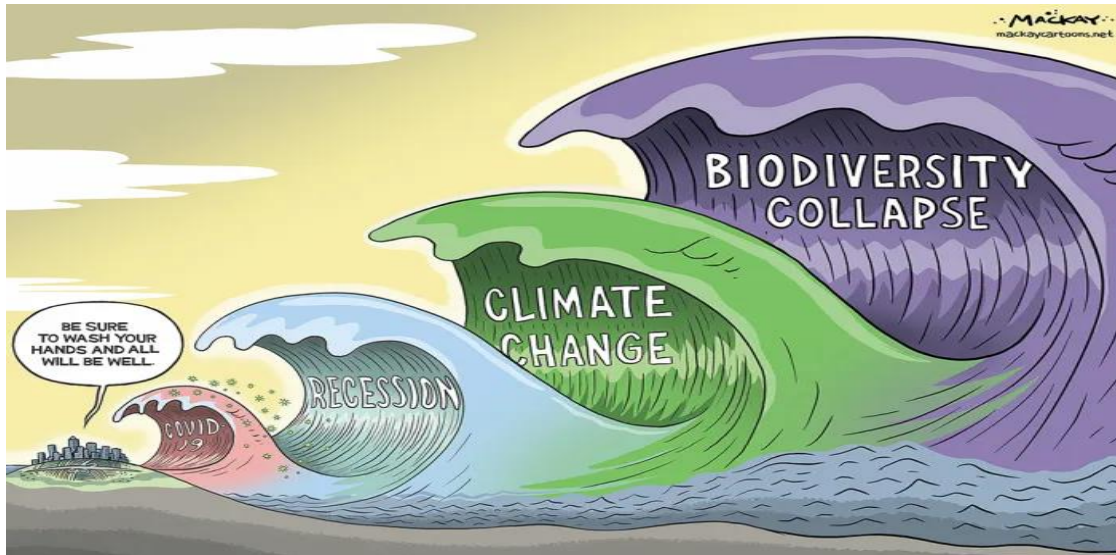


Figure 1: By G. Mackay, 2020. Links between COVID-19, recession, climate change and biodiversity collapse.

Human Health Within Planetary Health: The Pulse of Conciliation

Gazing at the pandemic induced crises through the Anthropocene enables us to deeply consider suturing the health of man and the wellbeing of the planet, where both are politically situated in the discursive-material discourses. A zoonotic spillover like coronavirus that respects no manmade boundaries impels us to question "'human exceptionalism' that maintains dominance over other species of nature" (Ray, 2021, p. 29), thereby turning us into anxious witnesses, observing the rupture of the human and nonhuman binary that technocapitalism thrives upon in its Icarian pursuit of development at any cost that could endanger the human species itself. The pandemic provides an opportunity through catastrophe in introspecting how every human life is interconnected despite race, class and gender among other human parameters, apart from being unpredictably entangled with microbes that have existed and thrived on the planet for much longer than the appearance of mankind. This presents novel priorities for global responsibility and accountability. As Harari (2021) has remarked:

Even the richest people in the most developed countries have a personal interest to protect the poorest people in the least developed countries. If a new virus jumps

from a bat to a human in a poor village in some remote jungle, within a few days that virus can take a walk down Wall Street. (“Anti-virus for the world” section, para. 4)

The vulnerable also cannot be considered expendable as it is the community health workers, sanitation workers, volunteers, ambulance drivers that have been standing at the frontline alongside doctors, nurses, police and politicians, relaying constantly evolving information to civilians and working against tremendous pressure and burnout to save human lives. The virus has given us a warning to drastically improve healthcare systems and prepare for future emergencies if they are to occur.

In revealing the impacts of hyper globalization and the loss of biodiversity, the pandemic “collapses the micro-world of the invisible virus and the macro dimensions of the hyper-visible climate change” (Ray, 2021, p. 21). Roy (2021) has visualized the pandemic as a gateway between one world and the next, where we encounter a choice between carrying on with “dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies” (last para.) or prepare ourselves “to imagine another world” (last para.). Indeed, it has become plausible to imagine the intersection of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3 and 13, i.e., good health and climate action respectively, that have been proposed among other objectives by the UN in 2015 to be achieved by 2030 (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, n.d.).

Situating the pandemic within the Anthropocene also enables us to plan ahead for posterity to prepare for the upcoming global catastrophe—the climate collapse—that is snowballing to unleash its cataclysmic potential upon the planet. As Kell has astutely observed, the collective lessons we can learn from this crisis is specifically relevant to the youth as they “will inherit the political and economic systems that are now being reshaped in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and their future is being mortgaged with enormous debt as governments are mobilizing unprecedented stimuli packages to avoid a deep recession” (2020, para. 2). A global restructuring of the preference of growth, irrespective of the cost, a product of the mindset born out of industrialization (Kell, 2020) is required to pave the way for alternative modes of production that promote ecocentrism and values human rights over hierarchical privileges. We are impelled to acknowledge that “healthy societies and markets depend on the health of the natural environment” (Kell, 2020, para. 4) and we are still worryingly vulnerable in the face of nonhuman threats. Burgio, by relying on the widely circulated editorial of Richard Hurton, the editor-in-chief of *The Lancet*, has cast the pandemic as a syndemic, implying that “diseases manifest themselves in different forms because they interact with each other relative to social and economic factors specific to a given population” (2021, para. 14). Burgio (2021) has emphasised that the lethality of the virus is exacerbated by ultrafine particulate matter (UP)—a major source of air pollution in industrialized cities—which increases the severity of ailments of vulnerable groups. The elderly for instance inhabiting the Po Valley of Italy, people with chronically inflamed arteries that predominantly includes those with obesity, diabetes, systemic atherosclerosis, residing in industrialized Western cities, precisely meaning most people with endothelial dysfunction who are constantly exposed to UP and other sources of pollutants are more affected by the virulence of COVID-19 (Burgio, 2021). This clearly reflects that human health can no longer be divorced from ecological wellbeing and the pulse of recovery ought to consider sustainable development in the

long-term for the sake of imagining green futures that are habitable rather than pushing ourselves blindly into the deepest recesses of the Anthropocene where environmental apocalypse could mar our very existence.

[Not] a Conclusion

Instead of putting a lid on the panic and fear engendered by the multi-faceted crises of the pandemic, it is more apposite than ever before to keep aside our scepticism of scientific prognosis and globally join hands in this sensitive stalemate posed by the Anthropocene to reimagine the lost connection of mankind with nature and become conscious agents in yoking the idea of progress with sustainable development. Because, what had been relegated as absurd in real-life—microbes overtaking humanity—to dystopian science fiction, is now our concrete reality. Denial as a response is impossible considering the universal upheaval we are still trying to grapple with. This is a new ontological pause in an androcentric, capitalist world that had forgotten the agency of the nonhuman and placed human life at the centre, with little accountability for dwindling forests, perishing flora and fauna, and rising temperatures. If we merely think of stepping outside the pandemic as a conclusion to a global tragedy and seek a return back to pre-pandemic times, without assimilating the inequalities of modern existence and actively engaging with the politics of climate change, then we should prepare ourselves to be constantly blindsided by the Anthropocene and trade our attempts at salvation with the role of anxious witnessing. If we are to thrive, we must learn to take even what seems like implausible contingencies seriously, when backed by hardcore scientific estimations and begin our preparations for greener futures from there on.

Declaration of Conflicts of Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest.

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