From the Virocene to the Lovecene epoch: multispecies justice as critical praxis for Virocene disruptions and vulnerabilities

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Abstract

In the Virocene epoch, global pandemics such as COVID-19 disrupt the world order organized by capitalism and racial privilege, making clear the unsustainability of 'normal' ways of organizing both society and nature. Despite its failure to address these disruptions, the existing capitalist-racist system attempts to reproduce itself, posing greater risks of disease, inequalities, and injustice to the most vulnerable human and nonhuman populations. The Virocene epoch makes these workings visible, and challenges both hegemonic and counterhegemonic ways of organizing human–nature relations. Political ecology requires new emancipatory theoretical-political strategies firmly grounded in a theory of justice that embodies social and ecological rights in order to imaginatively produce new ways to counter such social and ecological crises arising from the global process of capitalism and viral activities. To this end, political ecology must develop a universal perspective on the justice-rights-power nexus with an explicit moral basis to enhance its emancipatory praxis against the globalizing challenges of the Virocene, without reproducing existing vulnerabilities and without dismissing hegemonic and counter-hegemonic narratives in the name of otherness, difference, universalism or sameness. In this article, I reconfigure the justice-rights-power nexus to dismantle oppression and injustice in pursuit of regenerative solutions. I chart an alternate 'multispecies theory of justice' building upon love as an embodiment of the moral foundations for critical multispecies justice praxis, which produces another world of diverse, interconnected communities committed to social and ecological wellbeing. The 'Lovecene' is an aspirational planetary-order shaped by multispecies (human and non-human) equality and justice that transcends the anthropocentricism of current periodizations of planetary-level social and ecological change. It attempts to overcome the limitations of many political-ecological theories of justice centered on notions of 'right order', 'fairness', 'distribution', and 'opportunities and capabilities', thereby successfully addressing the sociological and ecological vulnerabilities of the Virocene.

Key Words: Virocene; political economy of health; capitalism; racism, vulnerability, pandemic

Résumé

À l'époque du Virocène, des pandémies mondiales telles que COVID-19 perturbent l'ordre mondial du capitalisme et des privilèges raciaux, mettant en évidence la non-durabilité des modes «normaux» d'organisation de la société et de la nature. Malgré son incapacité à faire face à ces perturbations, le système capitaliste-raciste existant tente de se reproduire, ce qui pose de plus grands risques de maladie, d'inégalités et d'injustice aux populations humaines et non humaines les plus vulnérables. L'époque virocène rend ces rouages visibles et remet en question les façons hégémoniques et contre-hégémoniques d'organiser les relations homme-nature. L'écologie politique nécessite de nouvelles stratégies théorico-politiques émancipatrices fermement ancrées dans une théorie de la justice, qui incarne les droits sociaux et écologiques afin de produire de manière imaginative de nouvelles façons de contrer ces crises sociales et écologiques résultant du processus mondial du capitalisme et des activités virales. À cette fin, l'écologie politique doit développer une perspective universelle sur le lien justice-droits-pouvoir avec une base morale explicite pour renforcer sa praxis

émancipatrice contre les défis globalisants du Virocène, sans reproduire les vulnérabilités existantes et sans rejeter les récits hégémoniques et contre-hégémoniques au nom de l'altérité, de la différence, de l'universalisme ou de la similitude. Dans cet article, je reconfigure le lien justice-droits-pouvoir pour démanteler l'oppression et l'injustice dans la recherche de solutions régénératrices. Je trace une «théorie multispécifique de la justice» alternative, fondée sur l'amour en tant qu'incarnation des fondements moraux de la pratique critique de la justice multispécifique, qui produit un autre monde de communautés diverses et interconnectées engagées pour le bien-être social et écologique. Le «Lovecene» est un monde ambitieux idéal, façonné par l'égalité et la justice multispécifiques (humaines et non humaines) qui transcendent l'anthropocentrisme des périodisations actuelles des changements sociaux et économiques au niveau planétaire. Il tente de surmonter les limites de nombreuses théories politico-écologiques de la justice centrées sur les notions de «bon ordre»,«équité»,«distribution» et «opportunités et capacités», permettant ainsi de répondre avec succès aux vulnérabilités sociologiques et écologiques du Virocène.

Mots clés: Virocène; économie politique de la santé; capitalisme; racisme, vulnérabilité, pandémie

Resumen

En la nueva era del Viroceno, las pandemias mundiales como COVID-19 interrumpen el orden mundial organizado por el capitalismo y el privilegio racial, dejando en claro la insostenibilidad de las formas "normales" de organizar la sociedad y la naturaleza. A pesar de no abordar estas perturbaciones, el sistema capitalista-racista existente intenta reproducirse, presentando mayores riesgos de enfermedades, desigualdades e injusticias para las poblaciones humanas y no humanas más vulnerables. La era del Viroceno hace visibles estos hechos y desafía las formas hegemónicas y contrahegemónicas de organizar las relaciones entre la naturaleza y los humanos. La ecología política requiere nuevas estrategias teórico-políticas emancipadoras firmemente basadas en una teoría de la justicia que encarne los derechos sociales y ecológicos para producir imaginativamente nuevas formas de contrarrestar las crisis sociales y ecológicas que surgen del proceso global del capitalismo y las actividades virales.Para este fin, la ecología política debe desarrollar una perspectiva universal sobre el nexo justicia-derechos-poder con una base moral explícita para mejorar su praxis emancipatoria contra los desafíos globalizadores del Viroceno, sin reproducir las vulnerabilidades existentes y sin descartar las narrativas hegemónicas y contrahegemónicas en nombre de la "otredad", diferencia, universalismo o igualdad.En este artículo, reconfiguraré el nexo justicia-derechos-poder para desmantelar la opresión y la injusticia en busca de soluciones regenerativas. Trazo una "teoría de la justicia multi-especies" alternativa que se basa en el amor como una encarnación de los fundamentos morales para la práctica crítica de la justicia multi-especies, que produce otro mundo de comunidades diversas e interconectadas comprometidas con el bienestar social y ecológico. El Amorceno es un orden planetario aspiracional conformado por la igualdad y la justicia multi-especies (humanas y no humanas) que trascienden el antropocentrismo de las periodizaciones actuales del cambio social y económico a nivel planetario. Intenta superar las limitaciones de muchas teorías político-ecológicas de la justicia centradas en las nociones de 'orden correcto', 'equidad', 'distribución' y 'oportunidades y capacidades', abordando con éxito las vulnerabilidades sociológicas y ecológicas del Virocene.

Palabras claves: economía política de la salud; capitalismo; racismo, vulnerabilidad, pandemia

1. Introduction

> Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love – Martin Luther King Jr., 1967.

> At the risk of sounding ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love – Che Guevara, 1965.[2]

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the world into the Virocene epoch, a period in which viral activity has evolved as a dominant force shaping human-nature relations. While viruses are "a sub-microscopic family

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[2] https://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1965/03/man-socialism.htm

of infectious agents that multiply and grow using the living cells of their hosts, causing disease in humans, animals, and plants", the "cene" in Virocene indicates newness, or novelty, signifying a historically unique moment of interaction between humans and eco-systems (Fernando 2020: 636). The Virocene's novelty lies in the " intensity of virogenic activity as an embodied force of nature, and in how this confronts and questions the capabilities and resilience of current political and economic models" (p. 637). The Virocene exposes the vulnerabilities in, and moral and pragmatic failures of social and ecological systems in safeguarding both social and ecological wellbeing, while underscoring "the need for purposive changes in humanity's ontological, moral, and pragmatic thought, as well as its current modes of living" (*ibid*).

As a product of racism and capitalism, the Virocene also exacerbates the unequal, negative impacts of both phenomena on vulnerable populations, as evident in recent demographic studies that show disadvantaged groups to be the most affected by the pandemic in areas around the world. The hegemonic influence of capitalism and racism in shaping human-nature relations that disproportionately impact economically and racially marginalized communities across the globe, is therefore a key target for resolving the crises exacerbated by the Virocene. Hence, the Virocene also emerges as a critical battleground for social and ecological justice, primarily directed at the capitalism-racism nexus.

In addition, environmental justice theories, originating from social movements to protect and secure social and ecological rights by persecuted minorities, offer additional insights into addressing injustices in the Virocene era. The later appropriation of the environmental justice movement by the privileged liberal middle class and its transposition into flawed 'anthropogenic' discourses on climate change, resilience, and adaptation weakened the movement's ability to challenge its capitalist and racist roots. Consequently, current discourses on environmental justice are divorced from (or not firmly grounded in) its roots: the moral basis of rights and justice, which were predominant at the beginning of the environmental justice movement.

As a field of study concerned with issues of social and ecological justice, Political Ecology (PE) contains critiques of capitalism and racism, especially the ways in which they shape human-nature relations. As a body of work, political ecology provides a fruitful perspective to think about why and how humans lost control over their 'normal' way of life in the Virocene epoch, and how humanity might regain control over the shaping of our lifeworld. It also offers critical insights into justice in the context of issues arising at the intersection of the Virocene epoch with political power, economic interests, societal norms, and emerging conflicts in human environmental relations (Albrecht 1995; Ballet, Koffi and Pelenc 2013; Di Chiro 1996; Edwards 2016; Harvey 1996; Peet and Watts 1996; McCarthy 2005; Robbins 2004; Towers 2000; Schroeder 2000). In fact, the emergence of the Virocene epoch underscores the urgency of placing dialogue on the moral basis of rights at the center of Political Ecology's interventions for social and ecological justice.

Yet, as a body of work, PE has yet to fully articulate a theory of justice that responds to the crises wrought by the Virocene. In aiming to address this gap, I articulate a natural rights–based theory of justice in this article, following a critical analysis of recent literature on justice in Political Ecology. I do not, however, intend to undertake a comprehensive review of all literature on justice and rights in PE and other related fields. Rather, my primary focus remains articulating a rights-based theory of justice to tackle existing deficiencies in PE's theories of environmental justice—especially identifying ways to address human and ecological vulnerabilities during the Virocene epoch. I have discussed these vulnerabilities at length in the first article, *The Virocene Epoch: the vulnerability nexus of viruses, capitalism and racism* (Fernando 2020). There, I underscore that impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and its interlocking synergies with capitalism and racism and the social and ecological devastation they cause are first and foremost issues of justice for both humans and nonhumans.

In this second article, I offer a multispecies theory of justice with a particular emphasis on the moral bases of the rights of human and nonhuman species for emancipatory politics, seeking to dismantle the power that capitalism and racism hold over nature-society relations, and create alternative pathways for justice. Drawing on the writings of Nicholas Wolterstorff and Martin Luther King Jr., the perspective of justice I offer in this article emphasizes the moral bases of the 'rights-justice-power nexus', with a focus on its relevance for

social and ecological justice movements addressing the vulnerabilities of the COVID-19 pandemic.[3] I also highlight the urgent need for dialogue on the moral need for a conversation on the current periodization of planetary ecological changes (Table 1), and for an intellectual and policy-focused pursuit of multispecies justice in Political Ecology.

2. Political ecology and environmental justice

Being a field of emancipatory praxis, political ecology is well-placed to articulate the terms of such a justice-rights-power nexus. From its inception, PE has engaged with how the contradictions of capitalism's appropriation of nature, and intellectual and policy responses to those contradictions impinge upon a variety of intellectual and political processes governing human/nature relations across the diverse spatial scales of the global order (O'Connor 1998; Rocheleau *et al*. 1996; Rocheleau and Nirmal 2015. See also Bookchin and Herber 2018; Enzenberger 1974). Its advances in this regard, however, suffer from a fundamental deficiency in terms of its engagement with justice.

In particular, PE's theorizations of the justice-power nexus are not firmly grounded in justice as it relates to rights, and their moral bases. When focused on rights, PE's justice-rights perspectives gravitate toward philosophical formalism, which in turn "is inadequate to establish a general equivalence with justice and rights" (Campbell 1974: 445). This limits the capacity of PE's emancipatory praxis to cope with the challenges of the Virocene Epoch. This limitation equally applies, albeit in different ways, to post-structuralist approaches, whether sympathetic and/or unsympathetic to emancipatory politics, and to culturally relativistic approaches framing 'local versus global' and difference versus 'sameness' in global environmental crises, that dominate most of the PE theories of justice (Escobar *et al.* 1998; Leff 2017; Peet and Watts 1996; Robbins 2004). Similar deficiencies are implied in criticisms of environmental justice by theorists adopting race and gender-based theoretical perspectives (Carter 2016; Pulido 2017; Pulido and De Lara 2018). These criticisms are highlighted in "abolition ecology" (Heynen 2016), which argues against the deferment of "racialized, postcolonial, and indigenous perspectives on the press and pulse of uneven development across the planet" and in the movement of feminist Political Ecology towards emergence as a separate field (Rocheleau *et al*. 1996; see discussions in Brownlow 2008; Newell 2005).

Despite the environmental justice movement's decades of activity across the world, COVID-19 continues to disproportionately impact African American and Native American communities across the United States, as well as other marginalized communities elsewhere (CDC 2020: 1). The U.S. and world economies, built on labor and land appropriated from vulnerable communities and from nature, are morally and pragmatically failing to address the vulnerabilities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic—which has also disrupted the ways in which capitalism and racism have historically organized society-nature relations (Anderson 2010; Bonacich and Alimohomed-Wilson 2011; Harrison 2001; Heggs 2015; Marable 2000; Spector 2014; West 1987).

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[3] The notion of spirituality occupies an important position in my discussion of moral bases of the nexus. I use the term *spirituality* (sometimes interchangeably with 'religion')**,** to refer to a set of beliefs that provide the moral basis for one's perspective on rights, justice, and power as manifested in the web of life. These beliefs may arise from institutionalized religion, or perhaps from an institutionalized and theologized set of beliefs and practices relating to a body of religious thought, which can mean a movement of spiritual practices away from the public rituals of institutional religion, to the private experience with a higher power within oneself (spiritual but not religious). In both cases, there is faith in certain normative ideals. People live out their ideals on a daily basis, and one's perspective of the 'rights-justice-power nexus' is always grounded in a set of normative beliefs and ideals, all of which are arguably not just equitable for humans, but also non-humans. In other words, the secular-religious binary does not mean the former is based on reason and the latter is not. *There is reason in faith and faith in reason*. Spirituality is neither very strange nor mysterious/mystical, and secularism is not always apparent and objective (for a discussion on the secular-religious binary, see Ramachandra 1996; Schneiders 2003). Thus, the ideals that govern one's view of the rights-justice-power nexus, and its impacts, must therefore be moral ones. Conflicts between religion and spirituality are a problem of justice, where their moral bases are doctrinal or arise from the way religion and spirituality are institutionalized. In this article, I primarily rely on Wolterstroff and Martin Luther King Jr's perspectives of the rights-justice-power nexus based on their theological understating of human worth and dignity, to articulate my perspective of multispecies vulnerability and justice during the Virocene era. Likewise, I also employ a clear and robust moral base in my critique of capitalism and racism as necessary for an emancipatory transition to a new era, which I term the 'Lovecene'—which is just for both humans and nonhumans.

Eocene: Climate activity is dominant and human activity is insignificant. A wide variety of climatic conditions exist across the globe without human disturbance.
Holocene: The end of the last major glacial epoch, or "Ice Age", ushers in the age of flourishing human activity. Marked by rapid population growth, technological revolutions, the rise and fall of civilizations, migration, and transition toward urban living. Human activity does not dramatically change the world and is subject to climatic cycles (Fairbridge 1968).
Plantationcene: Plantations as planetary effects of human activity. Human–nature relations are organized and disciplined through the labor practices of profit-driven plantations and extractive industries, creating enduring social hierarchies, oppression, and environmental degradation entangled with the legacies of colonialism and capitalism and the ideologies of exclusion and oppression (Haraway 2015; Tsing 2015)
Anthropocene: Humans displace the Holocene as a geological age, starting with industrialization, and human activity exerts a profound influence on the environment. Earth is set on a different trajectory that undermines its immense potential, leaving behind a biosphere depleted as never before (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000; Biermann *et al*. 2016; Castree 2016).
Capitalocene: Unlike the Anthropocene and the Holocene, the Capitalocene is geohistory rather than geological history. 'That modernity is a capitalist world-ecology. Capitalist civilization—a co-produced world ecology of capital, power, and nature': "Capitalism is, rather, best understood as a world-ecology of capital, power, and re/production in the web of life." (Moore 2015: 11). It aspires to bring planetary justice by "forging links between decarburization, democratization, decommodification to "dismantle, analytically and practically, the tyranny of Man and Nature (Moore 2017c: 54).
Chthulucene: Chthulu is a monstrous chthonic subterranean figure responsible for the intractable chaos, destruction, and suffering evident in the Plantationocene, Capitalocene, and Anthropocene. To survive on their troubled planet, humans must "stay with the trouble", reconfiguring their relations with the earth and its human and nonhuman inhabitants through responsible kin relationships (Haraway 2016b).
Gynocene: Anthropogenic geological violence is coextensive with patriarchy. Emancipatory organization of the economy and modes of governance are driven by gender-equalized and feminist-led practices (Pirici and Voinea 2015).
Virocene: Virogenic activity as a socially embodied force of nature colonizes, overpowers, and catastrophically affects humans and ecosystems, setting historically unprecedented and virtually inviolable limits on anthropogenic activities organized primarily by capitalism and racism and opening opportunities for change. Survival requires that social and ecological justice simultaneously drive not only resistance against capitalism and racism but also the creativity, imagination, and political power to organize a social and ecological wellbeing-centered world order. It is an era of resistance against, and the search for, freedom from multispecies inequalities and injustices. Emancipation from the Virocene epoch requires radical articulations of an ethical paradigm of multispecies rights, justice, and power (Fernando 2020).
Lovecene: The Lovecene is an era in which we are all in the process of perpetually becoming (to paraphrase Audre Lorde) stewards of multispecies justice. The multispecies justice-rights-power nexus of this epoch is constituted, shaped, and embodied by love. Emancipatory love simultaneously functions as the primary driver of resistance to, and dismantling of, knowledge, power and practices that are unjust towards humans and nature, and for the fostering imagination, creativity, hope and the resolve to embrace the risks necessary to pursue alternative pathways for sustainable and harmonious multispecies wellbeing. More specifically, the Lovecene is an era seeking emancipation from capitalism and racisms' dominance in the current planetary order, and navigating it towards a just and equitable multispecies coexistence.

Table 1: Planetary Epochs: from the Eocene to the Lovecene. Source: own elaboration, references given. [4]

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[4] The dominant forces of change in each of these periods (e.g. climate, human, plantation, cthuchulu, capital, and viruses) embody struggles against hegemonic ways of organizing nature-society relations, and hence, planetary periodizations. must also be understood as sites of struggle. For related critical analyses from the perspective of economic and racial justice, see Davis *et al.* (2019), Pulido and De Lara (2018) and Moore (2016a).

Through the COVID-19 pandemic, the Virocene hence reveals the impossibility of addressing the root causes of human and non-human vulnerabilities without finding alternatives to racism and capitalism (Fernando 2020; Laster Pirtle 2020; Wallis and Zhuo 2020). At its core, this is an issue of environmental injustice, arising out of the appropriation of land and labor, and the dispossession of surplus production, thereby creating suffering for both ecosystems and human communities.

Environmental justice (EJ), as a scholar-activist-field of study, has inspired the contemplation of justice at various levels of the global order and encourages resistance against injustice in the context of the diverse social and political positionalities adopted by or imposed on vulnerable populations, as well as how extra-local forces respond, accommodate, or resist local demands for justice (Walker 2012). In doing so, it addresses the intellectual and pragmatic challenges of the Virocene epoch and offers several important insights. **First**, most political ecologists are concerned with how access and control of natural resources are structured by power relations. They have sought to theorize justice using dominant perspectives of distributive justice, procedural justice, and justice from a capabilities approach. Despite "the core focus on procedural justice and the associated topic of participation" discussions of power are limited in political ecology (Svarstad and Benjaminsen 2020: 11). At the same time, PE's discussions of power are not adequately grounded in robust perspective on rights and justice and their moral bases. Political Ecologists place less emphasis on transitional justice, which consists of judicial and non-judicial measures to redress the legacies of human rights abuses—a concept dominant in conflict resolution and reconciliation literature.

The fact that inequities and vulnerabilities during the Virocene epoch are historically contingent and unevenly experienced means that transitional justice (including criminal prosecutions, truth commissions, and reparations programs) to redress legacies of human rights abuses, should occupy a central position in EJ analysis. Much EJ literature uncritically employs theories of justice from other disciplines, and there is a tendency to focus on justice at local levels and to shy away from thinking about universal forms of justice and how they connect with local forms. This tendency may be due to overdetermination or misappropriation of notions of justice by analyses that moved away from "Marxist and eco-catastrophist epistemology [in favor of] the approaches influenced by critical realism, post-structuralism and participatory development" (Forsyth 2008: 756), particularly since Piers Blaikie's seminal work in the 1980s, which focused on more "pragmatic co-production of environmental knowledge and social values" (Blaikie 1985) in the political-ecology nexus to address the needs of the most socially vulnerable people (Forsyth 2008: 759).

Second, EJ is typically analyzed from a local perspective (e.g. Morello-Frosch, Pastor and Sadd 2001; Pulido 2000; Towers 2000). The global scale of governance does not adequately explain or solve the problems of environmental justice in the local community (Adger 2001). At the same time, the social and economic vulnerabilities of the COVID-19 pandemic show the deep interconnections between multilayered and multiple forms of marginality and vulnerability, at multiple spatial scales in the global system (McCarthy 2005; Robbins 2004). Our thinking about justice needs to transcend these scales without succumbing to the traps of extreme universalism or relativism in our views of rights and justice. In this regard, Feminist Political Ecology (FPE), with its emphasis on intersectionality can provide insights, as it selects impacts on constituents including women, children, and those with disabilities. Rocheleau and Nirmal's (2015) feminist political ecology analysis has enriched thinking about environmental justice by emphasizing the importance of the gendered nature of environmental knowledge which impinges upon access to, and control over, resources in different spaces and places. This extends to issues of access and control in organizations, and social movements as well as the importance of understanding human-nature relations in everyday life through place-based thinking, research, writing, and practice.

Third, in most of the literature, justice (procedural and distributive) is valued predominantly in terms of monetary indicators derived from the market economy and structured through the formal legal system, which often disproportionately benefits privileged groups (Schroeder 2000). Degrowth economics, which problematizes the ontological foundations, rationalities, and practices of growth, rather than its absence or slow pace, has opened dialogue on rethinking justice outside the hegemonic parameters of the market economy (Büchs and Koch 2019; Kallis, Kerschner and Martinez-Alier 2012). The concept of freedom is central to perspectives of justice in a market economy and its legal system. In particular, 'freedom' involves the state

actively using its resources and power to structure and discipline diverse cultures of human-nature relations across the world to function according to the logic of capital (Harvey 1989). The state exploits religion, ethnicity, and race to confront challenges to its legitimacy which emerge from the internal contradictions of a neoliberal economy, state corruption, and peoples' demands for equal rights. Although good governance is touted as a goal of the neoliberal state, in practice, good governance that functions as the governmentality of the neoliberal economy is now curtailed by the seemingly impregnable challenges of viral activity in nature, expressed in 2020 as a global pandemic.

Finally, PE faces the following challenge: the SAR-CoV-2 virus (COVID-19) and other pathogens may evolve in natural ecosystems independent of human activity, but the socio-ecological effects of virulent pathogens and the global impact of pandemic diseases result from human-environmental relations. Hence, sensitivity to social and ecological injustice during the Virocene epoch does not necessarily mean an organic emergence of new subjectivities or a willingness to join efforts to address the root causes of vulnerabilities and injustice rooted in capitalism and local, national, and international modes of governance. Thus, the challenge we face is, "can we fundamentally adjust the modes by which we appropriate nature and arrive at more of a truce with these infections?" (Wallace *et al.* 2020).

Given these considerations, I argue for a theory of social and ecological justice that is able to assess diverse, multiscale, and multilayered human responses to social and ecological vulnerabilities in terms of their specificities and interconnectedness, as well as establish a basis for articulating progressive modes of human-nature relations. While viral pathogens are natural forces, human and ecological vulnerabilities of the Virocene are systemic; therefore, socially and ecologically friendly articulations of human-nature relations in response to the pandemic must be anchored in a theory of justice underpinned by a theory of social and ecological rights.

I feel a sense of urgency in this regard, like Martin Luther King Jr., speaking to 1,300 sanitation workers on strike against the environmental impacts of their work: "… I'm happy to live in this period [because] we have been forced to a point where we are going to have to grapple with the problems that men have been trying to grapple with through history, but the demands didn't force them to do it. Survival demands that we grapple with them [now]" (King Jr. 1968). King went on to say that "[nothing] would be more tragic than to stop at this point in the struggle. We've got to see it through" and called for people to "develop a kind of dangerous unselfishness" (*Ibid*). Such is the context for the urgent need to critically evaluate Political Ecology's engagement with justice.

A fruitful way of facilitating a dialogue on these questions involves framing them around social and ecological justice norms, and the cultures of morality that define the rights embodied in those norms. Examples of innovative dialogues are evident in new institutional forms inspired by degrowth economics, solidarity economics, social economics, cooperative societies, mutual aid societies, and critical examination of food systems against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the worldwide spread of these promising approaches is hamstrung by current processes of knowledge production in mainstream economics and history – the two disciplines used by some as ideological bases for both growth-centred neoliberal economics and racist ethnoreligious nationalism. In this respect, vulnerabilities of the Virocene epoch are also crises of academic knowledge production. Typically, scholars in disciplines critical of mainstream economics do not directly engage with their colleagues in economics departments or spend their energies advocating for justice-centred economic paradigms. In many countries where there is a rise of racist nationalism, official education systems, the state, religious authorities, and the media make little effort to stop racism or contradict the historical narratives and religious worldviews that inform it. The potential of the Virocene epoch to reinvigorate emancipatory intellectual efforts that are currently marginalized in both the academy and society, lies in bringing social and ecological justice to the centre of our intellectual pursuits.

3. The moral basis of justice

The world that is emerging against the backdrop of the Virocene epoch is a world of our own making, containing reflections and actions about how we want to live our lives. The involuntary social distancing imposed on us does in fact provide time to reflect on the world that existed before the COVID-19 pandemic.

How should we respond to the COVID-19 crisis, intellectually and practically? How different is the world now, and how different is it likely to be in the future? How is the impact of the pandemic different in diverse communities? How can we think and act towards ensuring that the world is better prepared to face the next pandemic and to reduce people's suffering? How should we value and measure human and ecological wellbeing? These are all question for action, where actions are moral judgements about justice as an expression of rights, "…about the ethical meaning of our society, our culture, and our entire civilizations" (Gottlieb 2019: 78).

Introducing justice and environmental justice

Justice hence ought to be our central narrative for deciding our actions. Justice in environmental activism (as 'environmental justice' or EJ) has evolved over time. By the mid-1980s, there was a growing recognition that environmental injustice was not only about human effects on the environment, but also related to racial, gender, and class inequalities. Thus, demands for environmental justice include social equity, equality, and impartiality. Against this backdrop, radical environmental justice theorists have approached the notion of justice with critical appropriation of influential approaches to justice – distributive, retributive, procedural, and Amartya Sen's (1993, 2005) and Martha Nussbaum's (2000, 2003) capability theory. These critical analyses point out the limitations of these approaches to justice, exposing their complicity with possessive individualism, utilitarianism, and Eudemonism (also known as Eudaimonia[5]). Other critiques of these approaches are based on the stifling impact they have on imagination and creativity, their lack of emphasis on power, and their weak social transformative potential. Thematic development of alternative theories of justice have been limited, however, because EJ theorists shy away from dealing with the justice-rights nexus, grounded in what Wolterstorff (2018: 10) terms a "moral subculture of rights."

Radical versions of justice within Political Ecology are primarily concerned with how unequal power relations impact people's access to resources and decision-making, which environmental justice theories view (rightly) as lacking in approaches to justice. Power in EJ theories tend to be viewed from four perspectives: actor-oriented, economic-structural, discursive, and participatory (Svarstad and Benjaminsen 2020: 10). EJ theorists' reflection on justice in participatory approaches underscores the importance of power as central to any theory of justice.

'Power is everywhere', diffused and embodied and divorced from any discourse, 'regime of truth' knowledge, and praxis (Foucault 1991). Power is a dynamic social phenomenon, continually in a flux of negotiation, compromise, and reification, as it is it is constituted by contested forms of knowledge, practices, and regimes of truth. If regimes of truth are inextricably linked with regimes of power, then we need a basis to distinguish between a truth-power nexus that is friendly toward just human and ecological relations, from those that are hostile. Efforts towards justice need to recognize that injustice results from the type of power that excludes, hegemonizes, resists, represses, censors, abstracts, masks, or conceals the interests and relations of humans and their relationship with nature.

For Foucault, power can manifest itself in a variety of ways – negative or positive. This distinction is necessary to address a long-standing issue of theories of power that has affected much of the thinking about justice. "Theoretical treatments of power phenomena have been reduced to an analysis of positive power and have consequently been unable to treat the contradictory interdependency of positive and negative power" (Rus 1980: 18).[6]

For the idea of positive and negative power to be meaningful, it is necessary to make a distinction between whose interests are oppressive and whose are liberating. The distinction then must be grounded in rights. Positive power needs to detach from negative power (Foucault, in Rabinow 1991: 75), if it is to become a counterhegemonic force. For example, studies critical of hegemonic development discourse use Foucault's analysis of power to examine how constitutions, interests, and the power of development originated in, were

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[5] The theory that the virtuous or well-lived life leads to happiness.

[6] For an analysis of positive and negative power see Rus (1980), Mulder *et al.* (1966), Lukes (1976) and Steinberg and Kincheloe (2010).

authorized by, and became an extension of, a Western hegemony that discriminatively affects the societies upon which development is enacted (Escobar 1995). Thinking about alternatives to hegemonic development needs to be foregrounded in a distinction between negative and positive power, based on moral judgments about rights. Negative power is to be resisted through harnessing positive power, and both forms are closely linked with regimes of knowledge and truth, which are embodied in articulations of rights and justice.[7] Nevertheless, the contribution of Foucault's analysis of power to intellectual and policy practices of justice is limited because it is not grounded in a moral base.

In contrast, while power was at the center of the praxis of civil rights activists who pioneered environmental justice actions during late 1960s, it was also firmly grounded in morality. As Martin Luther King Jr., wrote:

> …[Another] basic challenge is to discover how to organize our strength in terms of economic and political power. Now no one can deny that the Negro is in dire need of this kind of legitimate power. Indeed, one of the great problems that the Negro confronts is his lack of power. From the old plantations of the South to the newer ghettos of the North, the Negro has been confined to a life of voicelessness and powerlessness. Stripped of the right to make decisions concerning his life and destiny he has been subject to the authoritarian and sometimes whimsical decisions of the white power structure. The plantation and the ghetto were created by those who had power, both to confine those who had no power and to perpetuate their powerlessness. Now the problem of transforming the ghetto, therefore, is a problem of power, a confrontation between the forces of power demanding change and the forces of power dedicated to the preserving of the status quo. Now, power properly understood is nothing but the ability to achieve purpose. It is the strength required to bring about social, political, and economic change. (King Jr. 1967: 27)

For King and his close ally Mahatma Gandhi, the moral basis of power which shaped their intellectual articulations of justice and related social practices, was deeply grounded in their religious beliefs:

> …it inspired their belief in the unity of life and commitment to the way of love. Service to humanity was part and parcel of their religion…Their vision of a nonviolent social order was based on the assumption that individual transformation and social transformation are interrelated….; [Religion] defined their visions and provided them with the means of transforming self and society. Religion also made them aware that at its core, nonviolence is a way of life and not just a tactic for gaining ground in a conflict (Kapur 2012: 1).

Gandhi and King's moral understanding of justice was embodied in the notion of love, and they used this to scrutinize positive and negative implications of power. As King (1967) observed:

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[7] 'Power is everywhere', diffused and embodied in discourse, knowledge and 'regimes of truth' (Foucault, 1991) as well as in social practices. Foucault's (1998) notions of 'power is everywhere' and 'comes from everywhere' cannot be reduced to agency or structure (p. 63). Instead, it is in a kind of constant flux, negotiation, and contestation as it is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge and 'truth' (Foucault, in Robinow 1991: 46). Power is not always negative as it could be a source of critical thinking about, and resistance to, the hegemonic knowledge, truth and power nexus (Foucault 1998: 100-101). Positive power means the autonomy to engage in praxis for emancipation from, rather than in service to, domination, exploitation and oppression. Forms of domination and freedom cannot be explained by or survive without power. Emancipation from negative forms of life is *resistance against* and *creating* power. Positive power is a moral question derived from the moral bases of the justice and rights nexus, because not all forms of social practices and power/knowledge/truth embodied in those practices are normatively equal or desirable. However, the most well-known theories of power (including Foucault's), do not provide clear accounts of their moral bases.

> …[One] of the great problems of history is that the concepts of love and power have usually been contrasted as opposites, polar opposites, so that love is identified with a resignation of power, and power with a denial of love. It was this misinterpretation that caused the philosopher Nietzsche, who was a philosopher of the will to power, to reject the Christian concept of love. It was this same misinterpretation which induced Christian theologians to reject Nietzsche's philosophy of the will to power in the name of the Christian idea of love (p. 29)

In generating positive power, we must understand that "[what] is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive, and that love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love" (King Jr. 1967: 31). Perhaps, the weakness of dominant perspectives of justice-rights-power nexuses today as intellectual and policy practice, lies in their failure to develop robust moral bases of power and/or their taking for granted of moralities that are embodied in theories of power that influence those perspectives.

John Rawls and Amartya Sen

John Rawls argued that utilitarianism is an insufficient theory of justice, pointing out that rational self-interest or the reasonableness of humans and transcendental moral institutions could contribute "the greatest good for the greatest number of people" (Rawls 1999: 301). The Rawlsian idea of justice as fairness is based on two principles:[8]

- Each person should have an equal right to the most extensive system of basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all (Rawls 1971: 302).
- Social and economic inequalities should be arranged –
  a. to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, and
  b. attached to positions and offices open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.

Based on these principles, justice prevails when the following is present:

- An equal set of liberties for individuals,
- A certain level of material resources for all, and
- Tolerance of inequalities if they work to the advantage of those worst-off (Rawls 1971: 303)

Reasonable people believe that "justice as fairness" will allow society to negotiate its inherent pluralism when people are guided by reason. In *Justice as fairness: restatement*, Rawls (2001) points out that "when we look at the world rationally, the world looks rationally back" (p. 3). For years, Friedrich Hayek propagated the idea that "the market is a fair political mechanism because it is agreeable to, and permits the functioning of, free self-interested agents" (Choptiany 1973: 146). Rawls' notion of distribution as an important part of this theory of justice is centered on the (utilitarian) "principle of autonomy and right to satisfaction of each of its members" (*Ibid*). Choptiany (1973) also believes that the "rational egoists could accept principles of justice that Rawls describes." "The mere showing that rational egoists could accept principles of justice has been sufficient to earn Rawls's theory considerable praise and attention" (*Ibid*: 147). Choptiany also argues that Rawls is closer to Hayek than he is to Kant, by pointing to Rawls' (1999) argument,

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[8] John Rawls argued that utilitarianism is an insufficient theory of justice, pointing out that rational self-interests or the reasonableness of humans and transcendental moral institutions could contribute "the greatest good for the greatest number of people" (Rawls 1971: 301).

The aim of the contract doctrine is precisely to account for the strictness of justice by supposing that its principles arise from an agreement among free and independent persons in an original position of equality and hence reflect the integrity and equal sovereignty of the rational persons who are the concreteness (p. 462-463).

Rawls, like Kant, was oblivious to how rationality itself is ideologically grounded and socially conditioned. He also assumes that rational persons exist in an original position of equality and share a common conception of justice. He anchors his original position on an abstract concept of "natural rights", ignoring the moral basis of natural rights and that, in practice, natural rights are appropriated by capitalism—a root source of inequalities and injustices. As Wolterstorff (2008) explains, Rawls simply assumes that natural rights exist (p. 15). He fails to provide a basis for equal respect, upon which his argument about rational agents treating each other with equal respect rests (*ibid*: 16). In doing so, Rawls assumes that the principle of distribution pursued by rational individuals who treat others with equal respect will "honor and fully secure the non-violation of every other rights, other than equal respect" (*ibid*: 16).

Rawls' historical and non-sociological theory of justice is not concerned with accountability and the consequences of people's choices, the endowments they possess, or the need to compensate people for socially, politically, and naturally conditioned inequalities over which they have no control (Bret 2009). Rawls's theory simply ranks individuals according to measurements of acceptable levels and the consequences of inequality. According to Sen (1979), Rawl's mistakenly seeks to correct inequality by expanding equality and liberty for humans by mistakenly assuming that society is a fair system of cooperation for mutual benefit. Yet, liberty and equality of opportunity can be only be meaningful on an even playing field. Further, as Sen (*ibid*) argues, two people with equal liberty and equal opportunities will not make *society* just and equal.

Rawls recognized that growing inequality created an imbalance in political power, which threatens democracy. His notion of justice-as-fairness, however, does not address how to correct economic inequality; rather, it insists on *political* equality as a non-negotiable requirement for all forms of equality – including economic equality. By 'artificially' dividing economics and politics into two separate domains, Rawls' 'justice-as-fairness', seeks 'equal opportunity' to influence transcendental political processes and the legal framework, thereby hoping to resolve inequalities arising from the economic domain to be resolved in the political domain. In taking this approach, Rawls ignores how discriminatory ideologies and power structures shape the rationalities and subjectivities of both political and legal systems. He fails to explain *why* some economic and political disadvantages exist. Instead of being concerned with why people face injustice in the first place, he explores how such injustices could be corrected through the fair distribution of primary goods and transcendental democratic political processes. Rawls discusses "property-owning democracy" as a solution to inequality and injustice (as he interprets them) under capitalism and socialism (Rawls 1993: 92). An adequate model of liberal democracy based on human reason, equal opportunity, and equal respect, however, cannot be developed without first creating a moral basis for the right to own property. The extent of justice that can be rendered to humans and other natural beings that have been wronged or deprived of their equal social status, according to Rawls' analysis, is limited by reason or reasonableness, capabilities, rights and obligations under specific legal and political systems.

G.A. Cohen (1989), by defining his notion of egalitarianism as equal access to advantage, argues that no one can expect justice by merely specifying basic institutions and voluntary moral specifications for individual or collective relationships, as suggested by Rawlsian principles of difference and incentives. A fundamental issue in Rawls' idea of distributive justice, to Cohen, is that it applies to institutions rather than transactions between individuals. Moreover, institutions and their relationships need to be understood in their social contexts. Freedom in the political domain does not by itself provide freedom in either personal or economic domains. A true conceptualization of justice requires freedom from domination, including domination of the natural environment. The abstractions of "the original position" and "human veil of ignorance" (Estlund 2015) that Rawls uses to formulate his theory fail to examine existing realities of societal inequality, and divorce the full life of human beings from their social and ecological relationships. Those in

positions of power and privilege are often unmoved by rational arguments about equal respect and opportunity if accepting these means giving up their power and socioeconomic advantages. Justice for the powerless and the voiceless is simply unavailable in any practical sense. Rawls's theory of justice is therefore primarily concerned with maintaining a specific (capitalist, liberal-democratic) social order rather addressing issues of real-world injustice.[9]

Amartya Sen's perspective of justice builds on Rawls's notion that transcendental institutionalism cannot be applied universally. In his book, *The idea of justice* (2011), he says, "What moves us, reasonably enough, is not the realization that the world falls short of being completely just – which few of us expect – but that there are clearly remediable injustices around us which we want to eliminate" (Sen 2011: vii; see also Gibbard 1979 and Harsanyi 1975). Furthermore, Sens states that "if the demands of justice have to give priority to the removal of manifest injustice… rather than concentrating on the long-distance search for the perfectly just society, then the prevention and alleviation of disability cannot but be fairly central in the enterprise of advancing justice" (Sen 2011: 259).

But "even if two persons have equal liberty and equality of opportunity that doesn't mean that it will make the system just and fair" (Sen 2011: 260). To facilitate addressing inequality, Sen replaces Rawls' freedom-oriented theory of justice with a capability-oriented theory of justice. Rawls' theory of justice uses primary goods as the fundamental metric of justice as they are most representative of citizens' fundamental interests. The primary goods that citizens prefer to have more of, rather than less, include "rights, liberties, opportunities, income and wealth" (Rawls 1971: 54). Sen argues that Rawls assigns insufficient attention to the diversity of individuals and therefore their relative capabilities to convert primary goods according to their wishes. For Sen (1979), Rawls "is not merely ignoring a few hard cases, but overlooking very widespread and real differences" among individuals in terms of "health, longevity, climatic conditions, location, work condition and even body size" (p. 215-216). This omission could result in "unjustified inequality and unfairness" (Sen 1990: 112). Hence, for Sen, freedom is only possible when it is in the hands of individuals who have both the ability to convert primary goods into a life worth living, and the ability to uphold justice (Sen 1979: 214).

Sen's perspective of justice is based on the idea that the freedom to achieve well-being is of primary moral importance and that freedom must be understood in terms of people's capabilities: their freedom and real opportunities to achieve what they want in terms they consider as valuable based on their own reasoning. Sen's freedom, capabilities-wellbeing nexus as replacement for fundamental Rawlsian principles of justice draws on variety of normative theories relating social justice and development ethics, which he developed during his long career (1985, 1990, 1999, 2004). Sen also argues that Rawls' (2001: 176) position on primary goods and his concept of justice as fairness is narrow, compelling us to postpone the question of our obligations to those who are weak and in need (Sen 1979).

While environmental justice theories often adopt Amartya Sen's capabilities approach, perhaps to address power differences between persons and/or populations, it comes with certain limitations. Sen's critics have pointed out, for instance, that his concept of human agency is narrow and does not depart from the 'individual' theorized in mainstream economics, and thus is unable to explain the reasons for the existence of difference in capabilities. For instance, in Sen's analysis, communities are considered as single homogeneous units mimicking individual agents in mainstream economic analysis, rather than being internally differentiated units with different capabilities. Yet, when it comes to theories of justice, the "homogeneity of perceptions amongst members of an indigenous (or any other) group should not be taken for granted. Differences may be related to aspects such as relative wealth, positions of power, divisions of labor, gender, age and ethnicity" (Svarstad and Benjaminsen 2020: 8). The welfare of a community does not account for the welfare of its diverse individuals. At the same time, the ability of a community member to acquire capabilities is determined by the structural inequalities extant within the community. Sen's analysis thus ignores the

> …factors responsible for environmental injustice as well as the structures that enable acts of injustice. Thus, justice becomes a matter of bridging the gap between what victims want in terms

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[9] For a detailed analysis of Amartya Sen and John Rawls's theories of justice, please see Freeman (2019).

of well-being, compared to what they have as a result of an environmental intervention. This may render invisible the actors and structures behind the injustice. (*ibid:* 8)

Further, the use of the "capabilities approach in radical EJ…tends to concentrate more narrowly on negative effects on the well-being of victimized groups" and as a result, there is a limited focus on the fact that "people confronted with environmental in-justice need their own critical knowledge production in order to be able to expose villains as well as structural causes behind the injustice, and to elaborate their own aims and strategies" (Svarstad and Benjaminsen 2020: 8).

Hence, for EJ theorists to use Sen's capabilities approach, it needs to be centered on a perspective of the power-rights-justice nexus that is firmly grounded in moral bases, as it requires re-acquiring resources and reclaiming power from those who control them. Without doing so, EJ theorists are likely to reproduce the very utilitarian and instrumental perspectives of justice that they, along with Sen, seek to deconstruct. An emphasis on moral bases is hence critical to address questions such as: "[is] everything that's called a capability genuinely a capability?" (Robeyns 2017: 170), "[should] we commit to a specific list of capabilities?" (p. 171) and "[which] account of Power and Choice" (p. 190) is just in "different social realities and interpersonal relations?" (p. 191).

Likewise, Sen's failure to incorporate power differentials in his discussion of capabilities, is a critical focal point of discussions of justice within Political Ecology (Svarstad and Benjaminsen 2020; Svarstad, Benjaminsen, and Overå 2018). As Svarstad and Benjaminsen (2020) correctly point out,

> …there cannot be justice in an environmental conflict unless affected parties possess the opportunity to conduct their own critical knowledge production and thereby analyze their situation, independently of narratives produced by powerful actors" (p. 11).

Here it is important to ask: on what basis can affected persons distinguish between power that helps them and that which oppresses them? And how is it possible to make this distinction such that the narrative they construct is not simply an embodiment of the values and narratives of their oppressors? Thus, in the absence of a full discussion of the moral bases of the rights-justice-power nexus, it is impossible to critically analyze and dismantle oppressive power of any kind and rebuild emancipatory power for ecological justice.

The limited application of Sen's capabilities approach to addressing systemic justice, according to its critics, also arises from its apparent individualism. The capabilities approach "is an example of methodological individualism", where "the individualism of the [capability] approach leads us […] to a belief that there are autonomous individuals whose choices are somehow independent of the society in which they live" (Deneulin and Stewart 2002: 66 *op. cit*. Robeyns 2017: 184). Consequently, the approach pays less attention "to collective features, such as social structures, social norms, and institutions" (Robeyns 2017: 188) and also to the fact that capabilities are central to group conflicts over equality and justice, where ideas and norms about justice and distribution of power varies within groups (*ibid.*)

The reason for the emphasis on the individual in Sen's capability theory arises from a "deep complementarity between individual freedom and social arrangements" (cited in Fine 2004: 19). Thus Sen's analysis sits "uncomfortably within an individualistic and formalistic methodology" (p. 101). Critics have pointed out that Sen's analysis is insufficiently grounded in macro contexts and is of limited use for interpersonal comparisons because his analysis is "insufficiently cultural in failing to take account of meanings, although essentially his own approach is merely to add the symbolic or whatever as a dimension in the vector of characteristics of what is consumed." (Rosenbaum 1999 cited in Fine 2004: 19). While Sen is not seduced by mainstream economics, and has challenged its fundamental properties (Fine 2004; Batterbury and Fernando 2010), he has not radically departed from seeing capitalist political economy as fundamentally shaping individual agency, choice and capabilities. Thus, as Fine (2004) contends, we must consider whether free individuals are truly expressing their own interests or if their interests are conditioned by or simply expressions of external ideologies and power. If Sen's goal is to contribute towards justice for marginalized people, freedom

needs to be foregrounded in an understanding of the moral basis of rights, to allow the marginalized to justify their demand for rights to expand their capabilities and entitlements.

Sen's analysis is also less useful for creating systemic change, primarily because of his emphasis on the individual and his failures both to resolve the tensions between "micro and macro or individual and social" (Fine 2004: 97) and to provide clarity about and reasons for these tensions. Sen's analysis is thus vulnerable to charges of being complicit in "economic imperialism" (*ibid*), which arises from several other aspects of economics as well. **First**, economics as a discipline is "increasingly esoteric, technically and methodologically self-isolating, and intolerant of alternatives in method and theory" (Fine 2001: 35). **Second**, categories of economics align closely with Rawls' various conceptualizations of justice, and Sen's counter-Rawlsian formulation of justice does not fundamentally alter those categories and their power over current social policies. **Third**, mainstream economics' hegemonic power over social and environmental policies has no rival; it has shown remarkable creativity and power in reproducing itself by appropriating the language and strategies of its critics. Thus, any rethinking of economics, according to Fine (2004), will not take place within economics itself, because "economics as a discipline, in teaching, research and policy, is very poor at ethics" (p. 96). Of all disciplines, neoclassical economics stands out as the uncompromising intellectual ally of growth-focused neoliberal economic policies that are at the root of the vulnerabilities seen during the Virocene epoch. In addition, the discipline commands enormous power to maintain 'economic growth' as the primary focus of policies introduced in the wake of the pandemic.

Neoliberalism is organically palatable to mainstream economists because the categories, knowledge, moralities, and politics of both are inextricably linked. Mainstream economics functions as a type of governmentality by enabling neoliberalism to coordinate and configure a diversity of social and ecological systems to serve its purpose and to suppress and reconfigure alternatives to its own advantage. Neoliberalism as a political rationality is thus necessary for the survival of mainstream economics, and vice versa. The challenge today is not decolonizing economics from neoliberalism. Rather, we need to *confront the moral basis of its rationality and dismantle its power as an anthropocentric discipline in subjugating humans and non-humans to growth-focused market rationality, while regenerating a social– and ecological– wellbeing focused discipline*. Both these tasks need to be grounded in a robust theory of the justice–rights nexus that differs radically from the one embodied in neoliberal social and environmental policies (dominated by mainstream economics).

Natural rights–based theories of justice

The moral basis of rights ought to be derived from natural rights rather than from the law or the accepted order of a society, its obligations and duties, and community or societal membership. Nicholas Wolterstorff, a professor emeritus of philosophy and theology at Yale University, provides a nuanced analysis of natural rights-based theories, while critiquing theories of justice dominated by Eudemonism, Utilitarianism, and Christian agapism (Wolterstorff 1983, 2008, 2011). He provides several reasons why a natural rights-based theory of justice is necessary to address three common limitations found in current discourses of justice (Wolterstorff 2008, 2011). **First**, many writers are comfortable with first discussing the responsibilities and obligations necessary for an orderly society, and then moving onto rights. Justice does not extend beyond what is necessary to maintain predetermined notions of the proper order of society and one's obligations to maintain that order (Wolterstorff 2008: 3). If the contours of good order are predetermined, then so too are equality and justice. How one relates with others and with the natural environment is determined by one's obligations to maintain order, rather than the notion that one's fellow humans and their natural environments are equally worthy as one's own (2008: 4).

Second, rights-based discussions that place the individual at the center, as Wolterstorff notes, are utilitarian as they lead to "possessive individualism" and "underplay our responsibility to each other and to our communities" (Wolterstorff 2008: 3). Consequently, such a discussion

> …demotes the giving self and promotes the grasping self and it demotes the humble self and promotes the haughty self. It both encourages and is encouraged by 'possessive individualism' of

the capitalist economy and the liberal polity. It invites us to think of ourselves as sovereign individuals (p. 3).

In a world full of possessive individualism, conflicts over claims for rights by individuals takes priority over honoring the rights of the other.

> The other comes into my presence bearing claims against me. And I come to her presence bearing claims against her. It is the practice of honoring and claiming rights that have been distorted. At the root of the distortion is that the moral bases of rights do not go beyond rights and obligations, and there is neither clarity nor consensus about the moral bases of rights. (p.7)

Third, approaches to justice that are primarily centered on the "terms of duties and obligations are one-sided as it refers to the person who is claiming rights the agent-dimension of rights. And when we talk about right in terms of being wronged, then we are referring to a recipient dimension" of rights, which Wolterstorff argues is lacking in contemporary rights discourse (Wolterstorff 2008: 8). In his view, I am obligated to treat you in a certain way because your worth requires it, not because I am obligated to do so to protect your rights (p. 9).

In essence, one's moral worth cannot be derived from rights and obligations based in Eudemonistic, Utilitarian or Christian agapism, all of which have significantly influenced rights narratives from the Middle Ages to the present. Eudemonism, in Greek moral and ethical systems, evaluates actions by reference to personal well-being through a life lived on the basis of reason. Eudemonism is "[a] system of ethics that makes happiness the test of rectitude—whether *Egoistic*, as Hobbes, or *Altruistic*, as Mill" (p. 652). It holds that 'well-being' and happiness are essential components of rights, putting the individual at the center of life, associating personal happiness with individualism and egoism. In Utilitarian philosophy, actions are justified in proportion to increases in individual happiness and reduced pain, and theories of justice inspired by utilitarianism are likewise confined within such individualistic boundaries. However, Wolterstorff (2008) clarifies the notion of individual egoism in Eudemonism by pointing out that it should be better described as "agent oriented" as individuals have an array of choices for personal and common goods (p. 133). However, a Eudemonist "speaks only of the worth of life goods and services and of conditions of means for those; the worth of persons and human beings have no place in [their] scheme" (p. 179). "My living my life may require that I seek to promote your happiness; it may even require that I do so for its own sake and not because I think it means to my happiness. But always when a choice confronts me what action to perform the question is what contribution will it make for my own wellbeing and well living" (p. 177).

While Wolterstorff comes from a Christian theological perspective, and articulates the notion of justice as love, to which I will return in the conclusion of this article, he finds fault with any account of *agape* love (or sacrificial love) that voluntarily suffers inconvenience, discomfort, and even death for the benefit of another without expecting anything in return. According to Wolterstorff, one must be critical of the fundamental tenets of *agape* love in modern day applications that deviate from its meaning in Christian scripture. His contention is that one's unqualified calls for sacrificial love in most contemporary practices, without making a clear "distinction between love and justice" (Wolterstorff 2011: 17), makes one vulnerable to the tropes of benevolence (pp. 21-40). It also makes one complicit with injustice, and a threat to justice that sees all humans as endowed with equal worth and dignity (pp. 21-40). When it fails to address the root of injustice—or the reasons for devaluing and undermining one's equal worth and dignity—sacrificial love does not entail justice Love as an embodiment of justice, thus also entails engaging with how one's benevolent actions perpetuate systemic injustices.

Wolterstorff also underscores the importance of paying attention to the reasons why one person is treated justly and another unjustly, as that is more important than paternalistic benevolence as a foundation for a rights-based notion of justice. Such a language of rights "enable[s] us to call attention to the wrongs racked by paternalistic benevolence; thereby [enabling] us to voice a moral break on benevolence" (Wolterstorff 2011: 36). In other words, our intellectual and practical responses to do the right thing should always be a part of

recognizing and fighting against the reasons for people being wronged, which is at the root of an "ethos of possessive individualism that employs the language of rights for its own purposes" (*ibid:* 388).

> But for the origins of the ethos we have to look elsewhere: to modern capitalism, to that understanding of liberal democracy that says that the governing idea of such a polity, is that everyone is ensured equal freedom to act as he or she sees fit. And deeper: to the dark human self, to the flaws that afflict all of us and always have, to our inveterate inclinations to pride and to self-preoccupation and to hardening our hearts to the plight of the others. We twist the culture of rights to our malign impulses. (Wolterstorff 2008: 388)

Finally, Wolterstorff (2008) argues that "human capacity to rational action should not be the basis for equal treatment of the other", because "if nothing other than rationality determines one's worth, we cannot explain a fundamental reality of the world, that for a variety of reasons rationality comes in various degrees; and among those who possess the capacity to the same degree, some exercise it better, some worse" (p. 390). If justice is determined by rationality, then we should expect that those with lesser capacities will be systematically demeaned and denied their equal worth: "it would be arbitrary to give more worth to those with more capacities that the others…and we must expect less rational will be systematically demeaned" (p. 391). If human reason is the basis for one deciding what actions are right and wrong, then one's moral boundaries of justice reflect one's ability to reason, which in turn is shaped by one's worldview, morals, and power. Such a narrowly bounded conception of reason stifles the imagination and creativity necessary to enhance the capacity of human agency to make the world a better place. By pointing out that our moral subculture of rights (upon which our notions of justice and power rest) is frail as it is remarkable. Woltersorff locates his perspective of the justice-rights-power nexus in the moral world view of religion (in his case Christianity). He articulates it as a lived-in praxis of justice in contrast to 'secular humanistic' views that shape contemporary theories of justice. He does not hold religions and secular humanist views as always diametrically opposed to each other. Rather, he invites us to examine their moral foundations from a viewpoint that sees the worth and dignity of all humans as equal.

Against this backdrop, I discuss (below) how the aforenoted limitations of current conceptions of justice are manifested in the planetary level periodization of Anthropocene, Chthulucene and Capitalocene – the broad intellectual frames of our time, that are likely to shape intellectual responses and social practices to the planetary changes resulting from COVID-19. Such interrogation is critical to understand the pandemic's vulnerabilities in terms of historically evolving systemic changes in human and non-human relations, and to seek pathways to bring systemic change that are grounded in a theory of justice.

4. Epochs and justice

Anthropocene

The Anthropocene is presented as an epoch where the impact of human activity on the geological formation of planet Earth has overtaken the climatic/geological forces that dominated the Holocene, whereby human activity has become increasingly responsible for the activities of nature (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000). As noted in the first of my two articles (Fernando 2020), critics have identified numerous weaknesses in this argument. **First**, the Anthropocene is "ideologically in support of a neoliberal financialization of nature, anthropocentric political economy, and endorsement of geoengineering as the preferred—but likely disastrous—method of approaching climate change" (Demos 2017). While the Anthropocene exposes the limitations of understanding "nature/society dualism, it cannot resolve that dualism in favor of a new synthesis" (Moore 2016b: 7).

Second, as Jason Moore (2017c: 179) argues, the notion of "anthropogenic implicates an actor who doesn't exist. There is no Anthropos, no humanity as a unified actor. So, if not anthropogenic, what [is] it?" The Anthropocene cannot answer this question. Hence, it is an epoch without a subject, and the nature of the subject it alludes to does not explain the catastrophic environmental changes in Anthropocene. For Tim Luke

(2017), policies inspired by the Anthropocene "appear to be developing moral rhetoric of, and operational plans for, managing the Anthropocene to create specific outcomes for those who are the managers as well as the managed." However, "the fact that human beings do not, in fact, have this measure of technical control is ignored by advocates of Anthropocene politics to advance their policy agendas." (p. 81). Moore (2017b) by no means dismisses the reality of human autonomy altogether; he only underscores the significance of recognizing the embodied nature of human agency in empowering humans to transform oppressive systems. Locating human agency in the Capitalocene, Moore (2017c) explains,

> The Capitalocene argument isn't about blame; it's about identifying the system that has devastated life on this planet. It is about making clear the history of capitalism. The Capitalocene is a way to begin to ask how the accumulation of capital, the pursuit of power and the co-production of nature form an organic and evolving whole. That whole is a 'world-ecology'.

Third, there is the notion of an *Anthropos*, or 'humanity', as a global, unified 'geological force', employed in the Anthropocene. As Frank *et al.* (2016: 349) argues, it "[masks] …diversity and differences in the actual conditions and impacts of humankind, and does not do justice to the diversity of local and regional contexts." The universalization of human character with respect to human agency and its experience, "gravitate towards western ontologies and epistemologies of living in the Anthropocene" (Simangan 2020: 218). Germain (2018), while acknowledging the scale of human impact upon environmental processes, argues "we ought to reinterpret humanism in a way that acknowledges the limits of the enterprise to remake reality in humanity's own image" (p. 132).

The Chthulucene

In response to globally cascading ecological disaster, Haraway's (2016b) *Staying with the trouble*, offers a multispecies analysis to reconfigure relations between humans, non-humans, and the Earth. The articulation of the Chthulucene epoch draws on feminist theory, eco-criticism, genetics, science fiction, and science and technology studies, and frames the world as a place where inter-species hierarchies are not predetermined, but instead remain protean and open to re-interpretation (Haraway 2016b). "Chthulucene—the era in which the 'tentacular', the whole of human and non-human relations is part of an accelerated cataclysm, as the historical moment in which critical thought should overcome its, in [Haraway's] eyes, too pervasive 'game-over' cynicism, defeatism and fatalism. These forces that got us into trouble need to be countered by learning to 'stay with the trouble' of living and dying together on a damaged earth, which would open new possibilities (Haraway 2016B: 34 *op. cit*. Hood 2017: 2).

One might equate Cthulhu in Chthulucene to COVID-19 in the Virocene. In Haraway's use, Cthulhu, as an allegory, is a confusing, unpredictable, and subterranean force with diverse tentacular powers that inhabits the underworld (2016b). Figuratively or literally, Cthulhu can cultivate its own abilities independently, and cause devastation to all species, which humans are unable to control. Thus, the only option available for humans, rather than rejecting the realities of Cthulhu, is to stay alive with the troubles (as in the Virocene epoch) and develop new forms of consciousness, relationships and actions to ensure human survival. Yet, critics of the Cthulucene suggest that Haraway reproduces the same evils that she aspires to transform with new ways of living and dying together on a damaged planet. Instead, her analysis stands dangerously in the way of developing critical consciousness and survival strategies (Haraway 2016b).

Likewise, Haraway's take on population, 'Make kin, not babies!', according to Sophie Lewis, is neo-Malthusian, as it promotes a world where humans "will have dropped from eleven to two or three billion over a couple of centuries" (cited in Turner 2017). This invalidates and calls into question her rather rhetorical "gestures declaring her cognizance of systemic colonialism, capitalist austerity, white-supremacy, and their manifestations in the form of reproductive stratification" (Lewis 2017: 2). As Turner (2017) points out, Haraway's use of the term 'Cthulucene' is "fatally tainted by the neo-imperialism, neoliberalism, misogyny and racism its history contains" (p. 4). She also argues that Haraway makes a "decisive turn towards a primitivism-

tinged, misanthropic populationism, [which is] 'apolitical', 'ethnocentric' and dismayingly careless" (*ibid*). In short, Haraway is "trafficking irresponsibly in racist narratives" (*ibid*; see also: Aronowsky 2016).

At the same time, Haraway's failure to articulate a theory of justice does not provide reasoning as to why she thinks that "making kin with the more-than-human world is an urgent ethical responsibility" (cited in Paulson 2019). It also does not address the moral bases for harnessing this responsibility to correct the injustices inherent in the Capitalocene and Plantationocene –a course that she does not entirely reject. Thus, unfortunately, Haraway's attempts to address the limitations of the Anthropocene and Capitalocene fail.

Capitalocene

Jason Moore's (2017a) concept of the Capitalocene while framed as world ecology, is a version of World Systems theory that understands planetary level ecological crises as created by the capitalist system of power, profit and re/production in the web of life (p. 594). Moore's argument is a critical provocation to the Anthropocene—which he argues, ignores the origins of the ecological crisis in capitalism, while failing to see how the crisis "[fits] into patterns of power, capital and nature established four centuries earlier" (*ibid*). He says, "[capitalism] made this mess, and this mess will ruin capitalism" (Simon 2019: 1).

Advocates of the Capitalocene privilege capitalism in "the mutually constitutive transformation of ideas, environments, and organization, co-producing the relations of production and reproduction" (Moore 2016b: 11). As Moore notes,

> Crucial to my thinking has been a family of ideas that seek to show how capitalism, from its early modern origins, has been not only a mighty producer of changes in the web of life, but also a product of that web of life, and of the totality of transformations between what is usually called society and nature. This means that modernity never masters or possesses nature. Capital not only never subsumes nature, but it has few effective mechanisms for managing its own nature in any given era. The web of life is unruly, rebellious, and has a way of continually upsetting the best laid plans of states, of capitalists, of scientists and engineers. (Moore 2017b)

The concept of the Capitalocene avoids falling into the same traps as the Anthropocene and Chuthulucene by focusing on the metabolism between humans and nature. The notion of human agency in the Capitalocene as an embodiment of social and ecological relations, underscores the ability of humans to think and act beyond the systems that condition their being. The Capitalocene narrative shifts our understanding of ecological crisis from the Anthropocene's "idea that climate change is anthropogenic (made by humans)" and that "we are living in the Anthropocene: the Age of Man as geological force", to being produced by "capitalism as a connective geographical and patterned historical system" and "a world-ecology of power and re/production in the web of life" (Moore 2017c: 50). Moore points out that "the history of justice in the twenty-first century will turn on how well we can identify [the antagonisms arising from capitalisms organization of human-nature relations] and mutual interdependencies, and how adeptly we can build political coalitions that transcend these planetary contradictions" (*Ibid*: 54). Social and economic vulnerabilities are directly related to the antagonisms and contradictions arising from the internal dynamics of capitalism. We find that "[webs] of life everywhere are challenging capital's cost-reduction strategies and become a cost-maximizing the reality for capital. Climate change (but not only climate change) makes everything more expensive for capital — and more dangerous for the rest of us" (*Ibid*: 54).

Moore suggests that radical strategies in the Capitalocene entail simultaneous "decarburization, democratization, and decommodification" of human-nature relations (Moore 2017c: 54). Moore's articulation of justice is, however—perhaps unintentionally—silent about individual transformation in favor of structural transformation, implying that structural change to the world ecology would automatically bring personal transformation. Moore therefore fails to provide pathways for reimagining the problematic articulation of human agency in the Anthropocene. Both personal and systemic transformation are inseparable in the pursuit of justice. Yet personal transformation is first and foremost necessary to bring systemic change, although there can be no doubt that structural constraints impose voluntary and involuntary limitations on personal action.

Yet change must begin with, and be and sustained by, human agency. Sustainable transformation through human agency is unlikely to arise from legal and customary norms of justice as these mostly refer to rights and obligations, instead of transformation.

Moore's world-ecology provides a nuanced perspective of how capitalism transforms and is being transformed by individuals, helping us to understand the systemic nature of human behavior. He invites us to a conversation "around how we might dismantle, analytically and practically, the tyranny of Man and Nature" (2017c: 54) and to create pathways for planetary justice to be the center of our engagement with the modern world. Productive conversations need to be grounded in moral perspectives of how and why capitalism and racism is embodied in human agency: what is the moral basis for resolving the oppressor-oppressed dialectic (Freire 1970) internalized by the oppressed, and for closing the gap between us knowing what is right for multispecies justice and doing what we know is unjust?

The ecological theory of the Capitalocene derived from a critique of capitalism in terms of its social and ecological implications is a fruitful way of starting such a conversation on planetary justice from a multispecies relational perspective. As a Marxist analysis reveals, production of value via the commodification of the metabolic relationship between humans and nature is the basis for reproducing capitalist relations, which are eternally riddled with crises of expansion (continuing accumulation) and crises of legitimization (achieving popular legitimacy). These crises disrupt human-nature metabolism, instigate suffering and disharmony between humans, and are manifested in inequality, deforestation, desertification, devastation of natural resources and extinction of species. In that process, capitalism alienates humans from nature, and debilitates the productive capabilities of humanity and the development of human freedom (Saito 2017: 258). The individual pursuit of survival, which is both inevitable and encouraged in capitalist society, undermines collective norms, spirit, and societal institutions to pursue the common good.

The challenge for progressive forces today is to reclaim power from capitalism rather than "to use descriptive tools that do not give to [the] Capitalocene the power to explain away the entanglement of earthly, resilient matters of concern" (Saito 2017: 259). The way out of this predicament is to first recognize that 'nature' as such, exists and we experience it "only in relation to social reproduction" and strive to develop a "sustainable relationship between humans and nature with attention to nature's limits" (*ibid*). Marx recognized these limits, incorporating both the natural limits of resources, and the systemic scarcities of resources necessary to maximize profit. His expression "unconscious socialist tendency" (in *Ethnological notebooks*, *op. cit*. Saito 2017: 265) exemplifies Marx's alternative ways of organizing emergent international human-nature relations. This tendency, whether one calls it socialist or otherwise, is about interrupting the capitalist narrative. Although not explicitly stated, this is implied in emergent social and ecological justice movements worldwide. In his later studies, some of which are unpublished, Marx pointed out that "the extinction of species is still going on and man himself [is] the most active exterminator" (Marx 1975: 233 *op. cit*., Saito, 2017: 300). Marx explored precapitalistic and non-western forms of the organization of production and distribution, and argued that "communal forms of agriculture organization" are founded on a different metabolism between humans and nature that is "favorable to the preservation of agriculture communes" and "have survived the epoch when the capitalist system stood intact." (Shanin 1985: 108, *op. cit*. Saito 2017: 265). Marx's interest in non-Eurocentric and non-linear ways of organizing the human-nature metabolism (found in his incomplete studies in *Ethnological notebooks*), resonates with a diverse range of current movements around the world, searching and creating pathways for building sustainable communities.

I concur with Jason Moore that capitalism plays a determinant role in shaping multispecies society–nature relations: "[t]he Capitalocene signifies capitalism as a way of organizing nature—as a multispecies, situated, capitalist world-ecology" (Moore 2016a: 6). The vulnerabilities of the Virocene epoch are fundamentally embodied in the Capitalocene. However, Moore's reframing of the Capitalocene in the language of "world-ecology" (which is essentially a credible green version of the world-systems argument) does not adequately deal with how power in social and ecological relations severely limits the Capitalocene's explanatory potential.

Similarly, although Moore (2016a, b) rightly dismisses the Anthropocene for mis-conceptualizing the Anthropos, his lack of attention to the justice-power nexus and its moral bases, weakens his ability to both

explain why humans act as they do, and to envision a "new synthesis" of nature/human dualism as an emancipatory subject in the Capitalocene. Moore's limited emphasis on consumption, due to his primary focus on production/accumulation, also fails to provide an adequate explanation of the role of human agency in the crises of capitalism. While social and ecological injustices of accumulation generate resistance against capitalism, the transformation of capitalism requires normative changes in the values and power embedded in patterns of consumption. Resistance itself needs to be driven by a moral vision of world order that could replace capitalism.

Furthermore, the normative foundations of the "critical role of racial struggle, borne on colonial plantations"(Davis *et al.* 2018: 10) cannot be derived from the normative foundations of capitalist accumulation, nor can racism be addressed entirely by dismantling capitalism or simply 'staying with the trouble.' Racism has its own logic and purpose, as evident in the current Black Lives Matter movement and the calls to pay close attention to "Black ecologies as innovative practices of resistance" (p. 3). In this context, Vergès's (2017) notion of the "racial Capitalocene" captures the "the global use of the color line", which has, since colonialism to the present "led to a…devaluation of both human life and the nonhuman world" (p. 77).

How we perceive the power-justice nexus will thus determine two possible outcomes of the Virocene epoch: reproduction of the same world order, or the opening of pathways for a new order, that would make 'imminent, [the] decline of capitalism.'

Political-ecological perspectives on vulnerabilities during the Virocene era highlight, on the one hand, the close correlation between transformations within human and nonhuman ecological cycles and, on the other, the relations of social, political, economic, and cultural power that bring together mutations between nature and society that manifest in a complex and unpredictable manner. The intricate and multidimensional relationships among the biological, social, and technical organization of social and eco-systems – and the mutation and epidemiological cycles of viruses and their various impacts on different social groups – are closely related to uneven power relations between humans and nonhumans. While these complex relations shape the diversity of policy responses to the pandemic and their outcomes in nations across the world, the differences between these policies and their outcomes are matters of how complexities of political power and norms about justice intersect and determine the utilization of knowledge, technology and resources for the purposes of responding to the vulnerabilities of Virocene.

Lastly, as Phil O'Keefe (2020) suggests, there is a need to distinguish between the political economy of nature, and contemporary political ecology analysis, as the intellectual arguments of political ecologists do not in his view guarantee social justice. Positive synergies between political economy/world-ecology and political ecology, I concur, are necessary for coping with the vulnerabilities of the Virocene era, and must be driven by a theory of justice that is drawn from a moral understanding of rights and power. Such an emancipatory perspective of justice is necessary to prevent dominant policy responses to COVID-19 from reproducing the same world order that produced the human and non-human vulnerabilities of the Virocene era. Towards this end, by drawing primarily on the work of Nicholas Wolterstorff, I articulate the terms of a rights-justice-power nexus that will provide the basis for a new planetary epoch, which I refer to as the Lovecene.

Introducing Wolterstorff's counterposition: an argument for the Lovecene

The Lovecene is an aspirational, emancipatory era centered on establishing a new basis for justice in an emerging multispecies planetary order.[10] Drawing on Martin Luther King Jr's environmental justice work (e.g.

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[10] I do not claim to have originated the notion of love as the basis for justice; it goes back to the origins of the EJ movement started by Martin Luther King, Jr. and is integral to the work of revolutionary leaders. For the pioneers of the EJ movement, a notion of radical love was a spiritual matter derived from Christian theology that provided them the basis for a justice demanding the recognition of African Americans as fully human. It was love that motivated their praxis-oriented efforts to achieve racial, economic and environmental justice (Glave 2010; Harris 2017). The Black EJ movement combined the intersection of race, class, and gender. Women (e.g., Dorothia Height and Majora Carter) participated in protests against toxic waste dumping in New York City, New Orleans, and North Carolina (Harris 2018: 202).

the sanitation workers' strike in Memphis, Tennessee in 1968), which continues to influence EJ movements to this day, I demonstrate how a morality-centered conception of justice opens possibilities for resistance against injustices, while regenerating social and ecological wellbeing-focused planetary orders. Instead of limiting the scope of justice according to laws, cultural mores, or group membership, true multispecies justice must be an embodiment of love that reshapes and regenerates relationships between humans and nonhumans.

In the Lovecene, we must conceptualize justice beyond fairness of distribution and the enhancement of opportunities and capabilities, asserting the equal dignity and worth of all people. As an embodiment of love, justice must push us to determine why humans and nonhumans are being wronged, as well as to transform the conditions that have led to such wrongdoing. We must deliver justice to the needy, vulnerable, and powerless, never giving up the struggle or withdrawing in the face of failure or disappointment. This conception of multispecies justice will include among its goals, the dismantling of oppressive power and the creation of emancipatory power. If "the Capitalocene signifies capitalism as a way of organizing nature—as a multispecies, situated, capitalist world-ecology" (Moore 2016a: 6), then the Lovecene provides a moral basis for emancipating humans and nonhumans from the capitalist world-ecology and transforming it in the wake of the disruptions caused by both the Capitalocene and the Virocene eras. I discuss the fundamental ideas of Wolterstorff's perspective of justice in order to further contextualize my proposed theory of multispecies justice for the Lovecene.

Wolterstorff's intellectual project (2008, 2011) draws upon reflections of injustice and justice in communities of care in both developed and developing countries. It is a framework for critical thinking about truth, power and change at personal and systemic levels. His notion of justice is inclusive of social and ecological justice. It recognizes humans as socially and ecologically relational beings, and the notion of rights embodied in his theory is derived from the idea of equal worth and dignity of all humans rather than rights bestowed upon them as members of a culture, polity or legal system. This entails sustainable ways of organizing nature and social relations in a non-hierarchical manner, rather than humans dominating nature, which is implied in most theories of justice. This presents possibilities for subverting and altering oppressive power relations in diverse and multi-scalar ecosystems and reorganizing them in horizontal and democratic ways.

The inextricable links between love and revolution are well documented. Chabot (2008) argued that "love is much more than internal, personal, romantic, and sexual feelings – no matter how intense such feelings may be" (p. 823). "Creating revolutionary love and loving revolutions involves long and painstaking struggles against alienation – both within and between individuals – not merely the sudden, seismic shifts of social structures that most scholarly definitions of revolutions highlight (*ibid*; also Foran 2003). For revolutionaries, love was also an expression of outrage against injustice, as well as the passion for justice, and it resolves to give the courage needed for people to pursue justice with sacrifice (Bush *et al*. 2019; Bystydzienski and Schacht 2001; Cayton 2014; Emirbayer and Goldberg 2005; Foran 2005; Fromm 1956; Guevara and Scheer 1968; Goodwin *et al*. 2001; Reed 2004). Past revolutionaries saw the intertwined connection between love and revolution, where love generates criticism of capitalism:

> The principle underlying capitalistic society and the principle of love are incompatible…[Important] and radical changes in our social structure are necessary, if love is to become a social and not a highly individualistic, marginal phenomenon …. Society must be organized in such a way that man's social, loving nature is not separated from his social existence, but becomes one with it. (Fromm 1956: 7)

Love is arguably the emotion that most strongly underlies the vital force that impels many ordinary people into extraordinary acts, across time and place. Expressing hope and optimism, it provides a constructive counterpoint to those other powerful animating emotions, hatred and anger. "Love of life, love of people, love of justice all play a role across revolutionary political cultures. This is something that the revolutionaries of the future will need to learn to nurture and build upon" (Foran 2005: 274). Love does not exclude the use of a variety of strategies in pursuit of justice, either. As MLK says:

> Time is cluttered with wreckage of communities which surrendered to hatred and violence. For the salvation of our nation or mankind, we must follow another way. This does not mean that we abandon our righteous efforts. With every ounce of our energy we must continue to rid this nation of the incubus of segregation. But we shall not in the process relinquish our privilege and our obligation to love. While abhorring segregation, we shall love the segregationist. This is the only way to create the beloved community… (King Jr. 1967: 65)

Wolterstorff's (2008) account of justice highlights and addresses the deep-seated limitations of current conceptions of justice and, in turn, opens emancipatory pathways to justice. His central argument, also highlighted by recent racial and climate justice movements, is that the fundamental limitation of our conceptions of justice—and of fighting injustice—is their vulnerability to the pitfalls of individualism, human reason, Eudemonism, paternalism, legalism, universalism, cultural relativism, and anthropocentrism. Most justice theories also fail to provide adequate clarity about their moral foundations. The moral bases of justice implied in them are not rooted in a theory of natural rights inherent in humans as beings with equal dignity and worth. Instead, they conceptualize rights as derived from, or bestowed upon as legal constructs based on membership within a community (Wolterstorff 2008: 10-11).

Addressing these limits, Wolterstorff's (2008) theory of justice is based on his specific notion of natural rights, which builds on a critique of the "right order theorists" such as John Rawls who assumes the "right of moral agents to be treated equally" and that the principles of distribution principle honor that right and "secure the non-violation every other inherent national right," (p. 17). In Rawls's perspective maintaining the order of the society takes priority in way of thinking about rights and justice, rather subjecting order to moral criticism. The 'reluctance among…contemporary theories to talk about natural rights' is not surprising because the equal "worth of human beings does not enter into [their] way of thinking about rights" (p. 43), a limitation that was brought to light by Civil Rights and abolitionist movements of the past and by recent anti-racism and climate justice movements that are based on robust moral foundations of human worth.

Wolterstroff asks, should "the hungry be fed because they have rights or because it is in the 'right order of things' that they should be fed?" (*ibid*: 175). The answer to this question invites a debate "over the deep structure of the moral universe: what accounts for what, and "do rights come from justice or does justice come from rights"? (p. 176). He points out that "a theory of rights cannot be developed within the framework of [ancient] eudemonism" (*ibid*)—the theory that the virtuous or well-lived life leads to happiness—because "the conception of the good life with which eudemonism works is not of the right sort to comprehend all the goods to which we have rights" (*ibid*:178). Furthermore, in eudemonism, "[there] is no room in this scheme for the worth of persons and human beings, and hence none for one's right against others to their treating one a certain way on account of one's worth" (*ibid*: 179).

Wolterstorff is also critical of theories of justice that are linked to human reason and capacities. According to him the capacity argument presupposes "[our] conscious, rational capacity to manipulate things… to meet our ends…compare ends" and the "freedom to resist the immediate coercion of desires and impulses" (Wolterstorff 2008: 326). A fatal flaw of the capacities approach is that whatever yard stick we use to determine capacities, "it will always turn out that some human and [*nonhuman*] beings do not possess that capacity (*ibid*: 333). Justice also cannot be rendered by maintaining order according to the law.

Justice, in Wolterstorff's analysis, emerges as a natural theory of rights, in which "rights are normative bonds between oneself and the other" and serve as "boundary-markers for our pursuit of life-goods" (Wolterstorff 2008: 10-11). Seeing rights as a recognition of the equal dignity and worth of humans, he conceptualizes justice as an expression of love. Our obligation to support human rights calls us "to speak up for the wronged of the world", (*ibid* ix). This is because the rights of the wronged are inherently natural rather than derived from laws or membership in a specific community. Natural rights do not originate from human institutions, but a metaphysical source, which Wolterstorff theorizes as God, an embodiment of love (*ibid*: 265). He argues for adopting a theory of natural justice, where love acts as the driving force behind our approaches to living in harmony with one another and with nature (*ibid*: 296).[11]

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[11] Theorizations about justice in a secular world generally don't invoke theology, even though religious ideals and values influence how humans think about justice, especially in relation to subject formation, power, and politics. The secular humanism that informs most mainstream theories of justice is uncomfortable with the reality that the modern perspectives on rights are inextricably linked to religious principles in both positive and negative ways. For example, secular humanists' references to the history of environmental justice during Martin Luther King Jr.'s time often ignore its basis in a theology that posits an inextricable connection between rights, justice, and power. The marginalization of religious perspectives, however, is a contradiction of secularism itself. As G.K. Chesterton noted in 1908, "[t]he secularists have not wrecked

The recognition of natural rights as the basis for justice therefore transcends individualism: humanity's collective/relational being is responsible for both human and ecological wellbeing. Recognizing this as the moral basis for rights compels one to be cognizant of how one's own thinking and conduct—and those of different societies considered as a whole—are shaped by ideologies, regimes of truth and social policies that have led to injustices. This recognition avoids the trap of paternalism in our understanding of justice by requiring us to recognize that the fundamental reason to render justice to another is because he or she has been wronged.

In Wolterstorff's book *Until justice and peace embrace* (1983), he concurs with both Liberation Theology and the Calvinist position that the "culprit [of current social and economic injustices is] in the structure of modern society and the dynamics underlying that structure rather than in the acts of individual waywardness" (p. 65). This is understood by "locating the crucial dynamics of the modern society in the economics sphere—and in the political sphere insofar as it supports the economic" (*ibid*). The neoliberal standard, which measures our worth and relationships in terms of what we produce, contrasts with the liberationist focus on overcoming exploitation and domination of the powerless by the powerful and on the oppressiveness of treating economic growth as the ultimate goal in society.

Liberation theologians and Calvinists both acknowledge conflict as an aspect of social order. They agree that the "progress of history, though by no means smooth and uninterrupted", is gravitating towards the "attainment of freedom" (Wolterstorff 1983: 66). However, "[o]ne cannot say that we are all in the boat together" (p. 67), meaning that opportunities and power for attending meaningful freedom is equally available to everyone. In the case of COVID-19, it is a fallacy to claim that the pandemic affects all persons equally. Rather, the pandemic's social and health effects expose preexisting socioeconomic structures and hierarchies of inequality and dominance that unevenly distribute the impact of COVID-19 internally within and between nations.

In several ways, Wolterstorff shifts the focus on rights from narrow anthropocentric to relational and systemic aspects. As he writes (1983):

> [in] pursuits of justice, one has to say that 'when one human being is wronged by another, we have to take sides with the former.' We must declare solidarity with the oppressed with the oppressor, we need to "take sides on the struggle occurring on the boat" if we are serious about our declaration of solidarity. The action of liberation will flow forth. (p. 67)

Taking sides is essential for justice and will always produce conflict (p. 69). He further notes that while conflict is a path toward justice, working through conflict must be guided by value judgments about right and wrong. He also invokes the notion of *shalom* (peace) as not merely the absence of hostility but about the enjoyment of one's relationships with others and nature. For example, it is not an indication of *shalom* when a "nation [is] at peace with all its neighbors and yet…miserable in poverty" (p. 60).

By invoking the notion of *shalom*, he points out that a just society is more than everyone enjoying his or her rights—it is living in a complex web of relations. *Shalom* means human beings living at peace in all their relationships— "with God, with self, with fellows, with nature" (Wolterstorff 1983: 69). Further, while justice must evolve from conflict, the relational aspect of *shalom* means that justice as lived-in praxis evolves out of engaging in conflict, not avoiding it. Struggle towards justice should always be driven by preferential options for the oppressed and prophetic voice against economic and political oppression because it is from the sites of oppression that emancipatory praxis should evolve, emphasizing the importance of context in pursuits of justice (Von Sinner 2007).

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divine things; but the secularists have wrecked secular things, if that is any comfort to them" (Chesterton 2017: 26). The same argument could be applied to fanatical religious fundamentalists who oppose to any idea that are not consistent with the interpretation of their texts, even though the ideas are shared by secular and other religious worldviews. Chesterton highlights a deeper issue in the uncritical use of secular-religion binary in our understanding of justice in both a local or universal sense.

By referring to *shalom* as the embodiment of harmonious relationships in the web of life, Wolterstorff (2013) points out that "*shalom* is absent when a society is a collection of individuals all out to make their own way in the world" (p. 278). People can find "delight in community, only when justice reigns, only [when] human beings no longer oppress one another"—and when righteousness prevails over self-righteousness. An important attribute of justice as *shalom* is its relationship with the natural environment, "our physical surrounding." Justice is possible "when we, bodily creatures, not disembodied souls, shape the world with our labor and find fulfilment in so doing and delight in its results" (Wolterstorff 1983: 70). This implies the relational nature of doing justice, which requires caring not only for the immediate needs of the other but also for all entities present in the others' environment, as well as taking responsibility for changing all ideologies, institutions, and power relations that are implicated in the injustices faced by the other. Judging institutions in moral terms is a necessary aspect of the pursuit of justice and only with such an approach can we truly judge institutional contributions to human worth and well-being. Even if the harmful conduct of a specific institution does not directly impact the physical wellbeing of the affected community, we must nonetheless condemn it (Wolterstorff 2011: 135).

Justice as an embodiment of *shalom* goes beyond being responsible for caring about the well-being of the other, because "[w]e may all act responsible and yet *shalom* may be wounded, a delight may be missing. Always there are sorrows in our human existence that we are at a loss to heal" (Wolterstorff 1983: 71). As the tools we use to heal are imperfect, their outcomes cannot always be certain. This point is of critical importance to emancipatory praxis, especially in situations of uncertainty, which are the norm not only during pandemics but also during "normal" times. If we are to act, we must not wait until our actions are perfect or error-proof or until the positive result of our actions will last forever. Instead, under the idea of *shalom*, we must have enough humility to acknowledge the ontological and pragmatic limits of our thoughts and actions and be willing to make trade-offs between urgency and integrity when we have to respond to injustices.

Wolterstorff's relational articulation of justice is not confined to humans and their physical environments alone. It is inclusive of animals and plants. His theory of justice provides greater clarity regarding the moral basis of rights, thus allowing us to extend rights to non-human species and address existing gaps within current theories of multispecies justice. **First**, when justice focuses on why people and their institutions have been wronged, it inevitably embodies their relationship with the natural environment. **Second**, we must recognize that "animals and plants like [humans] have biological life; and in those lives there are states, events, actions and activities that are good for them and others that are bad for them. They possess wellbeing to one degree to another. And they cannot be wronged" (Wolterstorff 2011: 138). **Third**, Wolterstorff's idea of justice as love and *shalom* applies equally to all human and nonhuman species and is not based on the human domination of non-human species. Caring for animals means addressing individual and systemic factors responsible for the injustices that they suffer rather than simply demanding restrictions on human use of animals on an ethical basis. In his analysis, supportive of ways to extend of rights to non-human species, Wolterstroff (2011) points out the weakness of the claim that humans are more rational and capable than non-humans: "The more we beef up the capacity to assure ourselves that non-human animals possess, the greater will be the number of humans who also do not possess that capacity"(p. 115). What is the rationale behind anthropocentric views of rights and justice "since humans are animals of some of a sort there will presumable be some among our natural human rights that animals also have" (p. 146)?

Wolterstorff's multispecies perspectives on justice, together with those of Deane-Drummond (2014) and Wallace (2000), draw on creationist ideas, in which human relationships with nature are based on responsible stewardship rather than human domination. Wolterstorff's perspective, however, is diametrically opposed to the anthropocentric indictment of creationist perspectives often attributed to Lynn White (1967), who argues that creationist narratives based on the book of Genesis are responsible for much human exploitation of nature, claiming that they are founded on a dichotomous understanding of humans and nature. White's often selective and distorted readings of scriptures and broad generalizations see ecological crises as arising from the appropriation of the creation story while ignoring biblical explanations of relations between humans and nature and the solutions that scriptures offer to ecological crises.

Unlike most evolutionists, Wolterstorff and others who follow his perspective (e.g. Deane-Drummond 2014; McDonagh 1994; Wallace 2000) do not take comfort in the notion of the survival of the fittest by dominating human and ecosystems. Instead, they advocate for the responsibility of taking care of the vulnerable, with a primary focus on transforming the reasons for vulnerability.[12] This puts in place four limits on individual, human use of nature:

1) the well-being of the other/neighbor in present and future generations;
2) the inclusion of humans and nonhumans maintains "the integrity of creation" (Deane-Drummond 2014; Francis 2015a; McDonagh 1994; Wallace 2000);
3) the importance of responding to reasons for the vulnerability of the weak should not be compromised by efforts to take care of their needs: benevolence, maintaining peace and order, and redistribution must not comprise the emancipation from injustice.
4) Freeing from "misguided anthropocentrism," rejecting every form of self-centeredness and self-absorption, being the center of the universe, and "assess[ing] the impact of every action and personal decision on the world" (Francis 2015a). And, being critical of the "myths" of a modernity grounded in a utilitarian mindset (individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism, the unregulated market), that are causing "environmental degradation and social decay" (Francis 2015a).

Wolterstorff's approach also recognizes two fundamental human realities in the pursuit of justice: the vast and widening gap between the knowledge of the right things that we should be doing, juxtaposed with what we actually end up doing: "For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do" (Romans 7: 15). In Wolterstorff's narrative, pathways for justice are processes in which humans need to accept this disjuncture between good and evil, accounting for the uncertainty of the outcomes of our actions, because justice is an embodiment of love. Love provides no option but to continue to resist injustice and work towards multispecies justice. In addition, Deane-Drummond (2014) forcefully argues that the theological notion of environmental stewardship is closely linked with "human beings becoming fully themselves, not only through their encounter with God but also through their relationships with each other and with other animals" (p. 26). In such an encounter, the moral bases of rights, responsibility, and accountability are derived from a deeply spiritual domain that transcends anthropocentric domains. Brotton (2016), further provides moral argument for the rights of non-humans in the era of climate change.

In this vein, emancipatory theorizing of multispecies justice as matter of praxis occurs when we listen to the cries of the poor and the oppressed, inclusive of human and non-human species. Here, Wolterstorff concurs with Marx on a crucial aspect of ideology in relation to oppression: both are disposed to compartmentalize and ignore oppression, or, if aware of it, think it unalterable (Wolterstorff 2008: 380; see also Deane-Drummond 2016). Justice is about how we insert ourselves into the social and natural worlds and transform ourselves through that process – it is from this that emancipatory subjectivities, knowledge, and politics need to emerge. Dismantling oppression does not necessarily render the oppressed ready for a new way of living.

Wolterstorff's narrative of justice does not permit one to uncouple the sharp binaries of individual *vs.* social, micro *vs.* macro, and agency *vs.* structural reasons for justice and injustice. It encourages the emancipation of human reflection, creativity, and imagination from the traps of utilitarianism, eudemonics, and

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[12] Even George Perkins Marsh of Woodstock, Vermont, a pioneer of the environmental movement in the United States, endorsed this point regarding environmental stewardship versus environmental domination. George's father, Charles Marsh, was a renowned lawyer, Calvinist and an admirer of legendary preacher and naturalist Jonathan Edwards. In *Man and Nature,* G.P. Marsh says, "Man has too long forgotten that the earth was given to him for usufruct alone, not for consumption, still less for profligate waste" (Marsh 1965).

benevolent paternalism evident in most of the theories of justice manifested in analysis of the Anthropocene and Cthulucene epochs.

Articulating a multispecies justice perspective

Against the backdrop of the Virocene epoch, emerging discourses on human and animal relations seek to address the anthropocentrism in environmental justice by considering injustices done to animal environments—i.e., primarily arising from the production of particular human–nature relations driven by the ideology of economic growth. There exists overwhelming evidence of negative impact of economic growth on the environment (Bruyn 2020; Celermajer *et al*. 2020; Deane-Drummond 2014; Fuentes 2015; Heise 2016; Locke and Keil 2015; Radomska 2017). Emerging perspectives critical of the hegemonic growth paradigm, especially post-COVID-19, are likely to make a forceful case for including justice for nonhumans in an unprecedented way through their calls to imagine justice from the perspective of non-humans. They move beyond conservation and veganism to a recognition of wrongdoing against, and justice for, nonhumans (Emel and Nirmal 2020 forthcoming; Nirmal 2017) as part of humans becoming involved in deep spiritual relations with nonhumans. In these perspectives, multispecies justice "requires more than human diplomacy—a project that pursues justice with both sense of cultural difference and a sense of specie[s] differences" (Heise 2016: 199). These multispecies justice perspectives also bring notions of spirituality, love, and care into their analyses in a variety of different ways. Herein lies the potential for "solidarity [such approaches to multispecies justice] might produce a different framing for our understanding of capitalism as a system of domination" (Wadiwel 2019: 5).

In this regard, the perspectives of Wolterstorff (1983, 2008, 2011, 2013; Deane-Drummond 2014, 2016), and Wallace (2000) are closely aligned with Pope Francis' robust version (Francis 2015a), which emphasizes personal and systemic transformation as prerequisites for multispecies justice.[13] Pope Francis' Encyclical, *Laudato Si*, written in response to the climate crisis, while acknowledging the progress made by environmental movements around the world, noted that:

> Regrettably, many efforts to seek concrete solutions to the environmental crisis have proved ineffective, not only because of powerful opposition but also because of a more general lack of interest. Obstructionist attitudes, even on the part of believers, can range from denial of the problem to indifference, nonchalant resignation, or blind confidence in technical solutions. (Francis 2015a)

To address these limitations, *Laudato Si* calls for "new and universal solidarity", that needs to begin with a critical examination of "our hearts, transform our social values by recognizing the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental justice in building and protecting Our Common Home" (Francis 2015a). Such solidarity requires a "global ecological conversion" that would enable people to live their lives joyfully and authentically by grappling with deeply personal issues, opening the mind to "categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology and take us to the heart of what it is to be human" (Francis 2015a).

Laudato Si provides a political perspective on the ecological crisis as it reflects on the effects of the powerful on the powerless, as well as an economic perspective based on a scathing critique of the profit motives of capitalism. The root cause of *Laudato Si*'s political economy critique of the ecological crisis is "irrational confidence in progress and human abilities" (Francis 2015a). But unlike Political Ecology's secular analysis and response to the ecological crisis, *Laudato Si* calls for a profound interior conversion, because "the violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the

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[13] Yet many of the secular humanist appropriations Martin Luther King's idea to support the contemporary environment justice moment ignores deep love as the basis for justice drawn from theology, thus ignoring the moral framing of King's articulation of justice.

most abandoned and maltreated of our poor" (Francis 2015a). Thus, the interior crisis of the individual is manifested in the exterior: "The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast."

Justice practices in today's world in general are oblivious to the deep connection between personal and systemic causes of environmental and social crises as they are not concerned with the creation of a new moral basis of rights. For example, within a capitalist economy and liberal democracy, generosity and benevolence disguise the flawed nature of rights. On the one hand, generosity in the distribution of resources addresses the rights of recipients of those resources. "But it is not true in general that generosity generate new rights and that it is the violation of those generated rights that account for injustice in generosity" (Wolterstorff 2011: 218). For example, "Roger had a priori right not to be treated with culpable ill will; it was the violation of the prior right that accounted for the fact that he was wronged. For generosity, to be just, we must attend to the rights that we already have" (*Ibid*: 218).

> This points to an important reality relating to interpretation of generosity and benevolence as justice common in our society: a person's generosity and benevolence earns him or her praise from the society, but the persons who point out the causes of injustice that the benevolence and generosity seeks to address do not receive the same accolades from society. (Wolterstorff 2011: 214)

Having a "morally relevant reason to distribute resources to a person in need is insufficient for justice" (*Ibid*). Gratuitous "benevolence and generosity" can be complicit with injustice when the resources they donate are products of the system responsible for injustice in the first place. Benevolent generosity thus legitimizes injustices that are linked with violations of rights. "Generosity, to be just, must attend to rights we already have" (*Ibid*: 214.)

The egoistic interest of individuals is disguised in capitalist society when equal rights are morally and legally guarded through equality of exchange in the marketplace. These rights are abstracted and taken out of the realities that constitute actual human relationships. The sole purpose of equality in the sphere of exchange is to protect the:

> [bourgeois] device to establish and sustain bourgeois freedom to control wealth. The American Bill of Rights or the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights or the Irish Proclamation of Independence—Marx would train us to see the power that is represented behind these documents that have such an instinctive grip on us. (Hargaden 2013: 114)

Further, such rights discourse is based in a possessive individualism that is concerned with addressing why people, animals, and plants are wronged. But as Marx noted,

> [n]one of the so-called rights of man, therefore, go beyond egoistic man, beyond man as a member of civil society—that is, an individual withdrawn into himself, into the confines of his private interests and private caprice, and separated from the community. In the rights of man, he is far from being conceived as a species-being; on the contrary, species-life itself, society, appears as a framework external to the individuals, as a restriction of their original independence. The sole bond holding them together is natural necessity, need and private interest, the preservation of their property and their egoistic selves. (Marx 1977: 54 cited Wolterstorff 2008: 385)

Hence, given capitalism's powerful hold on society, pursuits of justice (environmental, climatic, or social) cannot be limited only to those that promote lifestyles that focus on caring for fellow human beings and the

environment (e.g., sharing; communal living; recycling; tree planting; organic, green, and vegetarian consumption). Rather, they require that we *cultivate a sense of comfort around raising uncomfortable issues of social and ecological injustices that make such lifestyles sensible and necessary in the first place, disrupt the narratives that shape those injustices, and have the courage needed to take risks and make sacrifices to bring change, despite failures and challenges.* Wolterstorff is also rightly critical of socially and ecologically friendly lifestyles that disengage with the pursuit of justice. For him, "love that perpetuates injustice is malformed love" and the "way we understand justice and love [should] not polarize them" (Wolterstorff 2011: 72).

Movements or lifestyles of ethical consumption, or those that advocate for the rights of non-humans but do not resist "green capitalism", embody a form of neoliberal environmentality (Arsel and Büscher 2012; Brand 2017; Cavanagh and Benjaminsen 2017; Dale *et al.* 2016; Friedmann 2005). Green capitalist strategies that optimize resource consumption and maximize profit by lowering the cost of production are fundamentally driven by capitalist efforts to sustain ever-increasing production and consumption, while capitalism continues to be at the root of systemic injustices. The rights-justice nexus embodied in notions of 'gone green', 'eat vegan', 'shop fair-trade', 'protect animal rights' and 'recycle, reduce, reuse', are aimed more at protecting the interests of their proponents, rather than addressing the systemic injustices that both humans and non-humans face. In green capitalism, the "ethical consumer is an idealization; a mythical moral hero that fails to conform to the reality of nuanced, 'flawed, self-interested' everyday purchasing and ethical consumption is about producing another consumer subjectivity" (Devinney *et al.* 2010: 185). Olive Pape (2018) argues that "green consumers feel better about living under capitalism, but do they really address the root cause of exploitation and environmental destruction" (p. 6)? It "ends up dividing the [society] by implying that those who purchase "ethically" are more moral than those who do not, regardless of their means of doing so" (p. 7) and thus "absolves the ruling class of any responsibility for its despicable treatment of workers, animals, and the environment" (p. 8).

The pursuits of justice, therefore, needs to view green capitalism as a form of religion/spiritual formation because of its faith that it can address ecological crises. Richard Smith (2016) writes about green capitalism as the 'god that failed', explaining that "ecologically suicidal growth is built into the nature of *any conceivable capitalism*" (p. 18). In fact, "the project of a steady-state capitalism is impossible and a distraction", when "under capitalism, the whole point of using resources efficiently is just to use the saved resources to produce even more commodities, to accelerate the conversion of *even more* natural resources into products" (*ibid*: 36).

Further, in a capitalist society, the social structure that we call "rights" arises from the need for exchange relations between capital and between capital and labor. When personhood is imagined in individual terms, it tends towards possessive individualism, ignoring the real lives and unequal relations of people in the sphere of exchange. The rights of people who are being wronged and who need justice—equality and freedom—are obfuscated in the capitalist economy, because in the relationship between labor and capital in the sphere of market exchange there is always the 'deceptives' of Jeremy Bentham. As Marx (1974) noted:

> There alone rule Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham. Freedom, because both buyer and seller of a commodity, say of labour-power, are constrained only by their own free will. They contract as free agents, and the agreement they come to, is but the form in which they give legal expression to their common will. Equality, because each enters into relation with the other, as with a simple owner of commodities, and they exchange equivalent for equivalent. Property, because each dispose only of what is his own. And Bentham because each looks only to himself. The only force that brings them together and puts them in relation with each other, is the selfishness, the gain, and the private interests of each. Each looks to himself only, and no one troubles himself about the rest, and just because they do so, do they all, in accordance with the pre-established harmony of things, or under the auspices of an all-shrewd providence, work together to their mutual advantage, for the common weal and in the interest of all (Marx 1974: 19).

Formal equality in the sphere of exchange and in liberal democratic politics are undermined by inequalities in the economic domain that arise from the internal dynamics of capitalist appropriation of labor and nature, and the ways in which that appropriation is mediated by racism and violence. Rights discourses and the moral bases underpinning any appropriation of nature must be understood in a historical context and within the context of existing human–nature relations. "Greek society was founded upon slavery, and had, therefore, for its natural basis the inequality of men and of their labor-powers" (Marx 1974: 64). Capitalism, however, envisions that "all kinds of labor are equal and equivalent" (*ibid*). Rights discourses and their moral bases in capitalism and liberal democracy are derived from private property and wage-labor in the generalized and monetized exchange in the marketplace.

By contrast,

> …it is in the character of the [exchange mediated by money]—as far as it is developed in its purity to this point, and without regard to more highly developed relations of production—that all inherent contradictions of bourgeois society appear extinguished in money relations as conceived in a simple form; and bourgeois democracy even more than the bourgeois economists takes refuge in this aspect (the latter are at least consistent enough to regress to even simpler aspects of exchange value and exchange) in order to construct apologetics for the existing economic relations, (Marx 1973: 239–240)

A perspective on justice is necessary to address the ideological deceptiveness of equality and the mystification of inequality in the sphere of exchange, as well as the gratuitous benevolence, philanthropy, and notions of justice on which "right order" theories rest (Wolterstorff 2008). In order to keep such a theory of justice based on natural rights from falling into the traps of universalism and cultural relativism (Donnelly 2007; Lenzerini 2014; Parekh 2017), it must be born out of a praxis of social and ecological justice. This involves critical and purposive reflections on the world's most vulnerable and marginalized communities, who disproportionately suffer the worst impacts of global social and ecological crises, and their culturally specific strategies of resistance (Folks 2012; Gomez *et al.* 2011; Kopnina 2012; Mathews 1994; Rice *et al.* 2015; Robertson *et al.* 1999; Rocheleau *et al.* 1996). We need to recognize the intimate connection between justice and distinct cultural lifeways, and how injustices and resistance against them are imbricated in peoples' distinct yet interconnected subjectivities and practices.

We must not diffuse or trivialize the specific demands for justice at a given moment, by claiming that all forms of injustice in different spaces are interconnected. We misuse the analytical purpose of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989) and transform it into an oppressive ideology in which we use the interconnected nature of overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage to suppress and distract from the specific struggles occurring in a particular moment and context. For example, a statement by the Combahee River Collective in 1974 explains how it was "committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression" and "the importance of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. " (Eisenstein 1978: 210). At the same time, the statement also underscores two important points. **First**, the specifics of Black women's experience in relation to patriarchy and racism:

> As children we realized that we were different from boys and that we were treated differently. For example, we were told in the same breath to be quiet both for the sake of being "ladylike" and to make us less objectionable in the eyes of white people. As we grew older we became aware of the threat of physical and sexual abuse by men. However, we had no way of conceptualizing what was so apparent to us, what we knew was really happening. (*Ibid*: 211)

Thus, unlike the struggles of white women to claim their individuality vis-à-vis white men, the Black women's struggle is one of solidarity as they "struggle together with Black men against racism, while [they] also struggle with Black men about sexism" (*Ibid*: 214).

Second, the Collective also believes in the complementary relationship between dismantling racism and many other forms of oppression. "If Black women are free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free, since it would necessitate the destruction of all forms of oppression" (Eisenstein 1978: 215). In this regard, Wolterstorff's perspective on justice is unique. Because of his emphasis on actively engaging with injustice, his approach to responding to the reasons why a person is wronged and who bears the responsibility for injustice, is built on the practice of responsible reflection of the lived-in realities of injustice. Echoing Paulo Freire's (1970) recognition of the dialectical relations between oppressor and the oppressed, Wolterstorff insists that the genuine pursuit of justice requires rejecting prescriptions for injustice recommended by those responsible for it. In the context of Black feminism, this means, it is the "responsibility of white feminists [to] recognize and act upon the racism against the Black community…more than superficial comprehension of race, color, black culture and black history" (Eisenstein 1978: 218).

bell hooks captures the reasons for our entry into thinking about justice in her personal move to theory as liberatory praxis:

> Let me begin by saying that I came to theory because I was hurting–the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend–to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing. (Hooks 1991: 1)

Our intellectual and pragmatic interests in justice should be driven by our pain about *in*justice endured by the oppressed and our desire to be stakeholders in their liberation, while also recognizing, critiquing and acting on the facts of our own agency in upholding their oppression.

The idea of natural rights-based justice, in Wolterstorff's analysis, exemplified by the notion of emancipatory love, transcends the limits of rights, obligations, and social order theories of justice. Wolterstorff's idea of justice is more a celebration of justice in peoples' lives in different cultural locations as embodied in the dialectics between universal and culturally specific notions of justice. It forecloses possibilities of exploiting universal natural rights to then ignore and suppress culturally localized injustices, justifying them by pointing to the cultural inappropriateness of universal rights. When justice is rooted in love, rather than commanded in law, duties, or obligations of being a member of a group or a community, is organic and ethically driven, it is less prone to abuse and commands greater power to fight against injustice

5. Love and justice

Love as an embodiment of justice drives "ecological conversion"[14] as it enables us to transcend the limitations of current narratives of justice. "Love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care, is also civic

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[14] Ecological conversion is a multifaceted concept that combines the changes in humans and social systems in their relationship with each other and nature. In *Laudato Sí*, Pope Francis' call for an "ecological conversion", argues that it is our responsibility "to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society, and our relationship with nature." (2015a). The argument is that the economic, social and ecological challenges are unlikely to happen unless they are underpinned by widespread personal, interpersonal and community conversion, and a corresponding cultural transformation of our relations with nature. The reason for the lack of change arises from our failure "in the task of stewardship: so often we are driven by greed and by the arrogance of dominion, possession, manipulation and exploitation; we do not preserve nature; nor do we respect or consider it a gracious gift which we must care for and set at the service of our brothers and sisters including the future generation" (Donal 2016: 41). The need for conversion arises from a moral issue. As Joshtrom Kureethadam points out, "at a deeper level, the ecological crisis stems from human hubris, namely,

and political, and it makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world. Love for society and commitment to the common good are outstanding expressions of a charity which affects not only relationships between individuals but also macro-relationships, social, economic, and political ones" (Francis 2015a). Social love is the key to joyful and authentic existence: "In order to make society more human, more worthy of the human person, love in social life – political, economic and cultural – must be given renewed value, becoming the constant and highest norm for all activity" (Francis 2015a). The personal transformation embodied in ecological conversion needed to combat the climate crisis is about a "culture of care' which permeates all of society" (*ibid*). When the people are complicit with the erosion of foundations of personal and systemic social life, "what ensues are battles over conflicting interests, new forms of violence and brutality, and obstacles to the growth of a genuine culture of care for the environment"(*ibid*).

The spirituality-informed notion of love as the embodiment of justice was part of the EJ movement in the United States when it originated as an inseparable part of the civil rights movement against slavery. For example, Martin Luther King's approach to justice was universal and it was centered on his theological understanding of love for humanity as a collective:

> We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. . .. A threat to justice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. (King Jr. 1963: 4)

In this idea of common destiny, love and justice are inseparable "Without love, justice become empty; without justice love become sentimental and empty. We must come to see justice is love, correcting and controlling all that stand against love" (Carson *et al*. 1992: 201). This understanding of a love-justice nexus for a common humanity led King's responses to racial and environmental injustices that disproportionately impacted African American communities. Dr. Lowery, a national civil rights leader who played a pioneering role in mainstreaming environmental justice into African American movements advancing equity, justice, and inclusion, noted that "love embraces justice" in a deeply spiritual sense (Davis 2020: 8). The notion of love embodied in spirituality, however, took a back seat in secular humanistic theories of environmental justice literature and it was confined to fields concerned with religion, philosophy and spirituality or remained functional at the margins of the society. It was no coincidence that the moral basis of environmental justice which was deeply rooted in a spiritualized notion of love lost its central place in the mainstream EJ movement.

First, the emergence of the White middle class as the leaders of the environmental movement shifted its environment justice concerns to the protection of the natural environment as a disembodied entity: "they loved wild nature didn't care much about the places where people lived, worked, played, and learned", (Britton-Purdy 2016: 15), thus ignoring the marginalization of communities of colored Americans, Latinos, Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans that results from the racialized domination of nature by the same class (Cone 2000; Niebuhr 1958). **Second**, the formal legal systems of justice that evolved during this period confined the moral basis of society's understanding of justice within the expansionary needs of capitalism, predicated on the abstract and universally generalizable anthropocentric domination of nature. **Third**, the evolution of the state as the primary arbiter of justice often derived its popular legitimacy from racialized economic nationalism that is often symbiotically linked with racialized religious theology of spirituality.

At the same time, spirituality did not completely disappear from the scholarly pursuits of justice, for it saw a resurgence in manifold articulations within EJ movements. These efforts viewed environmental justice and racial justice as inseparable with the moral foundations needed to transcend anthropocentrism. Examples of literature portraying nature as sacred, and human–nature relations as stewardship rather than domination continue to abound, drawing the ethical bases of human–nature relationships from a spiritual understanding of

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from our refusal to accept our proper identity as creatures and to acknowledge our radical dependence on the creator and our interdependence on the rest of creation" (Kureethadam 2014: 329).

love for nature (Gutierrez 1988; Hessel and Reuther 2005; Hoyt 1996; Martin-Schramm and Stivers 2003; McFague 1993, 2001; Radford Ruether 1996; Shiva 1994; Tinker 1996). Likewise, anthropologist Leslie Sponsel (2012) uses the notion of "spiritual ecology" to demonstrate the interweaving of nature and spirituality. For him, "spiritual ecology" is "the diverse, complex, and dynamic arena of intellectual and practical activities at the interface between religions and spiritualities on the one hand, and, on the other, ecologies, environments, and environmentalism" (*ibid*: xiii). In Sponsel's intellectual history of spiritual ecology, Indigenous people are "spiritual ecologist[s]" (p. ix). Spirituality is not separate from nature but instead is an integral part of an organic natural unity, with spiritual ecology having a key role to play in averting global ecological disaster—suggesting that "we would not have an environmental crisis today if we treated the earth with respect and reverence" (p. iv). However, with some exceptions, Sponsel's attempts to find synergies between science and spiritual ecology, expressed in a lifetime of publication and teaching, remain at the margins of EJ literature.

Likewise, within Wolterstorff's analysis, spirituality within social and ecological justice is not limited to mystical experience, but also a *lived-in critical praxis of spirituality that embraces resistance and regeneration*. Both secular and the religious/spiritual is a false binary when they both pursue and have faith in the same ideals that devalue, dominate exploit and cause violence against humanity and ecologies.[15] However, spiritual approaches reproduce the same anthropocentrism that they attempt to transform when they take the religious-secular binary for granted. Fitzgerald's (2012) critical analysis of Richard Dawkins' religious and secular binary points out that "[the] distinction between 'religion' and the nonreligious secular is itself a pure abstraction with no basis in empirical reality and very little meaningful content outside the shouting space of public rhetoric" (p. 4). Nor is the notion of faith the exclusive property of religion. Why is it that "the realization of justice in our lives, and the faith we have in the solemn procedures of the courts, [is] not itself a form of religious practice? Does Dawkins really imagine that *sharia* law is essentially religious but the judicial system in the UK is essentially secular?" asks Fitzgerald.

The idea of love as a basis for justice has also seen a resurgence in ecofeminist approaches to environmental issues. Ecofeminists focus on universal and inter- and intra-animal approaches to study conflicts of interest involving humans and animals, "undertaking the work of moral repair to address damage done to relationships of love and care in the process" (Emmerman 2019: 77). Ecofeminists characterize love as non-coercive and mutually transformative and embrace mutual respect and responsibility for the unique differences and otherness of subjects, human and non-human alike (Dobascha 1993; Haraway, 2003; Hawkins 1988; Mickey and Carfore 2012). These feminist perspectives are apprehensive about the absence of equal legitimacy for notions of emotion, such as passion, desire, caring, and love, in highly masculinized and racialized environmental research and environmental activism (Cole and Foster 2001; Dobasha 1993; Estévez-Saá and Lorenzo-Modia 2018; Hessel and Rasmussen 2001; Longenecker 1997; Mann 2011; MacGregor and Seymour 2017; Snyder 1992, Walker 1997). Further, Mickey and Carfore (2012: 122), "criticize the dominant model of globalization, which oppresses humans and the natural environment, and propose an alternative globalization grounded in planetary love."[16] They are also critical of models of justice centered on distribution. An "additional non-distributive model of justice is needed if what really matters ethically concerning the exploitation of human and nonhuman natural environments is to be captured and expressed" (Warren 1998), and such a model is "needed to supplement, complement, and-in some cases, take precedence over a distributive model." As Warren (1998) says:

> In *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Iris Young critiques the distributive model of social justice on two main grounds: First, 'it tends to focus thinking about social justice on the allocation of material goods such as things, resources, income, and wealth, or on the distribution of social positions, especially jobs.' [Young 1990: 14]. Second, even when the distributive paradigm is widened to include nonmaterial social goods (e.g., power, opportunity, self-respect), it continues to treat them as static things, rather than as functions of social relations and processes. (no pp.)

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[15] For a discussion on the limitations of a religious and secular binary, see Ramachandra (1999).

[16] Mickey and Carfore draw the analysis on the writings of Spivak (1988, 1999), Moore and Rivera (2011), Plumwood (2002) and Donna Haraway (1991, 2008).

The case for a non-distributive notion of justice is embodied in love and care arising from other concerns relating to an ethical basis of justice. For example, Aldo Leopold (1966) notes that "no important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections, and convictions" (p. 246). Just relations between nature and society can be formed only if "nonhuman nature is integrated in the ethical space of the moral community" (Cheney 1989: 139), and this relationship should be based on "love, respect, and admiration of the land" (Leopold 1966: 261). Such moral communities evolve when the transformation of unjust systems and power relations are given 'priority' over 'fairness' and the stability of the social order, which is typically the scope of justice that society ordinarily expects or permitted through laws and traditions. Yet, the notion of justice underpinned by love, remains marginal and underdeveloped in the environmental justice literature, despite the notion's resurgence as a force drawing people to current climate justice activism that increasingly focuses on dismantling capitalism and racism as its inseparable goals. The impossibility of achieving justice through distribution echoes Malcom X's idea that "It's impossible for a white person to believe in capitalism and not believe in racism" (Malcom X and Breitman 1994: 69). In the same vein, "you can't have capitalism without racism" and that the "logic that led to slavery and segregation in the Americas, colonization and Apartheid in Africa, and the rule of white supremacy throughout the world is the same one that leads to the exploitation of animals and the ravaging of nature" (Cone 2000: 36). In the wake of violence perpetrated in the name of religion and protest movements around world, combining dissent against capitalism, racism and climate change, there is growing interests in the moral bases of justice, rights, and power from religious/spirituality perspectives (Burbea 2015; Butler 2016; Francis 2015b; Hill 2016; Jha 2017; Trone 2018; Wright 2011).

Fruitful outcomes of social and ecological justice that draw on diverse forms of religious teachings and spiritualities associated with them, however, depend on the extent of their ability to transcend three limitations. **First**, they must avoid the excesses of universalism and relativism found in the theorization of justice, especially when they obstruct responding to injustices that arise from forces that impact diverse cultural settings, and when they exploit cultural relativism to escape responsibility for injustices specific to cultures. Indeed, there needs to be more emphasis on understanding the intersections between spirituality and capitalism and racism (Eggemeier and Fritz 2020; McCarraher 2019) as well as the positive synergy between the spirituality within global and culturally specific anti-capitalist, anti-racist and climate justice struggles (Barbour 2002; Brentlinger 2000; Hinkelammert 1986; Palaga 2016; Shadle 2018).

Second, they must subject the legal systems (e.g. civil, religious, and common laws) to the scrutiny of justice. As we know from Critical Legal Studies (Douzinas and Gearey 2005; Finnis 1985; Unger 1985) and feminist jurisprudence (Scales 1981, 1986; Whitman 1985), so-called neutrality claims made through abstract laws (e.g. private property, market driven exchange relations, citizenship, gender divisions, etc.), which are taken for granted as natural, are myths. Legal systems are used to maintain the status quo of society's hierarchies and power structures. Codified laws (e.g. slavery and private property rights) could very well be embodiments of society's biases against disadvantaged groups (the same applies to non-codified laws). Law is not equivalent to justice when it sustains inequality. As the Greek General, Pericles (404 B.C.) stated, "[if] we look to the laws, they afford equal justice to all in their private differences" (cited in Yue 2019: 2). The promise of justice in these different environments could be hollow when the law reproduces the very political and economic power structures responsible for injustice. The idea of love as the basis for justice allows one to scrutinize the equality and justice implications of the moral foundations of legal systems.

Third, rather than taking the spiritual-secular binary for granted, we uncover the production of the binary in everyday life and their implications for justice. In other words, we must be open to the realities that religions and secular worldviews can share the same ideals (Ramachandra 1996: 14-21) and have similar implications for social and ecological justice.

Justice as an embodiment of love, manifested in the epoch I refer to as the Lovecene, entails voluntary commitments to transforming the individual agents and systemic reasons associated with injustice, and to embodying human–nature relations in justice rather than pursuing justice within the limits of our personal interests and capabilities, or the limits of rules and regulations. Moving beyond these constraints requires that

power be backed by radical love. Martin Luther King Jr. rejected the treatment of "love and power as polar opposites" and identification of "love with a resignation of power, and power with a denial of love" (King Jr 1967: 20). "Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love" (King Jr 1967: 30). In criticizing the limits and dangers of benevolence and philanthropy, King points out that "without love, benevolence becomes egotism, and martyrdom becomes spiritual pride" (p. 44).

Elaborating on the love and power nexus, King notes that "this has led Negro Americans in the past to seek their goals through love and moral suasion devoid of power, and white Americans to seek their goals through power devoid of love and conscience" (King Jr 1967: 32). King, through his theory of love, recognized the difficulties the oppressed face in their efforts to change their conditions. This is well illustrated by Paolo Freire (1970), who points out that never in history has violence been initiated by the oppressed because,

> With the establishment of relations of oppression violence has already begun. How could [the oppressed] be the initiators if they themselves are the result of violence? How could they be the sponsors of something whose objective inauguration called forth their existence as oppressed? There would be no oppressed had there been no prior situation of violence to establish their subjugation. (p. 55)

At the same time, Freire's interest was to create a more humane world different from one that is responsible for oppression. For this reason, he advised:

> [liberation], a human phenomenon, cannot be achieved by semi-humans. Any attempt to treat people as semi-humans only dehumanizes them. When people are already dehumanized, due to the oppression they suffer, the process of their liberation must not employ the methods of dehumanization. (Freire 1970: 66-67)

Such modes of emancipation adopted by the oppressed "will actually constitute an act of love opposing the lovelessness which lies at the heart of the oppressor's violence, even when clothed in false generosity by the oppressors" (p. 155). Reinhold Niebhur (1963) noted that attempts to "substitute the law of love for the spirit of justice instead of recognizing love as the fulfillment and highest form of the spirit of justice", runs the risk of individuality, self-improvement, and complicity with the status quo as opposed to transformation (p. 84). According to Niebhur, "The law of love is involved in all approximations of justice, not only as the source of the norms of justice, but as an ultimate perspective by which their limitations are discovered" (p. 85). In this love-justice nexus, "love is neither of *eros* nor *philia*; he is speaking of *agape*, understanding and creative, redemptive goodwill for all men" (King 1963b: 52). Likewise, Wolterstorff's efforts in many ways takes us back to the origins of the environmental justice movement that was built on a theological understanding of the moral foundations of love–justice–power nexus articulated by African Americans and the Civil Rights movement.

6. Conclusion

The Virocene epoch forces us to rethink 'normal' ways of living with nature. It shows us that normalcy will not directly emerge from the pandemic. Rather, the end of the pandemic is a specific moment in history that neither originates with, nor belongs to normalcy or the pandemic—much as a dam is completely different in nature from the two mountains it connects, to paraphrase George Simmel's analogy of war and peace (Simmel 1903: 800). Unlike war, however, viruses are a force of nature whose recurrence does not depend on human intervention. They are of a wholly different nature than that of their hosts. At the same time, patterns of viral mutation and the frequency of them becoming pandemics and the human and nonhuman vulnerabilities they produce are all products of the way capitalism and racism have organized nature-society relations.

Specifically, these vulnerabilities emerge not from absence of, or slow pace of, distorted or mismanaged growth – but from the ontological foundations and internal logic of growth itself, now largely controlled by global financial capital. Moreover, we also observe a spike in the vulnerabilities associated with racism, xenophobia, and militarism during the pandemic in many countries, inextricably linked with neoliberal growth policies. These links are likely to continue in countries where post-pandemic economic policies and legitimacy of the state are driven by market rationality, authoritarian rule, and racist ethnoreligious nationalism.

Although the risks and vulnerabilities of the Virocene epoch demarcate the inherent limits of organizing human relations with nature using capitalist market rationality, and racist ideologies and modes of governance, they by no means imply that the Virocene epoch has exhausted the power of humans to organize their relations with nature harmoniously and sustainably. The notion that the Virocene epoch has imposed an unprecedented social, economic, and political crisis is misleading to the extent that it overlooks the historical precedent of these vulnerabilities. In addition, the range of responses to the pandemic and their different effects in different countries clearly demonstrate the extent to which political will assigns rights-based justice a central place in negotiating human and ecological wellbeing over the interests of capitalism and racism.

The most pertinent question is whether progressive socially transformative subjects will emerge from the Virocene epoch. Yet, revolutionary subjects do not evolve out of helplessness, destitution, fear, deprivation, and dispossession alone. This is partly because, as Freire notes, the 'oppressed' and the 'oppressors' often share the same worldview – often the oppressed want to get rid of the oppressor merely to claim the same way of living:

> The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom from oppression, as the oppressed under these circumstances are both the oppressor and oppressed, and the oppressed want at any cost to resemble the oppressors, to imitate them, to follow them. (Freire 1970: 47)

Further, the

> …oppressed, who have adapted to the structure of domination in which they are immersed, and have become resigned to it, are inhibited from waging the struggle for freedom so long as they feel incapable of running the risks it requires. Moreover, their struggle for freedom threatens not only the oppressor, but also their own oppressed comrades who are fearful of still greater repression. (Freire 1970: 47)

Under these circumstances, it is unclear whether helplessness in the face of pandemic illness and oppression under capitalism will lead the oppressed to desire the role of oppressor, or to search for new ways of living. The challenge we face today, therefore, is that of assisting those who are threatened by COVID-19 to question their own subjectivities as these have been embodied in oppressive economic and political ideologies. Those made vulnerable by the arrival of the Virocene may believe it is a short-lived period, with an imminent return to traditional ways of life that will be brought about by a return to existing social policies. In this case, they may—understandably—shrink away from challenging dominant ideologies and practices, instead pursuing any number of alternative social paths within them – or, perhaps, simply accept the status quo and search for ways to survive. Moreover, privileged social groups who genuinely aspire to live life in harmony with society and nature, by being unwilling to give up their privilege or their well-intended actions, do not necessarily help transform the systemic injustices faced by the less privileged.

The need of the hour, therefore, is an alternative worldview through which we may radically reformulate relationships between capital, culture, power, and nature, paving the way for a world premised on human and ecological wellbeing. Progressive change should occur at both individual and systemic levels, driven by values of human and ecological wellbeing that recognize the equal dignity and worth of all humans and of the environment. As Moore (2016a: 114) has argued, "[popular] strategies for liberation will succeed or fail on our

capacity to forge a different ontology of nature, humanity, and justice—one that asks not merely how to redistribute wealth, but how to remake our place in nature in a way that promises emancipation for all life."

Creating a new ontology is challenging on many fronts when closely associated moral subcultures of the justice-rights-power nexus align with existing systems of inequality, oppression, and domination; and when education, religious and cultural systems, legal discourses, and political and economic rationalities socialize people to accept these dominant systems as normal. The alternative perspective Wolterstorff offers to dominant perspectives of rights, the justice–power nexus, and the moral subcultures informed or ignored by theories of social and ecological justice, can provide a promising path toward a better world order.

COVID-19 has garnered a new recognition for alternative global approaches to organizing human and ecological well-being that embody Wolterstorff's articulation of a rights–justice–power nexus, and are expressed three different ways. **First**, the climate justice and Black Lives Matter movements, which are global and are more inclusive of racial diversity of the world than earlier movements, have espoused economic, racial, and climate justice as inseparable.

Second, examples abound of organizing production, distribution, and governance around the notion of multispecies social and ecological justice. For instance, the food justice and food sovereignty movements recognize the food system as "a racial project and problematizes the influence of race and class on the production, distribution and consumption of food" (Agyeman and Alcon 2011: 5). These movements support a vision of food sovereignty that is concerned with the "structural barriers communities of color face accessing local and organic foods", which arise from institutional racism now seeks to "craft collective racial and cultural identities s through the celebration of particular food" (p. 12). These movements have given rise to justice-centered community gardens and farms, food cooperatives, and mutual aid societies, some of which are serving the food needs of the most vulnerable populations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although COVID-19 has caused some disruption to alternative paths of human survival such as localist, sustainable cultures, renewable energy, sustainable food security systems, mutual-aid collectives, cooperatives, and climate justice actions, all these have proven far more resilient and helpful to vulnerable communities than centralized governmental authorities.

Third, emerging discourses on the Solidarity Economy, degrowth economics, the Green New Deal, and the social economy provides space for intellectual reflection on these alternative ways of organizing relations between society and nature (Allard *et al.* 2008; Bollier and Conaty 2014; Chiengkul 2018; Dacheux and Goujon 2011; North 2006; Pia *et al.* 2020).These interventions are organized around the concerns for the lack of positive correlation between material prosperity and individual and social well-being; gender and racial inequalities, and principles of inclusive self-determination and cooperation (Bauhardt 2014; Lloveras *et al.* 2018). These political movements, and intellectual trends and social practices they inspire, constitute a sort of social and ecological praxis that opens promising pathways for the evolution of organic and sustainable emancipatory political consciousness and power needed to dismantle oppressive ideologies and systems. Ideally, such a political consciousness will lead to a global confederation of, in Anthony Bebbington's words, "[i]slands of sustainability" (Bebbington 1997: 189), or 'multispecies communities of care' that reflect our world's social and ecological diversity as well as the interconnectedness and interdependence of human and nonhuman communities. This, in turn, will usher in a new planetary epoch—the Lovecene, in which people's care for all human and nonhuman species would be voluntary, and satisfying.

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