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Toward an Optimism of the Intellect Contribution to GTI Forum [Can Human Solidarity Globalize?](#)

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I applaud Richard Falk's cogent [plea](#) for waging generational battles against "the foreclosure of imagination" and his continued insistence on a moral epistemology to achieve "responsible anthropocentrism." I also endorse the rejection of the slogan that "politics" is the "art of possible." It has been the common experience that the quest for the "impossible" animates the tasks of justice. Falk reminds us that the itinerary of the "citizen pilgrim" is both a sacred peregrinology and secular (ad)venture: it installs the figures of the unthinkable as the very core of chasing the predictions of the past and footprints for the future.

Falk invokes three central components for new imagination of the future of the planet now engulfed by escalating anthropological harm. First, St. Francis suggests an "emancipatory path": "Start by doing what is necessary, then what is possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible." Second, the notion of a "citizen pilgrim" who thinks the unthinkable is a figure of thought by which alone just sustainabilites are sustained. Third, what is required is critical solidarity, not the oppressive imperial solidarities of the state, class (whether old or new), patriarchy, racism, and capital.

Falk seems to me to pose a much-needed question of Anthropocene "we-ness" that helps achieve a socially responsible/response-able planetary loyalty, one in which we are capable of responding to the world around us and the challenges and opportunities that arise. Falk describes it as the "uniqueness of the Anthropocene...to restrict the possible to unsustainable and dysfunctional structures and modes of behavior, while bringing to a head the question of finding more viable ways of organizing life on the planet and living together in a manner that protects future generations." This "we-ness" comes only through critical engagement with

the survival of the planet and all life forms in this seventh decade of the ongoing Sixth Mass Extinction.

Trading in corporate and political evil defines the business as usual paradigm that menaces, to take a most recent example, the Third World's requests to the World Trade Organization to lighten the load of an industrial patent regime and foster a just world order of vaccine distribution amidst the sinister middle phases of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Anthropocene problems such as extreme weather changes, floods, storms, tsunamis, massive deforestation, aggravated sanitation and potable water supply, and draught and desertification are already upon us. We stand warned of the alarming rate of deforestation and biodiversity loss. And even more dire evils will engulf us all towards the middle decades of this century—whether the problems of oceans warming; arctic glaciers melting; sea levels rising; or disappearing states and territories, causing internal displacement or necessitous mass migration across national frontiers. No matter how often climate change denialism persists, or how many theologies of a “Good Anthropocene” are propounded, the impending anthropogenic harm remains far more catastrophic, cruel, and pervasive than COVID-19.

Evolution of response-able Anthropocene “we-ness” involves several steps, big and small. First, the awareness that all forms of life stand imperiled by continuing anthropogenic harm must lead to acceptance that humans are as much a part of “nature” and must therefore begin to transcend all speciesism or anthropomorphism in approaches to Anthropocene justice.

Second, we must learn at least to respect all “companion species” (as Donna Haraway calls them) by pluralizing “several subjects of extinction” and by revisiting “the doctrines of species encoded in the images of ‘biodiversity,’ ‘humanity,’ ‘unloved’ subjects, and ‘absent or non-relational subjects.’”¹

Third, the violence of “many ingrained hierarchies” and the “embedded exclusions and inequalities in the dominant discourses” ought urgently to yield to “plural ethico-political responses” to “several subjects of extinction.”²

Finally, the threats (of globalization and neoliberalism) to erase pluralism must be met with Jean-Luc Nancy's fertile notion that obligations of global justice are not new but are embedded in the enterprise of living together. The task for each one of us is the creation of a new world "immediately, without delay," to "reopen each possible struggle for a world" against "global injustice." But this "struggle" must be sustained "precisely in the name of the fact that this world is coming out of nothing, that there is nothing before it and that it is without models, without principle and without given end, and that is precisely what forms the justice and the meaning of the world."³

The human rights struggle for the creation of a new world lies not in giving old meanings to a new reality; rather, the task is to fully grasp a new dialectic for the future of human rights. The obligation of justice is to de-create the existing world and simultaneously to create alternate worlds as being infinite. The ethical idea of human rights is now to be envisioned as a never-ending struggle for emancipation as justice. This new planetary solidarity is one of "being-in-the-common"—world-creating, in a heroic sense.

Finally, a jurisprudence of extinction (involving both de-creation as well as re-creation) signifies a reversal of Gramscian dictum: "I'm a pessimist because of intelligence, but an optimist because of will."⁴ No such optimism of will can now deliver us out of the combined effects of anthropogenic harm. How then may performances of optimism of intellect detract us from re-writing the past and produce new practices of counterfactual near-future history?

Endnotes

1. Donna Haraway writes, "The origin of rights is in committed relationship, not in separate and pre-existing category identities. . . . The question turns out not to be, 'What are animal rights, as if they existed preformed to be uncovered but, 'How may a human enter into a rights relationship with an animal?'" in *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003). On pluralizing subjects of extinction, see Audra Mitchell, "Beyond Biodiversity and Species: Problematizing Extinction," *Theory, Culture, & Society* 33, no. 6 (2016): 24. See also, Claire Colebrook, *Death of the PostHuman: Essays on Extinction*, vol. 1 (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2014).

2. Mitchell, "Beyond Biodiversity and Species," 23, 24.

3. Jean-Luc Nancy, *Creation of the World, or, Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 22. See, for an elaborate reflection, B. C. Hutchens, *Jean-Luc Nancy and the Future of Philosophy* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 142-154.

4. Upendra Baxi, "Reversing Gramsci: Notes on Optimism of the intellect and Pessimism of the Will?," LASSNET, Valedictory Address, December 10-12, 2016.

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