

## **Nietzsche, the Anthropocene, and COVID-19**

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### **Abstract**

I draw affinities between Nietzsche's criticisms of modernity and the Anthropocene, showing how this COVID-19 pandemic reflects our failure to dream radically but also our potentiality for a greater tomorrow. The Anthropocene represents society's unprecedented progress at the cost of a rift between nature and civilization guided by utopias. This meant, in greater terms, society's value for economics while sacrificing ecology. Though a viral pathology, this pandemic exposed societal pathologies ignored for a long time: defects in healthcare, city planning, and sustainable living. Our herd-like response to this crisis stems from a deep-seated homelessness caused by the Anthropocene. Life ought to be altered and Nietzsche's Eternal Return challenges us: If this is to return, what are our values? This paper is threefold: I first present the Anthropocene and draw affinities with Nietzsche's critique of modernity. I then proceed by giving several examples of how the pandemic challenges societal values. Lastly, Nietzsche's challenge of the Eternal Return is a test to our own values to life after the pandemic.

**Keywords:** Nietzsche, Anthropocene, COVID-19

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic caused a global standstill. Strict measures are implemented to flatten the curve of the rate of infection and deaths caused by the virus. I link this viral pathology to humanity's dominance over nature. "As we continue to exterminate vast swaths of macroscopic life through this cutting of new connections, we are also creating new conditions for microscopic life to thrive."<sup>1</sup> Our altercations of the macroscopic environmental landscape by the diversion of waterflows, immense logging activities, and deeper mining make us more susceptible to nature's potent pathogens that might prove extremely lethal to humanity, such as this current pandemic. We thus see how this current crisis is one of our own doing: our extol of nature's demise for economic success. Nietzsche's ideas serve as a beneficial counterweight during this critical time; if life is to return, do our values still stand? The pause this pandemic provides us is an appropriate time for critical reflection on the hollowness of our current values in the Anthropocene.

## Anthropocene

In geological terms, the Anthropocene as our current condition is primarily shaped by humanity's incalculable influence in ecology; scientific and technological advancements are causes for our disquieting unsustainability and demand for responsibility.<sup>2</sup> Paul J. Crutzen, Will Steffen, and John R. McNeill provide an outline to its eclipse:<sup>3</sup> (1) *The Industrial Era*

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<sup>1</sup> Mihnea Tanasescu, "Viral Political Ecology," *Civil Animal* (10 March 2020); available from <https://thecivilanimal.com/2020/03/10/viral-political-ecology/>; accessed 28 April 2020.

<sup>2</sup> See Timothy Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 1; Cf. Timothy Sean Quinn, "Anthropocene Crises and the Origin of Modernity," *Telos* 177 (New York: Telos Press, 2016), 43; and Sverre Raffnsøe, *Philosophy of the Anthropocene: The Human Turn* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), xii.

<sup>3</sup> See Will Steffen, Paul J. Crutzen and John R. McNeill, "The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature?" *Ambio: A Journal about the*

(ca.1800-1945). Industrial societies used about 12-20 times more energy than hunting and gathering societies. Natural practices of utilizing energy found in an environment abundant with trees and rivers were replaced with the coal, oil, fossil fuels, and gas. The Enlightenment meant an intellectual progression that braced the modern world for technological success. (2) *The Great Acceleration* (1945-ca.2015). The peace that came after the Second World War brought the world closer through communication, transportation, and digitalization, which was a hotbed for subsidies and funding for research and invention. This period witnessed a population explosion and an even greater concern for economics that meant a globalized effort for production at the cost of the world's sixth mass extinction for both terrestrial and marine wildlife and a catastrophic alteration of the global environment brought about by mining, plantations, and farming. It is during this second period, Steffen, Crutzen and McNeill argue, that the city garnered much importance as people flocked to them both for work and living. Urban settlement took shape without a grasp of the detrimental effects these had on the environment. (3) *Stewards of the Earth System?* (2015-?). This (then) projected period stands as a critical counterweight to the past times that recognizes the grave effects of human activity to the environment that may give varying focuses. With the Anthropocene, we have given premium to the city. The fast-paced life this offered us makes former ways inaccessible. We had to adjust at the monumental speed of the Anthropocene's development without any precaution.

Two things are worth our consideration in the Anthropocene. Firstly, I argue that it is about power. Our initial disposition was a disparity between humanity and nature. Vanessa Lemm offers a beneficial commentary by stating that civilization's objective "is to impose a 'second' nature on the human being which is, morally speaking, 'superior' to its 'first'

animal nature.”<sup>4</sup> An unhomely character erupts from this imposition. In philosophical terms, we give credit to Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer for recounting the stages of humanity’s encounter of nature from fear to mimicry to intellectualization and dominance.<sup>5</sup> The initial fear was due to nature’s intense power and humanity sought to “make home” of this nature, hence we imitated it and eventually this mimicry meandered to domination.

Our power over nature stems from our rationalization of it. In knowing more of nature, we discovered its malleability; enlightenment, technological success, and scientific discoveries meant the exhaustion of our resources. The fault Nietzsche finds here is the Socratic error of equating knowledge with virtue.<sup>6</sup> The Anthropocene premised on knowledge’s furthering—the unprecedented speed of industrialization and technologization, and the “human experience of nature’s hostility to humanity; fear of living at the mercy of nature intensifies the desire for power over nature.”<sup>7</sup> For Nietzsche, culture cannot progress with civilization for one necessarily has to give way for the other’s flourishing. Nature cannot coexist with civilization for these are not equal forces. Nietzsche bifurcates them and says that what hails the progress of one causes the damage of the other.<sup>8</sup> Lemm highlights this passage and underscores that

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<sup>4</sup> Vanessa Lemm, “The Biological Threshold of Modern Politics: Nietzsche, Foucault and the Question of Animal Life,” *Nietzsche, Power and Politics: Rethinking Nietzsche’s Legacy for Political Thought*, Herman W. Siemens and Vasti Roodt, eds. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, GmbH, 2008), 732.

<sup>5</sup> See Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, “Elements of Anti-Semitism,” *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, ed., Edmund Jephcott, tr. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 148.

<sup>6</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols: Or, How to Philosophize with the Hammer*, in *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings*, Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, eds., Judith Norman, tr. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, “Problem with Socrates,” §10.

<sup>7</sup> Timothy Sean Quinn, “Anthropocene Crises and the Origin of Modernity,” *Telos* 177 (New York: Telos Press, 2016), 59.

<sup>8</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelasse Fragmente Frühjahr–Sommer 1888* 16[10], *Digitale Kritische Gesamtausgabe Werke und Briefe*, Giorgio Colli, Mazzino Montinari, Paolo D’Iorio, eds. (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1967ff.); available

civilization is tantamount for Nietzsche as the “economical approach to animality” that seeks to tame man for integration in a social and political community, while culture is the “critique of civilization which liberates animal life” from society’s normative restrictions.<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche proposes a challenge regarding this unhomely character of the contemporary man: “Is life to dominate knowledge and science, or is knowledge to dominate life? Which of these two forces is higher and more decisive?”<sup>10</sup>

A concrete illustration of the Anthropocene as the dominance of power are global cities.<sup>11</sup> The interconnection of cities gathers humanity and the values of (global) cities have become the prevailing morality that encroaches on all aspects of life: economics, politics, education, art, and even culture. This is clearly seen in top cities that today play lead roles: Dubai, Hong Kong, Singapore have meant duty-free purchases and technological innovations; Brussels, Washington, Moscow test political relations; while New York, London, Milan have been likened to global trendsetters in fashion. On the far end, Kabul, Tehran, Tripoli have been similes for conflict; Beijing and Pyongyang for state surveillance; while Kinshasha [DRC], Sana’a [Yemen] and Naypyidaw [Myanmar] are images of poverty and underdevelopment. The polarities of cities demonstrate how science has maintained a stronghold of society through economic rankings for development.

Migration into cities that the last century witnessed marked a mass exodus to find a home in the city, leaving vast farmlands in exchange for tight living spaces nearer to

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from [http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/NF-1888,16\[10\]](http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/NF-1888,16[10]); accessed 28 April 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Lemm, “The Biological Threshold of Modern Politics: Nietzsche, Foucault and the Question of Animal Life,” 732.

<sup>10</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” *Untimely Meditations*, Daniel Breazealy, ed., R.J. Hollingdale, tr. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), §10.

<sup>11</sup> See Marcello Di Paola, *Ethics and Politics of the Built Environment: Gardens of the Anthropocene*, *The International Library of Environmental, Agricultural and Food Ethics Series*, Michiel Korthals and Paul B. Thompson, series eds. (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International, 2017), 3. This is where philosophizing about the Anthropocene leads to a natural intersection with Philosophy of the City.

commerce and trade. This grouped people into cities and globalization's impact set stage for a macro-competition among cities. Top cities became symbols of power as a fusion of cultures and identities. Through their global presence, these cities are places for multiculturalism, leaving weaker cities a dearth of intellectual and financial resources. They are presented as ideals of living – high living standards, public healthcare, clean habitat – yet reserved only for those who reside within its borders. This further ramifies their power; millions flock to these cities, forcing its initial residents to move out because of the higher prices of living standards due to the influx of people.<sup>12</sup>

Secondly, I argue too that the Anthropocene is driven by our utopias. We return to the city hierarchy and notice how in esteeming top cities the world has given less attention to the weaker end to live in the “Land of Plenty.” Rutger Bregman gives a critical assessment of today's society as living in utopia. He outlines how we currently live in the Land of Milk and Honey, the medieval “Cockaigne” as food is accessible 24/7, crimes and homelessness are lesser while medicines and social security are more with the pinnacle of automations that replaced manual labor.<sup>13</sup> An obvious effect of nature's rationalization is the technological boom and life has been made tremendously easier, replacing manual labor to give us more time to do activities only humans can do. Self-driving cars, smartphones and tablets, ‘smart’ houses with fully automatic washers, dryers, refrigerators, and cookers enable chores to be a simple press on an app. These replace manual labor to give more time for people to do activities proper to us, talk and debate, play music and create art.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> This resounds housing crises around the world. Prices of flats in major cities have skyrocketed to the extent that original city-dwellers are forced to move out to neighboring cities leaving their places open for sale to high-incomed individuals. These are greatly seen in capitals in Europe, Amsterdam, Berlin, London, Paris to name a few.

<sup>13</sup> See Rutger Bregman, *Utopia for Realists: How We Can Build the Ideal World*, Elizabeth Manton, tr. (New York: Back Bay Books, 2014), 4-10.

<sup>14</sup> See *Ibid.*, 177-200.

What proved detrimental to a complete appreciation of technological benefits was its inaccessibility for the majority outside the Land of Plenty. From Bregman's illustration above, instead of democratizing technology humanity capitalized it which sparked a race against the machine. This reserved such advancements for those who can afford and further expanded the gap between socio-economic classes. On a global scale, top cities embraced such achievements that renaturalized inequality into our societal goals.<sup>15</sup> We have accepted these pseudo-democratic ideals and worked hard to achieve them yet have failed to see how this further widens the gap between economics and ecology or even worse between man from man. For instance, we look at Timothy Clark's review of an environmentalist concern for SUVs:

the particular SUV is a simulacrum of indeterminate others, its occupier is a kind of doppelganger, the one thoughtless or irresponsible driver is also all the other imaginable thoughtless or irresponsible drivers. This may be another reason why an environmentalist's repugnance at the one car, like much green morality, always seems disproportionate in each individual case.<sup>16</sup>

The alarming rise of SUV purchase and use quashes efforts at green conservation as it is the leading cause of environmental damage, ahead of heavy industry, or aviation and shipping combined.<sup>17</sup> However, though correct, the critique is disparate because what is criticized is the underlying idea of

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<sup>15</sup> See Sabine Wilke, "Critical Theory and Ecology: The Shape of Performance in the Anthropocene," *Telos* 183 (New York: Telos Press, 2018), 33-34.

<sup>16</sup> Clark, *Ecocriticism on the Edge*, 143.

<sup>17</sup> See Niko Kommenda, "SUVs second biggest cause of emissions rise, figures reveal," in *The Guardian* (London: 25 October 2019); available from <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/ng-interactive/2019/oct/25/suvs-second-biggest-cause-of-emissions-rise-figures-reveal>; accessed 25 April 2020; and Rod Coronado, "The Smog Monsters vs. the Elf: Burning for a Better World," *Eco First! The Radical Environmental Journal* 24:1 (Arizona: Daily Planet Publishing, 2003), 14-15; republished by the Environment & Society Portal; available from <http://www.environmentandsociety.org/node/7196>; accessed 25 April 2020.

comfort and safety that the vehicle offers and the widespread ignorance of the damaging effects this has to the environment.

With the purchase of an SUV without the intention of using it for its intended purpose is the repression of its capacity. Utopia at this point merely meant the purchase of the commodity without its actual use that begets a sense of power and security. This however is an illusory sense that the Anthropocene justifies that unearths not freedom but a deeper pathology of “structural constraints that restrict self-conscious social transformation, bringing with it a profound sense of helplessness.”<sup>18</sup> We accepted this illusion of power in the Anthropocene along with city living; the SUV is just one of many mediatory ideas of happiness provided by the city that creates an illusory association of power. As our utopias brought us to radical scientific and technological breakthroughs, the same utopias failed to be radical enough to go beyond an ephemerality of materiality or pretense towards an inclusive approach to globalization.

Regarding both aspects, Nietzsche's critique of modernity serves as a counterweight. He extolled the masters than the slaves, not due to merely a physical or material condition but a psychical one. They were strong due to their willing for they are contented with what they have and who they are without any mediatory or manufactured desire;<sup>19</sup> modernity had covertly extolled not the expenditure of power but its privation through the blinding self-centered contentment associated with material gains. The power of manufactured desires is alarming for humanity which perpetuates a condition of lukewarm-ness, a period of weariness: “we are *weary* because we have lost the

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<sup>18</sup> Alexander M. Stoner and Andony Melathopoulos, *Freedom in the Anthropocene: Twentieth-Century Helplessness in the Face of Climate Change* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 20.

<sup>19</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality*, in *The Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings* Keith Ansell-Pearson, ed., Carol Diethe, tr. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), I:10.

main stimulus.”<sup>20</sup> The issue of the Anthropocene mirrors that of modernity: the “sight of man now makes us weary – what is nihilism today if it is not *that?* – We are weary of *man*.”<sup>21</sup> The failure to radically uplift living conditions of weaker cities show the weariness to truly democratize the benefits of scientific breakthroughs such as medicine and vaccines; the failure to make technological inventions a right than a privilege shows our complacency in not doing manual labor than a communal appreciation of more time for debates and conversations.

### COVID-19 and Our Response

Within four-five years of Crutzen’s last periodization, the world experienced both a scientific and political turmoil through the COVID-19. Scientifically, it is sensational as it is caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), similar to previous coronaviruses such as SARS-CoV and MERS-CoV, reported first in Wuhan, China late December 2019, that is highly contagious and currently has no cure or vaccine.<sup>22</sup> Politically, this questions the necessity of China’s continual censorship along with recent reports of spreading misinformation and propaganda while pressuring other countries to disclose favorable narratives.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelasse Fragmente* Ende 1886-Frühjahr 1887, 7[8], D, *Digitale Kritische Gesamtausgabe Werke und Briefe*; available from [http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/NF-1887,7\[8\]](http://www.nietzschesource.org/#eKGWB/NF-1887,7[8]); accessed 28 April 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morality*, I:12.

<sup>22</sup> See Wen-Hua Kong, Yao Li, Ming-Wei Peng, De-Guang Kong, Xiao-Bing Yang, Leyi Wang, and Man-Qing Liu, “SARS-CoV-2 detection in patients with influenza-like illness,” *Nature Microbiology* 5 (Berlin: Springer, 2020), 675; and Giuseppe Lippi and Mario Plebani, “The novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) outbreak: think the unthinkable and be prepared to face the challenge,” *Diagnosis* (Belin: Walter De Gruyter, 2020), 1.

<sup>23</sup> Dr Li Wenliang was the doctor in Wuhan who first raised concern over a pathogen similar to SARS but was silenced and shamed by the Public Security Bureau for “making false comments’ that had ‘severely disturbed the social order.’” He eventually contracted and succumbed to the virus. (See Stephanie Hegarty, “The Chinese doctor who tried to warn others about coronavirus,” *BBC* [6 February 2020]; available from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-51364382>; accessed 29 April 2020.)

Both scientific and political spheres overlap with how this pandemic challenged our security brought by the Anthropocene. Mihnea Tanasescu exposes the hollowness of our current condition: “Modern life has inured many to thinking that societies are fundamentally separate from their microscopic milieu. The appearance of a new virus gives the lie to this assumption.”<sup>24</sup> It is fundamentally the folly of modernity to believe that we are not anymore animals, and the virus’ decisive transmission from bats to humans confirms our inseparable link to ecology. Due to the rate of transmission, as of 29 April 2020

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Chinese Ministry of Education’s Science and Technology Department issued a directive that requires all papers for publication relating to the virus to be vetted both by the university and the State Council before publication. The directive was posted on several universities’ websites but eventually taken down as the Department clarified that it should not have been leaked to the public but was an internal document. (See Nectar Gan, Caitlin Hu, and Ivan Watson, “Beijing tightens grip over coronavirus research, amid US-China row on virus origin,” *CNN* (16 April 2020); available from <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/12/asia/china-coronavirus-research-restrictions-intl-hnk/index.html>; accessed 29 April 2020. A copy of the document is available from Fudan University’s website before it was subsequently taken down: <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/12/asia/china-coronavirus-research-restrictions-intl-hnk/index.html>)

China has been actively monitoring international reports about the virus and how other countries portray China in their narratives. Recently, the European Union came under fire as reports circulated that it softened its narrative due to enormous pressure from China. This coincides with a report in Germany of China’s intensified propaganda regarding information about the virus and China’s handling of it, and that “senior officials and staff at German government ministries were invited ‘to speak in positive terms about China’s management of the coronavirus’” which the German foreign ministry outrightly rejected. (See Matt Apuzzo, “Pressured by China, E.U. Softens Report on Covid-19 Disinformation,” *The New York Times* [24 April 2020]; available from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/24/world/europe/disinformation-china-eu-coronavirus.html>; accessed 29 April 2020; Jack Wright, “How Europe pandered to China in wake of outbreak...,” *Daily Mail* [26 April 2020]; available from <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8258305/EU-officials-watered-report-Chinas-coronavirus-fake-news-campaign-pressure.html>; accessed 29 April 2020; The Editors, “China denies seeking virus praise from Germany,” *France 24* [13 April 2020]; available from <https://www.france24.com/en/20200413-china-denies-seeking-virus-praise-from-germany>; accessed 29 April 2020.)

<sup>24</sup> Tanasescu, “Viral Political Ecology,” *Civil Animal*; available from <https://thecivilanimal.com/2020/03/10/viral-political-ecology/>; accessed 28 April 2020.

there are more than three million infected with 217,000 deaths globally—thus poses a serious problem to global health.

Though a viral pathology, this pandemic exposed societal pathologies ignored for a great time. A great difficulty in addressing this is the Land of Plenty's exclusion of the rest of the world; this pandemic serves as a symptom of a greater decadence in humanity—we face a global pandemic together without a level playing field. We now see the grave disparity among people for though physically we live in the same world, “[w]e inhabit a multitude of worlds, not all related in the same way to the crises that assail ‘us’. The coronavirus is a great, if cruel, illustrator of this perennial truth.”<sup>25</sup> UN Environment Chief Inger Andersen noted that “There are too many pressures at the same time on our natural systems and something has to give.”<sup>26</sup> The enormous stress we have put on the environment pushed it to this breaking point—climate change, melting of polar caps, burning heatwaves and torrential rainfall.

Our utopias banked on nature's dominance that created artificial barriers between person and environment but even worse among people of different social classes, nationalities, and religions. While our utopic visions for society meant tweaks in living conditions, the unradical vision is not tantamount to the burden laid on the environment. What makes this pandemic peculiar is the awakening of the sense of unfamiliarity and homelessness. We do not know how long this will last or what we need to sacrifice to make this end. Tanasescu aptly captures this as “there is no horizon of change, though undoubtedly, at some point, something will give.”<sup>27</sup> Something has to break for

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<sup>25</sup> Mihnea Tanasescu, “Viral Political Ecology III,” *Civil Animal* (23 March 2020); available from <https://thecivilanimal.com/2020/03/18/viral-political-ecology-iii/>; accessed 29 April 2020.

<sup>26</sup> See Damian Carrington, “Coronavirus: ‘Nature is sending us a message’, says UN environment chief,” *The Guardian* (2020); available from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/25/coronavirus-nature-is-sending-us-a-message-says-un-environment-chief>; accessed 7 April 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Mihnea Tanasescu, “Viral Political Ecology II,” *Civil Animal* (18 March 2020); available from <https://thecivilanimal.com/2020/03/18/viral-political-ecology-ii/>; accessed 28 April 2020.

civilization to once again flourish. This is something we cannot definitely answer now but ought to remain in our minds. Ecology is sacrificed for economics. This shift however is broken down further: a division among individuals; the Anthropocene has made us bask in social inequality and marginalization.

To bridge this to the city-scale earlier, the National Capital Region enjoys its distinction at the summit while poorer, rural cities are the bottom. What makes Metro Manila peculiar is it being home to a plurality of cultures from across the country in both formal and informal settlement. The population boom caused a demand for housing projects that is currently private-sector driven than state-led, which now define the Metro Manila skyline.<sup>28</sup> The rapid commercialization of the city and construction of towering skyscrapers and mushroom townhouses meant the demise of allotments and public spaces for leisure such as parks and zoos. The obvious lack of city planning now triggers difficulty in time of lockdown—no allotments or public parks for citizens to do gardening or to exercise respectively, a grave interdependence among *barangays* and cities and reliance on rural provinces for food reveals an absence in any sustainable food chain, and the spike in population led the government in the dark concerning the exact figure of residents especially those who severely need aid and workers who live outside the Metro who work within. The price or Metro Manila's esteem is the exclusion of its people; in it being home to many, it becomes home to no one. City planning is but one of the other social pathologies this pandemic shows; grave inequality exposes the inability of a great number to get proper and adequate healthcare services, mass public transportation has been given a blind eye due to the affordability of private cars that further congest ill-prepared roads, and ultimately the dearth of sustainable living in the country's political agendas greatly manifests itself in the capital region.

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<sup>28</sup> See Edgardo Angara, "Why is there a housing crisis?," *Business Mirror* (3 May 2018); available from <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2018/05/03/why-is-there-a-housing-crisis/>; accessed 29 April 2020.

The concentration of a great number of people in one place increases herd-like responses especially during this time of crisis. An exemplar of this was the illusory demand for a quotidian household product: toilet paper. This sudden demand is a symptom of our animal instinct of self-preservation.<sup>29</sup> This observation also extends to panic buying and hoarding of essential goods for those who can afford. What I seek to point out here is that this herd-like response is from a deep-seated homelessness caused by city ramified by the Anthropocene. We want to feel at home, we want to feel secured because we have grown alien to nature, to others, and to our very selves.

Thus, city and homeless ironically go with each other—and Nietzsche points out to us that we are currently conserving nothing, neither seeking a return to the past nor working for real progress.<sup>30</sup> The contemporary world is laden with the successes of the epiphenomenon of power as domination over nature, yet this bifurcation is essentially illusory. In an early essay entitled *Homer's Competition*, Nietzsche begins with the distinction between nature and humanity but is critical of it, saying that “in reality there is no such separation” for man “is all nature and carries nature’s uncanny dual character in himself.”<sup>31</sup> Humanity bears the imprint of nature and ought to be mindful of this. Essentially, we ought to be at home with nature and this pandemic makes us ponder on this. Though modernity and the Anthropocene have secured our distinction from nature, the pandemic is a sure reminder of our integration in ecology.

Ending this part, I would like to highlight key questions Bregman raises for our consideration: “What is the value of free speech when we no longer have anything worthwhile to say? What is the point of freedom of association when we no longer feel any sense of affiliation? What purpose does freedom of

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<sup>29</sup> DW News “What’s behind panic buying and the toilet paper craze? Coronavirus Pandemic Explained,” *Deutsche Welle News* (9 April 2020); available from [youtube.com/watch?v=t5yzNGNJBpM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5yzNGNJBpM); accessed 9 April 2020.

<sup>30</sup> See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, Walter Kaufmann, tr. (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), V:377.

<sup>31</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “Homer’s Competition,” in *The Genealogy of Morality and Other Writings*.

religion serve when we no longer believe in anything?"<sup>32</sup> What is the point of success if we have become estranged to nature, to others, and to our very selves?

## Eternal Return

In the *Gay Science*, Nietzsche posits the Eternal Return and, following Deleuze, I present it as a self-challenge to test our ability to actively forget and to overcome ourselves with the return of selective thought.<sup>33</sup> This is a rather heavily laden sentence, but for us to understand the enormity of this concept, we must experience it ourselves:

*The greatest weight.*— What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, an in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!"<sup>34</sup>

What if, in our loneliest loneliness, we confront ourselves and ask what life we want to live? What in this life do we choose to return and what do we wish we want to change? Nietzsche's Eternal Return forces us to confront ourselves, seeking not the preservation of life but its overcoming.<sup>35</sup> Thus, with this

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<sup>32</sup> See Bregman, *Utopia for Realists*, 249.

<sup>33</sup> See Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Hugh Tomlinson, tr. (London: Continuum, 1983), 68ff.

<sup>34</sup> Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, IV:341.

<sup>35</sup> See Keith Ansell-Pearson, *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker: The Perfect Nihilist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 49, 109.

pandemic, we confront ourselves in the loneliest loneliness of our quarantined selves and see the lasting impact it has on our lives. Thus, to end this paper I test Nietzsche's eternal return to the various aspects I have aforementioned:

If life is to return, then we must be mindful more of the paradox of our present predicament that in dominating nature, we realize its increasing activity or hyperactivity.<sup>36</sup> We cannot outplay it. The Anthropocene needs to confront the fact that humanity does not progress at the expense of nature and vice versa; nature does not heal while humanity is suffering. The division is illusory, and an integral ecological understanding must be our contemporary approach. We ought to strive not for further distinction but an appreciation of the leading role we play in ecology. Utopias must be radically different to incorporate sustainable living such as urban gardening or allotments and even a more radical integration of technology in construction and improving the supply chain.

If life is to return, then the pandemic was a potent drive to make governments weigh priorities and transcend political lines; "governments can act in the common good, and force industries to make what is needed, rather than only what they think will make profits[.]"<sup>37</sup> We had the money all along but we chose to prioritize economic figures and colossal projects but forgetting the simplicity of life, especially an individual who struggles daily to make ends meet. We slowly realize the sensibleness of a Universal Basic Income.<sup>38</sup> Utopias ought not to

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<sup>36</sup> See Tanasescu, "Viral Political Ecology," *Civil Animal*; available from <https://thecivilanimal.com/2020/03/10/viral-political-ecology/>; accessed 28 April 2020.

<sup>37</sup> Simon Dalby, "Pandemics, Borders and Crisis in a Globalized World" (Balsillie School of International Affairs, 2020); available from [https://www.balsillieschool.ca/pandemics-borders-and-crisis-in-a-globalized-world/?fbclid=IwAR1\\_T5DJNwm3J5H\\_uZxeABLBqbVWheyQ4CRGKmrmbMbl4IQ8C3jVvFVC9jU](https://www.balsillieschool.ca/pandemics-borders-and-crisis-in-a-globalized-world/?fbclid=IwAR1_T5DJNwm3J5H_uZxeABLBqbVWheyQ4CRGKmrmbMbl4IQ8C3jVvFVC9jU); accessed 28 April 2020.

<sup>38</sup> Spain has been severely affected by the pandemic and has offered a Basic Universal Income to all its citizens and plans to continue this even after the crisis. (See Kate Ng, "Coronavirus: Spain to become first country in Europe to roll out universal basic income," *The Independent* (6 April 2020); available from

restrict but be inclusive and radical, translating not to a gadget's new model but a renewed focus on uplifting living conditions. Money has and is always there, "the goal should be to do a lot better and straighten things in a reconstruction: people-friendly cities and traffic, environment-friendly manufacturing and energy production."<sup>39</sup> There should be a profound desire for global health as the collective effort to raise societal and even global living conditions.<sup>40</sup> This pandemic showed the possibility of flexible working arrangements, all the unnecessary meetings and vices set aside; we realize what jobs are truly essential and vital in sustaining the economy, sustaining lives. These latter should be our priority and not confined to low-income wages. This goes with the vast population in the economy's informal sector. We need to radically envision a new society that includes them in social services and benefits of citizenship.

If life is to return, we ought to rethink automation and technology. It must be democratized to raise standards of living. In the wake of this pandemic, "we will not need to keep doing everything the way we have [...]. We need to take a look back

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<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/coronavirus-spain-universal-basic-income-europe-a9449336.html>; accessed 30 April 2020.)

The United States distributed cheques to its citizens as part of its stimulus package to jumpstart the economy, larger than the 2008 bailout. (See Larry Elliott, "US stimulus package may be massive but it will not be enough," *The Guardian* (25 March 2020); available from <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/mar/25/us-stimulus-package-may-be-massive-but-it-wont-be-enough>; accessed 30 April 2020.) This provides a glimpse at a Universal Basic Income with the basic principle of giving money to people.

In the Philippines, numerous relief operations are taking place distributing rice, canned goods, vegetables, and even bread. Though not cash assistance, this may be a form of a Universal Basic Income allowing citizens to have a ration of essential goods that ameliorates living standards and serves as an incentive in being a citizen.

<sup>39</sup> Martin Gessman, "Kapitalismus als Corona-Party – und wie die Welt von morgen tatsächlich besser werden könnte," *Praefaktisch.de* (5April 2020); available from <https://www.praefaktisch.de/interview/kapitalismus-als-corona-party-und-wie-die-welt-von-morgen-tatsaechlich-besser-werden-koennte/>; accessed 29 April 2020. Trans is mine.

<sup>40</sup> See World Health Organization Commission on Social Determinants of Health, "Closing the Gap in a Generation: Health Equity through Action on the Social Determinants of Health" WHO-CSDH Final Report Executive Summary 2008 (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2008), 3-14.

and assess what worked well and what needs to be revised."<sup>41</sup> Businesses and opportunities can move to the virtual sphere to enable the physical for more authentic engagements among people. We have not even exhausted the benefits of the technological revolution and we are at the dawn of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, as "the fusion of these technologies and their interaction across the physical, digital and biological domains[.]"<sup>42</sup> With technology democratized, more people would have more time for activities properly human. Learning would be made more accessible online to reach a great majority. And progress may be evaluated not merely in zeros and ones of the economic epoch but a radical reconceptualization of the Anthropocene.

If life is to return, this pandemic offers time for us to ponder on what are the essentials in life, to long for meeting others and to return to the hustle of daily life. It makes us see what our capacities are and what decadent aspects of living ought to be overcome. Nietzsche reminds us that "[man's] dreadful capabilities and those counting as inhuman are perhaps, indeed, the fertile soil from which alone all humanity, in feelings, deeds and works, can grow forth."<sup>43</sup> From our earnest moments in quarantine, we recognize our enormous potential to alleviate the suffering of others and to fight for social injustice. It is a return to the basic call of humanity, that we are all connected, that the ephemeral barriers of nationality, religion, or colour have truly no ontological bearing in the face of the other person suffering, in the face of the environment's destruction. It becomes a return to the essentiality of life, to the rudiments of everyday living, to the activities properly human: talking, debating, creating art, and thinking. Only through this can humanity dream radically anew.

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<sup>41</sup> Achilles Georgiu, "After the Pan(dem)ic," *Central European University* (23 April 2020); available from <https://www.ceu.edu/article/2020-04-23/after-pandemic?fbclid=IwAR1tcdlaXr5b8LoPQlaHJgGyhWbhIBbWLMduyVbw0ILZciYI3H7R AgjWsFE>; accessed 28 April 2020.

<sup>42</sup> Klaus Schwab, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution* (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2016), 12.

<sup>43</sup> Nietzsche, "Homer's Competition."

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