



# laetus in praesens

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#### Systemic avoidance?

**Overcrowding:** The future may well marvel at the primary strategy advocated globally in response to the coronavirus pandemic, namely social distancing (*Coronavirus: What is social distancing and how do you do it?* *New Scientist*, 17 March 2020; *Wondering About Social Distancing?* *The New York Times*, 16 March 2020; *An Expert Guide to Social Distancing -- and what to do if friends and family aren't onboard*, *The Guardian*, 17 March 2020; *Coronavirus (COVID-19): Information on social distancing*, Australian Government, Department of Health, 15 March 2020).

Social distancing is in process of reinforcement by closure of borders between countries, possibly to be extended within countries and within urban environments -- "lockdown" (*Coronavirus: European Union seals borders to most outsiders*, *BBC News*, 18 March 2020; *Coronavirus Travel Restrictions, Across the Globe*, *The New York Times*, 18 March 2020; *Government in talks on scaling up social distancing, tightening ban on mass gatherings to fight coronavirus*, *ABC News*, 18 March 2020).

The question here is the viability of social distancing on a planet on which overcrowding is already widely recognized -- but as a purely local challenge. This is most evident in the restriction of access of tourists to popular destinations. The **reality of local overcrowding** is the theme of a separate argument which notes the total **unreality of global implications** (*Local Reality of Overcrowding -- Global Unreality of Overpopulation: comprehensible reframing of engagement with global issues via metaphors of proximity*, 2019).

**Population density:** Just as it is extremely rare for any politician or scientist to refer in any way to "overpopulation" -- except as a myth to be dismissed -- it is remarkable to note the ease with which the viability of social distancing is widely advocated and uncritically accepted, despite the most obvious physical constraints on a planet of limited dimensions. It is even more curious to note that even the most respectable sources of information on the spread of coronavirus around the world avoid any correlation whatsoever with **population density**. Are we witness to a form of "Big Lie" -- whether cultivated deliberately or unconsciously? (*Existential Challenge of Detecting Today's Big Lie: mysterious black hole conditioning global civilization?* 2016).

Bluntly stated, in the light of the process of infection, the closer the average proximity, the higher the probability of coronavirus infection -- hence the social distancing strategy. But how is this realistically possible in crowded urban environments, where many are obliged to sleep in one room, or where the streets are characterized by crowding -- as is typical of cities in many developing countries, especially in slums? The conditions of infection may well be aggravated in climates where some must necessarily crowd together for warmth or shelter.

**Overpopulation:** What is the perspective that is so systematically avoided and why? (*Institutionalized Shunning of Overpopulation Challenge: incommunicability of fundamentally inconvenient truth*, 2008; *Prohibition of Reference to Overpopulation of the Planet*, 2018).

Given the recommended requirements for social distancing -- 1 to 1.5 meters separation -- what reconfiguration of the urban environment does this imply, given the need to anticipate future pandemics? Does the prospect of future pandemics imply a need to radically restructure urban architecture?

Is there space for such reconfiguration on a planet which it is assertively declared to be unconstrained by overpopulation -- if the matter is even mentioned?.

## Misrepresentation of social distancing in an overcrowded context

Clearly "overcrowding" passes the lips of politicians and scientists only with the greatest of difficulty -- as can be satirically suggested (*Prohibition of Reference to Overcrowding: daft proposal for an international convention*, 2019). The manner by which it can best be handled -- indirectly and locally -- is indeed through "social distancing". It could however be asked how an equivalent "strategic euphemism" might be found for "overpopulation" -- globally, rather than locally, and even more indirectly of necessity.

It is somewhat incredible to note the manner in which any sense of overcrowding as such is avoided in most references to the spread of coronavirus. Thus for [Jeremy Rossman](#) as a virologist:

There are several possible reasons for the low number of cases in many of these countries.... including weak travel connections, effective border screening and travel restrictions, local climate effects, a lack of screening or a lack of reporting (*Why are there so few coronavirus cases in Russia and Africa?* *The Conversation*, 18 March 2020).

As with most representation of the cases worldwide, in the case of Switzerland, the point is argued in terms of the total population, not in the light of the density in urban areas:

When countries are ranked based on infection rate (cases/population), Switzerland now ranks ahead of China. Only Italy, South Korea, Iran and Norway have higher per capita infection rates than Switzerland. (*Coronavirus: Swiss per capita infection rate surpasses China's* *Le News* 10 March 2020)

Rare exceptions are evident in the case of some cities, as noted by Blair Kamin (*Why Chicago and other cities are vulnerable to the virus: their strength is their weakness*, *Chicago Tribune* 17 March 2020):

But now, when physical proximity carries the risk of infection and spreading a pandemic, the virtue of urban density is suddenly a vice. Shoving density off its pedestal is the mantra of "social distancing," which seeks to prevent the sick from coming in close contact with the healthy.

A similar conclusion is drawn with respect to prisons, and other typically overcrowded facilities (*Coronavirus inevitable in prison-like US immigration centers, doctors say*, *The Guardian*, 11 March 2020; *US jails begin releasing prisoners to stem Covid-19 infections*, *BBC News*, 19 March 2020). Hence the tendency for closure of educational institutions.

It is even rare to see any mention of overcrowding by the WHO, an exception being a more general comment, not specific to coronavirus however:

For communities, inadequate shelter and overcrowding are major factors in the transmission of diseases with epidemic potential such as acute respiratory infections, meningitis, typhus, cholera, scabies, etc. Outbreaks of disease are more frequent and more severe when the population density is high. (*What are the health risks related to overcrowding?* WHO)

Reference to overcrowding and population density is even rare in scientific reports, a notable exception being Hasan Sumdani, et al (*Effects of Population Density on the Spread of Disease*, University of Texas Arlington, 2014). In this respect, only mentioned by implication with respect to overpopulation by Brian Walsh (*Covid-19: The history of pandemics*, *BBC News*, 20 March 2020) is the following:

The bad news, as Covid-19 reminds us, is that infectious diseases haven't vanished. In fact, there are more new ones now than ever: the number of new infectious diseases like Sars, HIV and Covid-19 has increased by nearly fourfold over the past century. Since 1980 alone, the number of outbreaks per year has more than tripled. There are several reasons... For one, **over the past 50 years, we've more than doubled the number of people on the planet**. This means more **human beings to get infected and in turn to infect others, especially in densely populated cities**. We also have more livestock now than we did over the last 10,000 years of domestication up to 1960 combined, and viruses can leap from those animals to us. (adapted and updated from *End Times: a brief guide to the End of the World*, Hachette Books, 2019). [*emphasis added*]

Following recognition of the particular challenges of prisons, care homes for the elderly, and slum areas, a late summary of relevance is that of David Rubin and Paul A. Offit (*We Know Crowding Affects the Spread. It May Affect the Death Rate*. *The New York Times*, 27 April 2020). There it is argued that **densely populated areas can have nearly twice the rate of transmission, and can make Covid-19 more deadly**.

### Recognition of overcrowding -- only after instigation of social distancing and lockdown

- Overpopulation / Overcrowding:
  - Alon Tal: *The disconcerting association between overpopulation and the COVID-19 crisis* (*The Times of Israel*, 25 March 2020)

- Gabriel Andrade: *The Coronavirus and Modern Malthusians* (Merion West, 10 March 2020)
- Ranjeet Brar: Coronavirus: *The truth about 'overpopulation' and 'herd immunity'* (The Communists, 20 March 2020)
- Annalisa Merelli: *For most of the world, social distancing is an unimaginable luxury* (Quartz, 27 March 2020)
- Karsten Noko: *In Africa, social distancing is a privilege few can afford* (Al Jazeera, 22 March 2020)
- Prisons:
  - Ben Schott: *Overcrowded Prisons Around the World Are a Viral Danger* (Bloomberg, 31 March 2020)
  - Hannah Roberts: *In Italy's overcrowded prisons, fear of coronavirus* (Politico, 30 March 2020)
  - Jill Sutton: *Coronavirus highlights need for prison reform* (The Canberra Times, 26 March 2020)
  - Keri Blakinger: *Prisons Worldwide Face Coronavirus Crisis: Overcrowding, Lack of Sanitation and Labor at Slave Wages* (Democracy Now, 10 March 2020)
  - Shruti Mahajan: *CoronaVirus: Supreme Court takes up issue of overcrowding in prisons* (Bar and Bench, 16 March 2020)
  - Tamara Leger: *Overcrowding and the risk of unmitigated spread of COVID-19 in Madagascar's prisons* (Amnesty International, 3 April 2020)
  - *Countries work to reduce overcrowding in prisons for fear of coronavirus UN official* (Xinhuanet, 3 April 2020)
  - *Coronavirus threat to journalists in overcrowded Saudi prisons* (Reporters without Borders, 6 April 2020)
  - *Explainer: Prisons and COVID-19* (Human Rights Law Centre)
- Indigenous peoples / First Nations:
  - Logan Perley: *Overcrowding, vulnerable population make COVID-19 big worry for First Nations* (CBC News, 31 March 2020)
  - Bernadette Clarke: *Overcrowding in remote Indigenous housing could contribute to coronavirus outbreak* (NITV News, 5 April 2020)
  - Savannah Maher: *Overcrowding Makes It Hard For Native Americans To Socially Distance* (NPR, 7 April 2020)
- Housing / Camps:
  - Marian Faa: *Coronavirus lockdown rules 'impossible' in already overcrowded houses* (ABC News, 25 March 2020)
  - Nicole Gurran, et al: *Homelessness and overcrowding expose us all to coronavirus.* (The Conversation, 24 March 2020)
  - Sandy Powell: *Coronavirus crisis heightens concern of overcrowding at seasonal worker accommodation* (The Advocate, 1 April 2020)
  - Cagri Kosak: *UN warns of 'frightening' consequences of virus in Gaza UN humanitarian coordinator says long-term blockade, overpopulation, limited health facilities can mount to terrible results* (AA, 22 March 2020)
  - Arun Venugopal: *New Yorkers Sharing Crowded Apartments Struggle With Coronavirus Quarantines and Social Distancing* (Gothamist, 2 April 2020)
  - *Greek refugees in overcrowded camps at risk of Covid-19* (Neos Kosmos, 25 March 2020)
  - *Millions of Children in Overcrowded Camps as Coronavirus Spreads Globally* (Xenit, 25 March 2020)
  - *South Africa's Overcrowded Slums Most Vulnerable to Coronavirus* (YouTube, 2 April 2020)
  - *Crowded in camps, Rohingya refugees vulnerable to coronavirus* (The Japan Times, 4 April 2020)
- Transportation:
  - Jane Dalton: *Coronavirus: Train drivers furious at overcrowding as people ignore government advice to stop at home* (The Independent, 23 March 2020)
  - *Coronavirus News: Social distancing is not happening on the NYC subway* (EyeWitness News, 2 April 2020)
  - *Egypt's COVID-19 response delayed, trains remain overcrowded* (Middle East Monitor, 2 April 2020)
  - *Coronavirus: Tube drivers 'furious' at crowded carriages* (BBC News, 23 March 2020)
- Hospitals:
  - Gareth Harvey: *Inside the confronting and overcrowded reality of an Italian intensive care unit* (9Now, 20 March 2020)
- *Crowded places* (South Australia Police)
- Jada Yuan: *With police sick, New Yorkers take pandemic distancing -- and crowding -- into their own hands* (The Washington Post, 9 April 2020)

## Modelling crisis development ignoring relative population density?

**Modelling spread of infectious disease:** It is therefore of great interest to note how epidemiologists purport to model the spread of infection with pandemic possibilities -- specifically according significance to population density (*How scientists quantify the intensity of an outbreak like coronavirus and its pandemic potential*, The Conversation, 5 February 2020). The focus is on the so-called **basic reproduction number** ( $R_0$ ):

The basic reproduction number may vary across locations because contact rates among people may differ due to differences in population density and cultural differences. The effective reproduction number may vary, as well, because the communities in different locations may differ in their level of immunity. (*The reproduction number*, Australian Government, Department of Health, April 2006)

A more specific reference is made by Joel Achenbach (*Coronavirus came from bats or possibly pangolins amid 'acceleration' of new*

[zoonotic infections](#), *The Washington Post*, 7 February 2020):

Once a virus jumps into humans, population density becomes a factor in turning what might potentially be a small eruption of illnesses into an epidemic. A crowded city such as Wuhan, which has a population on the same order of magnitude as New York or London, creates conditions for person-to-person transmission.

It is therefore surprising to note the report by the Imperial College COVID-19 Response Team (Neil M Ferguson, et al, [Impact of non-pharmaceutical interventions \(NPIs\) to reduce COVID19 mortality and healthcare demand](#), 16 March 2020) on behalf of the:

- WHO Collaborating Centre for Infectious Disease Modelling
- MRC Centre for Global Infectious Disease Analysis
- Abdul Latif Jameel Institute for Disease and Emergency Analytics

The report and its implication in legitimising strategies of social distancing are usefully [summarized](#) by [Jeremy C. Young](#) (*Thread Reader*, 18 March 2020). The original report notes:

The global impact of COVID-19 has been profound, and the public health threat it represents is the most serious seen in a respiratory virus since the 1918 H1N1 influenza pandemic. Here we present the results of epidemiological modelling which has informed policymaking in the UK and other countries in recent weeks... Two fundamental strategies are possible: (a) **mitigation**, which focuses on slowing but not necessarily stopping epidemic spread – reducing peak healthcare demand while protecting those most at risk of severe disease from infection, and (b) **suppression**, which aims to reverse epidemic growth, reducing case numbers to low levels and maintaining that situation indefinitely. Each policy has major challenges. [*emphasis added*]

The report makes no mention of "basic reproduction number", and refers only once to "population density" in the following terms:

The basic structure of the model remains as previously published. In brief, individuals reside in areas defined by high-resolution population density data. Contacts with other individuals in the population are made within the household, at school, in the workplace and in the wider community. Census data were used to define the age and household distribution size. Data on average class sizes and staff-student ratios were used to generate a synthetic population of schools distributed proportional to local population density.

Less evident is whether the report's 18 references to " $R_0$ " reflect a relative insensitivity to population density across a country, raising the question as to whether the research was "coarse grained" for convenience, rather than adequately "fine-grained" (Peter Haddawy, [Uncovering Fine-grained Research Excellence: the global research benchmarking system](#), *Journal of Informetrics*, 11, 2017. 2). For Christian Yates ([How to Model an Epidemic](#), *The Conversation*, 26 March 2020):

Whether an outbreak spreads or dies out is largely dictated by a single number which is unique to that outbreak – the basic reproduction number... The average number of previously unexposed individuals infected by a single, freshly introduced disease carrier is known as the basic reproduction number, and often denoted  $R_0$  ... If a disease has an  $R_0$  less than one, then the infection will die out quickly as each infectious person passes on the disease, on average, to less than one other individual. The outbreak cannot sustain its own spread. If  $R_0$  is larger than one then the outbreak will grow exponentially. Early estimates of the basic reproduction number for COVID-19 [put it somewhere between 1.5 and 4, with a value of at least 2 in December and January](#) [before travel restrictions were introduced on 23 January].

An explicit reservation regarding the reproduction number -- only implying a reference to data granularity -- is that of Christian Drosten, who directs the Institute of Virology at the Charité Hospital in Berlin:

The reproduction number is just an average, an indication. It doesn't tell you about pockets of high prevalence such as senior citizens' homes, where it will take longer to eradicate the disease, and from where we could see a rapid resurgence even if lockdown were extended. ([Germany's Covid-19 expert: 'For many, I'm the evil guy crippling the economy'](#), *The Guardian*, 26 April 2020)

The manner in which population density is skillfully sidestepped is illustrated by *The New York Times* ([Some U.S. Cities Could Have Coronavirus Outbreaks Worse than Wuhan's](#), 27 March 2020):

In the early stages of an outbreak, the population size doesn't matter... But as an epidemic progresses, the number of cases per capita can provide a good measure of the prevalence of coronavirus in the community... To make useful per capita comparisons, we've focused on metropolitan areas instead of countries or U.S. states. That's because metropolitan areas roughly correspond with regions where the virus might spread quickly among families, co-workers or commuters... The number of confirmed cases is an imperfect measure of what we really care about: the prevalence of the virus in the population... and therefore how many people are sick or may be contagious.

Another very useful summary from the data is provided by Tomas Pueyo ([Coronavirus: The Hammer and the Dance What the Next 18](#)

*Months Can Look Like, if Leaders Buy Us Time*, Medium, 20 March 2020). This has no mention of "population density" and mentions "R<sub>0</sub>" but once.

It is curious to note a form of "information lockdown" with regard to modelling the spread of coronavirus, with transparency permitted late in government decision-making based on models relying on relatively low [data granularity](#). The aggregated data available encourages simplistic modelling and simplistic decision-making (Thomas Fuller, *How Much Should the Public Know About Who Has the Coronavirus?* *The New York Times*, 28 March 2020). Ironically, and only in response to pressure, announcements have had to be made in Australia that information on the modelling is to be "unlocked" (Kirsten Lawson, *Health authorities say they will release coronavirus modelling*, *The Canberra Times*, 30 March 2020):

The government has faced repeated questions over many weeks about why it won't release the modelling, and in recent days a chorus of scientists, medical experts and others have called for the data. Other countries have released the information, but Australian authorities have steadfastly refused to date.

**Learning from climate modelling?** The diffidence of medical expertise with regard to population density strangely echoes that of climate scientists with regard to population on a planet purportedly subject to anthropogenic warming, as highlighted separately (*Uncritical Strategic Dependence on Little-known Metrics: the Gaussian Copula, the Kaya Identity, and what else?* 2009). The [Kaya identity](#) mentioned there plays a core role in the development of future emissions scenarios in the IPCC *Special Report on Emissions Scenarios* prepared for the *Third Assessment Report* (TAR) in 2001. It is even explicitly obvious in a contribution to the *Fourth Assessment Report*, where it is stated that:

The Kaya Identity (Kaya, 1990) is a decomposition that expresses the level of energy related CO<sub>2</sub> emissions as the product of four indicators: (1) carbon intensity (CO<sub>2</sub> emissions per unit of total primary energy supply (TPES)), (2) energy intensity (TPES per unit of GDP), (3) gross domestic product per capita (GDP/cap) and (4) population... At the global scale, declining carbon and energy intensities have been unable to offset income effects and population growth and, consequently, carbon emissions have risen....

The challenge -- an absolute reduction of global GHG emissions -- is daunting. It presupposes a reduction of energy and carbon intensities at a faster rate than income and population growth taken together. Admittedly, there are many possible combinations of the four Kaya identity components, **but with the scope and legitimacy of population control subject to ongoing debate, the remaining two technology-oriented factors, energy and carbon intensities, have to bear the main burden...**(H-H Rogner, et al, *Introduction. In Climate Change 2007: Mitigation. Contribution of Working Group III to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, 2007) [*emphasis added*]

With regard to the Kaya Identity, at the time of the Copenhagen negotiations on climate change, might its discoverer, Yoichi Kaya, have echoed the words of [David Daokui Li](#) regarding the [Gaussian Copula](#) before the financial crash of 2008: *Very few people understand the essence of the model?*

Might the same now be said of the "basic reproduction number" (or "R<sub>0</sub>") in which the population-density factor is so subtly implicit? **Is evocation of a "Big Lie" then to be considered unreasonable?**

Bluntly stated again, **are the spread of infection and the fatalities of a pandemic directly proportional to local "overcrowding"?** Are the fatalities all the greater globally as a consequence of "overpopulation"? Should any future modelling, like *The Limits to Growth* (1972), take into account the vulnerability to pandemic associated with overpopulation? Which research facility would have the courage to do so? How is willingness to explore the role of unpopular dimension, characteristic of inconvenient truths", factored into such modelling (*An Inconvenient Truth -- about any inconvenient truth*, 2008).

**Learning from the process of warning:** The difference between the urgency of response to coronavirus and climate change, as deemed appropriate, raises the more general question of the process by which governance responds to warnings -- a theme of extensive study (Michael S. Wogalter, *Handbook of Warnings*, CRC Press, 2006). As framed by Eric Galbraith and Ross Otto (*Coronavirus response proves the world can act on climate change*, *The Conversation*, 20 March 2020):

The alarms for both COVID-19 and climate change were sounded by experts, well in advance of visible crises. It is easy to forget, but at the time of this writing, the total deaths from COVID-19 are **less than 9,000** -- it is the terrifying computer model predictions of much larger numbers that have alerted governments to the need for swift action, despite the disruption this is causing to everyday life. Yet computer models of climate change also predict a steady march of increasing deaths, **surpassing 250,000 people per year** within two decades from now. As scientists who have studied climate change and the psychology of decision-making, we find ourselves asking: Why do the government responses to COVID-19 and climate change -- which both require making difficult decisions to avert future disasters -- differ so dramatically?

This very useful question can be variously explored (*Are Environmentalists and Climate Scientists in Denial? Climate change recognized as primarily a psychological challenge*, 2019; *"Big Brother" Crying "Wolf"? But them "wolves" are a-changin' -- them's becomin' "werewolves"!* 2013; *Entangled Tales of Memetic Disaster: mutual implication of the Emperor and the Little Boy*, 2009).

With respect to the modelling of "spread of disease" and "climate change", it is curious to recognize the similarities and differences between controversy regarding "flattening the curve" and the "hockey stick" -- contrasting shapes which give focus to debate about warnings. (Michael Le Page, *Climate Myths: the 'hockey stick' graph has been proven wrong*, *New Scientist*, 16 May 2007; Claire

Gillespie, *Coronavirus Experts Want to 'Flatten the Curve' to Fight the Pandemic: here's what that means*, *Health*, 13 March 2020).

Surprise, surprise -- crises may be interrelated, meriting modelling of one in relation to others (Jonathan Amos, *Coronavirus: Lockdowns continue to suppress European pollution*, *BBC News*, 28 March 2020). But what of crises which aggravate one another as profiled in the *Encyclopedia of World Problems and Human Potential*?

**Proxemics and social distancing:** Given the emphasis on "social distancing", it is appropriate to note the science which has long addressed "social distance", namely **proxemics**, as discussed separately (*Range: proxemics and dilution of experiential connectivity*, 2019). Proxemics has tended to distinguish between four types of distance: (a) public distance (above 210 cm); (b) social distance, maintained during more formal interactions (122-210 cm); (c) personal distance, maintained during interactions with friends (about 46-122 cm); and (d) intimate distance, maintained in close relationships (from 0 to 46 cm). Preferences differ between cultures (Agnieszka Sorokowska, et al: *Preferred Interpersonal Distances: A Global Comparison*, *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 48, 2017, 4)

Whether such insights are framed as based on a "pseudoscience", as perceived by epidemiologists, is a matter for further analysis.

In response to coronavirus, it remains to be seen how proxemics informs the strategy of social distancing -- notably in the light of the arguments of John A. McArthur (*Why is social distancing so hard? Because it goes against every cultural norm of human communication*. *NewsWise*, 18 March 2020). The case of one culture has been discussed (John Mason, *Six Feet of Separation During Coronavirus: how Arabs will cope with it*, *Arab America*, 18 March 2020). The latter remarks: *it is interesting to note that six feet of separation is an enormous breach of Arab social norms*. This would be true of other cultures.

## Ironies and contradictions of social distancing

The basic contradiction lies in assumptions regarding the possibility of social distancing under overcrowded conditions on a planet on which many already experience severe space constraints. The ironies with respect to social distancing strategies are all the greater in the case of rural areas, where the population density is necessarily far lower than in urban environments. Arguably people in isolated homesteads have long anticipated and "implemented" the degrees of "social distance" now recommended.

**Critical distinctions?** How to distinguish between the "lockdown" extreme of social distancing and "self-incarceration" or "self-imprisonment", especially when enforced is some way -- rather than being purely voluntary? Does this reflect the aspirations of fanatics for "homeland security"? (*Coronavirus update: 84 million people under stay-at-home orders in US, Albania deploys Army to enforce curfew*, *ABC News*, 22 March 2020; *California orders its nearly 40 million residents to stay home to prevent the spread of coronavirus*, *CNN*, 20 March 2020; *Think before you coronavirus curfew and other commentary*, *New York Post*, 20 March 2020). How has it been possible to transform every country into a form of "concentration camp", "refugee camp" or "reservation"?

**Ausweiss?** Anticipating policy development in other countries, it is especially bizarre to note the order by President Macron of France (*'We are at war': Macron orders French to stay home over coronavirus epidemic*, *The Local*, 16 March 2020; *France in lockdown: What exactly do Macron's new coronavirus restrictions mean?* *The Local*, 16 March 2020; *France's lockdown permission form: What is it and where do you find it?* *The Local*, 16 March 2020). It could well be considered surreal that isolated farmers should be required to fill out and carry with them a form while herding animals alone in remote locations.

And what of the homeless, and the illiterate, whether migrants or otherwise? Should they get a "friend" to fill out the form? How should the homeless self-isolate?

**"Fighting" a virus?** Increasing use is made of the war metaphor, with the image of humans "fighting" a virus (*The World Has a Plan to Fight Coronavirus*, *The New York Times*, 12 March 2020; *UK pubs and restaurants told to shut in virus fight*. *BBC News*, 20 March 2020; David Katz, *Is Our Fight Against Coronavirus Worse Than the Disease?* *The New York Times*, 20 March 2020; Mina Pollmann, *Japan Takes Additional Measures to Fight Coronavirus Outbreak*, *The Diplomat*, 13 March 2020; Manlio Dinucci, *NATO in Arms to "Fight Coronavirus"*, *Global Research*, 9 April 2020).

Is this comparable to any image of an elephant endeavouring to fight a mosquito -- and equally ridiculous?

The latter image recalls the extent to which the greater challenge of the times is recognizing the "elephant in the room" (*Climate Change and the Elephant in the Living Room*, 2009). Who exactly is "fighting" whom? That frame can be compared with that many other virtual wars that have been declared (*Review of the Range of Virtual Wars: strategic comparison with the global war against terrorism*, 2005). Of related interest is the sense in which the "virus" may be of memetic rather than biological nature. As argued by George Monbiot regarding recent massive armament upgrades:

We are defending ourselves against the wrong threats... governments have been fighting not just the last war, but a redundant notion of war, spending hundreds of billions against imaginary hazards.... The UK is acquiring 138 new F-35 aircraft. According to the manufacturers, Lockheed, this "supersonic, multi-role" fighter "represents a quantum leap in air dominance capability". It "has the range and flexibility to win, again and again." But win against what? Can it bomb the coronavirus? Can its "advanced stealth, integrated avionics, sensor fusion and superior logistics support" defeat climate breakdown? *It is of as much use in solving the world's complex and pressing problems as a jackhammer is to a watchmender.* (*Let's Nuke the Virus*, *The Guardian*, 9 April 2020)

Seemingly little attention is given to other ways of engaging with the virus, recalling a critique with regard to sustainable development (*Enhancing Sustainable Development Strategies through Avoidance of Military Metaphors*, 1998; *Ensuring Strategic Resilience through Haiku Patterns: reframing the scope of the "martial arts" in response to strategic threats*, 2006). It is beyond question the final and only solution, as questioned separately with respect to terrorism (*Eradication as the Strategic Final Solution of the 21st Century?* 2014).

Seemingly missing is any strategic understanding of [resilience](#), naming the key to the manner in which trees "fight" the wind and the weather -- and a well-recognized feature of more nimble military strategy.

**Medical expertise?** Strange to witness have been the successive changes in the recommended maximum size of gatherings, whether reinforced in any way or not. The numbers have variously diminished from 1,000 to 500 to 10 to 2 -- in the light of medical expertise of the highest order -- prior to conditions of lockdown and avoidance of any social contact ([Coronavirus: Germany tightens curbs and bans meetings of more than two](#), *BBC News*, 22 March 2020). Arguably again, a gathering of 100 dispersed over an extensive area is quite distinct from a gathering of 100 in a night club or church.

More intriguing are the significant differences among medical experts, from country to country, regarding the risks -- and the appropriate response to them by authorities -- in terms of social distancing and lockdown regulations. The differences may also vary from state to state in large countries such as the USA or Australia. The manner in which such expertise is taken seriously, as justification for immediate action by authorities, contrasts strangely with the declared consensus worldwide among 97% of climate science experts -- readily set aside by authorities as negligible in relation to other priorities, notably prior to the current pandemic (Dana Nuccitelli. [Millions of times later, 97 percent climate consensus still faces denial](#), *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, 15 August 2019). Arguably challenges to the purported consensus are taken more seriously in the case of climate change, whereas the lack of consensus among "medical experts" of the highest authority are ignored or treated as the responsibility of governments.

**Masking?** Obvious measures, whether recommended or voluntarily adopted, are the use of face-masks as a feature of social distancing. This occurs in a period in which there is extensive debate regarding problematic face-covering -- framed in terms of human rights or the needs of face-recognition technology for security purposes. This has given rise to [anti-mask legislation](#) against face-covering, possibly as part of discriminatory religious agendas. Do those wearing face-masks run the risk of prosecution -- or is it those who fail to wear the in the light of lockdown regulations?

In describing that [Germans could be fined up to €10,000 as face mask rules brought in](#) (*The Guardian*, 27 April 2020), it is noted that;

But as Germans sought to understand the rules – which could radically alter social interactions by hiding facial expressions – in a confusing twist car drivers were warned not to wear coverings that completely disguised their faces or risk a €60 fine. This is largely so they can still be recognised by speed cameras and police surveillance. Since October 2017 it has been illegal for people to cover their face while driving, with veils, burqas and niqabs specifically singled out....

A poll by the Kantar market research institute found that acceptance for mask wearing was extremely high, with 97% of those asked saying they supported the rule and recognised the importance of keeping it to help tackle coronavirus.

This is occurring in a period in which the coronavirus has given rise to a worldwide shortage of [facemasks](#), the wearing of which is presumably prohibited by much legislation of that kind. Such legislation is a feature of related legislative idiosyncrasies ([Facism as Superficial Intercultural Extremism](#), 2009). As a metaphor, what else is being "masked" by this transformation?

**Social distancing of 1.5 meters?** It has been universally recommended by medical experts that people should maintain a distance of 1.5 meters to reduce the risk of inhaling the fine droplets which are distributed when a person coughs or sneezes -- and which could potentially carry the virus.

Curiously the recommendation takes no account of the direction or force of the wind which could carry such droplets over a greater distance (Knavel Sheikh, et al, [Stay 6 Feet Apart, We're Told. But How Far Can Air Carry Coronavirus?](#) *The New York Times*, 14 April 2020). How would a slight breeze, or a stronger one, affect the distribution of droplets -- and what of air conditioning fans? Should the recommendation have mentioned the possible need to stand upwind of those with whom one is interacting -- if there is such a breeze? Is the figure of 1.5 meters to be considered indicative of the quality of recommendations by health experts -- as now widely accepted by authorities?

As to the distance itself, it has become clear that this does not reflect the conclusions of evidence-based science ([‘It’s kind of a rule of thumb’: Adviser reveals UK gov’t’s 2-meter coronavirus distance instruction based on ‘muddy science’](#), *RT*, 25 April 2020).

**Suppression?** With one of the officially recommended responses to the pandemic being "suppression" (in contrast to "mitigation"), this strategy naturally recalls that elaborated with respect to terrorism, as separately discussed ([Eradication as the Strategic Final Solution of the 21st Century?](#), 2014).

As strategies, **both mitigation and suppression are a reminder of those already implemented with regard to information** from dissident perspectives -- readily criminalised with dubious justification. To what extent is official data on the pandemic, and recommended responses, already subject to "suppression"? Does "mitigation" reflect the fake-news strategies already adopted by authorities when deemed appropriate? Why is this factor not integrated into reporting on the pandemic, given that it was a major factor on the occasion of the Spanish flu pandemic? As recently noted ([Containment -- the attempt to limit spread of a virus and even eliminate it -- has failed](#) (*The Single Most Important Lesson From the 1918 Influenza*, *The New York Times*, 17 March 2020).

Donald Trump has made repeated efforts to frame the current pandemic as resulting from a "Chinese virus" ([Trump Defends Using ‘Chinese Virus’ Label, Ignoring Growing Criticism](#), *The New York Times*, 18 March 2020). It is therefore appropriate to note that the reason the 1918 pandemic was called "Spanish flu" was a consequence of the Spanish media being the only uncensored source of information, at a time when the media of other countries, as noted by Evan Andrews:

Since nations undergoing a media blackout could only read in depth accounts from Spanish news sources, they naturally assumed that the country was the pandemic's ground zero. The Spanish, meanwhile, believed the virus had spread to them from France, so they took to calling it the "French Flu". (*Why Was It Called the 'Spanish Flu?'*, *History*, 12 January 2016)

In a world in which lying by authorities is now understood to be a well-recognized pattern, are those presenting statistics and expertise on the evolution of the pandemic (and the viability of recommended responses) to be considered trustworthy?

**Economic consequences?** It has become increasingly evident that, as strategies, social distancing and lockdowns have disastrous economic consequences (*Socio-economic impact of the 2019–20 coronavirus pandemic*, *Wikipedia*; *Coronavirus Outbreak Could Destroy Up to 25 Million Jobs: ILO*, *The New York Times*, 18 March 2020; *Is the Coronavirus Crash Worse Than the 2008 Financial Crisis?* *Foreign Policy*, 18 March 2020; *Coronavirus shock vs. global financial crisis -- the worse economic disaster?* *DW*, 17 March 2020).

**Vulnerability and insecurity?** Restricting families under lockdown conditions can exacerbate domestic violence, as noted by Melissa Jeltsen (*Home Is Not A Safe Place For Everyone*, *HuffPost*, 14 March 2020):

As "social distancing" is urged to contain the coronavirus outbreak, home is exactly where the danger lies for some. But for others, such as victims of domestic violence for whom work is a necessary respite from the unpredictability of their partner's abuse, there can be more immediate danger inside the home than outside it.

**Divorce?** There is evidence that divorce rates will increase as a consequence of lockdown (*Chinese Divorce Rates Jump After Mandatory Coronavirus Quarantine*, *National File*, 16 March 2020; *Coronavirus: Self-isolation 'very likely' to cause rise in divorce rates says top lawyer*, *The Independent*, 17 March 2020).

**Hand-washing?** The remarkable focus on [hand-washing](#), so explicitly associated with social distancing, has not been explored in relation to its use as a metaphor -- most notably as cited in the notorious abdication of responsibility by [Pontius Pilate](#). The metaphor has been variously cited in relation to the many who have denied responsibility with regard to the ongoing historic trial/hearing of [Julian Assange](#), as discussed separately (*Extradition and Trial of Julian Assange: web resources*, 2020; *Future Commemoration of the Trial of Julian Assange: a Passion Play for Truth reframing the Christian glorification of speaking truth to power*, 2020).

It is ironic that Assange should be indicted for his actions against the suppression of information by authorities at a time when there is every reason to believe that authorities will be very tempted to suppress information of relevance to any collective response to the current pandemic -- both to disguise the inadequacy of the strategic response and to avoid engendering panic as a consequence. Being incarcerated while awaiting the result of his trial, there is every reason to suppose that, in his health compromised condition, Assange is among the most vulnerable to the coronavirus.

Cynics would readily argue that Assnge's death would avoid embarrassment to authorities -- following the pattern of [Jeffrey Epstein's demise](#). Opportunists might argue the possibility of reducing overcrowded prison populations by some such means. The pattern recalls the use of smallpox infected blankets in triggering the [Great Plains smallpox epidemic of 1837](#).

There is further irony to the worldwide hand-washing requirement in that it suggests that everyone is effectively a "Pontius Pilate" -- thereby able to dissociate themselves from any responsibility for the fatalities of the current pandemic, and from the current ills of a global civilization in crisis.

**Sanitisation vs Holy water?** Religions making use of "holy water" in their practices, notably Christianity, are under increasing pressure to prohibit its use (*Coronavirus concerns see Catholic Church recommend changes to holy communion and holy water practices*, *ABC News*, 5 March 2020; *Coronavirus: Catholic churches preparing to suspend Mass*, *BBC News*, 14 March 2020). The supreme irony is the worldwide uptake of [sanitisation](#) and disinfection -- readily to be understood as analogous in practice. Whereas holy water is a form of purification against vulnerability to an invisible evil, sanitisation (especially in the form of hand-washing) is the unversally recommended protection against an invisible virus. The first is blessed by religious authorities. In a world increasingly dominated by a secular perspective; the second is effectively "blessed" by medical authorities.

**Water-shortage?** The recommendations of medical expertise of the highest order include a focus on frequent hand-washing. It is remarkable to note how insensitive this is to the condition of many in developing countries where the available water may itself be polluted or where there may be severe water shortages, possibly requiring daily walks of kilometers to the only source.

**Risk aversion?** As argued by [David Zaruk](#), a risk-averse culture and a helpless population that expects others to solve every problem has made the developed world uniquely unsuited to evaluating and dealing with the dangers of the new coronavirus. (*West can't cope with Covid-19 because of docilians, the pampered herd whose demand for zero risk actually risks killing thousands*, *RT*, 24 Mar, 2020). From this perspective, if Western democracies had been capable of implementing basic risk reduction measures to keep exposures down during the first 10 weeks of 2020, there would not have been the need to lock down countries, strangle the global economy, leading to the unprecedented decline in physical and mental well-being of its populations.

**Research of the greatest urgency?** The nature of the pandemic has triggered an unprecedented reallocation of funding to pharmaceutical laboratories world wide. Despite the stock market crash, there is little difficulty in recognizing the profits being made by "Big Pharma" -- especially when possible cures become available. Little is said about how the world may be held to ransom under such circumstances -- and how there would be every justification to engender diseases for which expensive cures are required. What check is there on this?

By comparison, with social distancing as the strategy of first response, it is curious to note how little new funding for "research" into the

consequences of social isolation has been considered appropriate -- and urgent in anticipation of crisis. **Where, for example, is the socio-economic modelling to explore the consequences of:**

- releasing convicted prisoners into society, with the expectation that they self-isolate?
- ignoring the manner by which those already socially isolated will receive food and medical care -- most obviously the elderly without relatives or "friends"?
- failing to address the psychosocial stress engendered amongst those who are exceptionally dependent on socialisation -- and "getting out of the house"?
- the degree to which social isolation and social distancing will engender new forms of criminality -- or degrees of abuse?
- the overnight massive increase in the unemployed?
- simplistic measures of compensation for the most obviously disadvantaged (loss of employment, etc), ignoring less evident issues?
- ignoring the implications for trial by jury under conditions of social distancing?
- the reinforcement of social inequalities -- especially under the guise of protecting the larger employers?
- the immediate increase in lengthy queues (in defiance of social distancing orders) for those seeking vital employment or urgent compensation?
- the immediate increase in lengthy waiting times for telephone or internet access to essential services (where physical presence is not required)?
- the harmful delays in the recognition of the above -- a recognition effectively "outsourced" to "users" (following the playbook of manufacturers)?

**Democratic assembly?** Measures in place, or being envisaged, offer every opportunity to prohibit democratic protest and assembly of any kind. Already applied to conferences, this would necessarily extend to legislative bodies -- which might otherwise debate on the merits of any given strategy involving the restriction of human rights.

**Collective distancing?** As promoted, social distancing encourages and reinforces the separation between individuals to avoid infection. This is partially enforced by what amounts to distancing between collectives through the closure of borders between countries, or in some cases between regions. This curiously corresponds to trends towards formal separation between countries through abandonment of [multilateralism](#) -- exemplified by [separatist movements](#) (Brexit, Catalonia, etc), renegeing on multilateral agreements (US dissociation from Paris Climate Change Agreement, etc), and curtailing aid to the underprivileged.

More intriguing is the manner in which social distancing reflects collective distancing in psychosocial terms -- politically, ideologically and religiously. This is perhaps best exemplified by the well-documented progressive erosion of trust. As with the symbolism of "hand-washing" (noted above), is it to be understood as a form of distancing from any collective responsibility? In that sense, social distancing as a strategy is a new symptom of an ongoing and well-developed trend of social breakdown ([Responsibility for Global Governance: Who? Where? When? How? Why? Which? What?](#) 2008).

**Divide and rule?** It may come to be seen that it is very difficult to distinguished between social distancing and everything that has long been criticized with respect to "divide and rule" -- through to empowering authorities to control subjects, populations, or factions of different interests, who collectively might be able to oppose their rule. It can be used to weaken the alliances of opponents, notably . when propaganda is disseminated within in an attempt to raise doubts about any such alliance, as a device for achieving dominance..

**Cui bono?** There is curiously little discussion of this question in relation to social distancing. Whereas *cui bono* is typically asked in relation to the suspicion that a crime may well be committed to benefit its perpetrators, especially financially, the question could appropriately be asked in relation to the use of a particular strategy -- especially one that is upheld as beyond reasonable criticism. .Clearly manufacturers of certain products -- notably pharmaceutical -- will benefit considerably from the pandemic framing.

This is presumably the case with respect to the security services. It is obvious that it will be of benefit to those with repressive agendas, especially when these can be rendered permanent, as has been the case with the response to terrorism (Adrian Vermeule, [Emergency Lawmaking after 9/11 and 7/7](#), *The University of Chicago Law Review*, 75,2008, 3; Aniceto Masferrer, [Post 9/11 and the State of Permanent Legal Emergency Security and Human Rights in Countering Terrorism](#), Springer, 2012; Tom McCarthy, [Can Trump be trusted not to abuse his coronavirus emergency powers?](#) *The Guardian*, 24 March 2020).

## Potential challenges of social distancing

**Unforeseen consequences?** It is already argued that global mobilization in the face of the coronavirus pandemic presage a turning point in economic and political culture (Peter Isackson, [Social Distancing or the Danger of Life With Others](#), *Fair Observer*, 16 March 2020; Greg Miller, [Social distancing prevents infections, but it can have unintended consequences](#), *Science*, 16 March 2020). The latter notes that:

- social isolation can increase the risk of a variety of health problems, including heart disease, depression, dementia, and even death
- older people may be more susceptible, including the loss of family or friends, chronic illness, and sensory impairments like hearing loss that can make it harder to interact.
- despite the possibilities of electronic communication, such modes of communication do not entirely replace face-to-face interactions; a lot of the meaning conveyed between two people is actually not conveyed in the actual words, but in nonverbal behavior on which many may be especially dependent
- the social cohesiveness cultivated by many through social gatherings may be undermined in unforeseen ways and to an unforeseen degree

**Confronting mortality:** The strategy recommended by expertise of the highest order is in response to the probability of a percentage of

fatalities considered unacceptable -- but carefully not compared with that of other causes of death which might appropriately evoke equivalent panic. A list by *Wikipedia* is suggestive in that respect (*List of causes of death by rate*). It is also appropriate to ask how such percentages are to be compared with other causes of multiple deaths so frequently evoked in the news, notably various forms of violence and natural disaster.

The point is specifically made by Ron Paul (*The Coronavirus Hoax, Information Clearing House*, 18 March 2020):

A virus that has thus far killed just over 5,000 worldwide and less than 100 in the United States? By contrast, tuberculosis, an old disease not much discussed these days, killed nearly 1.6 million people in 2017. Where's the panic over this?

More curious is the suggestion that those most vulnerable from the pandemic are the elderly -- namely those with the highest probability of dying anyway, as with the "health compromised", possibly having indulged in various forms of "substance abuse". As argued by a palliative care physician: *There is, therefore, a glaring imperative to confront the topic so many of us long to squirm away from: the inescapable fact of mortality* (Rachel Clarke, *We can't be squeamish about death: we need to confront our worst fears*, *The Guardian*, 15 March 2020). Cynics might also argue that many of the vulnerable have long been indifferent to the fatalities exacerbated by the policies of their governments -- most obviously in distant countries.

**Insights from conspiracy theory?** Information is already circulating about the manner in which the coronavirus has been fabricated, with the declaration of pandemic as a questionable device by those who hope to benefit thereby. The question is whether panic is indeed being deliberately cultivated as part of a "Big Lie" as noted above. Other possibilities include:

- **Selective "culling"**: From this perspective, the manner in which the elderly are framed as the most vulnerable -- as with those who have indulged in "substance abuse" -- reinforces any arguments that the disease has been deliberately designed as a means of "culling" excess population. Aside from the case made in the past for [eugenics](#), might this reflect a response to widespread concerns about [ageing populations](#)? Analogous arguments have been made with regard to the HIV virus (*Conspiracy Theories: The CIA and AIDS, Time*; Jacob Heller, *Rumors and Realities: Making Sense of HIV/AIDS Conspiracy Narratives and Contemporary Legends, American Journal of Public Health*, 105, 2015, 1)
- **Implementation of dubious and repressive measures**: It is always difficult to determine to what degree an emergency has been hyped as a device for disguising implementation of previously impossible repressive legislation. Such subterfuge can be all too readily denied, with no one to prove the contrary. The point was remarkably made at the time of 9/11 when the PR adviser to Tony Blair made the classic remark which ended her career (Andrew Sparrow, *Sept 11: 'a good day to bury bad news'*, *The Telegraph*, 10 October 2001)
- **Weaponisation of coronavirus**: It has been variously suggested that the virus was created as part of [biochemical warfare](#) research -- and even planted in China by any of several obvious suspects. Promotion of social distancing could then be understood as part of testing public response (Thalif Deen, *Could the Coronavirus Be a Biological Weapon in the Not-Too-Distant Future?* *Other News*, 20 March 2020).
- **Vaccination?** The much anticipated vaccination against coronavirus, possibly to be made mandatory, would be expected to set aside the resistance associated with [vaccination hesitancy](#). To the extent that this reflects legitimate concerns, these would be reinforced by the suspicion that the vaccination would have unforeseen or additional functions (exemplified in the many controversial uses of pesticides).
- **Cultivation of fear?** The many references to the manner in which the coronavirus threat has been hyped suggest that this could be consistent with the deliberate [cultivation of fear](#) to achieve political or other strategic goals (Robert J. Burrowes, *Observing Elites Manipulate Our Fear: COVID-19, Propaganda and Knowledge, Transcend Media Service*, 23 March 2020). The strategy has long been a feature of religions in inciting a [fear of God](#) -- recalling that evoked by witch doctors. Such has been evident in the cultivation of fear of terrorism.
  - Is the coronavirus now to be usefully compared with the insidious threat of evil, as so widely highlighted (*Existence of evil as authoritatively claimed to be an overriding strategic concern*, 2016)?
  - In cultivating a pattern of unquestionable "taboos", is humanity now to be paid to indulge in fear in ironic historical contrast to being persuasively [sold indulgences](#) for a fearless afterlife?
  - With "social distancing" now widely adopted in the USA, for example, is the voice of contrarians urging "a more careful weighing of the harm as well as the benefits of such policies" to be condemned -- as queried by Amy Harmon (*Some Ask a Taboo Question: Is America Overreacting?* *The New York Times*, 16 March 2020).
  - What alternative strategies merit consideration -- and by what means are they voiced? Is strategic "lockdown" then to be usefully compared with strategic "lockstep" and conceptual lockdown" (Scott Willis, *Breaking the Lockstep, ASCD Education Update*, 36, 1994, 7)? Who takes alternative voices seriously -- without knee-jerk condemnation (Isaac Chotiner, *The Contrarian Coronavirus Theory That Informed the Trump Administration, The New Yorker*, 30 March 2020)
  - How did Sweden evoke and implement an alternative option (Maddy Savage, *Lockdown, what lockdown? Sweden's unusual response to coronavirus. BBC News*, 29 March 2020; *Sweden under fire for 'relaxed' coronavirus approach -- here's the science behind it, The Conversation*, 28 March 2020; Binoy Kampmark, *The Swedish Alternative: Coronavirus as a Grand Gamble, CounterCurrents*, 31 March 2020 ).

## Ensuring global strategic coherence in time of crisis

More intriguing is the possibility that undemocratic means are being employed by those "behind the scenes" to implement strategies understood to be necessary. These have proven to be non-negotiable in a viciously divisive political system in which rational argument is only too readily dismissed. An indication of this is offered by Graham Dockery (*What do the coronavirus and Greta Thunberg have in common? They're both great for the planet*, RT, 18 March 2020). The author insinuates that "extreme measures" being taken to stop the spread of coronavirus are what "environmental crusaders" really want in pursuing their climate change goals.

Others make similar points, with appreciation (*How the coronavirus crisis is helping improve the environment across the world*, SBS News/Head Topics, 21 March 2020; Arthur Lyon Dahl and Riya Sokol, *Does the Pandemic have a Silver Lining?/ Covid-19: What comes afterwards?* International Environment Forum, 19 March 2020, *Thank you Coronavirus: thank you for shaking us and showing us we're dependent on something bigger than we think*, YouTube, 19 March 2020). It is to be expected that some will review the response to coronavirus as a template, game-plan or playbook for a future response to climate change, if not to more fundamental crises (Sammy Roth, *Here's what a coronavirus-like response to the climate crisis would look like*, The Los Angeles Times, 24 March 2020).

In response, as reviewed by Ted MacDonald (*Right-wing media figures are making unhinged connections between the coronavirus and climate action*, Media Matters, 19 March 2020):

Some of right-wing media's most prolific climate deniers are using the disastrous effects of the coronavirus to promote their anti-climate agenda across multiple platforms. These figures have reframed their usual climate attacks around the pandemic. Some have compared the (alleged) outcomes of the Green New Deal to the (real) impacts of the coronavirus, while others have claimed that both the coronavirus and climate change are being used by leftists to push a radical agenda.

Another insight is offered by the desperate need of authorities to be able to blame anyone but themselves for previous strategic incompetence. Examples include: "the Chinese", "the Democrats", and "the military-industrial complex".

The pandemic can therefore be welcomed, as long argued with respect to any [invasion by extraterrestrials](#), as a singular threat -- effectively an [Act of God](#) -- or a form of [singularity](#) (*Emerging Memetic Singularity in the Global Knowledge Society*, 2009). In the absence of any means for eliciting global strategic coordination, or any understanding of how that might be otherwise conceived, the pandemic could be understood as a necessary trigger in global systemic terms -- whether enabled by "God" (as a feature of [end-times scenarios](#)) or as a resilient consequence of the [Gaia hypothesis](#). Might extraterrestrials opt for use of such a strategy to "stabilise" global civilisation?

Rather than alien invaders, has it now been effectively recognized that **the key to global consensus is through triggering a series of pandemics** whenever such coherence is deemed vital to sustainable development?

## Unexplored strategic implications of social distancing

**Social distancing as a displacement strategy:** Framed as regrettably but necessarily radical, it is appropriate to explore whether social distancing is a distractive device for "not discussing" other issues of which coronavirus may well be only one consequence -- and a convenient form of camouflage. Are there other issues which merit similarly "regrettable, but necessarily radical" responses? Clearly the current pandemic (already predicted as to be followed by others) has effectively displaced the consideration of other global issues which have been the recent focus of controversy.

The vigour with which politicians have engaged in a highly unusual degree of bipartisan focus on the pandemic contrasts remarkably with the divisive discourse on these other matters -- with no viable consensus -- issues which many deem to be urgent.

The point could be highlighted by a simple exercise in substituting "climate change" (or any of the others) for "coronavirus" in the many recent declarations of politicians and others. As an example, other matters of urgency for which global consensus is repeatedly (and vainly called) include: migration, terrorism, poverty, resource shortages, inequality, and human trafficking.

**Evocation of "war" with its legislative implications:** Especially interesting is the case of terrorism which has been promoted as the problem about which there can be no question regarding the need for global consensus -- and hence the so-called [Global War on Terrorism](#). The response to the pandemic has already been framed as a "war" -- requiring war-like legislative provisions (Gaby Hinsliff, *We are at war with coronavirus*, The Guardian, 17 March 2020; David Eccles, *"We are at war": France locks down as pandemic surges*, InDaily, 17 March 2020; Ryan P. Burke, *The 'war' on COVID-19 doesn't mean military lockdown*, The Hill, 20 March 2020).

It has not proved possible to enact such a response to climate change, despite arguments for such measures (David Blair, etc, *We must fight climate change like it's World War III -- here are 4 potent weapons to deploy*, The Conversation, 16 March 2020). However, as with the achievement of "sustainable development", it is possible that framing strategic challenges in terms of "war" may itself be avoiding subtler modes of response, as noted above (*Enhancing Sustainable Development Strategies through Avoidance of Military Metaphors*, 1998). The degree of dependence on "think tanks" may be but one indication of current inadequacy (*Tank Warfare Challenges for Global Governance: extending the "think tank" metaphor to include other cognitive modalities*, 2019).

Some make the point that it is the dysfunctional organization of the global system which requires radical readjustment -- which may well be brought about by the consequences of the current pandemic (Andrés Ortega, *The Deglobalization Virus? The Globalist*, 18 March 2020). Is the pandemic to be recognized as the ultimate catalyst for degrowth or zero growth? (Brian Davey, *Coronavirus, Degrowth and Self Isolation*, Resilience, 18 March 2020). The normality of business-as-usual -- widely upheld as desirable -- may well not be recoverable (Gideon Lichfield, *We're not going back to normal*, MIT Technology Review, 17 March 2020). As the latter remarks:

Social distancing is here to stay for much more than a few weeks. It will upend our way of life, in some ways forever.

The possibility of martial law to enforce whatever provisions are deemed necessary, with or without critical review, is already evident (Stephen Lendman, *Martial Law is Coming to the USA? Information Clearing House*, 23 March 2020; Debbie White, *Corona Coup: secret military plan to impose martial law and stop civil disturbances if government is crippled by coronavirus*, *The Sun*, 22 Mar 2020; Matt Honeycombe-Foster, *Government 'planning for martial law' under emergency no-deal Brexit preparations*, *PoliticsHome*, 27 January 2019). What is the difference for the citizen between "martial law" and "lockdown"?

## Requisite sacrifice in time of war?

**Confronting mortality:** Should the fatalities associated with the coronavirus pandemic, and the constraints on the efficacy of social distancing, now call for a reframing of "sacrifice"? (*Americans must relearn to sacrifice in the time of coronavirus*, *The Washington Post*, 19 March 2020; *Coronavirus outbreak is 'a time of sacrifice for all of us'*, *PBS News Hour*, 15 March 2020). As noted by Caitlin Oprysko and Susannah Luthi (*Coronavirus Trump labels himself 'a wartime president' combating coronavirus*, *Politico*, 18 March 2020), the lender of the free world declared:

Now it's our time. We must sacrifice together, because we are all in this together, and we will come through together.

The necessary "confrontation of mortality" noted above has long been a feature of warfare in which many -- if not everyone -- should be prepared to die for their country, despite controversial consideration of that requirement (Justin Ebert, *Dying for one's country: poetic or propaganda?* *The Red and Black*, 4 November 2015). Explicit evocation of the possibility dates back to the exhortation to the citizens of Rome by the poet Horace: *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* ("It is sweet and fitting to die for the homeland")

Death as a consequence of pandemic implies that the "enemy" bringing about fatality is now everywhere. Rather than seeking to avoid engagement with the enemy -- typically framed as cowardice in conventional arenas -- what does "prepared to die for one's country" now mean? Should the elderly be especially prepared to do so -- rather than the conventional expectation (by the elderly) that this is an obligation for the young? As with the security services, are the elderly and the "health compromised" now expected to "take a bullet" to protect society, as may be speculatively explored (*Terminal Empowerment: socio-political implications of radical mutual assistance amongst the terminally ill*, 2003)?

From the perspective of the statistics of warfare, should the fatality rates from coronavirus now be framed as "honourable" in the face of an implacable enemy worthy of appropriate demonisation by official propaganda and the arguments of religion?

**Tolerable fatalities in time of war:** Governments are notoriously tolerable of fatalities in time of war -- possibly regretting the fatalities inflicted on the "enemy" and civilian populations (after the fact) and deploring the fatalities of their own forces and civilian populations. The fatalities are presented as a necessity, long framed by so-called just war theory. With the response to pandemic now framed in terms of a war-time mindset -- unquestionably -- consideration could be given to the level of fatalities considered tolerable in the light of past adoption of that mindset.

New reflection on the matter is offered by Albin Eser (*Killing in War: unasked questions -- ill-founded legitimisation*, *Criminal Law and Philosophy*, 12, 2018):

Killing in war as a matter of course may be inferred from the fact that, as stated by Thomas Hobbes, "all laws are silent in the time of war" [*Inter arma enim silent leges*]. Although this traditional law-suspending power of war has been restricted to a certain degree by modern humanitarian international law, it is still commonly assumed that killing in war, unless and as long as not explicitly forbidden, is per se permitted and thus does not require any further legitimisation. This is in fundamental contrast to a "normal" homicide, which requires special justification to be considered lawful. This commonly unquestioned license to kill, by the mere reason of being at war, is all the more astonishing given that no legal norm can be found that positively and explicitly declares killing in war to be lawful.

Frequent reference is currently made to the fatalities resulting from the [Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918](#). Lasting from January 1918 to December 1920, it infected 500 million people -- about a quarter of the world's population at the time. The death toll is estimated to have been anywhere from 17 million to 50 million, and possibly as high as 100 million, making it one of the [deadliest epidemics](#) in human history.

That period -- namely the aftermath of [World War I](#) -- was witness to the implementation by generals of military strategies which resulted in a total of some nine million combatant and seven million civilian deaths as a direct result of the war, while resulting genocides and the resulting 1918 influenza pandemic caused another 50 to 100 million deaths worldwide. This can be compared with the 70 to 85 million fatalities of [World War II](#) -- more specifically with those implemented as acceptable and necessary by the UK and the USA. In the case of the UK the example cited is that of Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Arthur Travers Harris ("[Bomber Harris](#)") in implementing the policies of Winston Churchill, namely the "[area bombing](#)" of German cities, most notably the [Bombing of Dresden](#). In the case of the USA, the most cited examples are those of the [Atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki](#). Commentators now consider that neither was "necessary".

The fight against the pandemic is already being framed as [World War III](#), raising questions as to what has been learned from the strategies implemented at that time, especially in the light of subsequent military strategies over decades by a Western coalition (*Transforming the Unsustainable Cost of General Education: strategic insights from Afghanistan*, 2009; Mark R. Wilson, *The 5 WWII Lessons That Could Help the Government Fight Coronavirus*, *Politico*, 19 March 2020). As of 5 August 2018, there have been 3,459 [coalition deaths in Afghanistan](#) as a result of that conflict, and an estimated 360,000 [civilian deaths in Afghanistan](#).

Whilst fatalities are indeed to be deplored **in theory**, what fatalities are in process of being considered tolerable **in practice** by authorities -- notably by those leaders inspired by Winston Churchill? How many are expected to die "in combat" with the virus or as a consequence of "collateral damage"? The young? The elderly? The marginal?

Curiously it is difficult to disentangle the percentage of losses considered "acceptable" by generals and leaders in time of war -- whether military or civilian (despite details of the [civilian casualty ratio](#)). The misreporting by various sources is addressed with respect to World War I by Greg Allwood (*What Were The Actual Odds Of Dying In WWI? Forces Network*, 4 March 2020). As for World War II, Chris Keating notes: *Approximately 16 million Americans wore the uniform in WWII, and 290,000 died in combat. So, just under 2%. Another 115,000 died non-combat deaths, so now you're up to 4%* (*What were the average soldier's odds of surviving WWII?*, *Quora*, 15 January 2014). Also offered by the *History of Western Civilization* is:

World War II was the deadliest military conflict in history in terms of total dead, with some 75 million people casualties including military and civilians, or around 3% of the world's population at the time. (*Casualties of World War II*)

Another framing is offered by Jeremy Bender (*This Chart Shows The Astounding Devastation Of World War II*, *Business Insider*, 30 May 2014). What is the fatality expectancy of the pandemic virus by comparison? The probability of death after infection is variously estimated at from 2%-10% (Aylin Woodward, *The probability of dying after developing coronavirus symptoms is 1.4% in Wuhan, China, new research suggests -- far lower than initial estimates*, *Business Insider*, 20 March 2020). Rates are reported to be 9% in Italy (Virginia Pietromarchi, *Why is Italy's coronavirus fatality rate so high?* *AlJazeera*, 24 March 2020), now called into question as considerably overestimated (Peter Andrews, *How lethal is Covid-19 really? Why massive fatality rates from Italy are misleading*, *RT*, 25 March 2020).

**Why is no effort made to offer any such comparison, if a war-time scenario is promoted with its call for necessary sacrifice and expectation of "tolerable" fatalities?** Most curious is the exhortation of courage by leaders in time of war -- exemplified by those ordered to climb out of trenches in World War I, namely a process of "going over the top" from which relatively few survived. The irony of the lockdown response to the pandemic crisis, by contrast, is the order that people should stay at home -- "cowering courageously" until the pandemic abates? Who are the courageous during a pandemic?

A highly relevant question is asked by Ari Schulman (*What's the Plan? Yes, the Covid-19 shutdown is necessary -- but it won't work without a vision of how it ends*, *The New Atlantis*, 21 March 2020), noting that:

Understandably, some are already questioning the wisdom of this move, noting [how little information we're acting on](#) and [the devastation the shutdown is already wreaking on the economy](#).

If from some strategic perspective the world has indeed become "overpopulated" and ungovernable (by increasing from 1.6 billion in 1900 to over 6 billion in 2000), what percentage can global civilisation "afford to lose" without jeopardising its integrity? Would such a loss come to be considered as "healthy", as many have argued?

What of the "unthinkable" strategy intimated by Donald Trump in tweeting that *We cannot let the cure be worse than the problem itself* (22 March 2020, at 10 minutes before midnight eastern time). and argued by others (David Katz, *Is Our Fight Against Coronavirus Worse Than the Disease?* *The New York Times*, 20 March 2020; Jonathan Sumption, *Coronavirus lockdown: we are so afraid of death, no one even asks whether this 'cure' is actually worse*, *The Sunday Times*, 5 April 2020). The latter cites Franklin D. Roosevelt in relation to recession::

The only thing we have to fear is fear itself -- nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyses needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.

This view has naturally been challenged (Sten H. Vermund, et al, *The Wrong Way to Fight Coronavirus*, *The New York Times*, 23 March 2020). Most recognize the appropriateness of the old medical joke: *The operation was a total success -- unfortunately the patient died*. Will social distancing, as currently conceived, prove eventually to have been a "total success" -- if only from the perspective of medical expertise? Why the knee-jerk rejection of Trump's argument in time of war, as the pandemic is now declared to be (Jeet Heer, *Trump Toys With a Let-Them-Die Response to the Pandemic*, *The Nation*, 23 March 2020)?

## Self-reflexive implication of social distancing?

There is of course every reason to be focused urgently on the fatalities and chaos engendered by the pandemic. However this is in itself an unfortunate distraction from the learning to be derived from the crisis -- and others expected to follow. A valuable question is asked by H. Bruce Franklin (*What Is Covid-19 Trying to Teach Us?* *CounterPunch*, 13 March 2020):

Neither Covid-19 nor a major recession poses a threat to our survival as a species. We do, however, face two existential threats, both created by our species, and each featuring our nation in the lead role. At the very moment when only global unity and cooperation can save us from threats of nuclear holocaust and environmental devastation, deadly nationalism is tearing our species apart. Can Covid-19 teach us that those two great menaces to our existence are also not zero-sum games? That our species either wins or we, as well as many other species, all lose?

Rather than a question of winning or losing, the challenge might be more appropriately framed in the transcendent spirit of Eastern martial arts as how to learn from one's opponent to avoid the questionable enthusiasm for the restrictive cognitive conventions of **zero-sum games**, as variously imagined (*Ensuring Strategic Resilience through Haiku Patterns: reframing the scope of the "martial arts" in response to strategic threats*, 2006; James P. Carse, *Finite and Infinite Games: a vision of life as play and possibility*, 1986). Are there new possibilities, if we recognize that the form and operation of the coronavirus is a mysterious image of who we are, whether collectively or individually?

Is there some strange sense in which humanity has evoked the coronavirus as an appropriate challenge to a global civilization usefully recognized as "health compromised", especially as a consequence of "substance abuse" understood in its most general sense? How is learning from epidemics to be enabled, as framed by Shirley Lindenbaum (*Kuru, Prions, and Human Affairs: thinking about epidemics, Annual Review of Anthropology*, 30, 2001).

Does the form of the coronavirus mirror the human condition in a way that merits exploration if a "cognitive antigen" is to be discovered? In that sense, is the coronavirus very much an indication of who humans are and who they conceive themselves to be? The case was partially explored separately (*Reimagining Coronavirus in 3D as a Metaphor of Global Society in Distress: crowning pattern that connects spiky organisms, satellite constellations, nuclear explosions, and egomania?* 2020).

Clues to some such understanding might be derived from a sense in which, **when it is possible, social distancing is only a viable response to local overcrowding. It is however only a local indication of a degree of global overpopulation -- currently impossible to constrain.** The latter possibility is an issue which national, regional and global governance has been afraid to recognize -- let alone to address. Unfortunately, in systemic terms, pandemics (like wars) would seem to be engendered by society to address that challenge otherwise. However this too would seem to obscure a challenge which may be more fundamental.

With so many under global lockdown, are we very much **our own metaphor** -- cowering in our homes as makeshift "air-raid shelters" from bombing by COVID-19 at any moment? Does this experience thereby mirror that of so many in Syria and elsewhere -- as a result of our misguided global complicity in "humanitarian interventions"? Curiously the little known patron saint of resistance to epidemics, Saint Corona, is now a focus of media attention (Madeline Chambers, *Coronavirus: German cathedral to showcase relics of St Corona, patron of epidemics, Reuters*, 26 March 2020). Although **martyred in Syria for her support for another**, like Machiavelli she originated from northern Italy (Simon Heffer, *Machiavelli knew that pandemics were a metaphor for life under a corrupt political class, The Telegraph*, 26 March 2020).

To the extent that epidemics derive from genetic mutations transmitted from animals, their impact on humanity can even be understood as nature's revenge (Evaggelos Vallianatos, *Nature's Revenge: Climate Change and COVID-19, CounterPunch*, 20 March 2020; Shay Cullen, *Coronavirus Outbreak: the revnge of nature? UCA News*, 28 February 2020). Uncritical denial of that possibility is symptomatic of the problem (Alan Levinovitz, *The Coronavirus is not Mother Nature's Revenge, Foreign Policy*, 5 March 2020).

The argument has been developed separately (*Cowering for One's Country in the War against Coronavirus*, 2020).



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