Social Ecology and Social Immunity in the time of Sars 2

Usufruct Collective

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Contents

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The current pandemic of Sars 2/Covid 19 has become an al-
most all pervasive social problem. We are deeply social animals
and depending where you are the current pandemic and re-
sponses to it loom over every social relationship. In the follow-
ing essay, I will try to demonstrate the following points: Hier-
archical relations–defined by institutionalized forms of ruling
classes and ruling strata– cause and exacerbate infectious dis-
eases. To create a robust and resilient kind of social immunity,
we ought to create radical egalitarian institutions and social
relations. The goal will not be to provide an exhaustive expla-
nation of the above thesis and the various ways in which hier-
archical relations inhibit good health and egalitarian relations
promote good health, but merely to demonstrate its strength
as a framework to inform praxis to increase social immunity.

Causes of diseases

Pollution and ecological destruction–caused by hierarchy–
inhibit immune systems. Most infectious diseases are caused
through destruction of ecosystems (Robbins 2012) and more
biodiversity generally leads to less infectious diseases (and in-
versely less biodiversity generally leads to more infectious dis-
eases) (Keesing et al. 2010). A social ecological theory explain-
ing such ecological destruction would point out that destruc-
tion of ecosystems and biodiversity is not mere human activity,
but a specific kind of activity that is most significantly caused
by hierarchical relations between humans that instrumental-
ize human and non-human life towards maximizing profit and
power over others (Bookchin 2007). In such a process, capi-
talists and states that fail to utilize cheap nature will be less
able to compete with capitalists and states in a zero sum game
where nature (including social nature) is sacrificed to hierar-
chical power (Moore 2017).

Structural violence–inequality and hierarchy– inhibit overall immune system functioning throughout society (Wilkinson et al. 2011). Structural violence causes increased amounts of abuse and unmet needs and increased stress (Wilkinson et al. 2011) and toxic amounts of such increased stress inhibit immune system functioning (Mate 2019). Structural violence also causes greater prevalence of adverse childhood experiences (Wilkinson et al. 2011) and such adverse childhood experiences can cause toxic stress response in children which generally causes greater frequency and risk of infections as well as other negative outcomes throughout childhood and adult life (Franke 2014). The growth of structural violence can only happen at the expense of egalitarian decentralized participatory community organizations and networks. Such people-powered institutions and infrastructure can help with mutual aid work in times of disasters– and in times when there are not disasters.

Deprivation of resources existed prior to capitalism. Under capitalism, deprivation of resources happens through commodification, markets, wage labor, class relations, private property. Healthcare as a commodity inhibits treatment and access to treatment when it comes to infectious diseases. Universal decommodified healthcare, by providing care to the general population, enables greater social immunity. However, healthcare that is merely universal and decommodified is necessary but not sufficient for further healthcare optimization and other ethical criteria: for such decommodified healthcare can still exist in a broader context of commodification, other kinds of hierarchical power, or scientific ignorance. Furthermore, nationalization of healthcare and reforms such as single payer healthcare are distinct from communalized healthcare. Under communalized healthcare, decisions about healthcare are made through communities, doctors, patients, healthcare workers, and relevant experts talking together to find out what needs are and how to meet them through the scientific method guided by

care workers, etc.) about health precautions to find the right ways to organize together while giving extreme consideration social immunity (Woodbine 2020). After the Sars 2 pandemic, there is likely to be an economic depression. As people are increasingly unable to find work or pay rent, there will be a continued crisis of extreme magnitudes. Hierarchical institutions will try to restructure hierarchical power to meet such new conditions. Horizontalist and egalitarian movements must be prepared to respond to future crises with ethical and effective solutions that bridge short term goals and long term goals. Political action done during crisis moments is not all that matters: action done years prior and decades prior to give us capacity to respond ethically and effectively to disasters are very important, as are the kind of follow up organizing done to arrive at long term goals after specific crisis moments. As hierarchy continues to destroy the natural world and instrumentalize it towards increasing power over others, more crises will follow including more pandemics. It is the task of radicals to get to the root causes social and ecological problems (not limited to pandemics) through reconstructive politics and oppositional politics– linking short term goals and long term goals together towards a good society while using a process consistent with the principles thereof.

Endnotes

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problems: Relying more on video calls, phone calls, and texting for communication, deliberation, and collective decisions. Mutual aid projects to help provide necessities of life to people. This could look like mutual aid delivery systems towards people who are contagious and people who are not contagious, or it could look like providing necessities of life, soap, and hygiene supplies to people– or stuff like mask making and distribution as well as creating public handwashing stations. Taking over abandoned buildings and class property and turning them into housing and people powered infrastructure is a way to meet people's needs while turning exploitative and socially useless property into something socially useful. More broadly, other kinds of ethically justified expropriation can be useful to help meet people's needs. Rent strikes and pushes towards rent cancellation can help people not pay their rent while staying sheltered. Rent strikes can be practiced while keeping good physical distance and also directly speaks to worsening conditions of increased unemployment and rent still being due. Such rent strikes can build tenant power that can continue onwards beyond the Sars 2 crisis to help oppose landlordism and hierarchy more broadly. There is also the potential for striking at one's workplace and even general strikes. Escalated radical demands against hierarchs of various kinds backed by direct action and community solidarity can help people meet their needs in this current crisis and in many other crises. Prison abolitionist work is also crucial as aside from prisons being their own moral atrocity beyond the context of Sars 2/Covid 19, prisons are hotbeds for spreading diseases as people are forced to be in close proximity to others without access to personal space. This list is of course very incomplete and you can help by adding to it.

Anti authoritarian left social movements are related to what people need to live and live well. As the Woodbine Collective pointed out, we need to learn from people who have been working in the midst of this crisis (grocery store workers, health-

ethical practice. Such communalized healthcare would create a participatory process for healthcare and standard operating procedures. This would create more transparency, better communication, and cooperative conflict–which are shown to produce better processes and results worth striving towards than competition (Kohn 2017). The prescription that decommodification is necessary but not sufficient—and that communalization should be an additional feature to decommodication– will also apply to other commodities talked about in this essay. Furthermore, healthcare knowledge should be generalized rather than highly specialized and coveted (although some people will of course excel in this specific field of knowledge and various subsets thereof). In Rojava, healthcare systems embedded in self governed communities aim to teach everyone first aid and medical skills to create greater redundancy of skills– an important feature of a good healthcare system that the entire world should learn from.

The commodification of food and nutrition makes it so access to such food and nutrition is conditional upon how much one can afford within market systems. Nutrition of course contributes towards good immune system functioning which can help prevent, minimize, and fight off infectious diseases. This helps overall social immunity given how many infectious diseases are contagious.

Housing as a commodity inhibits people from having access to personal space. Such access to personal space helps people rest, recover from infectious diseases, and not spread infectious diseases when they are contagious. Without personal space, people have less ability to distance themselves from others when they are contagious.

Wage labor is the buying and selling of human time and capacity. People are forced to sell their labor power on the market in order to get access to the necessities of life. This forces people to go to work while they are contagious. This decreases overall social immunity and helps spread conta-

gious diseases. Commodities themselves create transactional relations with money and cashiers and customers which apart from only serving market functions helps spread infectious diseases through unnecessary human contact. If one person a cashier comes into contact with is contagious with something like Sars 2/Covid 19, then that could spread the disease to a specific cashier and the many people that cashier is in contact with (on and off the job) overtime during the incubation period. For many reasons that go far beyond Sars 2/Covid 19, we need to abolish wage labor and market economies. Instead of a money system, we need a system of free distribution of resources according to needs. Many jobs currently only exist to move money around.

Automation outside of ethical social relations leads to all sorts of ethical problems such as anti-ecological production and humans competing with technology for jobs they need to survive (within a system that should not exist). However, in a good society, automation would be done through ecological development (through regenerative and recycled materials) and would free humans from arduous undesired labor. At least some of the services needed in times of pandemics could be done by machines– minimizing spread of contagious diseases and allowing people to stay at home. Outside of a context of pandemics, such automation should be used to minimize arduous labor and give people a larger realm of freedom to do what they want to do within good ethical bounds.

One of the most important and simple ways to increase social immunity is for people to wash their hands. The commodification of soap and hygiene supplies makes it so not everyone has access to basic resources to keep themselves and others from getting sick and spreading infectious diseases. The lack of access to personal and public bathrooms also further spreads infectious diseases as lack of such access means that people do not have stations for going to the bathroom or washing their hands.

What should we do in the time of Sars 2/Covid 19

In some sense, the task at hand is to continue with revolutionary reconstructive and oppositional politics via organization building, direct action, mutual aid, and popular education. Such a process aims to meet people's needs, oppose hierarchies, while building the new world in the shell of the old. All of the above will always have to adapt to new relevant variables as they emerge. The Sars 2/Covid 19 crisis creates obstacles to the kind of social organizing needed to deal with both the pandemic and other social and ecological problems. Adapting libertarian socialist politics to Covid 19 is not enough, for we must also adapt such politics to specific locales and social relationships with all their unique social variables.

First and foremost, we do not need authoritarianism to help with social immunity. Aside from states causing infectious diseases to spread through destroying biodiversity (in the various ways they do this from their own internal logic to enforcing capitalism), states squander resources on non-solutions such as police, curfews, hierarchical enforcement, prisons, surveillance, emergency powers, their own internal bureaucracies etc. Instead of such authoritarian solutions, we need mutual aid, free healthcare, decommodification more broadly, free access to means of existence and production (including free access to housing and personal space), radical direct action, increased scientific literacy, community accountability and responsibility to each other to make sure we increase social immunity, and participatory organizations to help make all of the above a reality. The protocols and rules people should follow to keep good physical distance during the Sars 2 crisis do not require state enforcement.

Here are some things that can be done during the Sars 2 crisis to increase social immunity while also focusing on other social