

СОЦИАЛЬНЫЕ ПРОЦЕССЫ И СОЦИАЛЬНАЯ ДИНАМИКА

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The coronavirus challenge to modern anthropocentrism

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Following Goya's painting "Duel with Cudgels" as metaphor, with which Michel Serres opens his book *The Natural Contract*, this article argues that the coronavirus pandemic, with its devastating impact on our lives, dismantles the modern anthropocentric framework. It thrusts us violently into a post-anthropocentric perspective, which dislocates the human from the center of being and invites us to understand human existence in relation to nonhuman others such as the planet, the environment, animals, and technologies. However, at this critical moment, instead of seeing the pandemic crisis as a wake-up call for a shift of focus from the anthropocentric to a post-anthropocentric perspective, the dominant ways of understanding it on public discourse keep framing it in anthropocentric terms. As this discusses, taking as an indicative case the first wave of the pandemic in Greece, from March to June 2020, what seems to be a common ground in the rhetoric of the media, politicians, and a significant part of scientists, is that more or less almost all of them share and uphold the dividing lines between human-nonhuman, society-nature, ideologically obsessed with human superiority despite evidence to the contrary. In this respect, the post-anthropocentric challenge due to the coronavirus pandemic seems to have been postponed until further notice. Thus, as we are stuck on the old anthropocentric business as usual, one of the fundamental issues of human societies in the 21st century, that being man's fragile relationships with Planet Earth and other co-species, remains a blind spot, hindering appropriate action.

Keywords: COVID-19, coronavirus pandemic, modern anthropocentrism, post-anthropocentrism, posthumanism, coronavirus public discourse.

Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic crisis approaches its second full year. During this time a nonhuman entity, the SARS-CoV-2 virus, has taken its toll on more than 5,027,000 hu-

man lives, while the recorded cases worldwide come up to approximately 250 million¹. In the turmoil of this “unprecedented” global health crisis and amidst the waves and surges of the pandemic, a massive slowdown of the global capitalist economy has taken place. Borders and schools are closed. The imposition of extreme measures of a previous age, such as the mandatory use of masks in public places; contact tracing; curfews during the evening hours; physical distancing and social isolation; the restrictions on the operation of restaurants, shops or cultural venues; local lockdowns, all have dramatically changed people’s daily habits all over the planet.

The coronavirus pandemic crisis puzzles all of us who have been shaped within the modern anthropocentric framework of the exceptionalism of man, within the simplistic binary oppositions of culture — nature, human — nonhuman, subject — object. How is it possible that a nonhuman microorganism has induced such a violent subversion and changed the living conditions and the lifestyles of almost all the planet’s inhabitants? How can such a nonhuman, “primitive” and tiny entity wield such power over our civilized and techno-scientifically over sophisticated western world? As Bruno Latour [1] has put it, not altogether in jest, even what the opponents of capitalism have failed to accomplish for decades now, has been achieved by temporarily “suspending” it by a “humble” virus.

This article argues that the coronavirus pandemic, with its devastating impact on our lives, dismantles the modern anthropocentric framework. It thrusts us violently into the post-anthropocentric perspective, which dislocates the human from the center of being and invites us to comprehend human existence in relation to nonhuman others such as the planet, animals or technologies.

However, at this critical moment, instead of seeing the pandemic crisis as a wake-up call for shifting our focus from the anthropocentric to a post-anthropocentric perspective, the dominant ways of understanding it on public discourse keep framing it in anthropocentric terms. As I discuss in this paper, what seems to be a common ground in the rhetoric of the media, the politicians, and a significant part of scholars — both internationally and in Greece — is that they share and uphold the dividing lines between human — nature, human — nonhuman ideologically obsessed with human superiority despite evidence to the contrary.

In this respect, the post-anthropocentric challenge due to the coronavirus pandemic seems to have been postponed until further notice. Thus, as we are stuck on the old anthropocentric business as usual, one of the fundamental issues of human societies in the 21st century, that being man’s fragile relationships with Planet Earth and other co-species, remains a blind spot, hindering appropriate action.

From the anthropocentric to the post-anthropocentric perspective. Goya’s painting “Duel with Cudgels” as metaphor

Preliminary remarks. The “posthuman turn” across the humanities and social sciences during the last four decades has been expressed through a vast range of accounts and different versions. This represents a distinct area in humanities discourse which is growing in a fast pace. In the face of such diversity, any mapping remains precarious and incomplete.

¹ According to the latest figures of the World Health Organization on 05/11/2021, available at: <https://covid19.who.int/> (accessed: 12.08.2021).

However, for the purposes of this discussion, we adopt the typical distinction between the two alternative understandings of the 'post'-prefix. First, under the heading of "transhumanism", the 'post'-prefix refers to humanity's enhancement or evolution into a new "posthuman" form of existence through the contemporary technoscientific means. Assuming that there is commonality, for example, among thinkers such as Nick Bostrom's theory of superintelligence [2], Ray Kurzweil's singularity [3], Hans Moravec's downloading minds [4], the democratic transhumanism of James Hughes [5] or the accelerationist movement of Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams [6], transhumanist thought is presented as a continuation of the modern anthropocentric project of human mastery and power [7, p. xiii; 8, p. 287].

Secondly, under the label of "posthumanisms", the 'post'-prefix takes a critical stance by questioning the modern anthropocentric conceptions of human exceptionalism, as well as the binaries implied in humanism between human and technology, human and nonhuman, society and nature, meaning and matter. Post-anthropocentrism as a critique of modern humanism is located at the heart of the so-called critical posthumanism such as Neil Badmington [9], Katherine Hayles [8], Andy Clark [10], Rosi Braidotti [11] etc., and unfolds through actor-network theory [12; 13], affect theory [14], the new materialist thought with various theoretical insights such as the post-Deleuzian philosophy of Manuel DeLanda [15], object-oriented ontology and speculative realism [16–18], vitalist materialism [19], or performative materialism [20; 21]. In addition, this critique can be traced to a variety of different routes, such as system theory or cybernetics, the studies of material culture, animal studies, or Anthropocene studies. This article draws on this repertoire of critical responses, inviting us, as a theoretical approach, to displace the centrality of *anthropos* (homo sapiens) and rethink "Man" in relation to nonhuman others, such as animals, machines, objects, systems, environments, etc. [7, p. ix–xxxiv].

Contrary to the impression conveyed by many social scientists (see for example, Zake and DeCesare [22, p. 2–5]), such a displacement does not mean the demise of human or the lack of humanism. It is not an attempt to replace the category of human with the nonhuman or nature. If such was the case, then defending the one-sided focus to nonhumans or nature would still be the "other side of the coin" of the same old dichotomous categorization of human and nonhuman. In other words, it would reinforce the same sharp distinctions which we have professed to overcome. Furthermore, it is important to stress that this attention to the active participation of nonhuman forces is derived from the human perspective. Ironically, perhaps, the claim of providing insights into the nonhuman may be thought as a greater human "mastering", by giving meaning or humanizing the nonhuman world further, bringing us back again to the authority of Man.

After all, what is the point of post-anthropocentrism, if the analysis is still conducted by humans? The diagnosis is not new. As Neil Badmington argued 18 years ago [9, p. 11], in his article "Theorizing Posthumanism": "In the approach to posthumanism on which I want to insist, the glorious moment of Herculean victory cannot yet come, for humanism (as a Lernaean hydra, the mythical beast) continues to raise its head(s)".

We can't simply step outside of the modern humanist regime and its human exceptionalism. Post-anthropocentrism grows out of anthropocentrism. In this respect, in our view, questioning the idea of human separateness and superiority to nonhumans and directing the attention to human-nonhuman collectives continues the critical tradition of the Enlightenment and the self-reflexive condition of social sciences developing a new research agendas and concepts.

Goya's painting "Duel with Cudgels" as a metaphor. To conceive the difference between the anthropocentric and the post-anthropocentric perspective, I will use Goya's masterpiece "Duel with Cudgels"², as a figurative exemplification, with which Michel Serres opens his book, *The Natural Contract* [23, p. 1–3]. In this painting, Serres distinguishes two perspectives. The one focuses on the violent human conflict between the two opponents: between human actors. The other perspective, in addition to the two human adversaries, sheds light on a third unsuspected term, the quicksand, which threatens the very survival of the human duelists. In fact, the more intense the fight between these two combatants, the greater the risk of them drowning in the quicksand.

This active force of the swamp and therefore of the soil, of nature or ultimately of the nonhuman, takes place without the awareness of the two human adversaries, in a hidden way. The duelists, self-righteously obsessed with human affairs and seduced by the passion of the duel, ignore the fact that they are in danger of being defeated by a third, "invisible actor", the quicksand in which the human fight is taking place.

With this very powerful metaphor, Serres illustrates the limited view of the anthropocentric perspective. As a view, it focuses exclusively and with complacency on human affairs and fails to bring attention to the profound interconnection and interdependence between humanity and nature, and the human and nonhuman world. The anthropocentric frame confines our understanding as it obfuscates our entanglements with nonhuman others. Within it, the constitutive power of nonhumans in the shaping of humanity and its societies is overlooked. By contrast, the post-anthropocentric view expands our understanding of human society to include nonhuman others.

The modern anthropocentric Constitution. The invisible nonhumans. The modern anthropocentric framework is not only a way of seeing, but also a political constitution, a body of constitutional principles. Since the Enlightenment and the origins of Cartesian and Kantian philosophy and based on these constitutional principles, we conceptualize existence and being in the world, have defined the conceivable from the inconceivable. In the context of the modern Constitution, as Bruno Latour [12] calls it, with its arrogant or "fantasy of human exceptionalism" [24, p. 11], human existence is conceived on its disconnection and opposition to nature or the nonhuman world in general. In other words, the very idea of the human is cut off from the category of nature. A strong distinction is drawn between the world of humans on the one hand and the extrinsic world of nature on the other. On the one hand, there is the human endowed with autonomy, sovereignty, reason and agency, and, on the other hand, there is the blind, passive, tacit realm of nature. In this regard, the opposing binaries locate the human alone at the center of being and at the same time, place nature outside the human realm. Binaries praise human dominance and mastery and at the same time belittle the nonhuman world. The category of nature or the nonhuman are fundamentally meaningless.

More precisely, in the modern anthropocentric Constitution, the biological — physical dimension is eliminated from definitions of the human and the social. In the light of dualisms, humanity and society are conceived in their ontological purity. As a "purified being", the conscious human subject neglects its biological side and its connection to the nonhuman, organic and inorganic environments. The fantasies of disembodiment and

² See: *Duel with Cudgels, or Fight to the Death with Clubs*. Museo del Prado, available at: <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/duel-with-cudgels-or-fight-to-the-death-with-clubs/2f2f2e12-ed09-45dd-805d-f38162c5beaf> (accessed: 12.08.2021).

autonomy restrict the image of “Man” to its capacity for reason, language and sentience while its biological — physical dimension is considered as an insignificant exterior. Similarly, human society is conceived in its purity as the exclusive realm of human beings, independent of the nonhuman others. Natural history and biological phenomena have nothing to do with socio-cultural events.

In addition, in the modern anthropocentric framework, the recognition of nature becomes “decorative” [23, p. 3]. Nature and nonhumans are reduced to an inert background of culture and the history of human societies, without any “agentic” forces [20]. The ideas of human superiority and dominance suppress representations of nonhuman agency, failing to address it. Agency arises solely from within humans. In this sense, the agencies of nonhuman entities fall outside the sphere of the existence, thus devoid of any meaning and value.

Humanities and social sciences were part of the modern anthropocentric Constitution and contributed significantly to its establishment and perpetuation [25, p. 9; 26, p. 42]. In this context, the human and society have disconnected from the study of nature. Social sciences think human society outside nature. In the view of the human, they tend to systematically turn a blind eye to its physical or biological dimension. To be precise, over the last fifty years, based on the clear divide between nature and society, the conventional wisdom of social scientists has turned its back to the developments of the other sciences, such as physics, molecular biology, neuroscience, cognitive sciences, astronomy, cosmology, or mathematics. Too many social researchers are unaware of the findings of other scientific disciplines. Under the pretext of “reduction” of the social to the biological, human animality and the biological dimension with its evolutionary mechanisms; the links between the human species and the Earth; between humans and the natural environment with its inanimate and living forms; all have been ignored. Apart from some exceptions, such as Michel Serres [23], Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari [27], Bruno Latour [13], Isabelle Stengers [28], Jane Bennett [19] etc., social thought systematically denied that there are chains of interconnection between humans — human societies and nonhuman entities, such as microbes, animals, plants, objects, etc. In this sense, many social scientists did not avoid “ghettoization” as they neglected the findings of other sciences. Eventually, they yielded to the positivistic tradition of strict division of disciplinary fields and found shelter behind it.

Towards a post-anthropocentric perspective. Following Serres’ metaphor, the pandemic crisis can be seen as a wake-up call for shifting our focus from the anthropocentric to a post-anthropocentric perspective. The unprecedented scale and gravity of the situation force us to engage with a view which puts nonhuman agency in the spotlight, undermining the view of the human as a separate and independent form of life. It urges us to avow human hybridity and the complex chains of interaction between humans and nonhuman others.

By analogy, this shift of attention towards nonhumans and their relations to humans is reflected on the quicksand in Goya’s painting “Duel with Cudgels”. Our perception expands beyond the human duelists, so as to detect the quicksand in which they are sinking. The post-anthropocentric view does not focus exclusively on human affairs but expands to the continuity between nature and historical subject, nature and culture, nonhuman and human living beings. Thinking in post-anthropocentric terms and questioning anthropocentrism does not imply the end of ‘Man’, but the end of the “human-centered world” [9].

To put it differently, anthropocentrism remains [29]. However, the post-anthropocentric approach indicates a less-anthropocentric worldview, a weak or “enlightened” anthropocentrism [26, p. 41] that allows us to think beyond the limit of the human. In this sense, the all-too-human focus is only one side of the story. Equally important are the more-than-human social approaches such as human engagement with Planet Earth or the hybrid collectives of humans and nonhumans, of human and nonhuman life. To use the terms of Dipesh Chakrabarty [30, p. 21], “we need to bring together conceptual categories that we have usually treated in the past as separate and virtually unconnected. We need to connect deep and recorded histories and put geological time and the biological time of evolution in conversation with the time of human history and experience”.

In this light, the COVID-19 pandemic in its scale and gravity, brings to the fore what is ignored by the anthropocentric framework: the inextricable interdependences between human and nonhuman, society and nature. The interconnection between them has never been clearer. The nonhuman world can no longer be decorative. In the vortex of the pandemic, the coronavirus has a “leading role” as it completely governs policymaking and determines our social life. In other words, it appears as an active force, dramatically highlighting the fact that the capacity for action is not limited to human subjectivity. Agency, as a transformative force, extends beyond people and their achievements.

Through such a post-anthropocentric shift, which reveals the interconnexion between humans and the natural world, the human as biological entity comes to light. Opposing the anthropocentric fantasy of disembodiment, the coronavirus pandemic urgently reminds us that the human subject is not only a rational, symbolic, and conscious being but also a living species. As a living organism, it is not distinct and autonomous but takes part in the dance of entanglements with ecosystems, organisms, and other entities. Its existence is physically and biologically enmeshed in the biotic and abiotic environments, as it needs material resources and energy to survive. Equally, within the relational nexus of life on Planet Earth, the human species is living in conjunction with other nonhuman living species with which it interacts and occupies ecological niches which it shares with them.

More precisely, through the post-anthropocentric lens of the human as a living being, the arrogant anthropocentric illusion of superiority of the human is challenged. In evolutionary terms, the power of the human mind and intelligence loses its “transcendental envelope” and appears simply as an “evolutionary advantage” next the ones other living organisms possess. As Katherine Hayles [31] argues, the pandemic crisis can be conceived as a battle between two survival strategies. The human side possesses the mental and cognitive powers. In this sense, while a conventional vaccine would have taken 10 years of research to produce, today humanity has the vaccine at its disposal within just 300 days since the pandemic broke out [32]. By contrast, due to its short genome, the novel coronavirus has the strategic advantage of rapid replication, allowing for the disease to spread to humans as quickly as it has. In fact, as Hayles [31] points out, the new coronavirus “has hit the jackpot”. The spillover, possibly from Wuhan’s bats³, has affected the most numerous and the most predominant mammal species on Planet Earth: humans. Within the relational grid of life, human superiority now seems uncertain and fragile.

Furthermore, from a post-anthropocentric perspective, the emphasis is given to the interconnexions between humans and other living things and not solely to the binary

³ There is no direct evidence yet.

oppositions between them. In this regard, relationships between humans and microorganisms are commonly symbiotic and less often relationships of competition. The human body is an ecological system in itself: the so-called human microbiome, which hosts bacteria, archaeobacteria, fungi, viruses, microbes, and other entities. They live in our skin or in our body, they feed and reproduce, they excrete, and they die. Their existence is of great importance for human health. They produce vitamins and anti-inflammatory substances, break down food and often strengthen our own immune system. For instance, viruses are an integral part of the human organism. Scientists estimate that 380 trillion viruses coexist with human body [33]. “Violent opposition” between viruses and humans is rare. Most of the time viruses are harmless or even helpful.

But what conditions have possibly allowed the zoonotic transmission of SARS-CoV-2 from an animal reservoir host to human? How did it find the way to ‘jump’ from its former natural hosts, bats, into the human body? The post-anthropocentric approach highlights the links between the emergence and spread of SARS-CoV-2 and environmental changes⁴. The lens of the living being has revealed the deterioration of natural ecosystems on which social and cultural lives of humans and other species depend. Unconditional progress with population growth, rapid urbanization, deforestation, habitat destruction, climate change, degradation of the natural environments, biodiversity loss, wildlife trade — all facilitate the cross-species virus transmission [34, p. 4]. “Wildlife” is being destroyed. As a result, the distance between us and wildlife is dramatically reduced, making it easier to come to contact with wildlife populations and much more likely to encounter potentially pathogenic organisms. Additionally, the intensification of livestock farming under careless and ultimately miserable conditions (overcrowding, widespread antibiotic use, etc.) increases the chances of transmitting pathogenic viruses from animals to humans, as happened with bird flu, H5N1⁵. Outbreaks appear to be exacerbated during the last decades, an emerging “era of pandemics” [34, p. 1]. SARS-CoV appeared in 2003, MERS-CoV in 2012, Ebola in 2014–2016 and now SARS-CoV-2, causing COVID-19 disease.

In sum, the COVID-19 pandemic crisis makes the entanglements of human and non-human entities visible in an explosive way, bringing to the fore the significance of the physical and biological dimensions. Such an “enlightened” or post-anthropocentric view, which decenters the human, offers a suitable framework for understanding the changing conditions of our historicity, linked with the possible collapse of our life support systems. It is a way of reflecting upon the crucial issues and processes of our historical times, fostering an awareness of the fragility and vulnerability of life on Planet Earth.

The spectrum of the anthropocentric rhetoric in public discourse.

The opacity persists

The modern anthropocentric framework of Man’s exceptionalism and its superiority in the world has cast a heavy shadow on the understanding of the pandemic crisis. Any brief glance at Media and the discourses of presidents, prime ministers, and a significant

⁴ See: The Loss and the Rise of Pandemics. *Worldwide Fund for Nature*, 2020, available at: https://wwf.panda.org/wwf_news/?361716/The-loss-of-nature-and-rise-of-pandemics (accessed: 12.08.2021).

⁵ Indicatively, see: ‘The tip of the iceberg’: is our destruction of nature responsible for Covid-19? *The Guardian*, 2020, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/mar/18/tip-of-the-iceberg-is-our-destruction-of-nature-responsible-for-covid-19-aoe> (accessed: 12.08.2021).

part of experts (both internationally and in Greece) shows that the pandemic has been framed in anthropocentric terms. Thus, trapped in the narcissistic illusion of human excellence, they either insist on the mythological rhetoric of human mind primacy with the opposing binaries or they continue to overlook the physical and biological dimension.

To avoid any misunderstandings, this does not imply that they do not bring significant insights to bear on. The point is that the discussion as a whole is framed in a one-sided representation of the pandemic crisis, which privileges the human actor and neglects the nonhuman others. As a result, our interconnections to nonhuman entities continue to belong to the realm of the unthinkable.

More specifically, I will briefly outline three dominant ways of understanding the pandemic, taking as an indicative case the public discourses and rhetoric of politicians around COVID-19, as they appeared on televised media during the first wave of the pandemic in Greece, beginning in March⁶ until the end of June 2020. The aforementioned rhetoric is complemented by the positions of a significant part of Greek academic scholars around COVID-19. The first refers to articles, studies or analyses that discuss the socio-economic, political, and psychological consequences of the crisis⁷. These accounts will not concern me as they project the crisis as an exclusively internal human issue, clearly distinct from nature. We will deal with the other two main approaches, which refer to the warlike pattern of conflict between humanity and the coronavirus as well as the biopolitical interpretations of the pandemic.

The comparison of the pandemic crisis to wartime plays a dominant role in public discourse. Emanuel Macron's declaration to the French people on March 16, 2020, "We are at war", has become emblematic of the whole situation. In this regard, the war metaphor has been extensively used by the Greek Prime Minister⁸, government officials as well as by private and public TV stations. Phrases like a "war with an invisible enemy", "nurses and doctors on the front line", "wartime government" became the principal trope for describing and understanding the COVID-19 pandemic. Clearly, the use of the war metaphor shares the modern anthropocentric idea of the human-nature conflict. It is about a battle between rival forces. It connotes warring camps between humanity and the nonhuman virus. The enemy is not internal, within human society; it comes from outside, as an external natural phenomenon. From this perspective, our focus is too much on the rupture, the absolute separation, the major opposition between humans and the nonhuman world as two distinct poles (society on the one hand and nature on the other), as two external and irreconcilable realms.

This anthropocentric image of the human-nature's violent struggle is complemented by the commitment to the primacy of the human mind or reason. Thus, in public discourse, the extremely significant role of the scientific community in mobilizing scientists around the world to develop the vaccine takes on a conventionally 'heroic' dimension. In this simplistic thinking, the modern anthropocentric ideals of human progress and

⁶ In March 2020, the Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis announced the first lockdown.

⁷ For more information see: Research, articles and analyses on the consequences of the new coronavirus pandemic in the Greek economy and society". *diANEOsis*, available at: <https://www.dianeosis.org/research/covid-19/> (accessed: 12.08.2021).

⁸ For instance, see: Prime Minister's address to the Greek citizens. *Ελληνικής Δημοκρατίας* (17, 19 & 22 March & 13 April, 2020), available at: <https://primeminister.gr/2020/03/17/23593>; <https://primeminister.gr/2020/03/19/23609>; <https://primeminister.gr/2020/03/22/23615> (accessed: 12.08.2021).

mastery are validated through the forthcoming future triumph of human scientific reason over the nonhuman virus.

The biopolitical interpretations of the pandemic crisis⁹ constitute another key axis of the public discourse. Drawing from the work of Michel Foucault [35; 36] biopolitics, as a trait of ‘modern sovereignty’, aims at governing populations by maintaining control over the physical bodies and the life of human beings as a species — and not only as political subjects of law. In this context, the exceptional measures adopted to fight the pandemic have been seen as a further extension of (human) power mechanisms intervening in people’s lives. Advocates of this viewpoint consider that in the pretext of the health crisis emergency and in order to protect human as a living being, contemporary neoliberal states take the opportunity to step towards authoritarianism, as they have proceeded towards the partial suspension of democratic constitutions and human rights. In fact, population surveillance justified as a means of defending public health is strengthened through the intensified and expanded use of digital technologies for monitoring, regulating, and processing of information. The authoritarian ‘state of exception’, which was adopted with the consent of citizens, is now being manifested as a normal governing paradigm [37].

However, even such types of critical interpretations of the pandemic crisis disregard the biological dimension, as material and natural life, which is supposed to be the core of concepts such as biopolitics, bio-power or “bare life” [38]. The biological element itself is banished to the domain of the inconceivable. The exercise of biopolitics with its dual criss-crossing, that of the politicization of life and that of the biologization of politics, ends up being a one-directional move and not a reciprocal process. As Catherine Malabou [38] argues, the biological dimension appears to be passive and docile as it is deprived of the right to respond and resist human power mechanisms and the ways they construct meaning.

Based on the distinction between biological and symbolic, ‘zoe’ and ‘bios’ [39], the predominantly human political and symbolic life holds a privileged position, since the biological takes shape in the “mold” of political power [38]. Furthermore, the biological “bare life” [39] is treated as the inferior, negative aspect of human life, distinct from the symbolic or spiritual life of human subject. Consequently, the biopolitical approaches regress to the old, deeply anthropocentric dividing line between the human animal and civilized man.

In this context, biological-natural life, whether human or nonhuman, is disregarded to the point of being meaningless. In this respect, Giorgio Agamben’s [37] early position on the pandemic which is presented as a pretext, “invention”, or as “a kind of flu”, is symptomatic of this absence of meaning. In his analysis, the COVID-19 virus as a nonhuman agent, as the cause of illness, as biological-natural phenomenon, are all “inconceivable”. In Agamben’s anthropocentric perspective of human superiority and the primacy of symbolic life, power seems to come mainly from human governments and their domination-obedience model, while the nonhuman and natural coronavirus as an active force and political agent remains out of sight.

Before closing, it is significant to mention the drumroll of COVID-19 conspiracy theories and the discourse of returning to the old “normal” pre-COVID-19 condition that trace the public discussion. Beyond their radical simplification, both are also strongly

⁹ See, for example, Καπολα P., Kouzelis G., Orestis K. (eds). *Αποτυπώσεις σε Στιγμές Κινδύνου*, (*Impressions in Hazardous Moments*), Local XVIII, Society for the Study of Human Sciences, Athens: Nisos, 2020, available at: <https://www.openbook.gr/apotyposes-se-stigmes-kindynoy/> (accessed: 12.08.2021).

engaged with this distinct modern anthropocentric habit of thought that remains blind to nature or nonhumans. By relying on human superiority and uniqueness, the former frames the pandemic crisis as a subject of human agency, exclusively in human control. In this respect, they ascribe blame solely on human interests, intentions, or volition, such as the Chinese government, Bill Gates, or capitalists. The latter invites us to put the event behind us, even erasing it from collective memory.

Such an anthropocentric stance, however, does not unveil the critical and vulnerable planetary conjuncture in which humanity finds itself today. Thus, as Serres [23, p. 36] would claim, “Exclusively social, our contract is becoming poisonous for the perpetuation of the species...”

Conclusion

In the anthropocentric framework, the degradation of ecosystems and the nonhuman living conditions do not concern us, viewed as something external to us and our societies, even causing “yawns of boredom” [40, p. 18]. Hence the severity and duration of the pandemic due to the COVID-19 crisis could be the starting point for a post-anthropocentric shift: to stifle our yawns of boredom and become deeply aware that climate change, ecosystem and nonhuman others are an integral part of our human societies. In the words of Serres [23, p. 20] “the old social contract <...> ought to be joined by a natural contract. In a situation of objective violence, there is no way out but to sign it”. The question, however, is when we will accept the challenge.

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Коронавирус бросает вызов современному антропоцентризму

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В статье обосновывается, что пандемия коронавируса разрушает современные антропоцентрические рамки. Она открывает перед исследователями, политиками, практиками новую, пост-антропоцентрическую перспективу, которая смещает человека из центра бытия и предлагает трактовку человеческого существования в связке с другими, «нечеловеческими», такими как планета, окружающая среда, животные или технологии. Однако в этот критический момент, вместо того чтобы рассматривать пандемический кризис как сигнал к пробуждению для смещения фокуса с антропоцентрической на пост-антропоцентрическую перспективу, доминирующие способы понимания кризиса в общественном дискурсе продолжают формулировать его в антропоцентрических терминах. Автор на основе анализа кейса первой волны пандемии в Греции с марта по июнь 2020 г. показывает, что, несмотря на то что общим в риторике СМИ, политиков и значительной части ученых является понимание различий и соответственно проведение разграничительной линии между человеком и «нечеловеком», между обществом и природой, тем не менее идеологически доминирующей остается позиция превосходства человека над окружающим его миром. В этом отношении пост-антропоцентрический вызов, брошенный пандемией коронавируса, кажется, отложен до дальнейшего рассмотрения. Таким образом, поскольку общество застряло на старом антропоцентрическом пути, один из фундаментальных вопросов XXI в., а именно хрупкие отношения человека с планетой Земля и другими биологическими видами, остается «черным ящиком», препятствующим принятию адекватных мер.

Ключевые слова: COVID-19, пандемия коронавируса, современный антропоцентризм, постантропоцентризм, постгуманизм, коронавирусный общественный дискурс, пост-антропоцентрическая перспектива.

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