Perspective

Our Postpandemic World: What Will It Take to Build a Better Future for People and Planet?

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Policy Points:

- Despite the pandemic's ongoing devastating impacts, it also offers the opportunity and lessons for building a better, fairer, and sustainable world.
- Transformational change will require new ways of working, challenging powerful individuals and industries who worsened the crisis, will act to exploit it for personal gain, and will work to ensure that the future aligns with their interests.
- A flourishing world needs strong and equitable structures and systems, including strengthened democratic, research, and educational institutions, supported by ideas and discourses that are free of opaque and conflicted influence and that challenge the status quo and inequitable distribution of power.

Keywords: COVID-19, public health, planetary health, climate crisis, commercial determinants of health, disaster capitalism, surveillance capitalism, health equity, democracy, conflicts of interest, social justice, neoliberalism, ideologies, critical pedagogy, corporate welfare, global governance.

> A crisis forces us back to the questions themselves and requires from us either new or old answers, but in any case direct judgment. A crisis becomes a disaster only when we respond to it with preformed judgments, that is, with prejudices. Such an attitude not only sharpens the crisis but makes us forfeit the experience of reality and the opportunity for reflection it provides.
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> Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*[1]

The Covid-19 pandemic has claimed more than one million lives. Continued morbidity and mortality, combined with the social and economic consequences, threaten many more. Far from being a "great leveler," the most deprived have incurred the greatest burden of harm, and the pandemic has exposed existing, but too often overlooked, weaknesses and injustices in our societies. Yet it has also created hope. Global media coverage of the pandemic has been accompanied by a surge of commentary on the opportunities that the events of 2020 offer humanity, contemplating new kinds of societies and ways of governing in the postpandemic era (see the Appendix for additional reading). Organizations representing more than 40 million health professionals worldwide have called upon the G20 leaders to recognize recovery plans as opportunities to "come back stronger, healthier and more resilient."[2] Furthermore, current and former central bankers believe that the "crisis offers us a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to rebuild our economy in order to withstand the next shock coming our way: climate breakdown." They have called for a green recovery agenda centered on the aim to "build back better,"[3] and the head of an advocacy group, The Climate Mobilization, said, "We can't think we're going to go 'back to normal,' because things weren't normal."[4] We cannot, and *should* not, return to our "normal" state of affairs, which bred unacceptable injustices and ecological destruction. Considerable power resides in this wave of hope, and it must be harnessed to capture this moment in the interests of people and the planet.

This sense of opportunity has historical resonance. Crises such as earthquakes, hurricanes, economic recessions, epidemics, and wars have previously been catalysts for change and have led to advances in public health, medicine, and political thinking, as well as shifts in geopolitical power.[5-7] Solnit described how "disasters provide an extraordinary window into social desire and possibility, and what manifests there matters elsewhere, in ordinary times and in other extraordinary times."[7(p6)] She also noted that "armed with compassion," people mobilize in crises to help strangers, to rebuild communities and that the "positive emotions that arise in those unpromising circumstances demonstrate that social ties and meaningful work are deeply desired, readily improvised, and intensely rewarding."[7(p7)]

It is not predetermined that change will be beneficial or detrimental for all. Nor is radical change inevitable. This crisis, like others before it, has been influenced by many factors. Who is harmed, who survives, and who benefits are all shaped by existing structures of governance and power and the distribution of resources during and in the aftermath of the crisis. Government policies shape the pandemic's course and consequences. Societies may simply revert to the status quo, stimulating economic recovery by returning to an old world order of polluting industries and consumption-based growth.[8]

Early in the pandemic, it was suggested that the speed of government responses left little time for political lobbying and that their did not appear to be evidence of powerful vested interests that could gain from a worsening of the crisis.[9] Subsequently, however, serious abuses have come to light.[10] As advocates for human and environmental health and justice, we must reject a return to the old ways of working. To galvanize action in ways favorable to people and the planet, we must not only propose new ways but also understand the substantial forces that will oppose change, or seek to "own" it for their personal ends, as well as the circumstances under which favorable changes can prevail. Here we expand on

these considerations and explore what systems, ideas, and institutions are needed to build a healthier and fairer future.

Crises and Vested Interests

There are always those who seek to benefit from a crisis. This time, some individuals and organizations mobilized swiftly to seize advantage and dissipate the threat posed to their interests, regardless of the detriment to society and the environment. For example, a US senator is reported to have used his privileged knowledge to unload stocks and warn political funders about the anticipated severity of the pandemic while at the same time publicly endorsing the Trump administration's downplaying of the likely impacts.[11] In addition, major corporations like airlines acted swiftly to influence government responses, lobbying for bailouts and threatening job cuts despite years of buying back their own shares instead of investing in long-term resilience.[11] Conservative US think tanks exploited fear of the virus to counter or repeal bans on plastic bags by claiming that reusable bags posed a greater risk of viral spread.[12,13] Even the US Environmental Protection Agency, following lobbying by the energy industry, announced that it would forgive violations of pollution regulations if they could be proved to be due to the pandemic.[14] Finally, many free-market think tanks and foundations with links to harmful industries issued statements on how governments should respond to the pandemic and economic recovery in line with their deregulatory agendas. One US think tank, The Heritage Foundation, sent a "gentle reminder" to the Irish government to be aware that its spending could get out of control and that it needed to "go away as quickly as possible."[15] Australia appears to be set on a course for a "gas-led recovery" informed by the recommendations of a controversial recovery commission with links to mining and fossil fuel industries.[16-18]

Powerful actors who establish, maintain, and benefit from the status quo typically act to influence "change moments" like those created by the pandemic. Both the problem definition and the proposed solutions—whose vision of the future should guide our actions—will be highly contested.[19] Klein documented the dark politics behind disasters, in which a first disaster (e.g., Covid-19) is often followed by a second disaster when those with power and resources act to capitalize on the first.[20] Solnit similarly described how "at large in disaster are two populations: a great majority that tends toward altruism and mutual aid and a minority whose callousness and self-interest often become a second disaster. The majority often act against their own presumptive beliefs in selfishness and competition, but the minority sticks to its ideology."[7(p131)] History teaches us that harmful industries act to benefit from crises, with many examples of how those in high-income countries export, create, or capitalize on crises in other countries or regions, often in the context of their weaker regulatory systems. The tobacco industry, for example, has benefited significantly from exploitation of crises, often with support from governments, with the two world wars playing a crucial role in the growth of smoking.[21,22] Tobacco interests were even served by the Marshall Plan to "rebuild" Europe.[22] "Big Alcohol" benefited from the daily provisions of beer to the Rwandan army in the early 1990s and from the widespread consumption of beer by the perpetrators during the Rwandan genocide.[23] The oil industry has benefited from crisis and instability,[24] with one analysis demonstrating that every crisis in the Middle East over the 50 years before 2004 was followed by periods in which the major oil companies outperformed the Fortune 500 average.[25] "Big Oil" lobbied both the US and UK governments on the importance of Iraq's oil fields to its interests. Then, following the invasion, the largest contracts in the history of the oil industry were signed.[26,27] Hinnebusch's historical analysis argues that the Iraq invasion served the interests of the US oil-arms-construction complex.[26]

As advocates for a healthier future make their case, they can expect powerful opposition. Producers of harmful products are adept at navigating threats to their profits, such as stricter regulation of their activities, and have developed a playbook of tactics to spread doubt and delay change.[28-37] The precise strategies may differ. ExxonMobil adopted a dual strategy. Its own climate change research was distributed among "private" fora seeking to "provide Exxon with the credentials required to speak with authority in this area" while simultaneously publishing public-facing advertorials in the mainstream media intended to "emphasize the uncertainty in scientific conclusions regarding the potential enhanced Greenhouse effect." quoted in 38(p15) These tactics come together in the phenomenon of denialism, which in the case of the alcohol industry, like the tobacco industry before it, includes cancer denialism.[39-41] In other cases, silence may be the chosen approach, contrary to the well-established tobacco industry practice of "creating doubt about the health charges without having to deny it." quoted in 42(p1648) When confronted by evidence that tobacco smoke contains the radioactive substance polonium-210 (P-210), the tobacco industry remained silent, despite their own researchers' belief that they could make a case that the levels present posed little risk of lung cancer.[42] Indeed, the tobacco industry's own lawyers advised that their work on P-210 should be suppressed for fear of "waking a sleeping giant" in the public mind.[42]

In a crisis, industries may try to preempt restrictions. Although meat-processing plants have emerged as foci of Covid-19 transmission, Tyson (the second-largest meat processor globally, with an estimated worth of $22 billion and numerous prior violations of work safety regulations) placed advertisements in major US newspapers warning readers that plant closures would threaten meat supplies.[43,44] Within hours of their publication, the then US president invoked the Defense Production Act (DPA), ordering these plants to remain open, essentially declaring meat production an essential service.[44] The order also contained further

provisions shielding the industry from legal liability in the event that more workers contracted the virus[44] while at the same time perpetuating confusion about who was responsible for the workers' safety.[45] The sector already was known for its dangerous work conditions,[43] exacerbated by the relaxation of workplace safety regulations in January 2020 by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, part of the Trump administration's wider agenda to weaken workers' rights.[46]

These practices are especially reprehensible given that many powerful individuals and industries have often played a significant role in creating the very problems on which they then seek to capitalize.[20] They have also contributed to, and profited from, the weakening of societal structures and environmental protections, thereby increasing susceptibility to the harmful impacts of crises and diminishing the public resources needed to respond and protect the most vulnerable. In the United States, they have been carried out in highly racialized terms, converging with austerity budgets and the collapse of the welfare state to deepen racial health disparities.[47] The global pandemic of noncommunicable diseases, which has widened inequities and overwhelmed health systems, has also contributed to excess Covid-19 deaths and has been largely created by and perpetuated through the actions of unhealthy commodity industries, including the tobacco, alcohol, and ultra-processed food and beverage industries, as well as the neoliberal ideologies and structures that support them.[48]

The lessons learned from these lost opportunities should provide important insights and define our discourse and actions. The 2008 Global Financial Crisis (GFC) was similarly framed as providing the opportunity for a paradigm shift away from neoliberal policies and rising inequity. But transformational change did not materialize.[49] Farnsworth and Irving argue that instead, "neoliberalism survived, reinvigorated through an alliance with a new form of austerity that emboldened claims for the residualization of state welfare and safeguarded the power of economic elites" and that while the GFC "could have provided a

window of opportunity to strengthen resistance to both the overt and more covert marketization of everyday life, neoliberalism's devaluing of 'mystical' politics by economic rationality […] has enabled its persistence."[50(p5)] The problem was framed as too much government spending, labeled by one commentator as Wall Street's "big lie,"[51] and was used in multiple jurisdictions to justify policies that would go on to have devastating impacts on those least responsible for the crisis, thus further widening inequities and undermining efforts to address impending ecological crises.[52]

Change will require challenging vested interests while building systems and structures that will create and maintain policies supportive of health, just societies, racial equality, and environmental protection and also while dismantling those that have resisted change, enabled damaging policies and industries, and sustained entrenched global injustices.[53,54] Rising up in times of disaster "means understanding the forces that obscure, oppose, and sometimes rub out that possibility."[7(p8)] We must challenge the status quo and reject the discourses of inevitability. In Zuboff's words, "only 'we the people' can reverse this course, first by naming the unprecedented, then by mobilizing new forms of collaborative action: the crucial friction that reasserts the primacy of a flourishing human future as the foundation of our information civilization."[55(p21)]

A New Path

Harnessing this opportunity calls for substantial changes in *our* ideas, beliefs, and frames,[56] moving beyond a dominant biomedical focus that has undoubtedly led to significant benefits but, arguably, for only a small minority.[53,56] The biomedical model has sometimes been used to attribute racial health disparities to biological or behavioral deficiencies in Black communities, thereby concealing the social, political, and economic determinants of individual and population health.[57,58] We must instead broaden our view from solely

measuring harms to examining the commercial and political systems, discourses, and ideologies that combine to create those harms.[53,56,59] While a focus on wider determinants aligns with the foundational values and principles of global and public health, on many occasions this is replaced by "lifestyle drift" as the vision is drawn "downstream" to ideas founded on "the individualization of responsibility for health," personal "choice," and behavior change.[60,61] As a consequence, policymakers often ignore how little control many individuals have over their life circumstances, their exposure to risk factors, and the powerful influence exerted by macrolevel forces such as the activities of multinational corporations and trade liberalization,[60] the political determinants of health,[59] and the power of the consumerist economy in which we live.[62]

Many scholars argue that health has been "depoliticized by the disciplinary orthodoxies of medicine and public health."[53,59,63,64] Scholarly research on health policy and governance often remains guided by an orthodoxy of positivistic scientific inquiry, in which ill health is defined as an individual biological fault to which the answer is a technological solution.[53,59] This model discourages and devalues any critical interrogation of the power structures and political ideologies that influence health policymaking, and it therefore "serves powerful interests by delegitimizing analysis that might reveal and question those interests."[59] Bambra and colleagues argue that this process "does not occur by chance: both the masking of the political nature of health, and the forms of the social structures and processes that create, maintain and undermine health, are determined by the individuals and groups that wield the greatest political power."[64(p192)] They demonstrate the need for recognition of, and engagement with, the political nature of health if we are to strengthen public health and policy.[64]

As Krieger advocates, we will need to embrace the evidence that receives less attention among health communities but that is inextricably linked to health, equity, and

environmental integrity.[65] This type of evidence documents the strategies used by those who benefit from the current order to ensure that particular interests are served and outcomes are achieved, including at times of change, and that the structures and systems are established or realigned to enable such practices and benefit a chosen few.

In this Perspective, building on the increasingly loud voices of countermovements, we set out an agenda for action that challenges the structures, institutions, and ideas that must be reclaimed, rebuilt, and strengthened to achieve just and flourishing societies living in partnership with a thriving planet. Our agenda has four elements: (1) creating new and better ways of making decisions, (2) reclaiming ideas and institutions for the common good, (3) challenging the discourses defined by the powerful, and (4) rebuilding global solidarity.

Better Ways of Making Decisions

Ultimately it is for people, represented by their governments and equal in their inherent dignity, to shape and implement the changes needed to create a healthy, just, and sustainable world.[66] Indeed, at the heart of the most ambitious and progressive proposals for a Green New Deal are the pursuit of social justice *and* sweeping democratic reform.[67] We must focus on building and strengthening systems of decision making and deliberative democratic debate, drawing on the traditions of emancipation, social justice, and human rights and supporting community empowerment to address the structural drivers of health inequities.[53,54,68] These are equally important to ongoing pandemic responses and recovery.[69,70] We must widen the public's and policymakers' understanding of issues that sit on the health and environment nexus, supported by growing the evidence base for planetary health solutions.[71] But sharing evidence is not enough. For this to translate into positive change, we must have systems of governance that encourage public engagement, contestation, and scrutiny of the status quo. Access to information can empower the public

and civil society organizations to act as watchdogs, but again, this requires that they have the tools to scrutinize the actions of elected leaders. Although the public must have faith in science and in democracy if they are to be motivated to take part, recent analyses suggest that globally many are losing faith in the democratic process.[72] The public must be able to have their voice heard, racial and ethnic minorities must have equal access to the democratic process and their political rights must be fiercely protected. The public's voice is to be welcomed, not drowned out by more influential voices with privileged access to policymakers. Some spend eye-watering sums on political contributions tied to crucial decisions.[73] Indeed, as Hancock pointed out,

> the block is not lack of information, but ideology and interest, and what has been called a "culture war," which leads politicians and others with a particular ideology or a strong financial and power interest to willfully ignore the evidence, an act that has been called "ignore-ance." So we will need to employ economic, legal and political tools to address the power imbalances that lie at the heart of the problem.[74(p10)]

Engaging with policymakers on issues related to health and equity requires that those in power are receptive to public health and environmental issues, scientific evidence, and values of social justice. Krieger summarized the evidence of tactics used to exclude citizens, particularly racial minorities, such as voter suppression, political gerrymandering, and the undermining of the integrity of the US census, promoted by extremely wealthy and politically influential individuals who use their resources to "change the rules of the game to undermine the democratic majority […], thereby making it increasingly difficult to protect people's health and have a thriving democracy."[65(p5)] Many of these actors are affiliated with the petrochemical and fossil fuel industries and energy markets,[65] and as Mayer documented,

they have orchestrated a decades-long crusade of promoting free-market, antigovernment messages, deregulation ideologies, and a political establishment that serves this paradigm through the creation of an opaque web of foundations, think tanks, and front groups funded by "dark money."[75] Krieger calls on us to document the health- and climate-related harms of efforts to subvert democratic governance and counter these forces: "For the health of current and future generations, of people and of the other species with whom our lives are interdependent, we can afford no less."[65(p7)] Wiist similarly impressed on the public health community the need to engage with issues like campaign financing law, corporate reform, and corporate tax evasion, arguing that they have significant implications for healthy policymaking and public health.[76-78] Both Wiist and Krieger call for greater engagement with the social movements that confront these injustices, providing examples of many initiatives that health and academic communities can support.[65,76]

Youth-led global climate strikes, Extinction Rebellion, Black Lives Matter, the Poor People's Campaign, and other social justice movements are important examples of public outrage, contestation, and passion.[47,65] Social justice movements have been fundamental in achieving change, for example, by exposing and seeking justice against egregious practices, including human rights abuses and environmental damage, and in advocating for workers' rights, health care reform, and the right to vote. These movements are a source of hope and a signal of transformation, offering a vision of how to build societies in which everyone can thrive, based on new global paradigms.[47,79] We must do much more to protect and support such movements.

As a matter of public health, we also must confront examples of the curbing of public voices, such as China's national security law that threatens to restrict political expression in Hong Kong,[80] and resistance to public scrutiny. One report claims that adherence by the UK government to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 "is on the verge of collapse, with

departments ignoring their legal duties to supply information."[81] In his reflections on the pandemic, Žižek asserts that "there should be more than one voice in a healthy society" and that without "an open space for citizens' critical reactions to circulate," trust between people and their state is unsustainable.[82]

Klein revealed another threat: how giant tech companies have mobilized to capitalize on the pandemic and to rebrand prepandemic lobbying efforts as benevolent solutions to the crisis, with artificial intelligence (AI) laying the path to a better future.[83] The risks of escalating unregulated digital health technology in the wake of Covid-19 are many, including further encoding racially biased algorithms, infringing on privacy, blurring boundaries between police and health surveillance, and marketing expensive products for treating everything from mental health to disease prevention with little proven efficacy. Yet little space has been afforded to public discussions about who should benefit from reforms of, for example, education and health care systems—the public or the private companies?[83] We should listen to Stiglitz, who maintains that AI could offer a significant public benefit, but only if it is strongly regulated by a publicly determined regulatory structure.[84] Others go further, calling for investment in design solutions that are led and driven by communities' needs.[85,86]

Democracy is intimately linked to health and environmental sustainability and is threatened by what Zuboff refers to as "Surveillance Capitalism," epitomized by, but not exclusive to, the conduct of big tech giants like Facebook and Google.[55] Based on her detailed account of the provenance and rise of surveillance capitalism, Zuboff explains that it "unilaterally claims human experience as free raw material for translation into behavioral data" and that despite "the democratic promise of its rhetoric and capabilities, it contributed to a new Gilded Age of extreme wealth inequality, . . . and new sources of social inequality that separate the tuners from the tuned."[55(p518)] Accumulating unprecedented power at a time

when democracy was already weakening, surveillance capitalists have exploited this trajectory and have compromised democracy and democratic institutions.[55] There is much at stake: "What is at stake here is the human expectation of sovereignty over one's own life and authorship of one's own experience. . . . Let there be a digital future, but let it be a human future first."[55(p521)]

Nonetheless, we must protect our newfound hope and reject despair, fear, and cynicism. As Zuboff explains,

> Cynicism is seductive and can blind us to the enduring fact that democracy remains our only channel for reformation. It is the one idea to have emerged from the long story of human oppression that insists upon a people's inalienable right to rule themselves. Democracy may be under siege, but we cannot allow its many injuries to deflect us from allegiance to its promise.[55(p519)]

{{new ¶}}We have a window of opportunity for radical reform and the strengthening of our democratic systems. It is now apparent that politicians espousing populist arguments have been associated with the catastrophic mismanagement of the pandemic, something that is all too apparent to their electorates.[87] Democratic spaces are critical to exposing the failings of the neoliberal paradigm that dominates as a form of global capitalism:

> …frameworks associated with the dominant neoliberal political ideology have enhanced the ability of self-regarding economic considerations and short-term interests to dominate in all aspects of life, by giving rights to corporations to use their power to oppress individuals. Harshly stated, an increasing focus on materialism has become a central component of modern neoliberal ideology, with human nature

> characterized by an individualist form of independence, with economic self-interest as the prime virtue.[53(p7)]

{{new ¶}}Acknowledging the profoundly inequitable, unjust, and unsustainable impacts of our current economic, social, and political systems is an essential first step. Systemic problems call for transformational systemic solutions,[88] and new ideas and systems will be needed. Numerous examples of radical alternatives already exist,[89,90] and social movement networks offer countervisions to current hegemonic ideologies.[53,79] To build a more just and sustainable world, we should heed Benatar, Upshur, and Gill who call for governance structures and value systems based on a foundation of the notions of *power with* (collective power), broad rights and respect for the commons, as opposed to *power over* (coercive power), narrow rights and exploitation, and a fostering of virtues of social justice, social democracy, mutual respect, cooperation and solidarity, as well as policies grounded in such ethical commitments.[53]

Reclaiming systems of democracy, adopting new ways of doing things, and countering vested interests obliges us to recognize the ways in which ideas, institutions, and discourses have been appropriated. Ideas matter, as do their provenance,[75,91,92] and challenging the entrenched ideas and interests that threaten human and planetary health depends on having spaces that invite critical debate and the production of new ideas free from undue influence. We will need to reclaim and rebuild our places of public sanctuary.[30]

Reclaiming Ideas and Institutions for the Public Good

Ideas, norms, and values, and the institutions in which they are (re)formed and debated play a key role in progress and prosperity. Academic and educational institutions are places where new ideas can be formed and dominant ways of thinking are contested. These institutions

influence the ideas available to the public and policymakers and influence the way that current and future generations conceptualize issues. Yet over several years, many of the powerful groups and corporations that benefit from the current order, obscured by a veneer of think tanks and foundations, have influenced places of learning and research, pushing ideas that favor their interests.[75]

Around the world, schools have become fora in which corporations can disseminate ideas and values that align with their interests.[93] In what has at times been referred to as the "corporate assault on youth," public school systems around the world have become corporatized and commercialized.[94-97] Corporations have been reinvented as the experts that can provide the solutions to children's (un)healthy lifestyles and consumption[98] through the use of corporate philanthropy.[99] Children are taught that it is their personal responsibility to adopt a healthy lifestyle and to aspire to the consumerist ideal of thinness as equated with health.[99-101] Numerous industries attempt to contribute to the education of children. The fossil fuel industry, for example, has provided free teaching materials to schools, a prominent example being a storybook based on a character called Petro Pete who proclaims that "having no petroleum is like a nightmare!"[97] Another example is "Talisman Terry, your friendly Fracosaurus" who teaches about fracking through children's coloring books.[97,102] Such materials form part of what has is now referred to as "petro-pedagogy," which is described by Eaton and Day as intended to "restrict the imagination of possible climate solutions to individual acts of conservation that fail to challenge the structural growth of fossil fuel production and consumption."[103(p458)] It is important to recognize that the provision and funding of educational materials constitute just one element of a constellation of strategies and roles adopted by corporations in their attempts to shape education policy and practice.[97] As documented by Fontdevila, Verger, and Avelar, corporate actors assume a "diversification and hybridization of roles and strategies" that include "knowledge mobilization, networking,

engaging with grassroots, and sponsoring pilot projects," with the greatest influence achieved by corporations that "invest in multiple strategies" concurrently.[96(p11&3)]

The corporatization of education poses a threat to the role of public schools as sacred spaces in which to engage critical citizenship and nurture a democratic ethos.[95] Sandlin and McLaren, as well as Powell and others, promote the adoption of a " 'critical pedagogy of consumption' […] to challenge the global corporate assault on schools, disrupt attempts to fuse children's identities with consumerism" to promote and enable democratic change.[104(p382)] They also advocate a radical reform of the way students and teachers engage and critique corporate materials and the dominate paradigms of corporatization and marketization of their lives.[104,105] Saltman and Goodman contend that

> as corporate curricula continue to turn schooling into a propaganda ground for their own destructive interests, one solution is clearly to stop using them. Another is to provide teachers with resources for researching the agendas of the corporations that finance and distribute such products in public schools and museums so that the ideological functions of the curricula can be turned against themselves, and the corporation's global agendas will be shown as contextualized and centered within the curricula. In this way, students can be shown how their interests and worldviews actually differ from the way their interests and worldviews are constructed in the curricula.[106(p53)]

More broadly, Saltman and Gabbard maintain that approaches to teaching and learning in the United States are "essentially prohibitions on thinking."[107(p21)] As Giroux explains, public schools have become a place to produce consumers or impose "harsh disciplinary practices on those students marginalized by race and class," many of whom are

at risk of falling into the "school-to-prison pipe-line."[107(pviii)] Addressing disparities in educational attainment and school punishments are fundamental to building healthy, just, and thriving societies. We must ensure that democratic values guide curricula and teaching practices, empowering individuals to think critically and "exercise their political rights and civic responsibilities meaningfully in shaping social institutions to serve their collective interests—the common or public good."[107(p22)] We must strive to fulfill the right of all individuals to a caring and quality education.

If we extend the theme of sacred spaces to the generation of scientific knowledge, a postpandemic world that meets the needs of people and planet would require research agendas that align with these needs. But many universities have entered into conflicted partnerships with industry, becoming dependent on industry funds to produce research aligned with the interests of commercial entities in a process that Marks refers to as "research agenda distortion."[108] While it may not be possible, or indeed necessary, to identify any single "true" agenda that must be pursued, it is important that "industry interactions with the academy and government are shaping bodies of scientific research in subtle but extremely important ways that have a profound impact on knowledge, policymaking, and public health."[108(p76)] Marks proposes frameworks for assessing and managing the risks of partnering with commercial actors in order to mitigate corporate capture and support the founding principle of academic and public health institutions, that is, the promotion of the public good.[108] Academic systems need to address societal issues like health equity and ecological stability, along with efforts to avoid conflicted partnerships and with greater emphasis on engagement with policymakers, communities, and the public around these specific issues. In 2018, schools of public health and public health associations across the world pledged not to accept funds from the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World, an organization fully funded by Philip Morris International.[109,110] More action is needed to address industry influence on

science, including the funding of journals and editorial boards, all of which can bias the literature, leading to doubt and delay.[28,32,111-113] Such influence continues to threaten the integrity of the scientific process and, in turn, public and political discourse, particularly on contested topics. We must require major reforms, drawing on the emerging ideas about how to restore integrity and dignity to research and academic publishing,[111] and we must work for greater recognition of the limits, and harms, of conflict-of-interest (COI) declarations (vis-à-vis prevention)[114] and the impacts of institutional COIs.[115]

Challenging the Discourses Defined by the Powerful

Change will involve challenging dominant discourses and exposing their underlying assumptions and illusion of public support.[116] For decades, proponents of limited regulation and skeleton governments have deployed discourses of personal freedom and responsibility, and free markets while often simultaneously depending on, and benefiting from, government subsidies and funding.[33,35,75,117] The fossil fuel industry has long used both overt and covert campaigns to combat environmental protections and to seed doubt, disguised as defending market freedoms and limited government.[32,33,35,75] Through their funding of front groups like Citizens for a Sound Economy and Americans for Prosperity, the tobacco and fossil fuel industries have created the false appearance of civil society movements that act in the name of getting government "off our back."[118] As one tobacco industry actor explained, "Ultimately, we are talking about a 'movement,' a national effort to change the way people think about government's (and big business') role in our lives. Any such effort requires an intellectual foundation—a set of theoretical and ideological arguments on its behalf."[118(p324)] The pharmaceutical industry relies on a narrative of private-sector "innovation" to justify charging taxpayers twice for essential medicines, once in the form of publicly funded pharmaceutical research and again in the form of extortionate prices at pharmacies.[119] The

effects of this price gouging on racial minorities are particularly stark.[120] Similar events are already transpiring in the wake of the pandemic. Groups with links to front groups and their funders have mobilized in the United States to give the appearance of grassroots opposition to the government's actions addressing the pandemic.[121] The Trump administration's decision to defund the World Health Organization, which was described as self-harming and counterproductive, echoes pre-Covid campaigns by the Consumer Choice Center,[122] a group with ties to tobacco and other harmful product industries.[123] Of note, initiatives such as Who Funds You?[124] that seek to establish funding transparency among think tanks and political campaigns are able to challenge such deceptive practices.

Those national responses to the pandemic which result in the worst outcomes will undoubtedly be framed as evidence of the perils of an overreaching state, drawing on widely used frames that advocate deregulation. These frames exist within the wider discourse of free-market fundamentalism and must be countered if we are to build systems and government structures that can deliver health, social justice, and environmental sustainability. Countries like New Zealand, Vietnam, and South Korea that have invested in the long-term building of core public-sector capabilities appear to have fared better than the United States and the United Kingdom, where years of outsourcing, privatization of core functions, and underinvestment have hampered their ability to respond effectively. This has been termed the "Big Failure of Small Government."[125] Indeed, the devastating impacts of the pandemic and the lockdown measures in the United States, especially on the most deprived, are in part the products of decades of underinvesting in the American people and population health, which has led to inequities that Covid-19 both exploited and exacerbated.[126] There are likely to be efforts to conceal, or "own," how the public conceptualizes government support during the course of the pandemic and the role of public institutions in protecting societies and their economies. The current circumstances offer an opportunity to strengthen the counternarrative

regarding the role of public structures. The activities of central banks are a powerful example: they acted to prevent financial panic and maintain the flow of credit, a critical precondition to mounting a public health response to the pandemic.[127] Action was also taken to support the corporate world. The US Federal Reserve made an extraordinary decision to broaden its intervention in the economy, "establishing itself as the backstop to the trillion-dollar corporate bond market,"[127] including assistance for the junk bond market.[128] These events highlight the pressing need for more discussion and awareness among scholars, advocacy groups, and the public about the role of public institutions and the existence of corporate welfare.[117,129] Farnsworth has shown that flourishing capitalist economies and thriving corporations require a strong foundation of government and public services, explaining that

> the greatest myth of modern times is the suggestion that capitalism and corporations do better with less government. . . . Government programmes, designed to meet the needs of business, are not just every day, they are everywhere and they are essential. Just as social welfare protects citizens from the cradle to the grave, corporate welfare protects and benefits corporations throughout their life course.[129]

It is essential to shed light on the scale of corporate welfare in order to overcome the barriers to transparency that are undermining meaningful public debate.[129]

To achieve the system and policy changes critical to protecting health and the environment, we must continue researching the origins and impacts of those who seek to counter such change, often deceptively, and we must offer a counterdiscourse based on evidence, transparency, and the "point of assumption."[130] This must include educating the public, policymakers, and the media on the need to challenge the funding, goals, and provenance of certain organizations and movements. By adopting a people's perspective of

regulations, referring to them as "protections," for example, we can support a counternarrative.[125] How issues and concepts are "talked" about is of paramount importance.[131] However, framing is much more than the provision of sound bites and slogans, as it also requires empowering the public, policymakers, and the media by giving them frameworks and systems of thinking, "conceptual structures," that allow such frames to be received, understood, and contemplated.[131] We need to counter dominant neoliberal discourses and structures that serve particular agendas, legitimize some actors while limiting the authority of others, and preclude debate informed by other values such as human rights and environmental and social justice. This requires us to expose the contradictions and challenge the underlying assumptions.[59,132,133] We must invest in new discourses that allow deliberative debates about complex and abstract issues like social justice and the distribution of power and resources. This includes power that is hidden, often acting through opaque attempts to define the discourse and the terms on which issues are discussed.[134] Neoliberal ideas and philosophies were ushered in by their proponents to fill a "policy vacuum" created by the economic and social crises of the 1970s,[135,136] and we must now act to fill the postpandemic void created by people's desire for change, drawing from the work of those committed to offering a counternarrative informed by health and environmental agendas, such as that set out in the Vienna Declaration endorsed by European public health bodies.[137] Benatar and colleagues promote the adoption of a broader human rights–based discourse, moving beyond the narrow framing dominated by civil and political rights to one that recognizes the social, cultural, and economic rights fundamental to human flourishing and the obligations of duty bearers to provide the material resources needed to realize most human rights, and that draws from moral concepts like solidarity, virtue, and character.[53,54,56]

To achieve such a transformation, we must start by shifting the discourse surrounding the pandemic and recovery. Dominant global discourses among political and business leaders

rest firmly on arguments for a speedy return to "business as usual" from what is conceptualized as an inconvenient detour on an otherwise successful path. These conceptualizations, which risk foreclosing the possibility for change and concealing the racially and socially inequitable impact of the status quo ante, need to be challenged, drawing from the hope and desire for change expressed globally. We must not let the inspirational but potentially fleeting images of cities free of pollution and the return of wildlife to urban spaces be dismissed as a utopian vision.[138] We must show why the pandemic is both a tragedy and an opportunity, exacerbating the weaknesses and injustices imparted by our ways of governing the world but also opening a space for recognizing the dedication and value of our essential workers and the power of community solidarity, and further exposing how the path we were on will lead to human suffering and environmental destruction that in turn fuels crises that deepen existing harms. We must argue how the change moment that the pandemic has created is an asset, an opportunity to choose a healthier and equitable path and add further momentum to social justice movements advocating for meaningful change.

Building Global Solidarity

If we are to build a more equitable and sustainable world, we must work together as a global community. In this Perspective, we have described not *their* crises or *your* crises but *our* crises and the broken systems that *we* must and can fix. The vested interests that hinder transformative change and deepen and obscure the crises that jeopardize a prosperous future threaten us all. Many operate transnationally while we all too often focus on harm within our own borders, perpetuating forms of nationalism that are expressed in everything from the racist labeling of Covid-19 as a "China virus," to the race for a vaccine.[49,139] While Covid-19 and the climate crisis demonstrate the threats posed by our connectivity, both illustrate the devastating consequences that will follow if our response is to close our borders, leave vested

interests unchallenged, blame others, and lose compassion. Our current systems are built on fear of others and notions of scarcity, whose daily impacts are mitigated by the acts of solidarity, altruism, and mutual aid carried out by those who are driven by love and hope.[7] As Solnit notes, disaster can encourage these values as it becomes clear that they do work, unlike fear and divisiveness, which serve only to cause more harm.[7] In this way,

> disaster reveals what else the world could be like—reveals the strength of that hope, that generosity, and that solidarity. . . . A world could be built on that basis, and to do so would redress the long divides that produce everyday pain, poverty, and loneliness and in times of crisis homicidal fear and opportunism.[7(p312)]

{{new ¶}}We must promote moral imagination, which for too long has been dulled, allowing us to conceal our interconnectedness and remain complicit in the quest for personal comfort and economic growth while others are harmed as a consequence.[54] We should heed Benatar when he says that

> the ability to empathise with others requires the critical examination of our individual lives and of our nations' actions, the capacity to see ourselves as bound to all other human beings, and the sensitivity to imagine what it might be like to be a person living a very deprived and threatened life.[54(p1209)]

Concluding Remarks

This moment in history is both an opportunity and a test: how are we going to change in order to save our planet and end the injustices exposed by the pandemic? Because we face unprecedented challenges and powerful vested interests, we cannot afford to interpret these

"through the lenses of familiar categories, thereby rendering invisible precisely that which is unprecedented."[55(p12)] We need new lenses and structures, and we must use evidence that has long been confined to the shadows. Those who have been silenced for too long must be given a voice. Transformational change will necessitate believing we must, and can, do things differently, bringing others with us on this journey; "If paradise now arises in hell, it's because in the suspension of the usual order and the failure of most systems, we are free to live and act another way."[7(p7)]

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Appendix

Supplementary Material Collected by the Authors During the Pandemic

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