

Immunity: a clot between ourselves and the world

Immunity

Three and a half weeks ago I had my first Covid vaccine shot. I felt relived and surprised about feeling relieved.

I took the opportunity to shop—living in a remote area pre-made pizza is a serious luxury! I remember being up, super positive and encouraged as the days were getting rapidly longer, weather warming here in the far northern hemisphere and hints of green buds appearing.

It is an hour and a half mountainous drive back. Entering the house I stumbled. That's remarkable—I am used to exceptionally good balance as a skier and climber. Being unsteady with shopping in my hands is weird.

It got stranger

By the next day I am short of breath and definitely noticing my well out of kilter balance—as I'm walking back down a hill I am worrying about faceplanting! By the evening I am fatigued, feeling chilled or feverish in rotating cycles, sore stomach and head with an almost continuous adrenalin-endorphin like rush coursing through my skin.

I look up the covid vaccine side effects.

In many ways the vaccine side effects are a straightforward list. They are clearer than worldwide side effects—our activities such as fossil fuel consumption driving are planetary biodiversity loss, colonialism underlying an intergenerational, wildly inequitable wealth distribution. These are our meta-crises.

The analogy to my side-effects is apt. We did not set out to create these crises. Mostly we were, and are, seeking solutions.

Crises feed each other

The loss of biodiversity, for example, has quite a direct link with the likelihood of future covid like pandemics—see *Pivotal moment* [here](#)> Similarly, our burning of fossil fuel is obviously warming the planet and creating feedback, more severe and dangerous weather patterns, floods, fires alongside much more that. More significant worldwide calamities and extinctions are on the way.

Cross-meta-crises links might be less obvious, e.g. between our current pandemic and colonialism plus wealth disparity. Yet, this is very present. For example people in richer countries eat more meat, we produce significant quantities of this in factory farms where animals are fed grain rather than grazing on grass. That grain is grown on arable land which in turn pushes less profitable farming into more and more marginal land, to de-forest land and degrade river systems. Links from that include: more meat, less forest, less greenhouse gas absorption, a warmer planet.

There are many other connections yet, in simple terms, the world has a fever. When we have a fever it is usually our body fighting an infection. A virus is multiplying inside us and our body is fighting to regain health. However, if the fever is too extreme, it can damage our brains and it can kill us.

Day 5

After the vaccine, I definitely felt feverish.

Cycling through fever feelings, for 20 minutes, and then onto the same periods of chills and dizziness, I headed to the floor. I was thinking: ok, this is quite intense and definitely more than 48 hours. I'll just sit here while it passes.

It became stronger.

I lay on the floor and flipped off somewhere else—a vivid experience, dream state, where I am in some wonderful and deep conversations with a group of people. Except, of course, I am alone. Coming back to my room I stay put a while longer. A little more time on the floor, I think. This will pass.

A short time later I look at my watch. It is 5 pm. I have been there for nearly seven hours. However, I am still thinking this will pass within days. I am certainly not thinking it will take weeks or months.

Time-folding

There is a time slip too with our lives and our planet. For example, the greenhouse gases we emit today will impact for decades and centuries to come. This is from you-I-all of us through direct and indirect impacts such as from the foods we eat and clothing we buy and wear.

If, magically, we are to stop all such human driven extra carbon dioxide (and other gases) going into the atmosphere what's already emitted will continue to warm the planet.

Our planet's fever is not simply cured. Just as heading to the floor was not a simple relief for my fever.

Restoration and justice

Similarly, colonisation and its impacts endure. This did not end as the sun set on Britain's empire. Nor did it end with the American Civil War and slavery being banned. Our minds and thinking patterns, our ways of being—prejudices as well as intra-people-culture care, compassion and connection—are deeply ingrained from such experiences. Much of these impacts did not start with us. Our forbears lives—and the pain, struggle and beauty from those times—remain influential today.

We see this today. As I'm writing this ex-policeman Derek Chauvin is found guilty for murdering George Floyd. While this is welcome and overdue it is not a simple fix. Minnesota's attorney general, Keith Ellison makes the point:

I would not call today's verdict "justice", however, because justice implies true restoration. But it is accountability, which is the first step towards justice.

A four part story

Part two> is *Visions beyond crisis*. That title is inspired by my (short lived) relief on day 8, Saturday and Vandana Shiva's essay *Planting the seeds of the future*. The visions are followed by a rapid, significantly difficult, crash—read on here>

COVID-19 has made people in India wake up to the links between food and health. Everyone was waiting for the vaccine. But it turned out that the people who did not get COVID-19 were the ones with high immunity. And who were they? The ones who weren't eating junk food. They were eating indigenous diets: lots of turmeric, a lot of ginger, a lot of ashwagandha. As a result, there's been a waking up to the sophistication of the Indian diet. This is in line with Ayurveda philosophy and its foundational idea about diet, which is just as Hippocrates recognized: *let food be thy medicine*. Ayurveda says, "*Annam Sarvaushadhi*." Food is the best medicine. Vandana Shiva

Part 2

Visions beyond crisis

The next day, day 6, is very much the same. Same encounter with the floor. Same time slip except this time I look at my watch while heading to the floor, noon. I am more aware of an hour passing while I am lying there. Except, when I look again, it is 5 pm and I am realising it is not just time compression. I've been somewhere else for at least a short period of this. This time, the memory of that dream is a little less detailed but the sensation of it, of being in another place, remains vivid.

Perhaps I was just asleep?

If you are reading, or have read, the known side effects of the covid vaccines you'll know that fatigue is one of them. I am certainly feeling tired. The night before I'd headed to bed at 8 pm and pretty much slept for 11 hours. When I-you sleep for that amount of time it is rarely continuous. I lifted out into different levels of wakefulness through the night. However, my 'dream'—between noon and 5 pm the next day—is wildly different. Calling those five hours, or a short bit of it, sleep is an inadequate explanation. I have a strong sense it is different.

Vaccine side effect information says 48 hours. I am a lot further past this yet thinking, just an outlier. I've never liked statistics but I can do enough of it to understand probability curves and standard deviations. I was far from the average reaction already by this stage but yet to reach the wild outer limits.

Outer limits

For many people, including me, we are already at or into the extremes of our meta-crises. How many more people need to die because of the color of their skin? How many more are limited in life, capacity to be educated or survive on unhealthy or inadequate food? How can a couple of thousand billionaires have more wealth than over four billion other people while many of those folks don't have clean water to drink, sanitation or health care?

A reality today is we have more than enough technical solutions. Yet we're submerged by crises that seem to defy time. For example, our capabilities to address infection disease are phenomenal. 12 months to develop vaccines for a new human killer is a staggering achievement. Especially when viewed against the ravages of, say, smallpox on previous generations.

Uniquely, as a global and unusually self-aware species, we are able to predict future threats. Despite this we seem to be in a collective continuous time-slip, a compression within which past knowledge does not crystallise in the present and the felt future states we all wish to avoid can be shifted from our current timeline.

I've heard "we're sleepwalking into the future". Just as I was not asleep for those five hours I don't feel the sleepwalk does us credit. We know. We know the issues and pathways we could follow for thriving, for sustainability, for humanity. We're letting ourselves off easily by failing to acknowledge that reality.

Easy

There's a relief around letting myself off easily.

Day 7 and—despite ongoing symptom now so far out of the norm I should really be questioning them hard—I'm cycling to the beach. Doable but a two hour round trip takes double as long. Still, it feels glorious to be in the sun and not on the floor. I am sure this must be good for me—a weekend gently out and about. Surely by Monday I'll be past the symptoms and able to work, write and concentrate. They are all things that have been completely impossible for the whole week.

Our climate crises is similar. We know and lived through Australian bushfire infernos, California, Oregon, Washington and Canada forest fire conflagrations, floods, stronger and more frequent hurricanes, heatwaves and more. Yet, on a day like today—it is peaceful and still outside, not a cloud in the sky, about 50F, ten degrees centigrade outside—I can shift that cataclysmic reality to the side.

It is not like it goes away, the ever present awareness of threat to the viability of many of the life forms around me. I don't believe the step away from being directly and continuously concerned with our meta crises is compassion fatigue or becoming used to a new normal of disaster. However, it is a concerted practice to hold *via positiva* and *negativa*, hope and despair, grief and awe, all simultaneously. Like any practice it requires work. It can feel easier to shirk that. For example see *Surfing simultaneous states* here> <https://be-benevolution.com/2020/04/10/surfing-states/>

Connections

Regardless, in our lighter moments, I believe it is easier to envision a brighter future.

As I cycle back from the beach I meet my doctor for the first time (we had only been in contact by email until now). I am in a rural and remote area—a small population scattered between hills, hidden bays and lakes.

Alex pulled over and said hello, asked me how I was going—I guess I am rather easy to recognise! I answered optimistically, feeling the beauty of this outdoor day and this is mixed with hope alongside the relief still present from the day of the vaccination. It is lifting me even now, after a week of struggle, and surely I am on the mend. No matter that holding a conversation with the doctor and the cycle back is straining me—the individual positive pieces are prominent for me and I was sure the difficulties will pass.

We do a similar thing with our crises. We live with the consequences and advocate for alternatives. We actively embody and create such alternatives. Our struggle is connecting the extraordinary local and personal examples—new economies, social enterprise, regenerative systems, planning and action for *thrivability*—together so that they are more than the sum of the parts. That helps to overcome our predominant thinking patterns. These inhibit the emergence of such positive potentials (e.g. see *Strong attractors* here>).

New meta

One way of thinking about such a shift is *what's our new meta?* The old one has comprehensively outlived its usefulness.

That new meta is our current reach, how do all these individual stories become something greater? What emerges that is more than the old competition plus individual excellence will solve everything narrative?

I am not thinking about a new meta as I'm heading into the next week. While I'm taking it easy the small steps past my floor are making me feel this is passing. We-I am on track for something brighter. Yet is it really that simple? Do crazy outlier impacts such as those I am experiencing, a week already, simply leave?

> Read on for part 3. Descent here>

Part 3

Descent

One planet, one health. Humanity as one planetary citizen among millions, all equally deserving to be here and to thrive. We can choose to re-create ourselves as a modest,

economically and demographically downscaled component of a biodiverse and rewilded Earth. An ecological civilization will accomplish far more...

Eileen Crist, COVID-19, the Industrial Food System, and Inclusive Justice in The New Possible: Visions of Our World beyond Crisis

Descent

Tuesday afternoon, day 11, and a wave of dizziness hits me, steamrollers up behind me, wallops me over the back of my head repeatedly and I'm taking myself down to the floor again. Wow. I had managed a small conversation with a friend in the morning, cut it short after 20 minutes, and spent two hours taking it easy in recovery. Or so I thought. There was no recovery to speak of and by one or two in the afternoon I'm stretched out flat, on my back or front, staring at the carpet or ceiling, doing nothing more.

With this, pretty much from the start of these symptoms on day 1 after the vax, comes an adrenaline-endorphin rush through my body. If you've ever run down a steep hill on a rock trail or, psyched yourself into a plunging ski-line drop down a deeply-powdered snowy couloir, you'll know the feeling as you get to the bottom and stop. It's like my-your-our bodies are still catching up with us. We've run and plunged ahead of our skin and blood which rushes back into our bodies, flowing through us in waves. It is quite delightful in those outdoor contexts.

Delight is not really associated with this feeling after eleven days. The rush moves through me on the floor and standing. It accentuates my loss of balance and dizziness. It retards my already very limited ability to concentrate and I can feel it taking over after even a short period of reading or talking. I reduce what I am doing even more to try and manage it down, hoping this limits the cycle of feeling feverish, to chills and head-stomach-ache too. In some clearer minutes I have on the floor, I haul my computer down to and email Alex, my doctor. My list of symptoms and severity runs across multiple short-paragraph dot points.

I am not going to write such a list for our world, humanity, all sentient species and planetary meta-crises. Such lists are easy to find. Just like my list of personal physical impacts, when written these are a little abstract. In part they have to be. We are summarising a significant amount of interconnected complexity even if that list is just focused on one aspect of it—say, a human body, global warming or racism.

Extenuating situations

However, our bodies, planetary-weirding, bigotry and more are deeply interconnected. As my beloved gently puts it to me—as I'm lying here we're texting and talking when we can, separated by pandemic rules on different continents—so many people are experiencing strange and inexplicable ailments. She and I don't believe these are disconnected. Our extenuating circumstances are, if you like, the very conditions we're able to correct—fossil fuel consumption, biodiversity destruction, income and race radical-inequity and more.

My doctor emails back. It is time to visit his surgery for the first time.

As Ken Wilber put it in his beautiful and heart-wrenching book, *Grace and grit*, when you or a loved one is sick start with the physical, the concrete. If there's a diagnosable physical cause for our ailments—global or personal—let's fix it. Personal, do I have some strange and pretty unlikely coincidental infection? Global, in addressing inequity let's start with at least some accountability. The guilty verdict for murderer Derek Chauvin is a step towards justice (see part 1>).

Pursuing, respectively, a western medical diagnosis or criminal trial, is not an act of denial. However, the more subtle and very-subtle-entangled influences are important too. Let's hold them in our minds while we are excluding or treating the diagnosable physical stuff.

Drive to another world

It is the next morning and I'm feeling quite fragile. I drive over to the doctor's surgery. That's unusual for me, I would usually far rather cycle the eight miles/thirteen kilometres and something of a measure of how unwell I'm feeling.

Alex ushers me in—I meet his medical students too on placement, Fianna and Moireach—and we set off into checks. Yes, my balance is off. No, my temperature is normal at the moment. Ouch, my blood pressure is some 50% higher than what I'd usually get. Etc. And then I am somewhere else.

This group of people are exciting, wonderfully interesting, I'm deeply engaged with them and them with me. We're reaching for something important, co-creating something wonderful and... I shift. I don't come 'back'. Experiences like these for me—full technicolour alternative realities—take me to a somewhat new track. It's like I was following a different set of railway lines on a parallel course to our normal world and my life. Then, stepping out of that place I'm never fully 'back' and instead on a merged course, one part of me always in that new and different world.

Hold steady

Alex has his hand on my shoulder supporting me. I've been out, passed out, for 15 seconds. My alternative world feels far longer than that.

Then I do it again, pass out. This time for around a minute they say. This time the full technicolor alternative world is present again but my recollection of it is less nuanced, less available to me when I come around again.

Fianna, Alex and Moireach are all holding me steady. They help me to the medical bed in the next room and I stay there for the next 3 hours with Fianna and Moireach spelling each other to keep an eye on me. We chat, a little. It is quite draining and my words come slowly. While I feel like we've been talking the whole time I realise later that two small topics have covered nothing like the hours—time slips again.

Paradoxical sat navs

All around me I see humanity doing this. We are co-creating thriving alternatives, our next economies and contributing to the large-scale systems-change which answers our meta crises. At the same time, these activities can feel like a disconnected and connected bubble—I feel vitally and deeply in collaboration with people all around the world and in my communities while it seems like I am wading through sinking-sands, molasses and treacle all at the same time.

If that sounds paradoxical and difficult it certainly is. Yet, as Martin Shaw recently put it, "*paradox and uncertainty can't be dismissed out of hand. They are the identifying brands of now, our hashtags, our tweets, our sat navs into the murk of consequence.*" At the same time there is much we can do to transcend those inherent limitations especially through what we see, how we make sense of it and our connections. For example see *Shamanic sensemaking* <https://benevolution.com/2020/08/31/shamanic-sensemaking/>

However, this murk is inherent with what we do. Our step, our paradigm shift if you like is to embrace it all while continuing to act. That's a both-and just as my parallel worlds are now. I've stepped, in my conscious-unconscious dreamstates into another place. On 'returning' I remain, at least partly, in both places.

It is late afternoon. By the time the ambulance arrives, to take me to the hospital an hour and a half away, I can walk myself up its steps.

Read on for part 4> Boom, crash, bounce?

Part 4

Boom, crash, bounce?

A&E—Accident and Emergency—machines, doctor assessment, X-rays, blood... at least there's nobody yelling clear, no defibrillator or really any drama. I mostly sit-lie there, get as far as a cup of tea, do the rapidly becoming familiar nerve, balance and coordination assessments for the duty night doctor, and I am admitted some hours later. They wheelchair me (not letting me walk) to the ward. The staff keeps apologising, it's a covid times repurposed Children's ward. Personally, I'm finding the monkeys swinging from vines and banana pictures on the wall quite darling.

We have done our assessments too for climate change, biodiversity loss, global injustice and inequity and the poorer outcomes for all that brings—not just the poor. We know about structural racism, more plague/new virus likelihoods (likely), intergenerational collective trauma and far more. We know the issues, dangers, lags in the system. Our diagnostic capability, just like the A&E machines, is superb.

The thing is, if the A&E procedures had found a blood clot in me, stroke or wild infectious signs in my blood they would have piled on in with the treatment. The actions to take on me will be clear. It is highly likely I will agree to such treatment. Similarly, the actions to take on our meta-crises—for our own, family and mass numbers of sentient species survival—are clear.

One is greater than billions

Why the disconnect? How come we will act to save an individual life yet emergency action is failing all humans? Around climate crises you'll commonly hear rationales such as 'it costs too much', 'we're an insignificant contributor to the problem/our actions would not matter', 'technology/human ingenuity will save us in the future'. All of those clearly do not apply to someone in A&E. He's having a heart attack. Oh, let's wait until his heart stops and then we can use the defibrillator?!

You'll notice something in this discussion as well. It is a very technical one, machines, money, proportion of global greenhouse emissions per country or per person depending on the picture we wish to convey. There's a healing function—connecting and making sense of ourselves and others—that's vital here and all too easily not present when we frame these crises.

Humanising

I'm healing a little in the hospital ward bed. They wake me up every couple of hours and my blood pressure is gradually dropping back to what I'd call normal for me (96 over 60 lying down—around 50% lower than it was). By the morning I am really champing to leave. It is snowing outside and beautiful, the staff-nurses are lovely and we're chatting about animals, farms, near and far away places, being separated from our homes by the plague and pretty many of the sorts of healing conversations that humanise life. Some more conversations, doctors, another machine and I'm out of there before 5pm. It feels like a lifetime ago I left for my local doctor's surgery yesterday.

By this time, through Friday in recovery, I'm obviously chatting with family all around the world. My family is a transcontinental diaspora, Australia/NZ, north America, Europe. The timezones mean there's always someone to chat to regardless of the hour. A conversation about seizures with my daughter at 2am. No problem, it's her 8am.

Such global communications are wild. In what's to come I'm buoyed by the fact that, in a remote and isolated house, there's always someone awake—on the other side of the world or across the Atlantic—if I need someone to call the emergency help (no phone service in this house for me).

Initiation

Our global communications clearly enable a lot more of than this. We're answering global crises by connecting globally. The very conditions that enable crises—e.g. rapid transcontinental travel

spreading plagues and intensifying consumptive production—are fundamentally part of the solutions too. We are a global village yet how can we be initiated into caring for everything? Even knowing we're connected to it all there can't be the timely feedback from an entire world, as there could be from a small village, to an individual. Yes, it takes a village, and at the same time alongside this is a recognition it is an unsolvable riddle. Unsolvable riddles need to be embraced to assist us to shift in our own beings and understand ourselves in new ways. See *An initiation and a koan* [here](#) for more.

Week three!

Saturday to Saturday and I'm very far from a new understanding of myself and the vaccination impacts. Some things are getting better. Some symptoms are getting worse. I spend a significant amount of the week on the floor. It feels less stressful there. Psychologically supported by the carpeted ground. Managing the occasional email, computer joining me on the floor, in 5 minute bursts with an hour or two recovery, or more, afterwards.

The thing is I value and celebrate these bursts. I will continue to try as it makes me feel good. It is so much more than we-I am a social creature. I-we-you are entangled with all around us. In acting to create and co-create a new-meta, a new story through which we make sense of all this and shift beyond old thinking that holds us back, you-I-we are part of generating that reality too. That vibrancy of life is worth far more than the downside crash of another 2 to 5 hours, I'm time-slipping right back into the fever-chill-head/stomach ache-skinrush cycle, after a short piece of effort.

The trouble is—just as we can set aside somewhat the exceptionally challenging global metrics around our crises like climate and racism—I was not really admitting the depth of my current difficulty. By Thursday more tests have been scheduled for the hospital and I feel significantly more limited on day 20 than on day 7. I am getting close, albeit not stepping over this line, to admitting this is getting worse rather than better. Some symptoms are easier, some are stronger and more intense. Am I allowed to have a lack of clarity in that? That's my thought or excuse anyway...

Friday

Day 21, is mostly spent on the floor. Crying on and off.

The analogy here is with the depth of our world crises. We're addressing pieces of these dangers while many parts are becoming significantly more challenging as the days go by. I find this to be a despairing and inspiring paradox. For example, who could not stand on the beach in Fiji, marvelling in the beauty of place, people and company while heartbroken on the election of another climate do-nothing-burn-coal government (in Australia). See Hope and disappointment [here](#) Similarly, who can't watch Dave Chapelle 8:46 [here](#) without crying, being re-appalled and feeling the energy for change

We know a meta-shift is possible, there are multiple visions of a thriving new future and many standout examples where parts of this are being realised. What is clear, however, is gradual change inside more of the same system won't cut it.

Gradual change

Even on day 22 a part of me thinks I am gradually improving. Day 23 is Sunday morning and I did not really feel up to going anywhere. I have expended what seems to be a totally unreasonable amount of energy to do something simple (organises a taxi to the hospital, 90 minutes away, for Monday). Nevertheless, a day inside, while killing me it is so beautifully and sunny outside, does not seem awful.

By the early afternoon I am on the floor. Again. Around 5 pm I feel a little dizzy, having raised myself onto a seat, and then I have a very intense reaction. This is really like break into your pain centre cramps and such a full-on high-screaming-frequency pile-driving adrenaline rush I am paralysed.

Sweat is pouring off me. I have my head almost between my legs and can do nothing for the first 20 minutes. I cannot move. I stay sitting for an hour. I do not stand up. Eventually, I take off my t-shirt. It is literally soaked and can be wrung out.

Another hour or so and I email my doctor, from the floor and relatively ok. Chills have set in. I say I am quite lightheaded and I feel like I'm shaking more than I felt like I was shaking before.

Thrombosis

It is the country, isolated and few people are physically close by. Alex replies at midnight. My backup plan has been in place—my beloved in N America, sister in Europe, daughter in Australia. Check. I have 24 hour coverage. With these timezones someone would always be awake to call Alex (and emergency) for me, if needed.

Happily no emergency call is needed. However, I and the doctors are by this stage concerned. I am forced to admit to myself this is getting worse, not better. In hospital on Monday, after five hours of machines and consultations, we eliminate the potential that this is a thrombosis—the super rare blood clot associated with two of the covid vaccines including the one I had. Of course, I am interested in the mechanism too. It's believed that the vax can trigger antibodies to form, like an immune response, that then promote clots. See *What causes the rare blood clots linked with some covid-19 vaccines* [here](#)>

In many ways our actions to address meta-crises, while laudable, do this too. There are numerous examples such as biofuels encouraging agriculture to exploit more and more marginal land. Partly, through the cash price of such fuel feedstock this consequently adds to global warming. Similarly, with the 'war on terror' and racism people's experience in one context can lead to dire consequences in others (see 8:46 above).

Problems

Vaccination can be problematic especially when we fail to simultaneously address the systemic causes. That's a call to embrace and assist our thinking pattern shifts alongside addressing the immediate. Yes, let's take the immunity promoting options. However, it time to do this individual stuff together with the collective—reconceptualize the systems as well as put out the fires. E.g. see *A climate for change* [here](#)>

As I am writing these final paragraphs it is now day 29. I thought I was going to finish on day 28. I spent the afternoon on the floor instead with a quick trip to what now feels like another universe, another place for a short time in that period too. I'm guessing 5 seconds although when I'm in that it feels more like 15 minutes. Coming back into the room is an experience of a return from a long, multi-week trip somewhere else. I (you and we) remain at least partly in that other place, on a permanently parallel track to what existed before.

Throughout this whole essay there is good in the bad alongside plenty that is confronting and seems unresolvable. To bounce beyond that we need to embody a new paradigm, step into a new way of being together, while celebrating the best of now and the past too. I think we're doing that and, like my 'recovery', it is not straightforward.

To be continued...

I'm tentatively working out the patterns of this—what sends me into a crash. It is not easy. It continues to unpleasantly surprise me but I'm (mostly) cautiously optimistic.

Fortunately, we know far more about our global meta-crises-crash. We've mapped the patterns, the entangled interconnections—we're putting ourselves into the picture along with our thinking patterns—and we have some awesome answers. These include connecting the extraordinary care and help I've been assisted by, I was a complete stranger here a few months ago, to our global village. That's a source of deep inspiration. And a continuing story.

Simon, morning of 24 and 26 April 2021.