Towards a New Anthropology of Justice in the Anthropocene: Anthropological (Re)Turns

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Abstract: This introduction to the special issue on 'Justice in the Anthropocene' is animated by the central intuition that the new anthropology of justice should be brought into closer conversation with current debates about the Anthropocene. Unpacking this assumption, we first discuss the potentials and limitations of recent anthropological engagements with justice, and develop an analytical definition of this key concept for both ethnographic and political use. We then turn to debates about the Anthropocene and propose disassembling the name-giving global subject of this new epoch – humanity – through a multidimensional justice lens. The third part highlights the mutual benefits of both debates, notably by jointly becoming attuned to the multidimensionality of conflicting concerns for justice and keeping in focus the different roles that various beings, human and non-human, potentially play here. In part four, we discuss the five contributions to this special issue, demonstrating the work of the proposed analytical concept in advancing our understanding of justice in the Anthropocene. Finally, we recapitulate the extended argument put forward in this text for an *anthropological turn* – or rather: a *return* leading to a new anthropology (not only) of justice in the Anthropocene, rediscovering and reclaiming the human as an indispensable category of analysis and action, promising useful political returns.
[justice; Anthropocene; humanism; posthumanism; anthropological turn]

This text, and the special issue it introduces, is animated by the central intuition that the promising development of a new anthropology of justice and the important contemporary debates about the Anthropocene in anthropology and beyond should be brought into closer conversation with each other and joined together. More specifically, we are interested in scrutinizing, on the basis of ethnographic case studies, how studying the Anthropocene benefits from using anthropological involvement with justice and how a new anthropology of justice can be further developed by engaging with concerns discussed with regard to the Anthropocene.

In order to unpack and process this overall assumption, this text is divided into five parts. It starts by first discussing some of the potentials and limitations of new anthropological approaches to justice. Against this backdrop, it develops an analytical definition of justice as the precondition for studying ethnographically the multiple notions of justice that co-exist, are challenged and renegotiated, and thus evolve in numerous empirical settings. The second part shifts towards debates of the Anthropocene

and problematizes implicit notions of an undifferentiated humanity as a global ho-mogenous actor allegedly responsible for anthropogenic and anthropocenic ecological crises. While attempting to internally disassemble the idea of a global human subject through a multidimensional justice lens, we remain committed to a meaningful and relevant conception of 'anthropos' – the human as an indispensable category of analysis and action at the moment of the human's supposed conceptual demise and potential extinction in the Anthropocene.

In light of these separate discussions, the third part elaborates on how the new an-thropology of justice and debates about the Anthropocene can each profit from each other's insights, notably by becoming attuned to the multidimensionality of potentially conflicting justice concerns (ecological and otherwise) and by keeping in focus the potential and actual roles that different kinds of beings, human and non-human, can play within regimes of justice in the Anthropocene. Part four analyses the different contributions to this special issue in light of the proposed analytical concept of jus-tice. It follows the potentials and pitfalls of turning subjects and concerned agents of justice into responsible providers of their own justice, and it also maps the conflicting trajectories through which opposed actors strategically mobilize different legal orders in search of their own values and norms of justice. This part also zooms in on the shift-ing interpellations of humans and non-humans as agents (concerned and responsible), subjects and objects of justice, and reflects on the consequences that follow from such variable engagements.

Against this backdrop, the concluding part recapitulates the extended argument put forward in this text for an *anthropological turn* for a new anthropology (not only) of justice in the Anthropocene – or rather: for an *anthropological return* in the sense of both rediscovering the human as an indispensable descriptive category of analysis and reclaiming the human as an indispensable normative category of action promising better political returns than those provided by its alternatives.

The New Anthropology of Justice: Potentials and Limitations

Since its inception as a modern discipline, anthropology has studied numerous issues that are directly related to or have relevance for matters of justice ethnographically, such as the moral legitimacy, fairness and rightness of idea(l)s, practices and normative orders, as well as the social distribution of benefits and burdens. Despite this longstand-ing empirical interest, a recent body of literature advocating a new anthropology of justice (e.g. Anders and Zenker 2015a; Brunnegger 2019a; Clarke and Goodale 2009; Johnson and Karekwaivanane 2018a; Wolf forthcoming) starts from the observation that 'justice' itself has so far been theorized mainly in political philosophy, while an-thropologists have shown 'surprisingly little analytical interest in the concept of justice' (Brunnegger 2019b:3).

Within Western political and moral philosophy, justice has been conceptualized in diverse ways since the beginnings of ancient Greek philosophy. While Plato and Aristotle discussed justice broadly as a quality of both individual humans and larger polities (typically city states) (Brighouse 2004:1–2), modern political philosophers have primarily focused on justice as a characteristic of social institutions (ibid.). In this sense, the American philosopher John Rawls (1971 and 2001) proposed his theory of justice as fairness as one of the most influential philosophical approaches of the twentieth century. Advocating a 'political conception of justice for the special case of the basic structure of a modern democratic society' (Rawls 2001:14), Rawls's social contract theory posits that people would opt for certain principles of egalitarian liberalism if they imagined themselves behind a 'veil of ignorance' that made them unaware of their generational membership, natural endowments, social class background, and conceptions of the good.

Rawls's theory of justice has been criticized for being too communitarian by libertarian philosophers such as Robert Nozick (1974), and for being too individualistic by group-rights theorists such as Will Kymlicka (1989). Furthermore, Amartya Sen also argues against dominant social contract theories such as Rawl's theory of justice as fairness. According to Sen's 'idea of justice' (2009), a narrow focus on arrangement-focused views of justice (*niti*) needs to be complemented by a realization-focused view of justice (*nyaya*) – two Sanskrit terms that Sen borrows from Indian philosophical jurisprudence to illustrate that a concern with just institutions needs to be amplified by the freedom people have to choose a life they have reason to value. What Sen means by a realization-focused view of justice becomes particularly clear in the capability approach he developed with Martha Nussbaum (e.g. Sen 2009; Nussbaum 2007), according to which justice cannot be measured solely by what rights people in a society are entitled to, as the capabilities society actually offers them to make use of these rights also need to be taken into account.

Philosophical approaches such as these aim to develop normative concepts of justice, while anthropological approaches have centred upon an empirical description of what people in their respective fields consider to be just. Due to this different disciplinary orientation, anthropologists within the newly emerging field of an anthropology of justice have criticized philosophical approaches at large for being normative, abstract and ahistorical, and for inappropriately universalizing merely particularistic perspectives without reflecting upon problematic hegemonic implications. In other words, they are seen as lacking ethnographic grounding. Jessica Johnson and George Karekwaivanane (2018b), for instance, criticize the 'transcendental institutionalism' of political-philosophical approaches to justice as 'not feasible' and 'of no real use' (ibid.:2). Sandra Brunnegger bewails the fact that 'philosophical theorization [note the singular form] is often "nomothetic", "universalizing", and transcendental, regardless of scale or context' (2019b:11).

However, such generalizing anthropological criticism may itself run the risk of inappropriately eclipsing important differences within political-philosophical theories of

justice. As the very brief allusion to Rawls illustrates, the philosophical critiques of his theory of justice have been multidirectional, exhibiting vastly divergent, context-sensitive and often conflicting liberal, libertarian, communitarian, welfarist etc. ideals. Moreover, the somewhat limiting focus on social institutions is only a relatively recent development and does not exhaust political-philosophical approaches to justice (Brighouse 2004). Last but not least, there are also political-philosophical approaches that are empirically grounded and therefore not fundamentally different from anthropological engagements with justice. While some political philosophers, such as Rawls, work with abstract thought experiments, others like Nancy Fraser (e.g. Fraser and Honneth 2003) take 'real-world problems' as their starting point in developing their theoretical ponderings. Moreover, as Sen's *Human Development Index* illustrates, political-philosophical theories can produce practical instruments designed to solve real-life problems of justice. Therefore, instead of dismissing political-philosophical theories of justice altogether, we include some important insights from political philosophy in our own analytical definition of justice proposed below.

Before doing this, however, we take a brief look at how 'justice' has been addressed so far in anthropology. As pointed out earlier, matters of justice have been extensively studied empirically, if not necessarily under this name, in anthropology in numerous areas of social life both in and beyond law, including religion, morality, economics and kinship. This has, of course, also included theoretical approaches driven by strong normative concerns with justice such as (neo-)Marxism, feminism, postcolonial theory and critical race studies. Within the evolving field of legal anthropology, 'justice' has been equated with law or legal systems and has been studied in institutional settings. Justice in this sense has been understood as referring to the judicial contexts of customary law, state courts and other alternative dispute resolution forums based on the 'double institutionalization' (Bohannan [1957]1989; see also Hart 1961) of norms and customs, as well as being animated by specific legal cultures (e.g. Rosen 1985, 2018). 'Justice' has sometimes also been treated more narrowly as a synonym of criminal prosecution, as evidenced in the burgeoning literature on 'transitional justice'. Here national or international prosecution is often referred to as 'justice'-seeking, whereas other mechanisms also attempting to come to terms with large-scale abuses, such as truth and reconciliation commissions, are seen as rather advancing 'truth' or 'peace'; these mechanisms are often discussed in terms of a dilemma of 'truth' or 'peace' versus 'justice' (e.g. Rothberg and Thompson 2000; Roht-Arriaza and Mariezcurrena 2006; Sriram and Pillay 2009 – for a critical engagement see Anders and Zenker 2015b). Given that justice has, so far, rarely been discussed systematically within anthropology, these related but separate meanings of justice have often been conflated.

In recent decades, matters of justice have been somewhat eclipsed within political and legal anthropology by a more prominent focus on rights and culture (Cowan et al. 2001), including human rights (e.g. Goodale and Merry 2007). Similarly, within the evolving anthropology of morality and ethics, an emphasis on ordinary ethics (Das 2012; Lambek 2010), virtue ethics (Laidlaw 2014) and moral breakdowns (Zigon

2007) has equally constricted conceptualizations of justice. Against this backdrop, more recent approaches have called for a new anthropology of justice that specifically deals with the justice of broader social, political and economic dynamics (e.g. Anders and Zenker 2015a; Brunnegger 2019a; Clarke and Goodale 2009; Johnson and Karekwaivanane 2018a; Wolf forthcoming).

Mark Goodale and Kamari Clarke (2009) see a historical turning point at the end of the 1990s when justice became a central global ideological, yet empirically pluralized, ordering principle. The authors regard the central question of political-philosophical approaches to justice, namely what justice *is*, to be misleading (Goodale and Clarke 2009:5) because they are sceptical of 'any overly abstracted notion of justice' and instead 'envision a framework for understanding justice that is theoretically substantive enough to serve as a basis for institutional action, but which does not do conceptual violence to what the growing body of ethnographic research on normative practices reveals' (ibid.:5). Their metaphor of 'mirrors of justice' is seen as making visible political, moral and ideological imperatives, which appear condensed in volatile angles of reflection (ibid.:12). For the authors, this metaphor demonstrates that justice is formally contextual, normatively thin, and functions discursively as an 'empty signifier' generating meaning when invoked, instead of constituting a set of norms to be applied (ibid.:10–11).

Investigating how justice is pursued in Africa, Johnson and Karekwaivanane (2018b) follow Goodale and Clarke in abstaining from 'an overarching and abstract theory of justice' because they 'cast doubt on the usefulness of such a theory' (ibid.:2). Referring to 'mirrors of justice', the authors emphasize the contextual and contingent nature of justice (ibid.:3). Gerhard Anders and Olaf Zenker (2015b) equally offer no general definition of justice and focus instead on empirical instantiations of it as characterized by two intertwined dialectical relationships: first, the dynamics unfolding between the lofty ideals that promises of justice typically entail and the usually much more messy, ambiguous and uncertain realities that differentially unfold for various actors regarding their hopes for, and disillusionments with, such promises; and, second, the complex entanglements following from logics that present matters of justice as mundane and ordinary, and profoundly different logics that evoke some sense of emergency as the justification for bringing about exceptional measures of justice (e.g. in transitional justice). Capturing such a broad understanding of justice as a multifarious, spatio-temporally contingent, indeterminate and dynamic 'object multiple' (Brunnegger 2019b:15) that is constantly negotiated between different actors, Brunnegger recently proposed the term 'everyday justice' (2019b). All these approaches share the ambition of developing a new anthropology of justice that is both theoretically sophisticated and ethnographically grounded. Advancing an anthropological concept of 'justice beyond law' (Brunnegger 2020), many of these authors deliberately abstain from offering an a priori definition of justice and thereby claim 'not to privilege any particular epistemological or ontological tradition' (Brunnegger 2019b:4). A theorization of how people in everyday life negotiate, enact and fight for specific notions of moral legitimacy, fairness and rightness has thus been at the heart of these recent endeavours.

While sharing this ambition as an important starting point for a new anthropology of justice, we wish to develop the overall approach further in two important respects. First, rather than following Goodale and Clarke's clear-cut distinction between 'thick' theories of justice developed in so-called Eurocentric philosophical approaches and 'thin' or everyday conceptions of justice (Goodale and Clarke 2009:11), we contend that approaches to justice everywhere are more or less 'thick'. On the one hand, philosophical approaches to justice inspire people around the world in their everyday conceptions of justice and vice versa, since '[t]he fundamental questions that have driven moral and political philosophers' inquiries into justice are similar to those that have exercised individuals and communities' (Johnson and Karekwaivanane 2018b:3). On the other hand, while it is an important anthropological contribution complementing established theories in political philosophy to emphasize the empirical contingency and mutability of persistent negotiations of justice, this is hardly a 'thin' conception of justice free from a priori ontological and epistemological assumptions.

Second, the characterization of justice as multifarious, spatio-temporally contingent, indeterminate and dynamic, situated as it is within a processual, praxeological paradigm, is actually applicable to every social phenomenon seen through this lens. As such, it does not help us understand what is specific about justice or what sets justice apart from other social phenomena. James Laidlaw identifies a similar problem with a Durkheimian perspective in identifying morality and ethics with 'the social' more broadly. Yet, as he argues, it is important to ask, 'what might be true of the ethical dimension of human life that is not true of everything else?' (Laidlaw 2014:23) – and the same applies to 'justice'. We consider this question important because a sole focus on the negotiability of justice at the expense of a more specific definition on what sets 'justice' apart from other phenomena has serious theoretical limitations. This is so because an intentionally unspecific definition of justice paradoxically limits researchers in arbitrary ways. Without an analytical definition of justice, researchers are either arbitrarily constrained to look at settings where people happen to use the word 'justice' themselves (whether in English or in local translation) or to follow their own implicit notions of justice when trying to locate justice empirically. In other words: abstaining from explicitly defining justice does not mean that researchers do not implicitly apply their own definitions. To answer the basic question of what constitutes a field site or case study in the anthropology of justice, some pre-understanding of justice is inevitable – whether implicit or explicit (Wolf forthcoming). Therefore, a more specific and distinctive analytical definition of justice is the precondition for studying the empirical plurality of justice.

In order to develop such an analytical definition, we take inspiration from the English political theorist and philosopher David Leslie Miller, who proposes a pluralist approach to justice 'by identifying elements that are present whenever justice is invoked, but also examining the different forms it takes in various practical contexts' (Miller 2021). Miller suggests that 'the constant and perpetual will to render to each his [its] due' (Miller 2021) expresses succinctly an essential feature of justice, thus providing a

useful starting point. In other words, justice can be seen as something that someone considers to be due to them and others (Wolf 2023).

Setting out from this formula, five core characteristics of justice can be further elaborated. First, justice refers to an entitlement, something, a means to some other end – what we call an *object of justice* – that is *due*. Justice can thus be claimed and demanded as it constitutes some form of right or enforceable obligation – it implies some normative 'force of justice' (in analogy to the force of law). Accordingly, justice is different from charity or humanitarianism based on voluntary goodwill or compassion (Miller 2021; Fassin 2012). Moreover, what is due can include not only benefits and burdens, but also sanctions and punishments following some violation of values and norms. Therefore, distributive and retributive justice regimes can both be analysed by the suggested definition. Second, justice is due to someone or, more abstractly, some entity – the ends for the means (i.e. objects) of justice. Within regimes of justice, specific *subjects of justice* are thus imagined as concrete addressees of entitlement, sometimes called 'rights-holders'. Depending on the particular regime of justice, these subjects may include – as individuals or collectives – humans, non-human animals, other creatures, spirits and gods, as well as (non-sentient) entities.

Third, what is due to these subjects of justice is typically based on values and norms that are assumed to have a minimum of trans-situational stability. Here, it is important to point out a difference between etic observations on the situational negotiability and apparent fluidity of justice (as highlighted above in many contributions to the new anthropology of justice) and emic expectations that values and norms informing claims to entitlements should have some trans-situational continuity. In other words, the fact that norms are observable as constantly contested and negotiated does not mean that they are not seen (and intended) by the actors involved as having trans-situational validity. This is not to say, however, that values and norms of justice are emically expected to be always applied indiscriminately. Exceptions from the rule might be justified in order to deliver justice. Examples of such exceptions include 'equity' as a particular body of law developed historically in the English Court of Chancery as a remedy for legal outcomes deemed unfair (Bathurst and Schwartz 2016) and multiple affirmative action measures offering privileged access to benefits for structurally disadvantaged people. Nevertheless, even in such exceptional contexts, there is still a minimal expectation that comparable cases should be trans-situationally treated in the same way (Miller 2021).

Fourth, regimes of justice typically require specifiable agents who are responsible for ensuring that subjects of justice get what is due to them, and who can be charged if they fail to do so. For agents of justice to be held responsible for their actions, and thus to be accusable of potential injustices, they must be regarded by the actors involved as having good enough 'agency' – that is, the capability to have acted differently, at least to some extent (Giddens 1984:9). Sometimes imagined as 'duty-bearers', these *responsible agents of justice* endowed with (some) agency are thus indispensable for regimes of justice. However, it is important to emphasize that they are not necessarily identical

to the above-mentioned subjects of justice (the beneficiaries of specific entitlements) as illustrated by the example of animal justice or the rights of nature regimes; instead, they comprise any agents deemed capable, in principle, of deliberating about options before acting (Young 2011).

The fifth and last core element of the proposed definition of justice consists in the fact that justice is a *matter of concern* for someone. Someone must consider something to be due to someone (else). Hence, justice requires someone we call a *concerned agent* who can care, and does care, about justice in the first place – that is: agents that are capable of reflecting, communicating and potentially acting upon (in)justices as problems to be addressed and solved. Responsible agents and concerned agents of justice are often seen as being closely aligned within regimes of justice. However, there might also be individual agents, or categories of agents, that are not regarded as being both concerned about and responsible for justice. For instance, a philosopher of justice concerned about the conceptualization of justice regimes may not be held directly responsible for implementing it. For this reason, we suggest distinguishing analytically between responsible and concerned agents of justice.

We argue that these five core elements constitute prototypical components for an analytical definition of justice. *Justice*, we contend, thus refers to *matters of concern about what is due to different (kinds of) subjects according to relatively stable and impartial values and norms to be enacted by specifiable and thus responsible agents*. This definition includes subjects of justice (to whom justice is due), objects of justice (what is due), responsible agents of justice (responsible for implementing justice) and concerned agents of justice (for whom justice is a matter of concern) as well as values and norms (according to which justice is to be realized). This proposed definition is broad enough to be applicable to diverse empirical cases past and present. It can be used to describe and analyse a wide range of empirically observable justice regimes pertaining to questions of social justice, distributive justice, retributive justice, restorative justice, transitional justice, environmental justice, ecological justice and many more such kinds. Moreover, it does so without necessarily making normative (etic) claims about rightful subjects, objects and agents of justice, who, depending on the regime of justice, can be either individuals or collectives (e.g. elites, the working class, women, politicians etc.) as well as human or non-human (e.g. nature, animals, gods). Justice imaginaries of others can thus be described without necessarily being congruent with researchers' own justice imaginaries.

This ideal-typical definition might create the impression that it is always clear within regimes of justice who count as subjects and agents of justice and what count as objects of justice, while in most empirical contexts the scale and scope of justice seems much more complex, ambiguous and multivocal (Fraser 2008). Individual, seemingly innocent acts may accumulate in inadvertent structural injustices (Young 2011) or aggregate into seemingly self-perpetuating institutions of 'structural violence' (Galtung 1969), in which some systematically benefit while others are systematically disadvantaged. In such settings, it is often not that clear what is due to whom by which responsible agents

according to which values and norms. If everyone and anyone, but no one in particular, is an 'implicated subject' in a world seemingly 'beyond victims and perpetrators' (Rothberg 2019), and thus all are somehow somewhat responsible – a situation that is typical of many of the systemic crises that characterize the Anthropocene (see below) – then one might wonder whether this analytical model of justice is still of any use. Turning this argument on its head, however, we contend that, whenever these highly complex situations are being apprehended, discussed and contested in the modality of justice, participating actors cannot but ascribe (some of) the different components to (some) differentially imagined subjects and agents of justice. In other words, unless some actors care about, and advance, *some ideas* about who is (more) responsible to ensure that some subjects get (more of) what is thought to be due to them, on the basis of some values and norms deemed (more) legitimate (than others), we are not dealing with matters of justice but with something else, such as questions of fate or destiny. Therefore, it is precisely the complex process of differentially ascribing divergent roles to different entities, of insisting on differences that do make a difference, especially in ambiguous and equivocal contexts, that is at the heart of contestations around justice.

While humans have been taken for granted in the past as key subjects and agents in justice regimes empirically studied by anthropologists, paradoxically their role has been aggravated massively and simultaneously questioned fundamentally in part of the Anthropocene literature to which we now turn.

The Anthropocene: Posthumanist Turn or Anthropological (Re)Turn?

An emphasis on humans' capacity to act as a geological force has a long history in the natural sciences dating back to the 19th century. The Italian geologist Antonio Stoppani, for example, coined the term 'Anthropozoic era' in 1873 to highlight humans' geological influence. Hence, the concept of the Anthropocene, which has recently gained prominence as a signifier of the influence of human behaviour on earth's geology and ecosystems that is so significant as to have the potential to constitute a new geological epoch, is part of a complex genealogy. It is also situated within the growing ambition of the natural sciences since the 1980s to develop an interdisciplinary Earth System Science comprising disciplines such as geology, physics, chemistry, geography, biology and mathematics, among others. Within this literature, a call for the inclusion of social sciences in the interdisciplinary endeavour to study the Earth System has been raised (Steffen et al. 2020:12). Earth System scientists identify the 'human factor' (Schellnhuber 2001:25) or the 'anthroposphere' (Steffen et al. 2020:12) as an important component of the Earth System next to the ecosphere, geosphere and biosphere. According to the Director Emeritus of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, this 'human factor' consists of a 'physical' sub-component that is the 'sum of all individual human lives, actions and products', and of a 'meta-phys-

ical' sub-component that reflects the emergence of a 'Global Subject' (2001:25). This Global Subject is seen as 'a self-organized cooperative phenomenon, a self-conscious force driving global change either to sustainable trajectories or to self-extinction'(ibid.). The human factor is imagined as a homogenous 'global creature' or 'superorganism' in which all human differences are levelled because 'everyone on the planet will become so interdependent that they may grow and develop with a common purpose' (Schellnhuber 2001:29). The urge to include social-science perspectives on the 'human factor' into Earth System Science has thus defined humans – or rather, humanity – as a single global entity affecting the planet at large.

The term 'Anthropocene' itself was first widely debated when atmospheric chemist and Nobel prize winner Paul J. Crutzen and biologist Eugene F. Stoermer published a short eponymous article in 2000 in the *Global Change Newsletter*, a magazine that connects science, society and policy. Following Crutzen and Stoermer's suggestion, in 2016 the Anthropocene Working Group voted to proceed towards a formal proposal to acknowledge the Anthropocene as the official designation for the current geological era (Zalasiewicz et al. 2017). However, in 2024 the International Commission on Stratigraphy and the International Union of Geological Sciences rejected this proposal to recognize an Anthropocene epoch, largely due to its shallow sedimentary record and extremely recent proposed start, sparking renewed discussions to shift attention away from narrow questions of dating and time intervals towards a more transdisciplinary and inclusive approach (Edgeworth et al. 2024).

Much debate has indeed focused on the question of when the Anthropocene actually started. Suggestions range from the Pleistocene extinction of megafauna (50,000 years ago) to the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century to the 'Great Acceleration' of massive growth rates across a large range of measures of human activity since the mid-20th century (Hornborg 2020). No matter when exactly quantitative changes of degree are seen as turning into qualitative changes of kind that justify the claim of a new epoch, the Anthropocene is typically characterized as an era of environmental degradation caused by humanity at large (Hornborg 2020). This central idea has been widely used and developed in scientific debates and beyond after Crutzen and Stoermer suggested the term. Over the past ten years, journals focusing on the Anthropocene, such as *The Anthropocene Review*, have been founded, research institutes such as the Max Planck Institute of Geoanthropology in Jena, Germany, are being established, and publications on the Anthropocene have increased significantly not only in the natural but also the social sciences.

The analysis of the Anthropocene in anthropology and the social sciences more generally has important antecedents in previous decades within ecological anthropology and political ecology. Numerous studies have focused on anthropogenic environmental destruction covering a broad empirical field ranging from industrial disasters in Bhopal (Fortun 2001; Das 2017) and Chernobyl (Petryna 2002) to carbon democracies (Mitchell 2011) to activist groups and social movements fighting for environmental and ecological justice (e.g. Shiva 1991; Escobar 1992). However, studying the Anthro-

pocene within a decidedly interdisciplinary framework explicitly engaging the natural sciences has arguably introduced a new quality to the hitherto more or less self-contained perspectives of the humanities and social sciences. This shift is vividly exemplified by the 2009 article 'The Climate of History' of the postcolonial historian Dipesh Chakrabarty, one of the key texts igniting the debate about the Anthropocene in the social sciences. In this article, Chakrabarty develops four theses 'around the proposition that the present crisis of climate change is man-made' (Chakrabarty 2009:201), emphasizing that anthropogenic explanations of climate change in the Anthropocene 1) fundamentally challenge the established distinction between natural and human history; 2) severely qualify humanist histories of modernity; 3) require us to put global histories of capital in conversation with the species history of humans; and 4) thereby probe the limits of historical understanding (Chakrabarty 2009). Assembling, among others, revised articles published over the past decade, Chakrabarty's recent book *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (2021) distinguishes between a 'global' human-centric perspective and a 'planetary' perspective in which humans are intentionally decentred, and argues for the need to simultaneously engage and interrelate them both.

It is somewhat ironic that, while the 'death of the subject' (Heller 1990) became a dominant narrative in the humanities and social sciences during much of the late 20th century, the human subject – as the natural-cum-cultural 'anthropos' – has prominently re-entered the stage of planetary history in the early 21st century to give its name to an entirely new era. However, this human agent of the Anthropocene has been at risk of making its appearance only as a homogenous global subject (Chernilo 2017:48) held uniformly responsible for anthropogenic climate change and global environmental catastrophes. In other words, humans are at risk of merely occupying the undifferentiated slot of the 'human factor' as envisioned in the Earth System Science discussed above. For this reason, much of the debate within the Anthropocene literature has focused on criticising the term itself for not sufficiently considering global asymmetries within humanity based on race, class, gender, etc., and for thereby failing to acknowledge how global environmental degradation and suffering have been caused and distributed highly unequally (Steffen et al. 2015; Davis et al. 2019; Antweiler 2022).

Triggered by this critique, other concepts have been suggested to replace the term 'Anthropocene'. Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg (2014), for example, have proposed the 'Capitalocene' as an alternative in order to stress that capitalism as the creation of a human minority has been the driving force behind current global conundrums. Developing the concept further, Jason Moore (2017, 2018) argues that the Capitalocene starts 'from humanity's patterns of difference, conflict and cooperation' (Moore 2017:4) and sees the age of capital as characterized by 'exterminism [that] is not anthropogenic but *capitalogenic*' (Moore 2017:597, original emphasis). Following Haraway et al. (2016)'s call to rethink aspects of the Anthropocene in terms of the 'Plantationocene', the potential of the Plantationocene concept has been seen in its decentring of 'the Eurocentric narrative by which coal, the steam engine, and the industrial revolution constitute the epicenter of global environmental change, instead pointing to the crucial role of

plantation ecologies and politics in shaping the present' (Davis et al. 2019:4), informed by an imperative to extract and produce (Wolford 2021). However, the Plantationocene concept has been criticized for not using its potential to analyse racial politics in a meaningful way but rather 'obscuring the centrality of racial politics' (Davis et al. 2019:1; see also Wolf 2022) in the continuation of the idea 'that "humanity" writ large is responsible for catastrophic environmental change' (Davis et al. 2019:2). Moving beyond the Anthropocene, Capitalocene and Plantationocene, Donna Haraway (2016) has evoked yet another concept for our current epoch: The 'Chthulucene' as an inextricably interlinked modality of being and (be)coming together of the human and non-human and of 'making kin' as '[l]iving-with and dying-with each other potentially' (2016:2) within a shared project of 'staying with the trouble'.

While these alternative terminologies have highlighted important aspects of our contemporary moment, the suggested labels arguably have their own limitations. To begin with, there is the risk of merely replacing one homogenizing mono-causality ('humanity') by another ('capitalism' or 'the plantation economy'). This way, such alternative labels may, again, be only insufficiently sensitive towards internal pluralities and variations. Moreover, evocations of the Chthulucene that aspire to generate 'humus' out of 'humans' and 'compost' out of 'posthuman(ism)' (Haraway 2016:32) may be throwing the baby out with the bathwater. In celebrating the coming and becoming together of 'myriad intra-active entities-in-assemblages – including the more-than-human, other-than-human, inhuman, and human-as-humus' (2016:101), Haraway seemingly refrains from offering differences that can make a normative difference vis-à-vis the question of which forms of 'kinning' can, and should be, preferred over others. In other words, in her celebration of the innumerable ways of establishing new lines of 'response-ability' between living beings, Haraway's Chthulucene risks conceptually losing key agents that are not merely descriptively 'response-able', but can also be normatively 'responsibilized', that is, enticed to act as responsible agents for themselves and on behalf of others, such as humans. For these reasons, we follow Anna Tsing, Andrew Mathews and Nils Bubandt (2019), who want to hold on to the concept of the Anthropocene and thereby keep the human in focus, elaborating it further in order to rethink 'anthropology's anthropocentrism while insisting that people matter, still' (2019:S188). However, while Tsing, Mathews and Bubandt (2019) advocate a 'patchy landscape' lens in order to account for 'the uneven conditions of more-than-human livability in landscapes increasingly dominated by industrial forms' (2019:S186), we propose complexifying the term 'Anthropocene' primarily by internally diversifying it with regard to multiple contestations around everyday justice among differentially positioned beings, humans prominent among them.

Disassembling the global human subject while remaining committed to a meaningful and relevant conception of humans in all their complexities and pluralities requires ethico-onto-epistemologically reconsidering the place of the 'anthropos' in the Anthropocene. One prominent position in this debate has been a decentring of the human subject through a shift away from anthropocentrism and a turn towards

posthumanism. Whether denying an ontological difference between humans and non-humans or considering such differences as indecisive factors in determining agency (Kipnis 2015:55), such posthumanist positions have been advocated – in substance, if not in name – by various strands of science and technology studies, including actor network theory (e.g. Latour 1999, 2005) and multispecies feminism (e.g. Haraway 2016), within multiple ontologies approaches (e.g. Viveiros de Castro 1998; Descola 2013; Holbraad 2012) as well as various strands of new materialism (e.g. Barad 2007; Bennett 2010; Braidotti 2013). One main ambition of different posthumanist approaches has been to dissolve 'modern Western' dichotomies such as the Cartesian onto-epistemological dualism between subject and object, nature and culture, human and non-human (Hornborg 2017:96) while being highly critical of the arrogant anthropocentric exploitation of natural resources by humans, disregarding other animals, beings and entities within a more-than-human world.

Instead of further differentiating the human, posthumanist ontologies have thus proposed to flatten ontological differences not only within humanity but among all beings and entities. Posthumanist thinking thereby proposes that non-human actants have agency as well, materialized in distributed agency. For instance, a gunman acts as an assemblage of a gun and a man who jointly carry out the act of shooting (Latour 1999:176). Thereby, not only are ontologies flattened, but also the understanding of agency that Bruno Latour minimally defines as '*any thing* that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference' (Latour 2005:71; original emphasis). As this illustrates, agency thus conceived does not require intentionality (Block 2020:82). Similar to new materialists' ontological monism, material effects are seen as the defining feature of agency (e.g. Barad 2007; Bennett 2010; Braidotti 2013). Non-human agency is thus not merely a metaphorical anthropomorphic projection but '*a property of the world itself* and not only a feature of the language *about* the world' (Latour 2014:12, original emphasis). Confronted with the challenges of the Anthropocene, Latour defines it as the crucial political and ethical task 'to *distribute* agency as far and in as *differentiated* a way as possible' (Latour 2014:15, original emphasis).

Posthumanism offers critical food for thought for more open and inclusive modalities of planetary care. At the same time, such approaches have also been criticized for various reasons, two of which we want to highlight here. First, conceptualizations of agency in posthumanist approaches to the Anthropocene have been somewhat inconsistent. On the one hand, humans have been criticized (and thus conceived) as the prime perpetrators of environmental degradation, ascribing to them a hyper-anthropocentric ability to act. On the other hand, humans are seen as unable to act decisively on the current ecological crisis, while 'the Earth has now taken back all the characteristics of a full-fledged *actor*' (Latour 2014:3, original emphasis). Anthropocentric phantasies of omnipotence are thus fundamentally criticized, while paradoxically making a reappearance in the posthuman imagination that ecological crises of the Anthropocene have been caused by seemingly omnipotent human agents, constituting what Daniel Chernilo (2017:50) calls an 'anthropocentric paradox'. Second, onto-epistemologically

distributing agency equally among all actors within a network or assemblage of actors also entails ethically distributing responsibilities equally. Such distributed agency thus results in a problematic politico-ethical levelling and flattening (Block 2020), in the course of which everyone and thus, practically, no one can be held responsible, accountable or liable for the ecological crisis. Put differently, rather than merely neglecting important differences between human actors within the figure of a homogenized global human subject (problematized above), distributing agency along posthumanist lines makes this problem even worse by escalating and extending it to the entire world of assembled human and non-human actors.[1] By contrast, and building on our discussion in the previous section, we insist that, while difficult, there is no alternative to descriptively and normatively interrogating the differential implicatedness of everyone in the making of injustices, ecological and otherwise.

In light of these problems, we argue instead for an *anthropological turn* – that is, the rediscovery of and return to the human as an indispensable category of analysis and action at the moment of the human's supposed conceptual demise and potential extinction in the Anthropocene. For this, we mobilize supporting arguments from human ecology, philosophical anthropology and the anthropology of freedom and individuality.

Within the field of human ecology, Alf Hornborg has argued that posthumanist conceptions of distributed agency can actually be seen as a form of fetishism, thus being part of the problem rather than the solution. Yet, as Hornborg points out, 'artifacts have consequences, not agency' (2017), as they may influence human agency but cannot consciously or intentionally reflect on their purposes as humans can (Hornborg 2017:98-99). 'Artifacts may systematically make people inclined to behave in certain ways, but rather than attribute purposes to the artifacts, we must trace their social consequences to the human activity of designing them' (Hornborg 2019:14). By fetishizing artifacts, objects are seen as having the power to organize society, while this attribution of agency to objects is illusory, and problematically obscures unequal social relations (Hornborg 2019:13). Technology fetishism is the illusion that technological progress saves human and natural resources while technology actually '*displaces* demands on human time and natural space onto other populations with less purchasing power' (Hornborg 2019:16, original emphasis). General purpose money, an 'artifact of the uniquely human capacity for abstract symbolic representation' (Hornborg 2019:7), as manifested in the logic that anything can be exchanged for anything else, is another key example of human fetishization. Hornborg shares the posthumanists' 'professed

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1 Another haunting illustration of this conundrum consists in cases of genocide. While it can be safely assumed that hardly any posthumanist would actually argue for such a position, it is difficult to see how theoretically refusing to take the capacity to act differently and hence intentionality into account as a crucially differentiating factor of agency can prevent a position in which the victims of genocide are effectively seen as being as 'responsible' for their suffering as the perpetrators (as well as their means of mass destruction imagined as non-human actors).

emancipatory concerns' (2017:96), but argues that attributing agency to artifacts such as money or technology instead of understanding them as the product of human fetishization actually hinders rather than enables such emancipation because the responsibility for human social relations is falsely delegated to things. For Hornborg, by contrast, the analytical distinction between humans and non-humans is the precondition for a truly critical social science, enabling a 'humble anthropocentrism' (Hornborg 2020:3) as the *sine qua non* for radically transforming modern artifacts and society in order to overcome global inequalities and save the planet in the time of the Anthropocene.

The growing demand, if not affordance, of our contemporary moment to reconsider the natural-cum-cultural 'anthropos' in the Anthropocene (along lines sketched, for instance, by Chakrabarty) has also led to an unexpected revival of the field of 'philosophical anthropology', a philosophical tradition that emerged and became influential in Germany during the 1920s. One example is the recent German-medium volume edited by Hannes Bajohr (2020), the title of which explicitly refers to the return of the human in the Anthropocene at the moment of its seemingly irretrievable demise. Several contributions to this book take inspiration from Helmuth Plessner's concept of 'eccentric positionality', which the German philosophical anthropologist developed in his book *Levels of Organic Life and the Human*, first published in 1928 (with the English translation appearing for the first time, tellingly, only in 2019). Building on Plessner's approach, social theorist Katharina Block (2020:77) proposes a 'reflexive anthropocentrism', which decentres the human without running into the same politico-ethical problem of levelling responsibility as posthumanism does. Following Plessner, Block suggests that eccentric positionality is common to all humans, while not being restricted to them. The human is only one historically contingent form in which the eccentric positionality of what Plessner calls 'the person' manifests itself. Key to Plessner's eccentric positionality, as Joachim Fischer (2020) argues in the same volume, is the ability to position oneself self-consciously and reflexively in relation to oneself – to be at the same time within and outside of oneself. The subject of eccentric positionality makes itself (and other entities) the object of reflexive contemplation. Therefore, only eccentrically positioned beings such as humans can be concerned about and care for other creatures (Fischer 2020:34–35).

Building on this tradition of philosophical anthropology and proposing an ethnography-based 'border conversation' between anthropology and philosophy, Thomas Schwartz Wentzer and Cheryl Mattingly equally emphasize that, in light of the pressing political, ethical and ontological demands of our time, '[w]e cannot afford to do away with the category of the human' (2018:145). They insist that we should revisit the human, conceiving it – very much in resonance with Plessner's notion of 'eccentric positionality' – as 'a plural form of life in the manifold of its potentiality' (2018:150). Urging us to keep open the question of human universality while acknowledging the pluriversality of human and non-human existence as experienced in intense ethnographic encounters, they advocate a move '[t]oward a new humanism' (2018). Tim Ingold (2024) also argues that the multiple crises of our age demand a 'new humanism',

one in which we both rejuvenate our ancestral human past (rather than repudiating it as a backward tradition to be overcome) and relearn the arts of coexistence with all beings, human and non-human, inhabiting our planet. Ingold sees this humanism as unapologetically anthropocentric in that 'humans carry a burden of responsibility not shared by other beings [which] does not make them superior to these others; quite the opposite, in fact' (2024:2). He also conceives this humanism as situated within a tension between universality and multiversality, 'one-in-many and many-in-one' (ibid.), echoing the concern with the human-universal-in-the-manifold that has been a dominant theme within both classical and more recent approaches in philosophical anthropology.

Ironically, Ingold wishes to overcome a problematic binary rhetoric that he identifies with 'philosophers of the Enlightenment, in the Europe of the 18th century' (2018:2), evoking a radical break with the past in the promise of a different future – only then to repeat this very rhetorical move in his own homogenizing demand for a 'new humanism' in contradistinction to 'the old humanism'. By contrast, we argue that intellectual histories engaging 'the human' within philosophical anthropology and beyond, within 'the West' and elsewhere, have yielded much more complex, diverse and nuanced genealogies that are worth revisiting and revising. For this reason, we prefer speaking of the need to *return to and rediscover the human* as an indispensable category of analysis and action while in substance agreeing with many of the reflexive arguments advanced under the label of a 'new humanism'.

The importance of reflexivity as a precondition for moral agency is also emphasized in recent anthropological engagements with freedom and individuality more broadly. Within anthropological discussions of ethics and morality, for instance, James Laidlaw (2014) notes that the social sciences, including anthropology, have been ill-equipped to conceptualize 'freedom', which he sees as constitutive for the ethical. For this reason, Laidlaw propagates a new anthropology of ethics and freedom, not as a new sub-discipline of anthropology, but in the sense of a freedom-based integral dimension of anthropological thought as such, given that 'ethical considerations pervade all spheres of human life' (Laidlaw 2014:2). Laidlaw uses the term 'reflective freedom' (2014:147), inspired, among others, by the philosophers Bernard Williams (1985) and Harry G. Frankfurt (1988), which he sees as 'a distinctive feature of personhood'. It implies a human reflective consciousness that 'means that we "step back" from and evaluate our own thoughts and desires, and decide reflectively which desires we wish to have and to move us to action' (Laidlaw 2014:148).

Reasoning along similar lines, Olaf Zenker (2018) makes the case for 'why the individual must be defended', arguing, among other things, that a non-deterministic social theory cannot exist without affording humans at least the potential to behave like individuals with agency, even if such moments might be rare empirically. While 'individualism' as an ideology celebrating the 'cult of the individual' (Durkheim 1898/1973) might thus be historically specific, 'individuality' as a quality of consciousness is not. As Nigel Rapport (2010a:378) puts it, it refers to 'the universal nature of human ex-

istence whereby it is individuals who possess agency'. As Rapport argues, humans can take up the stance of 'anyone', potentially leading the non-indexical and post-cultural existence of a cosmopolitan subject (Rapport 2010b). Thus, whether using the language of critical anti-fetishism (Hornborg), eccentric positionality (Plessner, Block, Fischer), new humanism (Wentzer, Mattingly, Ingold), reflective freedom (Laidlow), individuality (Zenker) or mobilizing the figure of 'anyone' (Rapport), all these approaches highlight the crucial importance of a reflective consciousness underlying an agential capacity to act differently that warrants an *anthropological turn* as a return to the human as an indispensable category of analysis and action.

Synergies between the New Anthropology of Justice and Debates about the Anthropocene

After discussing the new anthropology of justice and Anthropocene debates in anthropology and beyond, we return to our initial intuition that both debates can benefit from each other when brought into closer conversation. We argue that there are two important aspects to what justice brings to debates on the Anthropocene and vice versa.

Analysing the Anthropocene in terms of justice, first highlights the need to disassemble the global human subject into highly diverse and differentially implicated agents of justice. Differently positioned humans are unequally responsible for environmental destruction while at the same time suffering unequally from its consequences. For instance, those who are responsible for tremendous greenhouse gas emissions due to their lifestyle are usually not the ones (humans and non-humans) who suffer most from the consequences of ozone depletion such as extreme weather conditions, megadroughts or harvest losses. Integrating a global justice perspective into thinking about the challenges of the Anthropocene helps improve our differentiation between concerned agents, agents who are (more) responsible for environmental degradation, and subjects of justice to whom a life without extreme heat and with sufficient food is due.

Second, contextualizing questions of ecological justice within complex fields of numerous other justice regimes that may coalesce but also be in conflict with each other is another way in which debates on the Anthropocene may benefit from multi-dimensional justice lenses. Ecological justice as a primary focus in the Anthropocene is only one among many other justice concerns, and it needs to be recognized as such. A world imagined as ecologically just is not necessarily also perceived as, say, socially or economically just and vice versa. Questions of social and distributive justice need to be balanced with (possibly conflicting) ecological questions. For example, sustainability initiatives advocating localism may promote environmental justice but do not necessarily reduce social injustices and relative exclusions (Born and Purcell 2006). A justice lens complexifies debates on the Anthropocene by internally diversifying them

with regard to multiple contestations around everyday justice also beyond the eco-logical among differentially positioned human and non-human beings.

Conversely, we suggest two complementary ways in which the new anthropology of justice can learn from Anthropocene debates. First, a focus on the Anthropocene introduces an urgent reminder into general discussions of justice not to neglect the eco-logical dimension, with its various temporalities, as an important cross-cutting concern within seemingly 'non-ecological' justice debates. In other words, as much as ecological justice benefits from acknowledging the multiple ways in which other justice regimes may coalesce and/or come into conflict with its ecological concerns, discussions of non-ecological interests should take their multifarious interrelations with ecological justice into account. Inasmuch as different dimensions of justice, such as gender, race or class, need to be considered in respect of their intersections with various other regimes of justice, the ecological dimensions should also be included and systematically address-ed when engaging in questions such as gender justice, race-based justice or economic justice. An obvious example of such an approximation and the attempted integration of different justice dimensions can be found in contemporary debates about a 'just transition', increasingly conceptualized as addressing socio-economic objectives related to human well-being regarding income, health, education etc. and sustainability con-cerns in terms of decarbonization, resource efficiency and ecosystem restoration, thus encompassing multiple forms of justice (Abram et al. 2022).

Second, the anthropology of justice may also benefit from the renewed discussions within the Anthropocene literature of the ontological, epistemological and ethical stat-us of human as well as non-human actors. This may help acknowledge, and problem-atize, the strong anthropocentrism within justice debates that often take for granted the idea that matters of justice are primarily concerned with what humans owe each other. Rethinking the anthropology of justice in light of the humanist and posthuman-ist controversies that are emerging within the planetary horizons of a multispecies An-thropocene thus helps sharpen our understanding of the various roles that humans and non-humans have played, could play and possibly should play within different regimes of justice. In fact, our own analytical model of justice – ideal-typically distinguishing between objects, subjects, responsible agents and concerned agents of justice, as well as the values and norms trans-situationally interlinking these divergent engagements – is meant to be already informed by, and oriented towards an awareness of such more-than-human worlds, in which various entities and beings may be entangled quite dif-ferently within multiple evocations of justice. It is to the specific configurations of these components of justice, shown to be emergent in the different ethnographic settings discussed in the five contributions to this special issue, and the important insights that they garner regarding questions of justice in the Anthropocene, that we now turn.

Everyday Contestations around Justice in the Anthropocene:
The Contributions

Nicole Ahoya starts off our empirical engagements with situated matters of justice by studying the trials and tribulations of justice entrepreneurs in Kenya. Her interlocutors in Nairobi and beyond, many trained as lawyers, are deeply dissatisfied with the ways in which the Kenyan state aims, and fails, to deliver justice officially. This has prompted them to look for alternatives in order to achieve (more) justice for themselves and others. These different avenues comprise both alternative legalities and new modalities to seek solutions outside the formal justice sector. Against the backdrop of the explicit inclusion of 'access to justice for all' in the international development agenda in 2015 – as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – and in light of spreading digital service provisions in the context of the COVID pandemic, many of these concerned agents of justice, who are also subjects of justice dissatisfied with their own share of justice, have become digital start-up entrepreneurs. As such, they develop technical tools for reporting examples of corruption, accessing online dispute resolution, providing legal expert knowledge etc.

As Ahoya demonstrates, this drive towards entrepreneurial justice is imagined as offering market-based solutions that are both donor-independent and promise actually to pay. This entrepreneurship is embedded in globally circulating development discourses of 'people-centred justice' that claim to overcome technocratic top-down approaches, include previously unheard voices as well as alternative practitioners of justice, and thereby to democratize justice. This way, ordinary people are envisioned as providers of their own justice, turning concerned-agents-cum-subjects into responsible agents of justice as well: Kenyan justice entrepreneurs are thus responsibilized, while simultaneously responsibilizing themselves. Yet, the political-economic odds are firmly against these hustlers for justice, ingeniously locally called 'justlers'. Hardly ever moving beyond the stage of prototyping, and rarely if ever making a living from their entrepreneurship, these justlers oscillate ambivalently between idealistically fighting for a more sincere system of people-centred justice and cynically living off an ultimately still donor-driven discourse that ever more dissolves responsibility for justice to potentially everyone, and thus to no one.

Leaving behind the solid grounds of terrestrial justice-making in transnational Kenya, Luisa Piart opens up new horizons of justice in the offing by interrogating the cross-border complexities of labour justice among global seafarers. Working on commercial vessels cutting across multiple jurisdictions, seafarers are subject to the national labour laws and regulations of the state whose flag their vessel flies. In the past, shipowners mostly registered their vessels in their respective national registry, forcing them to employ seafarers under their national labour laws. However, with the increasing neoliberalization of the industry since the 1970s, more and more owners have flagged out their ships from, for example, the German registry to 'flags of convenience', that is,

to the open registries of countries such as Liberia or Panama, with their considerably lower labour standards. This has unleashed a race to the bottom in terms of wages and working conditions. Within this overall configuration of multiple national labour laws with vastly divergent standards, shipowners have thus exploited this differential between the national values and norms of labour justice (regulating what is due to seafarers) to their own advantage.

This is the overall context in which members of the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) – the main research partners and interlocutors in Piart's project – have been intervening over the past decades. Piart shows how ITF members have successfully campaigned against flags of convenience by themselves using the differential between national jurisdictions to their own advantage: mobilizing dock workers within jurisdictions with stronger labour protection to organize industrial action and ship boycotts, thereby applying leverage in one port to further workers' interests in another part of the supply chain, or aboard ships at sea, ITF labour internationalism has often forced ship-owners sailing under flags of convenience ultimately to agree to transnational collective bargaining agreements. The bargaining power of ITF members further increased when the international Maritime Labour Convention (MLC) came into force in 2013, since the ITF is also charged with inspecting ships and ensuring that the MLC is adhered to, with the power to detain ships in case of non-compliance. This demonstrates how union members cross, selectively mobilize and strategically combine different national labour laws in their struggle to put to work their own transnational values and norms of labour justice in the shipping industry, thereby making their vision of justice a reality, – also in the offing.

The other contributions engage equally with conflicts over the values and norms which different actors see as legitimately ensuring that certain subjects of justice get their dues. Moreover, they also zoom in to the complexities of differential ascriptions of responsibility in order to ensure that justice is actually done. Yet what is particularly interesting, and peculiar to their respective discussions, is the variable emergence of new subjects of justice, which raises important questions about the variable interrelations between subjects, objects, concerned agents and responsible agents of justice in the Anthropocene.

Felix Lussem takes us to the brown-coal mining region of the German Rhineland that has been undergoing a structural transition from an economy based on fossil fuels to renewable energy generation. Studying a self-organized network of coal-critical civil-society actors which formed around the installation and work of the official coal commission (2018–2019), deliberating over possible coal-exit paths, Lussem charts the developments among these actors regarding their views on injustices related to vast open-pit mining. Using various forms of political protest, public education and legal means to oppose the local expansion of mines and their infrastructures, Lussem shows how an original motivation to prevent the immediate loss of the individual quality of life was transformed into expanded concerns with broader injustices related to the coal industry, scaling up towards general questions of climate justice and the future of

planetary habitability. Against this backdrop, many of these coal-critical actors also came to oppose narratives of 'green growth' and the 'just transition' that they see as centring narrowly on the interests of industrial workers. Often, in their view, there is a 'not now, not here' mentality here that emphasizes stable jobs and good salaries for humans in preference to prioritizing biodiversity loss and other problems related to the Anthropocene. In contrast, many anti-coal activists aspire to a 'sustainable transition', envisioning a more encompassing eco-social transformation.

What started out as a local interest group of exclusively human subjects of justice primarily concerned about losing what they saw as being due to them anthropocentrically (e.g. the relative absence of noise and air pollution) was thus transmogrified over time into a network of agents concerned about the larger-scale dynamics of planetary injustice. In this process, the needs and well-being of distant and future human as well as non-human others turned into a crucial concern of their climate activism, despite their remaining spatially and temporally absent in the here and now. As Lussem shows, the more these absent others entered an expanding imagination of planetary justice as new and irreducible subjects of justice in their own right, the more local civil-society actors were responsibilized, and felt responsible, for these absent beings.

Mario Krämer also engages with questions of environmentalism and the renewable energy transition. However, for his interlocutors – rural nature conservationists in Western Germany – climate protection, through the extension of wind power, and nature conservation are not easily aligned. Situating the concerns for environmental justice among his research partners within the specific history of nature conservation in Germany, Krämer shows that the citizen's action group he collaborates with is motivated by the traditional impulse to preserve 'nature' and 'the landscape'. These nature conservationists are deeply concerned about biodiversity loss and species protection, especially with regard to endangered birds such as the red kite, which are greatly exposed to injury or death from wind turbines. Moreover, the landscape and its aesthetic and affective values, unspoiled by the relentless industrializing conquest of nature, are conceived as also in need of protection. Far from seeing the renewable energy transition through the expansive installation of wind turbines in rural regions as a solution advancing environmental justice (as Lussem's activists might be more inclined to think), these nature conservationists experience wind power rather as part of the problem of an ever-accelerating demand for energy. Therefore, many of them subscribe to degrowth ideals while resenting what they regard as the hypocritical discursive hegemony of young urban climate activists in demanding, and consuming, excessive amounts of renewable energy without bearing the costs of its production.

Like the anti-coal activists, the nature conservationists that Krämer works with explicitly extend the subjecthood of justice to non-human beings (such as endangered birds), thereby decentring humans when it comes to those to whom justice is due. At the same time, they regard humans (themselves, politicians etc.) as the most important, if not the only seriously concerned agents capable of and responsible for defending and instantiating their more-than-human ethic. Their vision thus combines a strongly

anthropocentric responsibility for, and concern with, an equally strongly anti-anthropocentric subjecthood of justice, revealing layers of complexity that are easily lost in the indiscriminate talk of flat ontologies. And there's a caveat of further complexity here: when talking about the aesthetic value of pristine landscapes, there seems to be an ambivalence among conservationists in envisioning landscape protection as both an end in itself, i.e. granting the landscape subjecthood of justice, and as a means to some other end, i.e. turning unspoiled nature into an object of justice that is due to some other subject. This observation foreshadows an issue that has been neglected thus far, though it is particularly relevant for the last contribution to this special issue: the potential for instrumentalizing the alleged subjecthood of justice of some other entity for one's own gain.

In the last contribution, Laura Affolter deals with a topic that has been celebrated as iconically breaking with anthropocentrism both in law and in more-than-human planetary ethics, namely 'rights of nature'. This notion refers to a legal instrument that enables ecosystems or species to have inherent rights, allowing their defence in court for the sake of nature itself. In several countries, rights of nature have been introduced into their respective constitutions, as is also the case in Ecuador where Affolter's research is based. The 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution included new rights of nature (integral respect for nature's continued existence; nature's right to be restored; as well as a state mandate for preventive and restrictive measures ensuring protection) as well as the right to environmental consultation, and also lowered the threshold for taking legal action on behalf of such rights. Focusing on resistance to the Llurimagua copper-mining project in the Ecuadorian Íntag region, Affolter notes that much of this anti-mining struggle shifted to the courts around 2018, when political protest was increasingly criminalized and the Constitutional Court became politically more independent under a new government, thus increasing the transformative potential of constitutional lawsuits. Against this backdrop, Affolter studies the meandering dynamics of the Llurimagua and Los Cedros cases, following the question of how and why rights of nature are mobilized in specific circumstances by different actors.

Among the various observations to emerge from this project, three are of particular relevance for our discussion here. First, as was the case with Krämer's nature conservationists, it becomes clear that many local anti-mining activists argue in court and beyond that 'Mother Nature', 'a mountain' or 'a tree' are independent and legitimate subjects of justice in their own right. Yet at the same time, these activists equally insist that these subjects are unable to act as concerned and responsible agents of justice, for which they need humans who can, and must, care and act on their behalf. Second, Affolter shows how strategies in legal reasoning have varied in sometimes focusing solely on the rights of nature (e.g. of endangered species) in order to prevent mining activities, thereby also indirectly benefitting human subjects of justice opposing extractivism. In other contexts, justice is explicitly claimed for both non-human and human subjects through an evocation of their respective rights. In such arguments, the interests of humans and non-humans thus become aligned.

However, and this leads to the third observation, the demands of nature-centred and human-centred justice may also be at loggerheads: rights of nature can also be mobilized against subalterns, criminalizing subsistence practices or silencing their claims to (re)distributive justice. While such confrontational action may be motivated by a genuine concern for nature as a subject of justice, it might also be driven by ulterior motives – for instance, to get rid of mining opponents in order to re-engage in extractivism. This demonstrates that rights of nature may also be instrumentalized from different sides, thereby turning nature's ostensive subjecthood of justice into a mere means to a different end. This may still happen within a framework of justice when the ostensible demand to protect, for instance, an endangered species is not really done for the sake of this non-human being, but for the protection of an environment (including this species) that is actually seen as a cherished object of justice due to humans. However, such instrumentalization may also happen beyond any concern for justice merely to advance one's strategic interests, such as weakening one's opponents (as alluded to above).

This demonstrates that even in one of the most iconically 'posthuman' cases of justice in the Anthropocene, humans remain crucial actors to reckon with – not merely as concerned and responsible agents and as subjects of justice in their own right, but also, as ever before, as strategic actors capable of exploiting the 'rights of nature' as a new resource even when (and precisely through) ostensibly celebrating it as an intrinsic value in itself.

Conclusion: Anthropological Returns

In this introduction, we have suggested how the new anthropology of justice and current debates about the Anthropocene can be fruitfully related to each other. We have discussed recent approaches in the new anthropology of justice and argued for the need to develop an analytical definition of justice that, we insist, is not an obstacle but the precondition for studying justice ethnographically in multiple contexts. Using this framework, it becomes possible to chart descriptively what kinds of values and norms of justice the people we study envision; what kind of agents with agency they see as being concerned about and hold responsible for implementing such justice; what kinds of subjects of justice they imagine as deserving justice; and what specific entitlements they conceive as being due to these subjects. As the ethnographic record of the five contributions to this special issue demonstrates, there are many different ways of imagining regimes of justice and putting them into practice. While multiple entities, human and non-human, thereby make their appearance within regimes of justice as both subjects and objects, all ethnographic discussions eventually highlighted a prominent role for humans as concerned and responsible agents, especially when acting on behalf of non-human beings within the horizons of the Anthropocene.

This leads to the second prominent theme in this introduction, namely our critical engagement with debates about the Anthropocene and related evocations of a global

human subject as allegedly responsible for the ecological crises of our time. We problematized such homogenizing constructions, also haunting terminological alternatives, and highlighted the ethico-onto-epistemological paradoxes undergirding posthumanist approaches. Against this backdrop, we proposed to disassemble the idea of a global subject through our multidimensional justice lens and, mobilizing supporting arguments from human ecology, philosophical anthropology and the anthropology of ethics and freedom, argued for an *anthropological turn* – or rather, for an *anthropological return* in two senses of the word. First, as also demonstrated by the contributions to this special issue, there is a descriptive need to explicitly rediscover and *return* to the human as an indispensable category of analysis, including and especially when engaging with other-than-human entities within considerations of justice. As we showed, anthropocenic contexts in which non-human beings increasingly turn into subjects of justice do not diminish the roles of humans as concerned and responsible agents but, to the contrary, often make them even more relevant.

Max Weber (1949) observed a long time ago that, when studying the values of others, they lose their normative force and turn into descriptive phenomena. However, when confronted with the dramatic conditions not only of the Anthropocene, the question arises whether it can suffice for anthropologists to merely chart descriptively how our interlocutors emically define justice. We suggest that, in order to cope with the ecological and other crises of our time, we also need an et(h)ic(al) definition of capable agents of justice – agents that we believe can be truly 'responsibilized' in that they can be appealed to, made to feel responsible, enticed into action and thus ultimately also legitimately held responsible for the injustices that persist. This underlines the normative need, too, for a *return* to the human as an indispensable category of action. We believe – and this is where the second meaning of an anthropological return comes in – that such an approach promises better political and practical *returns* for a discipline that is also aiming at public engagement and intervention rather than a stance of further consigning 'the human' to forgetfulness (Zenker forthcoming). We remain hopeful that such an analytical framework will allow us not only – echoing Karl Marx (2000:173) – to apprehend and interpret the world of (in)justice in the Anthropocene productively, but also to intervene in it and change it.

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