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Article

Climate Weirding and Queering Nature: Getting Beyond the Anthropocene

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Abstract: Though many scientists and scholars of the environmental humanities are referring to the current geological era as the anthropocene, this article argues that there are some problems with this trope and the narrative that emerges from it. First, responsibility for the current era of climate weirding is not shared equally, some humans are way more responsible than others. Second, the claim of the anthropocene works rhetorically to maintain a sense of human exceptionalism from the rest of the evolution of life on the planet. Third and finally, the suggestion that this geological era be named the anthropocene suggests that the problem and the solution to our ecological crisis lie with *Homo sapiens*. Does this not re-create the sense of mastery that has fueled contemporary planetary ills in the first place? This paper argues that the idea of agency must be reconfigured and redistributed throughout the planetary community in order to deal with the wicked problems arising from climate weirding and an uncertain future.

Keywords: Queer theory; new materialism; animality; wicked problems; human exceptionalism; ethics of uncertainty

1. Introduction

Perhaps some type of monotheism is in part the response to a relatively stable climate over the past 10,000 years. Books such as Ian Morris's *Foragers, Farmers and Fossil Fuels: How Human Values Evolve* suggest that a relatively stable climate and fossil fuels, have led to a very robust civilization which values non-violence as a moral foundation, for instance [1]. In other words, as he and many environmental historians argue, morals are contextual. What happens when this contextual order is

then taken as a foundation for the way in which the world is, and then enforced on the entire planet? What happens when we humans mistake our subjective, context for objective reality. "As humans articulate the objective world, they articulate their own subjectivity; technologies fashion selves as they fashion the world" ([2], p. xix). In many ways, the very process of the globalization of fossil fueled capital and the resulting global climate change may be a mistake of articulating a contextual subject position from within the context of a stable climate as an objective reality. If, however, it is our very sense of order reinforced by the fossil-fueled pace at which we operate that has brought about the conglomeration of ecological ills we now identify as "climate change", then perhaps naming it as a problem of the *anthropos* alone is part of the logic of that we need to interrupt question.

This article argues three things. First, we should talk about climate weirding rather than climate change or global warming (as if there were a steady state background to reference on a planetary time scale). In other words, the logic of the names "climate change" and "global warming" may only make sense from a human perspective within the past 10,000 or so years. What if we place ourselves into a planetary perspective rather than having the entire planetary community conform to our tiny, limited perspective? Second, and along these same lines, this paper argues that we should resist the rhetoric of the anthropocene. The anthropocene suggests that the problem is primarily human and, thus, that the solution will be primarily human. What makes us think that problems which arise from "mastery" narratives will be solved by yet more mastery? Furthermore, as a recent article points out so well, the anthropocene lumps all humanity together as if "humans" in general are responsible; it would be more accurate to call this the capitalocene, not the anthropocene [3]. Third and finally, working outside of mastery narratives, this article argues that we need queer practices that break us out of these habitual ways of thinking. What can we take from queer understandings of nature in order to address the eco-social issues that arise with climate weirding?

2. From Climate Change to Climate Weirding

There is a certain strand of environmental thought, most often falling under the trope of stewardship, that seems to promote a form of business as usual. Not business as usual in the form of continuing the illusion that we humans and our technologies and cultures are not a part of this world, but rather that the solution to the ills brought about by the industrial and post-industrial fossil-fueled age is merely better technology, and better human ingenuity. From this perspective, our problems and the Earth's problems will be solved with the same mastery mentality that landed us here in the first place. We just need to be better stewards, or we just need "cleaner" technologies, or we just need to live more simply and lightly on the land. However, at least since eugenics and the holocaust, the invention of nuclear bombs and nuclear energy, and the "green revolution" in agriculture, huge questions have been raised about the capacity of human ingenuity and reason to merely think and engineer ourselves out of these problems. Instead, what we may need is a totally different way of understanding the relationship between humans, technologies, cultures, and the rest of the natural world, one that puts all of these things on a single plane of existence, as part of the evolving planetary community.

The problem of human mastery, or at least the illusion of human mastery, is deep rooted, and the human desire to present technological solutions for our problems can hardly take on all of the blame.[1] Whether we are talking about the Platonic hierarchy of reality, the teleology of Aristotle, the imago Dei traditions in Judaism and Christianity, the vice-regency of Islam, the release from samsara in Vedic traditions, the Cartesian divide between "thinking things" and the rest, or even the Enlightenment mentality, which promises Reason as our guide out of the dark muck of superstition and animality, most extant philosophical and religious traditions of the past 5000 years have suggested that humans are somehow exceptional to the rest of the world and/or special [4]. This philosophical and religious suggestion has led us to a place of assuming highly developed understandings of human responsibility for the rest of the natural world. While not arguing that we do not have more responsibility for driving cars and technological evolution than say dolphins or dogs in regards to current climate shifts, I would argue that the high amount of faith placed in the human ability to respond in ways that better manage the world leans toward hubris, which we are all guilty of at times.

Just as some have argued that guns, germs and steel have led to the abilities of some humans to live as if they transcend the rest of the natural world [5], and just as others have argued that dogs have evolved humans as much as humans have domesticated dogs [6,7], I want to argue in this paper that more than anything it is the recorded history during a relatively stable climate that allows for our illusion of mastery, control, and ultimate responsibility. The relatively stable climate that has seen the flourishing of all human civilizations is misread as a background for an ordered world in which we are largely in control. In other words, it is perhaps this relatively stable climate during which all of the extant (recorded) philosophical and religious traditions have developed that allows us to project a sense of order onto the world that is not really there. Ideas of origin—Greek, Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and even modern western scientific—are more about projecting order onto an unstable world, from within this parenthetical period of a relatively stable climate, than anything else. In fact, older religious and philosophical ideas of origin have led, in the modern scientific world, to the concept of the origin of ideas from a linear, narrative of big-bang progress and a corresponding value hierarchy of life: from the big bang, to the emergence of stars, planets, single celled organisms, life, and eventually consciousness. This "story", can place a lot of importance on the linear narrative that leads to *Homo sapiens* and thus on the ability of *Homo sapiens* to calculate and effect changes for the future of planetary (if not cosmic) realities.

Global warming and climate change are but another step in this narrative of human involvement in the world: as if the climate has not varied greatly over the course of the Earth's existence and as if this is just another stage that we are responsible for managing. Many comparisons between the current extinction and the Cambrian extinction compare humans to the asteroid that led to the 5th great extinction, yet the metaphor breaks down when we want to claim that we are more responsible than the asteroid. Do not get me wrong, I think we are more responsible, but we are only qualitatively different from that asteroid rather than quantitatively different. What if we thought of ourselves as part of a "single plane of existence" with the rest of the planetary community [8], and what if we thought of our climate as a dynamic process that is as "queer" or "strange" as all other life? Timothy Morton, following Derrida, argues that we need less an ethic of neighbor love, or even stranger love, than that

[1] See for instance Hogue's discussion of Hans Jonas [2].

of recognizing and acknowledging the "strange stranger" [9]. The strange stranger is something that can never be grasped by our attempts at knowing: it is our very selves, our neighbor, other life on the planet, the Earth itself. The strange stranger is that which escapes our concepts and desires, that which remains and is left over that we cannot see, and which comes back to haunt the realities that we live in. The strange strangers are the many refusals to conform to any construct, the chaotic edges of any given system, the place where possibilities of becoming in the future emerge *ex profundis* [10]. Totalizing attempts to make the strange strangers conform lead to violence toward the very reality of the evolving planet of which we are a part. Naming this current period, "climate change", or "global warming" at least in part (and understandably so) makes the changing world conform to our human understanding and, thus, keeps it under human control. In other words, it is as if our human experience can exhaust the realities of the strangeness of the world. We need a more human-contextual moniker for this period and while I will later in this article suggest a name, from our located perspective, what we are experiencing now is more like climate weirding. The strange stranger that is the Earth's climate is just that: always a stranger to human sensibilities and reality. It is not fully under our control and any attempt to force it fully under human control (including narrative control) will lead toward a continuation of the same, which in Heideggerian terms means making the rest of the world "standing reserve" for the human project of progress [11].

Let me be clear, this is not a veiled attempt to justify business as usual or remove human responsibility for climate weirding from those within fossil-fuel heavy societies, which would be a cheap shot at what I am trying to argue here. Rather, it is an attempt to suggest a new way of understanding ourselves as part of this evolving planetary community and to break open our tendencies toward organizing everything within the confines of human (instrumental) reason, so that we might open on to different ways of becoming with the planetary community. The silver lining of climate weirding is that the human species (or at least some of us within the human species) has the opportunity to end our somewhat neurotic illusion and desire for mastery and control. We do not know what climate weirding is going to mean for our future: no scientist or sage can tell us that from where we stand, though there are more and less probable projections. We do know that the climate is shifting from what it has been over the past 10,000 years because of certain ways of being in the world, and if we begin to understand ourselves as part of that world, then we can ask how we ought to adapt, react, and change for the multiple other Earth-strangers within the planetary community. In order to open up to these earthly strangers, perhaps it is best first to challenge the language that combines all human strangers as a single entity: the language of the anthropocene.

3. Resisting the Anthropocene

Many scientists, other academics, and environmentalists are beginning to refer to the contemporary geological era as "the anthropocene". Though there are variations on when exactly this period began, with some arguing on settled agriculture and others arguing for the combustible engine or the Industrial Revolution, the meaning is the same: the current era in the Earth's history, the end of the Cenozoic era, is marked by the transformation of the Earth by one species, *Homo sapiens*. This claim is problematic on many levels but here I will explore three in more depth. First, this naming lumps all humans together as if there were no inequitable distribution in responsibility for anthropogenic

forcings of climate change. Second, and moving beyond the intra-human critique, this claim suggests that humans are somehow in more control than we actually are, as if we are not heirs to bio-historical, evolutionary-cultural flows that have nothing to do with human responsibility. Third and related, this naming suggests (again) that we are somehow in control of the future evolution of the Earth.

As others have argued, the anthropocene does nothing to delegate responsibility within the human community; rather, it suggests we are all equally part of the problem [3]. The truth is that "Capitalists in a small corner of the Western world invested in steam, laying the foundation stone for the fossil economy: at no moment did the species vote for it either with feet or ballots, or march in mechanical unison, or exercise any sort of shared authority over is own destiny and that of the Earth System" ([3], p. 64).[2] Much like homo-normativity leaves issues of race, class, gender, sex, and nationality out of the picture when defining what it means to be "gay" [12], so the anthropocene creates a *homo-anthropos*. In other words, it creates the illusion that Indonesians, Indians, and Africans (for instance) are equally guilty in the causes of climate change as are white Europeans and Americans who have disproportionately benefitted from the use of fossil fuels. This naming also makes, at the same time, a colonizing claim: that the experience of fossil fuel (ab) use by 1/5 of the world's population can be used to adequately describe the entire planetary community. This universalizing type of discourse has been challenged thoroughly by feminist, queer and postcolonial theories just to name a few. If "wilderness" has been critiqued as an elite experience of nature, then surely the anthropocene falls victim to that critique as well. Even more, it is an anthropocentric understanding of geological time that denies, at least in some ways, our animality.

The second critique of naming our current geological era as "the anthropocene" comes from the realm of evolution, ecology, and animal studies. This planet has a 4.5 billion year history and for most of that history, *Homo sapiens* were not even on the scene.[3] Over the course of biological life on this planet, there have been great shifts in the climate: some more hospitable than others. It is only the last 10,000 years of relative climate stability that have enabled the orderly human civilizations that we know of to thrive. To take our very small experience and now suggest that humans are in control of climate change seems to me to be a bit of hubris. Further, there is both a denial and an avowal of our embeddedness in the rest of the natural world with the language of the anthropocence. As Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg point out, "Climate change is denaturalized in one moment—relocated from the sphere of natural causes to that of human activities—only to be *renaturalised* in the next, when derived from an innate human trait, such as the ability to control fire. Not nature, but human nature—this is the Anthropocene displacement" [3]. Again, I disagree with the insistence on separation between the natural and the social that these authors want to maintain, partly because it leads to such awkward double standards of avowal and denial. They make the mistake of assigning agency and causality to either the "natural" or the "social/cultural" side of the spectrum. Thus, a more

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2. Though I agree with the analysis of social justice Malm and Hornborg make in this article, they also hold to the claim that the social and the natural ought to be separate. I would argue they do this in order to hang on to the idea of human responsibility. It is precisely the idea of the agential/passive divide between humans/nature that I trouble in this article and I do so by re-thinking agency throughout the planetary community.

3. The "Universe Walk" at the Natural History Museum in New York makes this pointedly clear.

productive route, which I explore in this article, is one that understands life as natural-cultural or bio-historical flows.

Lest I be accused of denying the influence of the use of fossil fuels on our planet, I completely acknowledge their impact. What I resist is that we are in control of our own evolution or the future of the entire planetary community: even with the technologies of bio- and geo-engineering. We are gifted our biological makeup from the evolutionary history of other organisms: our bodies are not something that we created *ex nihilo*. Furthermore, our languages and cultures are gifted to us by thousands of years of cultural innovations, most of which we had nothing to do with. Finally, other animals have helped us to evolve into the largely urban and settled creatures we are today [6,7]. Does this mean that humans do not have more "responsibility" in responding to possibilities for future becoming than say, a dog, dolphin, a single cell, or an atom; or, that some humans do not have more responsibility for the destruction of the planet than others? No. It means that we are embedded in and with other life in planetary processes. Attempts to deny that embeddedness (with mastery or control) are what helped to create most of our eco-social problems and injustices.

This brings me to my third critique: we are not in full control of the planetary future. Perhaps the "silver lining" of climate weirding is that it puts an end to the narrative of human separation and human mastery. Perhaps climate weirding will begin to open us onto our relationships with other humans and the planetary community. Perhaps it will change our linear, narrative ways of thinking in terms of progress and speed into concentric circles and cycles of concerned thought for our planetary community. How our actions affect other earth-bodies can be mapped out, creating geographical analyses of "slow violence" reverberating out in time and space [13]. Such mappings might enable us to keep an eye on how our imaginations and decisions affect Earth-others, rather than keeping us locked into some false notion of linear time/progress. These mappings might reveal the uneven distribution of ecological and social burdens and, thus, might suggest calling this period the era of fossil-fueled geo-capitalism (more on this below). This type of naming and analysis resists attempts at smoothing over the inequalities that happen with a name such as the "anthropocene". Furthermore, it deconstructs the inevitability of something like a norm for ways of being human or geological becoming (as if there were only one *anthropos*). It is this inevitability and certainty that has kept us locked into specific instrumental and efficient ways of understanding human-earth relations. Perhaps we need a bit of apophatic relationality, such as described by Catherine Keller in her most recent book, *Cloud of the Impossible* [14]. This type of not-knowing or unknowing is not blind mystery but recognition of the ground of relationality in which impossible possibilities emerge along with the becoming of the entire planetary community. Chaos and uncertainty, from within this type of reality, are the grounds for new creations and new ways of being. Our actions then are never complete but rather in an Arendtian way they ripple out beyond our control, affecting multiple Earth bodies and creating unforeseen impossible possibilities for future becomings [15]. In order to begin to live into this planetary ground of impossible possibilities, perhaps some queer sensibilities and new thought-habits need to be produced.

4. Queer as Nature

If a certain type of transcendent monotheism (mind you not all monotheisms) has helped to create knowledge as mastery (certainty, linear thinking, efficient causality, impermeable categories, *etc.*), then it has only done so through certain technologies of habitus [16]. Habits such as purity laws regarding production and reproduction, for instance, help to maintain the boundary between humans and the rest of the natural world, and boundaries between male and female. Habits, such as the hetero-nuclear family, help read competition and heteronormativity into the social and ecological world, and thus help justify capitalistic understandings of reality [17]. Further, technologies of the individual help us to background our embeddedness and indebtedness to human and Earth-others. These technologies, among others, promote ordering the world in precisely the way that we find it today, yet this ordering has come with much disorder. Taking a cue from queer theory, here I want to listen to the "abjections" (or left-overs, remainders) that have built up around the planet in response to attempts at mastery and control. It is in listening to these abjections that new possibilities for planetary becoming might emerge. In particular, I want to explore a spectral ecology of waste, understandings of Earth-others as strange strangers, and our queer animality in an attempt to open us on to new habits that might help provide the space for new possibilities for planetary becoming. These "disorderly orders", are precisely what might be called for in an era of climate change if we are to resist the masterful leveling of the *anthropos*.

In his recent book about the psychology of consumption, Ken Worthy challenges the notion of our "throw away" culture. He points out that there is no such thing as "away" to where our waste magically goes; in fact, in ecosystems the waste-nutrient distinction is limited only to a single perspective/context [18]. Our fascination and disgust with waste and keeping ourselves away from it has helped also to create a host of environmental justices issues around the world (not to mention serious land, water, and pollution issues). One clearly has to know what exactly is waste *vs.* nourishment from within an organismic perspective lest one would not last too long in this world. However, waste cannot be sent "away" anywhere, so we had better find out how to gift rather than attempt to hide our waste. Purity laws, orthodoxies, and order here do not help us, whether religious, environmental, or otherwise.

In a recent book entitled Prismatic Ecology, the authors seek to move us beyond "green" (pristine) understandings of nature and explore the whole spectrum of colors for what they might mean ecologically [19]. After all, "green" is only one color in nature and there is nothing more "natural" than the full color spectrum, so why have we limited our metaphors (and habits) to green thinking? In the chapter on "Brown", the authors link the dirt with fecal matter and other waste. The humus, the source of all of our nutrients is, after all, nothing more than decay and waste. "Smelly, rancid, and impure, it is no one's favorite color. We need brown but do not like looking at it. It is a color you cannot cover up, that will never go away" ([19], p. 193). To deny this is to deny the decay that is necessary for all life to continue. In some ways, the logic of mastery helps to build the illusion that we are somehow beyond the cycle of death and decay. How much is spent on a daily basis to remove our waste from our daily sight, to remove the food we eat from its relationship with the Earth and other life, and to secure our bodies from the rest of the natural world, not to mention securing white bodies from brown ones? Even in death, as Val Plumwood notes, we try to keep our bodies from returning to the Earth,

either by burning it up or embalming it and placing it in a vault ([20], p. 227). Maybe a healthy look at our own waste and its relationship to other bodies might help us think ourselves back into the predator-prey cycle.

In yet another chapter, "Orange", the author takes an object-oriented approach to discuss ecological relations. "For color, like any complicated phenomenon, reveals itself to be a multiplicity, a knot in motion that connects different times and places in a structure of only apparent simultaneity. Additionally so, at almost every moment, my orange ecology waxes in and out of being, revealing itself to be merely one orientation to a generalized prismatic archive" ([19], p. 94). This type of understanding of the world (and individual's therein) highlights the individual-in-relation: similar to the process of Process, or the idea from Deleuze and Guattari that the virtual is the real [8,21]. There are no colors without relation, there is no ecology without relation: thingness is an abstraction from these sets of relations, whether an "orange," a "color", a "tree", or an "individual". There is "realness" at every level of life: all the way "up", and all the way "down". As Graham Harman notes, "Humans lose their place as the metaphysical core of the universe in object-oriented thought, but only because no object is allowed to occupy that core, including the inanimate sort. Instead, all objects are equally decentered, equally converted into just one object among others" ([19], p. 107). This means, as the chapter "Chartreuse" suggests and as Karen Barad has pointed out: that all matter is agential [19,22]. In the end, the authors in prismatic ecology are trying to take us beyond a human-centered approach to the world and all the mastery that entails, toward a "postgreen, postcolor, posthuman ecology" ([19], p. 333). Not so much a denial or refusal of our embodiment, a spectral ecology focuses on the relationships of bodies: of our own with others, of the multiple bodies that make up our own, and on the ways in which these queer relations can only be understood when we abstract from them and create abjections. Our abstractions are inevitable but they do not have to be blinding or final; we ought always to keep our eye on the strangeness that makes up our solidity.

As mentioned briefly in the opening of this article, co-critic Timothy Morton argues for a queer understanding of ecology that meets the non-essentialist understanding of biology. He writes,

> Queer ecology may abandon the disastrous term *animal* and adopt something like *strange stranger*—my bad translation of Derrida's *arrivant*. To us, other life-forms are strangers whose strangeness is irreducible: *arrivants*, whose arrival cannot be predicted or accounted for ("Hospitality"). Instead of reducing everything to sameness, ecological interdependence multiplies differences everywhere ([9], p. 277).

If "animal" is what keeps us locked into a separate sphere as the *anthropos* in some sort of value hierarchy anchored by Aristotelian essentialism, then perhaps understanding all life as a collection of "strange strangers" does more justice to the mixed up, tangled world in which we live. From Morton's object-oriented approach, we might consider entities from multiple different perspectives among which "humans" and "other animals" are just two. Climate Change, a forest, the flora of our guts, a city, plastic, the Internet, and a book are all agential entities in life that command their own world around them. None can be reduced to the other, and the meaning of each can never be fully exhausted because we live in a world that is radically interrelated, changing, and open toward multiple possibilities for future becoming. This latter insight is perhaps why Morton (and many other "non-essentialist" thinkers) finds a Buddhist ontology more compatible with his understanding of the world than those

that are essentialist, foundational, or substance based. Regardless, the strange-stranger that Morton (through Derrida) calls for means that multiple agencies pervade all levels of reality, just as Karen Barad in *Meeting the Universe Halfway* also argues [22].

For Barad, performativity as a concept does not end at the human, but extends "all the way down" to the quantum level and perhaps "all the way up" to the level of the universe. What this means on one level is that all combinations of life have some sort of agency that exert influence on other levels. When we extend this to think about something like climate weirding, we ought to be careful when we place the cause of such change with one, reified, entity: the *anthropos*. The *anthropos* is nothing without: oxygen, water, the planet, evolutionary adaptations upon the planet, the sun, and all other "strange strangers". Furthermore, climate weirding is nothing without the anthropogenic forcings, dead dinosaurs, changes in solar energy, volcanic eruptions, the tilt of the Earth's axis, and the evolution of life on the planet. The point here is not to draw responsibility away from humans, but rather to re-place human responsibility in the larger context of the ability to respond ([14], p. 112). In other words, whereas within the realm of *Homo sapiens* referring to the current geological realm as "the anthropocene" covers over varying responsibilities within the *anthropos* (race, class, gender, nationality, generational, *etc.*), beyond the realm of *Homo sapiens* it affords the *anthropos* with too much responsibility (also known as, mastery and control). The message here is not so much that what we human beings do does not matter, but that what we do does not matter alone. The planetary community is not a soundboard that can be controlled by a DJ, but rather it is like the whole rave in which ravers, DJ, and music are in a constant performance together, acting and re-acting to one another [23].

One way to focus in on this planetary performativity is, as Morton does, with "strange stranger" metaphors that dispenses of anima all together; this goes a long way in doing away with the culture/nature divide. It is to this great divide between agential/passive, alive/dead that hierarchies of value are attached. These hierarchies are exactly what Mel Chen troubles in a different way by re-thinking "animality" rather than getting rid of the concept altogether. Chen writes,

> The traces I examine in this book are those of animate hierarchies. If affect includes affectivity—how one body affects another—then affect, in this book, becomes a study of the governmentality of animate hierarchies, and examination of how acts seem to operate with, or against, the order of things ([24], p. 12).

In other words, how are hierarchies, the top of which are the "most animate" and the bottom of which are the "least animate", operative in securing the place of bodies in a given time and space? Rather than get rid of the animus all together, Chen wants to show how all of these hierarchies rely on this animus and then trouble the ordering of the hierarchy to redistribute agency throughout. Curiously, Chen leaves out of this stated interdisciplinary discussion any analysis or mention of religion, though references are made to animism and even to the "great chain of being", an ordered hierarchy from inanimate object to plant to nonhuman animal to human, by which subject properties are differentially distributed (with humans possessing maximal and optimal subjectivity at the top) ([24], p. 40). In different ways, it is precisely this hierarchy that critical theories of religion—race, gender, ethnicity, sex, sexuality—have sought to deconstruct, so why the lacunae when it comes to religious analysis? The answer to this question warrants its own article, so for now I will just let this question hang.

The point of this interlude into animacy is that Chen highlights an important aspect of any value hierarchy: it both depends on the *animus* and often takes it "from the bottom" (earth/rock/vegetable) to give "to the top" (human/especially elite male humans), while at the same time denying the animus upon and from which it is constructed (e.g., by claiming that nature is just dead stuff). Thus, Chen writes, "Human self-representation's original 'error', if such a determination could be ventured, was in attempting to essentially provoke an unhappy wresting of animacy in order to apply it 'above' the level of the animal itself to the realm of the (rationalized) subject" ([24], p. 46).

What is important here is the covering over of the ground of being on which the human as sole agent in the world is formulated. Is not such a formulation in a way repeated in the naming of the contemporary era as the anthropocene? In other words, the very term abstracts a species (and makes that species an object at the same time by blurring any differences within the category *anthropos*) from the evolving planetary community and makes that species somehow special, even if it is in their especially responsible nature.

Here, I am reminded once again of the famous Lynn White critique, that (a) technological solutions will not heal the environmental crisis, because (b) the problem is at heart a religious one, and thus (c) the solution must be religious [25]. Though the emergence of the field of "religion and ecology/nature" has gotten a lot of mileage out of this: what difference does it make, in one sense, whether the solution is religious or technological if both are limited to human solutions? The hierarchy of order here that wrests the animus from rocks, plants, machines, the climate, genes, and even cultures and languages is maintained, and the sole ordering agency is still that of the "rationalized" subject. The problem is thus identified as the *anthropos* (rational, individual subject), and thus the *anthropos* (rational, individual subject) is also the one who solely manages the solution. Without denying varying levels of responsibility across the spectrum of planetary life, isn't such thinking keeping a certain type of humanity at the top of the heap? If we truly are in a world that is alive, and if these animalities, or conglomerations of "strange-strangers" are always exceeding our grasp; if we live in a nature that is queerer than we could ever imagine; if we live as part of a planetary system with a climate that is weirding beyond our control; and if our problems today are wicked and cannot ever be fully understood from within the thick of things, then perhaps we need a better metaphor for acting response-ably.

5. Responsibility within the Tangled Bank

One of the most acute moral problems for us is that the colossal growth of our human power to impact the world is joined by an increasing uncertainty about how morally to guide this power [2].

As this epigram from Mike Hogue's book *The Tangled Bank* suggests, we humans (to various degrees) have the twin problem of exerting a huge influence on the rest of the natural world while at the same time not having a clear idea of what effects those influences have on the world. Hogue uses Darwin's metaphor for evolution, "*The Tangled Bank*", as the name of his book and as description (an apt one I might add) of our moral quandary today: we are part of the rest of the natural world, we are the most response-able (responsible) creatures within the rest of the natural world, yet we do not have any objective grounding for our knowledge of the natural world nor any clear ethical foundations for acting in one way rather than another. If this is not to lead to nihilism, as Hogue is concerned about, then we must find a way to articulate ethical grounding and guidelines within this context. What better

way to end an article about a queer nature and a weird climate than with metaphors of entanglement? This is, then, no conclusion, but rather a further entangling of the issues addressed throughout this article in the hopes that it will generate some thoughts that ripple outwards.

Though I may differ with some of the particular ways in which Hogue draws on Jonas and Gustafson to ground a critical, religious natural ethic, it is exactly the type of thinking he puts forth in *The Tangled Bank* that the uncertain future marked by the wicked problems of climate weirding and globalization calls for. My concern in this article has been that naming the current geological era the "Anthropocene" gives way too much control, value and power to the *anthropos*. It falls in line with the continuation of Enlightenment style certainty in the face of pluralism and uncertain times. As Hogue notes, paraphrasing Gustafson:

> The Enlightenment quest for a universal rationality and an inviolable morality is motivated in large measure by recognition of the problems of the historical and social variability of construals of meaning and value ([2], p. 41).

At various times throughout history humans have been faced with their historicity in light of the plurality of beliefs they encounter. As Rome was burning in the 4th and 5th centuries, Christians and "Pagans" blamed one another, in still extant polemical treatises, for the fall of the empire. As the Golden Age of Islam was coming to a close, some Islamic theologians blamed the natural philosophy of the Greeks and others blamed those who ignored the book of nature all together. As the shifts from a geocentric cosmos to a heliocentric one took place from the 14th to 16th century, adding fuel to the protestant Reformations, and coinciding with the era of European colonization, Descartes' big doubt about how we can know anything and his slippage into the individual thinking-thing as foundation for everything provided a new, individualistic basis for objectivity. The Enlightenment mentality holds on to the idea that one can have a lease on an objective reality with its very (colonizing) metaphor of bringing people out of the darkness of local customs, superstition, and beliefs, and into the light of science and reason. I could go on, but the point is that in the face of major uncertainty wrought by climate weirding, we are once again trying to enforce certainty and a managerial metaphor onto a tangled, messy, evolving planet.

The label "anthropocene", among all of the other issues I have aired here, squarely locates the problem and the solution in the *anthropos*. How is this not a further attempt at certainty and tidiness in the face of uncertainty and messiness? How does this not foster an attitude of geo-engineering as easily as it might an attitude of moving toward some less fossil-fueled (more "green") way of living on the planet? Geological eras are named after the fact for a reason: from within a point in time the future is open toward multiple possible outcomes and there is no possible way to determine what exactly that outcome will be. This is true for the expansion of the universe and the future of this planet. Yes, there are clear and present dangers, and yes our actions do matter; but the future is not solely up to us if we are to take seriously the fact that we are a part of an evolving planetary community. Rather than place a veneer of control over these planetary problems with something like "the anthropocene" why do we not just refer to this era as the era of fossil-fueled geo-capitalism? Such a moniker, it seems to me, both allows for the variations of responsibility within the human community, and for the agency of the rest of the planetary community beyond the (permeable) boundary of the human.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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