
THE LETTER: LEAVING THE ANTHROPOCENE, ENTERING THE NEMESCENE

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The adjective 'Anthropocene' is popularly described as 'relating to or denoting the current geological age, viewed as the period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment'. Similarly (though not identically), Wikipedia informs us that the 'Anthropocene is a proposed epoch dating from the commencement of significant human impact on the earth's geology and ecosystems, including, but not limited to, anthropogenic climate change'.

It appears to me that the Anthropocene epoch is an apt description not so much for an epoch we are absolutely still in, but rather for an epoch that we are now, in fact, leaving. Since the industrial revolution (or whenever), human activity has been more and more a factor in climate change and environmental change, and it has yielded benefits for humanity (at least) that (arguably) can be considered greater than any negative outcomes for humanity. In other words, Gaia (or call it what you will) has until now accommodated human activity in a manner that has allowed such activity to become the dominant influence.

But this is no longer true, since we now have examples every week of major climatic events, temperature and sea-level rises, environmental degradation, the destruction of ecosystems and the extinction of species, all of which (while their cause or at least their extent is a consequence of human activity) appear to be well beyond human control. In other words, human activity (which is increasingly forced to focus not so much upon exploitation as on largely unsuccessful attempts to contain the consequences) is no longer the dominant influence.

It would help us to get an intellectual grasp on recent developments if we had a label for the 'post-Anthropocene' epoch, in which humanity (while, and if, it survives) must learn humility. I suggest that the post-Anthropocene might meaningfully be termed the 'Nemescene' epoch, from the Greek words *nemo* (to give what is due) and *kainos* (new). That is, the planet has now entered a period in which the goddess of retribution is dominant, characterised by a nemesis that is (largely) consequent upon human activity during the Anthropocene.

Formal acceptance that we are now in this new epoch—that human activity is no longer dominant—might operate against any remaining optimism that humanity can significantly change how things are now going. But there is perhaps also some practical value, as well as some spiritual consolation, to be gained by acknowledging that we are beyond the so-called ‘Anthropocene’. This is, after all, an extraordinarily anthropocentric concept that magnifies the significance of an extraordinarily short period (in terms of the overall duration of this one planet’s existence) when one species (*Homo sapiens*) acted with extraordinary arrogance.

This text is taken from *International Review of Environmental History*,
Volume 4, Issue 1, 2018, edited by James Beattie, published 2018 by ANU Press,
The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

doi.org/10.22459/IREH.04.01.2018.02