



How do people live in the Anthropocene?

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While geologists have focused their efforts on which changes in the strata might constitute a functional shift out of the present epoch, environmental humanities scholars, museums and creative artists have taken up the Anthropocene as a concept raising new moral and practical dilemmas. A central concern is with how people adapt and live creatively in a world that is functioning beyond the physical planetary boundaries defined by the Holocene.

This paper will provide an overview of the lively scholarly and popular debates on the question of what it means, ethically, to be human in an Age of Humans. Major questions include the question of who are 'we' in the Anthropocene, and how the conditions of the putative new epoch will affect 'more-than-human-others'. Creative and justice activist responses to the Anthropocene typically distinguish among humans, focusing not on the causes, but rather on concerns of the people on the receiving end of global change (for example, the Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) group of 39+8). Some are concerned about the collateral effects of technological 'fixes' for energy transformations and climate, and others about economic shifts and market-based incentives.

As a historian of ideas, I explore the multiple paths by which people have come to the Anthropocene concept, and the uses to which it has already been put, even before a final decision is made on its formal status. The Anthropocene already arouses anxiety about 'the future'. One big idea that is shared across activists and scholars (and not just those in the humanities) is the question of enabling hopeful responses. A diversity of creative projects for living in the Anthropocene, which can contribute to coping with the stress of accelerating global change, is essential to this.