



The Anthropocene: Is it Homo sapiens' ultimate opportunity to 'come of age'?

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What can Biology tell us about our future? From both ecological and sustainability perspectives, the Anthropocene epoch that we have now reached is generally thought of as a testament to humankind's worst instincts. The impacts of our activities on the Earth's ecosystems have reached levels that seriously threaten not only our own species' future existence but also much of the rest of the current biodiversity on the planet. Could we have expected our trajectory to this point to have been any different? We are after all just another species in many senses, and therefore driven by the same fundamental genetically-endowed traits for growth, survival and reproduction that all species share. Biological expression of those traits results in resource use (and waste production), resource accumulation, and population increases respectively... that ultimately lead to cycles of resource scarcity and population crashes for any species.

However, we have also evolved a strong consciousness trait that is clearly distinctive, and allows our species a unique capacity to be aware of our impacts - something no other species is capable of. In this talk, I will argue that the Anthropocene could be our species' 'finest hour'. We are faced with a sustainability crisis, and are becoming more and more aware of our environmental impacts, and the root biological causes. Awareness of the ecological implications associated with the Anthropocene could be the necessary catalyst for a profound paradigm shift in how we choose to live, and what we choose to really value in life. Imagine how different our lives would be if we were to truly prioritise looking after and respecting (ourselves), each other, other species, and our environment as one single interconnected system – which it undoubtedly is at the most fundamental biological and philosophical levels. Here, I am suggesting that Homo sapiens could fully 'come of age' in the Anthropocene and realise its full potential by finally achieving the meaning underlying its species descriptor – wise humans. Our species' unique capacity for conscious awareness could allow Homo sapiens to rise above and tame its base genetic drives, while instead prioritising a more mature lifestyle focussed on the combination of existentialism, compassion and wisdom. I will conclude by suggesting ways to achieve this fundamental change in mindset.