

Jürgen Manemann. *Kritik des Anthropozäns. Plädoyer für eine neue Humanökologie*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2014. 144p. EUR 16,99

Since Nobel Prize Laureate Paul Crutzen's short article on the "Geology of Mankind" first appeared in *Nature* (*Nature* 415: 23, 2002), not only has the idea that we are living under a "human-dominated" geological epoch – the Anthropocene – been made public to a wide audience, but it has also triggered a lively discussion about the extent and the implications of considering mankind as a major geological (and environmental) force, particularly from the perspective of a possible climate catastrophe in the near future. Although this framing of an emerging geological epoch and its possible negative outlook for mankind has raised a lot of anxiety, 'ecomodernists' are welcoming this new epoch, claiming that it is a sign that humans have the ability to transform and control nature [sic]. This claim seems to be based on the old belief in quick techno-centric fixes for all sorts of problems, including, now, planetary environmental disturbances. 'Ecomodernists' even believe that through a radical decoupling of humans from nature a "good Anthropocene" is possible. But does it make sense to speculate about a "good Anthropocene" with such thermodynamically alien and naïve assumptions? What is at stake in the competing views on how to govern in the Anthropocene?

The philosophical essay *Kritik des Anthropozäns* by Professor Jürgen Manemann – he is the director of the Research Institute for Philosophy Hannover, in Germany – addresses the Anthropocene framing from a different perspective. His essay is intended not only to introduce the reader to the debate about this unofficial geological epoch but to show what's behind this idea, its dangers as well as to present an alternative to the dominant technological and scientific perspective when it comes to deal with the consequences. Professor Manemann pleads for a new human ecology, aiming to transform our current civil society into a "culture society", a society that enables people to live a humane life.

By looking in more detail at the many issues Professor Manemann addresses in his ten chapters-long essay, it is worth mentioning his discussion about our catastrophe blindness or how the development of a catastrophe sensibility could help us to drive our actions towards global regeneration. Also worth mentioning, is his discussion about the necessity of getting rid of the sustainability paradigm to replace it by a resilience paradigm (discussed from a psychological and pedagogic perspective) if we intend to shift our concerns from global to universal problems. His alternative to the dominant discourse is the main subject of Chapter Ten "On the way to a new human ecology". In pledging for his alternative, Professor Manemann makes a strong criticism of the "anthropocenists" (in German "die Anthropozäniker") who take refuge in trans or post-humanist visions of a new human being in which the abolishment of humane humans is imagined. To counter what he sees as a progressive "hominization" Manemann opposes the "humanization" of his new human ecology.

Professor Manemann claims also that his proposal of a new human ecology is holistic because it takes into account not only environmental destruction, but also the destruction of socio-cultural environments. However, it seems he wishes to distance himself from the sort of systems analysis present in current human ecology approaches, because for him despite their interdisciplinary character they are concerned mainly with the adaptation capacity of humans to their environments; they see humans merely as part of their biophysical environment. On the other hand in the new human ecology, "das Humanum" is emphatically in the foreground. Honestly, I can't see in Manemann's argumentation any substantial reason to dismiss the adoption of cyber-systemic approaches in the way he describes they have been adopted in human ecology. Or, in other words, I can't see why by putting simply "das Humanum" in the foreground would be a sufficient reason to claim his approach is (more?) holistic. Out of his

pledging for a “culture society” emerges also a strong ethical dimension, made apparent through his discussion of the moral status of animals and how this unfolds into imperative action directives. Manemann’s ethical stance is, however, strongly influenced or driven by religion-anchored beliefs and values like mercifulness and compassion, not to mention his recurrent references to religion given the importance he ascribes to it as part of culture and to allow an appreciation of contingency. But his stance is understandable considering the religious commitments of the Research Institute he leads.

Regardless of the controversy or the dispute among differing views of this “age of us” – the Anthropocene – what seems to be at stake is if this framing of a geological epoch dominated by human influence can trigger new ways of thinking and acting regarding the governance of the relationship humans-nature. Therefore, instead of thinking of a radical decoupling of humans from Nature, which is a thermodynamic impossibility, why not think in terms of a radical re-integration of human civilization into the fabric of life, inspired in approaches like the new human ecology Manemann is pledging for? His essay is to be recommended both for those who normally are concerned only with the most relevant scientific aspects of the debate, and foremost for all those who are concerned with its human dimension and with what it means to be human in this new geological epoch. Further, Manemann’s essay might shed some light in a world still obsessed with economic growth and technological progress, helping us to avoid the traps of techno-centric solutions as a strategy for governing in the Anthropocene. Therefore, it is a pity that at the moment the book can be found only in German, limiting thereby the access to a wider readership.

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